Further, the buildings and requisites for worship should be truly worthy and beautiful, signs and symbols of heavenly realities. 

Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani

It is often said that when times get tough, people get religion. This used to mean that people would return to church, and the stories of this after the calamity last September are instructive. Priests, like firemen and policemen, rushed to the scene at the same time that all sane people rushed away. And some of these sane yet overwhelmed people found themselves entering the doors of a church, perhaps for the first time in years. Catholic churches were natural destinations notwithstanding the fact that they are normally open as places of prayer and refugium peccatorum. How many sheep returned to the Shepherd in the weeks following the terrorism of the World Trade Center, and how much did the beauty, warmth, and sacramentality of our churches help facilitate it? How many prodigal sons and even older brothers returned to their father during quiet meditation in front of the Son whose body was broken for them or during the heavenly banquet in which saints and angels were seen to participate? It may be difficult to really know.

There are those who have seen more seasons than I who say that when the economy slows, people build churches. Given the church building boom of the past five years, it is hard to believe that church construction could increase any more. Yet, it may be so. Let us hope that—just as in other areas of life—the present trials will cause us to reflect and even to rethink the identity of the buildings we call church. What kind of church offers solace to the sinner, comfort to the dying, and hope to the sick? Is it not a place of harmony, of salvation stories etched in glass and marble, of a radiant light which emanates from the ark of the covenant? Like a hearth which we gather around when we are cold and to which we often become entranced by the delicate flickering of the flames is the golden tabernacle. All of us are embattled by sin, sickness, and death, and the house of the Church reminds us of this in its timeless manifestation of those heroes and heroines who have been through it all and have endured until the end. Martyrs holding instruments of their death and mystics gazing upon the sensual beauty of their mother or their bridegroom welcome us into our spiritual home. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and in their presence we are attracted to higher ideals, realizing that our bellies should not be our masters, and offering us the opportunity to be changed in some small way.

Life is serious business, and religion is more so. Many of us were brought to our senses by the senselessness of the destruction of many lives on the tip of Manhattan. Once again we must raise tall towers in boldness and in faith, but not the abstract towers of commerce nor the skyline of human Babel. Those are easy to construct with their transient symbolism and material remuneration, workshops for many but a home for none. And furthermore, let us reject the impulse to invert these cathedrals of commerce into commercialized Cathedrals, where the pitiful art and architecture which serves the temporal needs of corporations is employed by the eternal institution. This is the legacy of the past half-century, with its adulation of the progress of science and technology. A new century offers us a chance to return to our senses and reemploy an architecture that speaks to our senses in a profound way. We have had our eyes narrowly focused on ourselves, beautiful creations but not the ultimate beauty, and now we must broaden our vision upward and outward. We need an architecture which helps raise our hearts and minds to heaven, which indicates where our treasure should be, not by ignoring heaven but by intimating it. A transcendent architecture welcomes all people with a generosity of space, volume, and elaboration in a way of which any great office building, museum, or sports arena can only offer a pale imitation. And while the church building offers us peace, joy, and hope, it also implicitly asks something of us. Our response to the saints, the eucharist, and the resurrection is to offer hope to the world.

Duncan Stroik
Notre Dame, Indiana

SACRED ARCHITECTURE

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Sacred Architecture News

A Greek Orthodox church destroyed by the collapse of the World Trade Center will receive $500,000 for reconstruction from the mayor of Bari, Italy, the Associated Press reported. Italian Foreign Minister Renato Ruggiero announced the aid for St. Nicholas’ Church fifteen days after the Sept. 11 tragedy. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of Bari. “I have brought just a small gesture of solidarity, but I believe it is significant one,” Ruggiero said.

The church has about 80 members. The building was constructed in 1832 and later housed a tavern. Greek immigrants made it a church in 1916.

Young monks and consecrated members of new ecclesial movements and communities are taking over historic monasteries in France. The most striking case is that of Mont-Saint-Michel. The Benedictines ended a 1035-year residency in Summer 2001 when three elderly monks moved out and allowed a dozen members of the Monastic Communities of Jerusalem, founded in Paris in 1975 by Pierre-Marie Delfieux, to take over. This latter group already had 150 monks and nuns living in monasteries in France and Italy. The average age of the members is 32. Another case is that of the Abbey of Dombes, a symbol of the age age of the members is 32. Another case is that of the Abbey of Dombes, a symbol of the Monastic Communities of Jerusalem, founded in Paris in 1975 by Pierre-Marie Delfieux, to take over. This latter group already had 150 monks and nuns living in monasteries in France and Italy. The average age of the members is 32. Another case is that of the Abbey of Dombes, a symbol of the world ecumenical movement. This past October, the last elderly Trappist monks left this architectural complex in the Diocese of Belley-Ars, where they had resided for more than 140 years. The new occupants will be Chemin Neuf, a Catholic movement founded in Lyon in 1973 by Father Laurent Fabre. The Chemin Neuf community of Dombes will soon number 30 people.

A new study shows that people who attend religious services regularly are more likely to pick up and maintain healthy habits than less-dedicated church-goers, Scripps-Howard News Service reported. “Individuals who regularly attended religious services were more likely to become more physically active, quit smoking, become less depressed, increase social relationships and initiate and maintain stable marriages,” claimed William Strawbridge, a researcher at the Human Population Laboratory in Berkeley, California.

Building the Church for 2010, a conference on Catholic liturgical architecture, was held at the Liturgical Institute at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary, Illinois, October 25 through 27, 2001. The theme of the conference was continuity and renewal in Catholic liturgical architecture. This included a look at the rich history and tradition of Catholic church art and architecture, as well as how one might reclaim some of the ground which has arguably been lost in the past fifty years.

The conference featured a number of speakers including Rev. Robert Barron, Page Cowley, FAIA, Rev. Brian Hughes, Duncan Stroik, AIA, Denis McNamara, Rev. Jamie Lara, Virginia Raguin, and John Yiannias.

The culmination of the conference was a design presentation for the “Church for 2010” by James McCrery of Franck, Lohsen, McCrery Architects. The design solution was in response to a hypothetical program given to the architects by the Liturgical Institute. The presentation utilized video to display a three-dimensional walkthrough of the project, which was an artful use of the classical language of architecture. - Carter Hord

For the first time, the International Seminar of European Christian Artists—a five-day festival of art and prayer—was held in the Italian Shrine of Oropa during the first week of September, 2001. Some 150 people, including professors, professionals and artists in fields such as music, dance, painting, sculpture, and mime joined in the ecumenical meeting. “Spirituality and art are simultaneously present here,” said gospel singer Aurelio Pitino, explaining the reason for the choice of venue.

This sacred place in northern Italy is dedicated to Our Lady of Oropa, represented by a Black Virgin, a wooden sculpture brought here, according to tradition, by St. Eusebius. Legend attributes the sculpture itself to St. Luke.

New church development among Catholic populations in the United States is being outpaced by other faiths, including Islam and Bahai, according to a new survey conducted by researchers at Hartford Seminary and published March 14, 2001, in the Washington Post. Newly organized Catholic parishes at midcentury represented about ten percent of all new churches. That portion has dropped to five percent, while the combined percentage of new Bahai, Muslim, Jewish, and Mormon congregations has increased from about three percent to more than twenty percent. Evangelical Protestant congregations make up the largest portion, fifty-eight percent, of new congregations. However, most new congregations are quite small. Over half have less than one hundred adult participants. Although Catholic congregations have built few new churches, the survey found they tend to have the largest congregations of any faith.

The Archdiocese of Armagh has launched its Web site which contains a 360-degree virtual tour of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. The site has 450 pages of information on the life of the archdiocese, including a section on shrines and places of pilgrimage. The site may be accessed at http://www.armaghradiocese.org

In August, 2001 the Archdiocese of Caracas temporarily closed seven churches in the capital because of explosive devices found in the vicinity of some of them. In a published statement, Cardinal Ignacio Velasco said the cathedral and six other churches in the city center would close as a sign of “reparation and rejection” of what he called a “destructive protest.” Earlier, two explosive devices were found, and one detonated injuring a young woman, in churches within the capital.
Robert D. Putnam, professor of public policy at Harvard University, has been making something of a stir in public policy circles on both sides of the Atlantic through his speaking tours promoting his new book, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. This book argues that people in America have become disconnected from their friends, neighbors and social structures, resulting in a dramatic decline of "social capital." Putnam chooses as his icon for this decline the local bowling leagues, which have seen their membership decrease by two-thirds in the last twenty-five years. Americans worship together, eat together, play together, and even watch TV together far less than they did even a few decades ago, says Putnam. He also sees signs of the same social collapse taking place in Europe.

On June 8, 2001, the first chapel to twentieth-century martyrs was dedicated in the Shrine of the Family of Fatima at the tiny town of Alexandria, South Dakota. A commemorative tablet will list the names of the witnesses of the faith, including Maximilian Kolbe, who died at the Auschwitz death camp; St. Edith Stein, Carmelite nun of Jewish origin, who also died in Auschwitz; Italian Blessed Gianna Beretta Molla, who sacrificed her life for her unborn child; and Blessed Miguel Pro, killed in 1927 during the religious persecution in Mexico.

The Baltimore Sun reports parishioners are attempting to restore the neo-Gothic sanctuary of the St. Mary, Star of the Sea Catholic Church to its former glory. The ornate church once boasted a lavish interior with an abundance of gold leaf. But in 1968 the carvings were taken down, the high altar torn out, statues removed and the church accoutrements—chalices, vestments, candlesticks, altar cloths—unceremoniously dumped out front. Now church old-timers, as well as young professionals recently attracted to Baltimore’s fashionable downtown, are excited about restoring the church and re-establishing links to their past. According to the Sun, the church is part of a nationwide movement, principally among Catholic churches, to correct the sins of the 1960s and 1970s, when church interiors were radically simplified and modernized to give an appearance that, only decades later, already looks dated. At the Emmanuel College Chapel in Boston, the grandiose high altar had been abandoned and a smaller altar table was set up in the middle of the church, surrounded by fan seating that critics said distorted the chapel’s intended layout. In a restoration completed last year, the altar was restored to the front of the church, constructed out of pieces of the old altar railing. At St. Alphonsus Catholic Church in Lemont, Ill., a renovation in the 1960s removed all ornamentation and covered delicate stenciling with beige paint. The stenciling was reappllied in a restoration completed last month. The College of Notre Dame in North Baltimore is in the midst of a $1.5 million restoration of its Theresa Hall Chapel, where a vaulted ceiling was hidden by metal ducts and a drop ceiling. Pine floors had been covered with carpeting and plaster walls with wood paneling.

Cathedrals for a New Century. Over 200 clergy and laity gathered October 21-23, 2001, at the University of Notre Dame to attend a symposium organized by the School of Architecture and the Theology Department. Breakout sessions were structured for presentation of New Cathedrals, Recently Refurbished Cathedrals, and Cathedrals to be Refurbished. Both the School of Architecture and the Department of Theology provided a critical response to the presentations, highlighting what has been successful or unsuccessful in these projects, and adding what implications can be drawn from these for future projects. Projects presented ranged from restoration of the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore, America’s first cathedral by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, begun in 1806, to new construction of the Cathedral of Los Angeles designed by Rafael Moneo. A question raised at the end of the symposium: Does the liturgy serve the building or does the building serve the liturgy? begs another question: How can the liturgy, which is experienced sequentially in time through words and actions, be in harmonious partnership with the architecture, which houses it through images and space regardless of time? - Margaret Ketcham.

After 85 years of Minnesota weather, the Cathedral of St. Paul is being restored. The cathedral’s 60,000 square-foot copper domes and roofs are distressed, failing and must be replaced. Black rubber patches dot the roof’s exterior where breaks in the copper have occurred. On the dome interior, damage to the plaster is evident. All of the exterior surface stone needs to be cleaned to prevent further deterioration and return it to its original, lighter color. The master plan for the restoration requires $35 million in funding and 30 months to complete. Work began on the cathedral in 1906 under the famous Archbishop John Ireland and his architect E.L. Masqueray. The exterior was completed in 1915, the interior in 1952. In addition to serving as the mother church for a diocese with over 750,000 Catholics, the cathedral functions prominently in the local community, hosting concerts, funerals, and other civic ceremonies. It draws more than 200,000 tourists a year.

The St. Paul, Minnesota, Cathedral is being restored.
Construction of the new Los Angeles Cathedral is on schedule for the September, 2002, dedication.

Cardinal Roger M. Mahony announced that the $75-million Our Lady of Angels Cathedral is on schedule and will be dedicated on Sept. 2, 2002. Consecration of the massive mother church of the nation’s largest Roman Catholic archdiocese will come during two weeks of celebratory events expected to draw thousands from throughout Southern California and the nation. Already, the 11-story cathedral, designed by Spanish architect Jose Rafael Moneo, has reached its maximum height. It will cover 57,000 square feet of interior space, and, at 333 feet in length, will be a foot longer than St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. Several 60-foot-high clerestory windows of translucent alabaster stone will cover 27,000 square feet of surface area, more alabaster than at any church in the world. In Spring 2002 the church will open a landscaped plaza, which will include waterfalls, fountains, carillon bells, a shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe, a conference center, gift shop and cafe. The garage, plaza and conference center will cost $88 million.

On August 5, 2001, John Paul II marked the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, the first Western church building named in honor of the Blessed Virgin. The building of the church is connected to a dream of Pope Liberius on the night of Aug. 5, 356. In the dream, the Blessed Virgin asked him to build a church in the place where he would find snow the following day. The present building, atop the foundations of Pope Liberius’ church, was built by Pope Sixtus III.

More visitors are flocking to monasteries and convents, in search of silence and contact with God, a French newspaper reported in July. L’Événement contacted 322 monasteries and convents throughout France during its research. It found that the number of visits lasting several days and the number of group retreats are increasing. The data also reveal that many who visit convents and monasteries are from other religions, and that many returned to Catholicism after having had a negative experience with sects.

A fire caused by old, faulty electrical wiring swept through the ornate Sacred Heart Parish Church in Indianapolis in the early morning hours of April 27, 2001, doing more than $1 million in damages. Murals, stained-glass windows and irreplaceable handcrafted items in the landmark building were destroyed, officials said. The German-founded parish started in 1875. The church now serves 410 households. Destroyed or damaged in the fire was the high altar, which was made by Bernhard Ferring (1868-1944) of Chicago; statues on the high altar; and several stained-glass windows that were designed and installed in the mid-1920s.

Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila decried the desecration done by Estrada supporters at the Edsa national Shrine to Our Lady of Peace, and called for law and order as massive protests in support of jailed former President Joseph Estrada subsided in early May. For two weeks in late April and early May 2001, two million Estrada supporters gathered at the shrine, at times using foul language and singing obscene songs. The Vatican flag was removed, and pictures of the ousted president were pasted on the image of the Blessed Mother, which stands atop the shrine. “They are profaning a house of prayer, a temple of God, a monument to peace,” Cardinal Sin said. Stressing that “a time of crisis is also a time of heroism,” Cardinal Sin added: “We must preserve the blessings of our Edsa II,” referring to the January “rosary revolution,” which led to Estrada’s political downfall, and the subsequent proclamation at the shrine of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as president.

In August, 2001, Italian authorities unveiled the restored fourteenth-century frescoes of St. Clare’s Basilica in Assisi, four years after they were severely damaged by an earthquake. Brilliant light bathed the basilica during a Mass on Aug. 11 to celebrate the restoration of the Giotto School frescoes which adorn the pink and white marble building. St. Clare’s Basilica was reopened to the public in 1998, months after the thirteenth-century building’s facade had been damaged by two earthquakes on Sept. 26, 1997. Most of Assisi’s churches suffered serious damage. Four of the ten people who died in one of the earthquakes were in St. Francis’ Basilica when the vaulted ceiling caved in. St. Clare’s Basilica was built between 1257 and 1265. The saint, a disciple of St. Francis, was born in Assisi in 1194 and died in 1253.
The Greek Orthodox Church hopes to build three luxury hotels in Athens for the 2004 Olympic Games. The Church, which owns extensive land in Athens, already has the approval of the Greek Tourism Organization to build a 750-room luxury hotel in the heart of Athens. Sources of the Greek Orthodox Church explain that “it will not become an hotelier, but will simply make use of its property.”

On May 6, 2001, John Paul II became the first Pope to enter a mosque, calling for brotherhood between Christians and Muslims. The Pontiff went into the Omayyad Mosque accompanied by Grand Mufti Ahmad Kuftaro, the highest Muslim religious authority of Damascus. While entering the mosque, the Pontiff admired the beauty of the temple of the Omayyads in which, according to tradition, the head of John the Baptist is preserved.

More than 400 of North Dakota’s 2,000 prairie churches are vacant and poorly maintained, and at risk of falling apart, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The churches, mainly founded by first-generation settlers from Germany, Poland, Iceland, Russia and Scandinavia in the late 19th century, were usually the first building erected when a town was settled, trust officials said. North Dakota’s population peaked by 1930, then began to decline, forcing many communities to close or demolish their churches. Many of the remaining structures contain irreplaceable artwork, stained glass windows, carvings and statues. Architectural styles vary from simple folk to Gothic, Greek Revival, Tudor and Romanesque.

American Catholics in many communities are no longer acquiescing quietly to the large-scale renovations of their churches, says Zenit news agency. Protests against renovations in Petoskey, Michigan; Rochester, New York; and Grand Rapids, Michigan, may be indicative of a wider national trend to question experts who insist that radical alterations of traditional church interiors are mandated by Church law. Bishop Raymond Burke of La Crosse, Wisconsin, agrees that there is a larger movement at work. Parishioners once thought there was nothing they could do about impoverished renovations, said Bishop Burke. “Now,” he said, “people won’t accept that.”

Most of the projects that have drawn opposition include such elements as moving the altar closer to the congregation, removing the altar railing or statues, moving the tabernacle and replacing pews with chairs.

Three countries are helping to rebuild 400 Salvadoran churches. The Catholic Church in the United States, Germany and Spain will assist in the reconstruction of 400 churches in El Salvador, damaged or destroyed by earthquakes this year, Archbishop Fernando Saenz Lalacalle of San Salvador disclosed. The archbishop said the assistance was obtained after the archdiocese organized separate meetings with the episcopates of the three countries.

Siberian Catholics mark a decade of religious liberty. The Catholic Church in Siberia is marking the tenth anniversary of the return of religious liberty to these lands. On April 13, 1991, the Catholic Church was able to re-establish ecclesiastical structures after more than seventy years of state-imposed atheism. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet government confiscated all the Catholic Church’s property. This was followed in 1923, under Stalin, by the systematic and total elimination of ecclesial life. Churches were closed or turned into factories or warehouses; priests were suppressed, and priests and faithful were deported or killed. But beginning in 1990, religious persecution abated. Today in these regions there are an estimated 500,000 Catholics. Problems remain, however. According to Bishop Joseph Werth, apostolic administrator for Western Siberia, there are critical shortages of priests, religious, and funds for building churches and schools. Moreover, a 1997 law restored some restrictions on the activity of the Catholic Church. Bishop Werth’s office can be reached at: Telephone (3832) 21-61-09. Fax: (3832) 21-88-06.

On January 16, 2001, The Association for The Arch of Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and International Shrine of the Holy Innocents, a not-for-profit New York corporation, was formed in Buffalo, New York. The Association’s purpose is to build a truly world-class, globally significant shrine, probably to be located on the western shore of Lake Erie adjacent to downtown Buffalo. The shrine will feature primarily a monumental,ascendable, golden triumphal arch, the Arch of Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to be the world’s tallest monument measuring 700 feet to the tip of the golden Cross that will surmount its peak. The monument will commemorate the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary as predicted by the communications given at Fatima. Below the arch will be a shrine to the innocent children lost to abortion. More information is available on the internet at www.archoftriumph.org.

Bulgaria will erect a statue to Pope Blessed John XXIII by May 2002 in front of the Cathedral of St. Joseph. The monument is in remembrance of his presence in Bulgaria where, as Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, he was apostolic nuncio for 10 years. Last October, Istanbul dedicated a street to John XXIII, who once worked in the Vatican diplomatic service in Turkey. He was beatified last September.

The damaged 17th-century Cathedral of Arequipa has become a rallying point for Peruvians rebuilding after a June earthquake that killed 102 people. “It’s a top priority for us to restore it,” said Mayor Juan Manuel Guillen. Nestled amid the Andes mountains 465 miles southeast of Lima, Arequipa is nicknamed Peru’s colonial “White City” because of its brightly colored buildings that sparkle in the sun. But the city is located in an area prone to major earthquakes, which struck in 1687, 1858, 1868, and 1960. The church, built in 1656, had weathered them all. When the quake struck, Arequipa resident Augustin Medina watched in horror as the cathedral’s steeple tumbled backward and crashed through the ceiling of one of the side chapels. “It sounded like a bomb had exploded,” she said. The mayor estimated the cathedral’s restoration will cost around $3 million and take anywhere from six to eight months.

Bishop is principal liturgist of diocese, says Cardinal Egan. Cardinal Edward Egan of New York, general relator of the Synod of Bishops, touched on issues of liturgy, art, and architecture in his opening address to the Synod on October 1, 2001, in

An artist’s conception of the new Arch of Triumph Of the Immaculate Heart of Mary proposed for Buffalo, New York.
“My ambition is to give Oakland’s cathedral a universal character independent of the Catholic Church,” says Santiago Calatrava, explaining his unorthodox design for the new diocesan mother church, which combines elements of Chinese, Buddhist, Hindu, and nature-religion traditions. “Pluralism is universality,” he explains. Calatrava’s design would sport a signature rib-like armature of painted steel, glass and concrete. Inside, in the spirit of oriental religions, the congregation will sit encircling the altar and cathedra in the middle of the 34,000 square-foot space. At night, the cathedral will be a central beacon, while an auditorium nearby will be for myriad celebrations. Its gardens will symbolize earth, air, fire and water—all gods within many pantheons. This all-encompassing celestial view is no coincidence. The “word culture comes from ‘occult,’” says Calatrava, and in multicultural Oakland, there are many “cults” to consider.

Architects give an old seminary new life as a five-star conference center. St. John’s in Plymouth, Michigan served as a Roman Catholic seminary from 1946-1988 when it was closed due to declining enrollment. Detroit’s new Archbishop, Adam Cardinal Maida, retained Brown-Teehey & Associates to design a youth center and convert the 30,000 square foot seminary on 200 acres into a world-class facility for weddings, conferences and other events. Brown-Teehey worked carefully to preserve the old architectural beauty of the seminary while adding new infrastructure. Work on the seminary commenced in 1998 with an $11,000,000 budget and a 2-year schedule for completion. The all-new St. John’s opened on Jubilee Day, September 2000 as planned.

The controversy surrounding the renovation of Milwaukee’s St. John the Evangelist cathedral was the most highly publicized church architecture news in 2001. Planning for the renovation began a few years ago when Archbishop Rembert C. Weakland was approached about needed repairs on the cathedral and decided a thorough re-working of the church and surrounding property was needed. Changes to the interior of the Cathedral include moving the altar to the center of the nave, displacing the tabernacle from the high altar in the apse to a separate side chapel, replacing pews with chairs, and building a pipe organ into the apse. Some Milwaukee Catholics objected to the plans, however, and retained a canon lawyer to present their case to the Vatican.

Renovation began after masses on May 20, 2001. On May 26, the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments moved to halt the renovation until the Congregation could review the plans more fully. In June, Archbishop Weakland flew to Rome to discuss the matter with Jorge Cardinal Medina Estevez, the prefect of the Congregation. On June 30, the Cardinal faxed a letter to the Archbishop outlining four difficulties the Congregation found with the plans, and asking for a revision of them. (The text of the Congregation’s letter can be found on page 22 of this issue.) The Archbishop responded to the Cardinal immediately in a letter that was not made public. A few days later, he also sent a personal letter to all diocesan clergy explaining his understanding of the controversy and analyzing those individuals and groups who opposed him.

These letters as well as the issues surrounding the renovation were covered in articles in the New York Times, Washington Post, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and numerous newspapers around the country.

Despite the controversy, renovation work continued and was completed. The renovated Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist was dedicated at a Mass on Saturday, February 9, 2002. Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland celebrated the Dedication Mass and was joined by bishops from throughout the state, archdiocesan priests, and representatives from each parish in the 10-county Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

The new church of St. Mary’s in Rockledge, Florida,
by Michael Graves

From the Editor

Dear Friends of Sacred Architecture,

We are pleased to be publishing our sixth issue of this unique journal which focuses on Catholic art and architecture. It has received strong support from laity, priests, and architects. As you are aware, Sacred Architecture is published twice each year in the Spring and Fall. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the journal did not come out in Fall 2001 as planned, and instead we are bringing you the Spring issue. We apologize to all of you for the inconvenience, but want you to know that you will receive all of the issues for which you have subscribed. If you have not recently renewed your subscription, we invite you to renew and support the news stories, features, editorials, and articles of this unique journal. Thank you for all of your support.

—The Editor

The dedication mass for the renovated Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee.
With hindsight, many are waking up to the fact that the experimental church architecture designed and built in the latter half of the twentieth century has miserably failed the Catholic people. The “innovative” forms used by church architects in the sixties and seventies—think how clever they thought themselves then—look not only outdated at the dawn of the new century, they look ugly. The non-churches of the eighties and nineties that can pass for libraries, post offices, or nursing homes are so uninspiring and banal that they fail to attract, to evangelize, or to raise the hearts and minds of men to God. They fail to acknowledge that Christ was made flesh and dwelt among us. They fail to serve the Catholic community, and they fail to make Christ’s presence known in any particular place. Similarly, the insensitive renovation of traditional churches that stripped these sacred edifices of their Catholic trappings, not only denuded a physical place, it effected the worship and beliefs of the people.

Happily, however, the realization of this failure—on the part of laity, priests, bishops, and architects alike—is the first step that will lead to the renewal of our sacred places. Designer Francis X. Gibbons, for instance, now speaks of his 1968 renovation of St. Mary, Star of the Sea Church in Baltimore as a “raping” of that church. Helen Marikle Passano, the primary patron for the restoration of the 1869 chapel at Notre Dame College in Baltimore, remembers loving the “modernization” of the chapel when she was a student there. “We thought we were moving forward with a contemporary space. But guess what? We’re moving back,” she told the Baltimore Sun in early 2001. “It’s time to bring [the chapel] back to its original glory.” To this end, she donated $1.5 million to peel away the 1960s alterations “including a flat ceiling and metal ducts that obscured the vaulted spaces above, wood paneling that covered plaster walls, and carpeting that smothered the handsome pine floor.”

Even the Vatican finally addressed the renovation problem earlier this year when Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez, prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship informed Milwaukee’s Archbishop Rembert Weakland that his proposed cathedral renovation did not conform to Church norms or liturgical law and is doing a disservice to Milwaukee Catholics.

This “realization period” should lead to four distinct ways to improve the architecture of Catholic churches, returning these edifices from meeting spaces to sacred places. The first is the restoration—or “re-renovation”—of traditional Catholic churches. That is, architects and pastors must work together to return the older, traditionally-oriented buildings that were renovated over the past three or four decades to their former glory. The second is to salvage and renovate the modernist churches built in the latter-half of the twentieth century by re-orienting them. Many of the buildings erected during the 1960s and 1970s, although irregular in form, can be transformed into beautiful transcendent places within. The third method is to transform ugly, modernist churches into parish halls or school buildings, and build “replacement churches” that will serve as genuine sacred places, designed in continuity with the Church’s tradition. The fourth method is perhaps the easiest: to build beautiful churches anew when parishes are established.

**Re-orienting the Renovated Church**

The first step must always be to restore the hierarchical form. The sanctuary must be made distinct again from the nave, where the congregation sits. In many cases this will mean that altars that have been moved into the midst of the congregation be returned to a proper sanctuary. The altar platform—usually consisting of one or two steps—that sits out in the nave with chairs gathered around it is not a sufficiently defined sanctuary by any means. Most, if not all, of the traditional churches are designed in the basilican cruciform plan. That means that there already exists a proper location for the sanctuary. The proper location is at the elevated “head” of the building. The nave serves as the body.

In other renovated churches the sanctuary has been moved to one of the nave’s side walls and the entire building re-oriented so that when one enters the church building, there is no natural progression down an aisle toward the altar of sacrifice. This type of renovation is really just a dis-orientation. Again, the sanctuary needs to be restored to its proper position at the...
head of the building and the nave reoriented to lead once again toward the restored altar.

The sanctuary should also be “re-defined,” that is, if the raised platform of the sanctuary has been removed, it must be restored. If the communion railing has been eliminated, the restoration of such a device would provide a distinct boundary for the sanctuary, and it would also be functional if Communion were to be distributed to kneeling penitents at the restored railing. The design of a restored railing should match the architecture of the church and the altar especially. However, in many cases, the altar in renovated churches is itself inadequate.

The poorly designed table altars that replaced high altars of past centuries can be deficient in several respects. First, they are often crafted of wood alone. In order to focus again on the sacrificial nature of the altar, the altar ought really to include an altar stone, the plain horizontal slab upon which the priest places the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The restored altar should also be a permanent fixture, built of durable materials. A simple table that could be used for a thanksgiving dinner in our homes is insufficient.

In some renovated churches the high altar fortunately still remains, although it has often served only to hold flowers or candlesticks since a freestanding altar was introduced after Vatican II. The most obvious solution in these fortunate churches is to eliminate the inadequate freestanding altar and revert to using the high altar, which is often already the natural focal point of the church, accepted by either a reredos or baldacchino. In fact there is a growing movement, given impetus by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, among younger priests especially to return to the ad orientem (or ad apsidem) Mass, that is, reciting the Eucharistic prayer while facing in the same direction as the congregation at the elevated altar.

Although many priests and not a few members of the laity believe this practice has been outlawed, banned, or otherwise made illegitimate, it is not so. Nor is this centuries-old practice awkward in any way. In fact, it is quite natural for a priest to lead his congregation by turning with them toward the Lord. This solution is so obvious that it can only be politics that are preventing such a restoration.

In many other churches, however, the high altar and reredos or baldacchino have been summarily removed. Although this is a most unfortunate situation, for those parishes that are committed to restoration it can be an opportunity to design and build something even more worthy and beautiful than the original. Such is the case with St. Paul’s Cathedral in Worcester, where a beautiful new wood reredos and cathedra were constructed in 1996 to replace a semi-circular concrete block wall that was put up in place of the old reredos.

It is also the case with several traditional churches that were restored in the Victoria, Texas diocese. The Diocese of Victoria is noted for its preservation of the famous “painted churches” in the Schulenburg area. Some of these churches had lost many of their sanctuary furnishings shortly after the Second Vatican Council. A generation later, however, nine parishes in the Victoria diocese tried to recapture what they had lost. The ornate high altar and reredos at St. Joseph’s Church in Moulton, Texas, for instance, was completely reconstructed from scratch by local carpenters in 1994.

There really is no reason that dignified altars cannot be made anew, complemented either by a beautiful reredos or baldacchino, depending on the style and design of the church. These elements will not only bring the focus back to the altar, they will ennoble it.

Restoring the Tabernacle To Prominence

Another important aspect—perhaps the most important—of a sanctuary restoration is moving the tabernacle back to its original position in the center of the sanctuary, behind the altar. In 1997 Father Richard Simon of St. Thomas of Canterbury Church in Chicago blazed a trail in this regard. He 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. In his June 24, 1997 letter to his parishioners he wrote:

I believe that much of the liturgical experimentation that began thirty years ago has failed. We are not holier, nor more Christ-centered now than we were then. In fact, we are facing a generation of young people who are largely lost to the Church because we have not given them the precious gift that is at the heart of Catholicism, that is, the Real Presence of Jesus. Mass has become simply a drama, a vehicle for whatever agenda is currently popular. The church building is no longer a place of encounter with the Lord but a sort of a social center, not a place of prayer, rather a place of chatter.

In many churches, including our own, the tabernacle was moved from the center of the church to add emphasis to Mass and the presence of the Lord in the reception of Holy Communion. That experiment, however, has failed. We have lost the sense of the sacred that formerly was the hallmark of Catholic worship. The behavior of many in the church is outrageous. When Mass is over it is impossible to spend time in prayer. The noise level reaches the pitch that one would expect at a sporting event. The kiss of peace seems like New Year’s Eve. Christ is forgotten on the altar. You may counter that He is present in the gathering of the Church, and though this is true, it should not detract from the Lord present on the altar. If the Lord is truly recognized in the congregation, it should serve to enhance the sacredness of the moment. This is simply not happening...

Therefore, 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. This means that I
Sacred Architecture

Sacred Architecture

will nag and nag until a sense of the sacred is restored. I will be reminding you that a respectful quiet will have to be maintained in church. Food and toys and socializing are welcome elsewhere, but the church is the place of an encounter with the Living God. It will not be a popular policy, but this is unimportant. I can hear one objection already. Where will the priest sit? I will sit where the priest has traditionally sat, over on the side of the sanctuary. Here as in many churches the “presider’s” chair was placed where the tabernacle had been. I am sick of sitting on the throne that should belong to my Lord. The dethronement of the Blessed Sacrament has resulted in the enthronement of the clergy, and I for one am sick of it. The Mass has become priest-centered. The celebrant is everything. I am a sinner saved by grace as you are and not the center of the Eucharist.

Let me resume my rightful place before the Lord rather than instead of the Lord. I am ordained to the priesthood of Christ in the order of presbyter, and as such I do have a special and humbling role. I am elder brother in the Lord and with you I seek to follow Him and to worship. Please, please let me return Christ to the center of our life together where He belongs.

Once Fr. Simon returned the tabernacle to its former location at the center of the sanctuary behind the altar he was surprised, he said, at the response. It was overwhelmingly positive and effective. Some sense of reverence was indeed restored at Mass in his church. On September 16, 1997 he reported the results of the move in a “form letter”:

You cannot imagine the response I got to the letter I addressed to my parishioners on June 24th. I have received so many calls and letters that I am reduced to saying thank you in a form letter. Still, I simply have to write to say thank you for your support and prayers. So many people thought I was brave to do what I did. Brave? I simply read the Catechism and moved a few pieces of furniture. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. In the parish, some people even wept for joy when they saw the change. I am still kicking myself and asking why I didn’t do this years ago. The response has been so supportive. Many wrote and expressed their sense of loneliness in the battle for Catholic orthodoxy. Well, you are not alone, neither among the laity nor the clergy.

Perhaps you have heard the definition of a neo-conservative. He is a liberal who has been mugged by reality. That certainly describes me. I was in college in the late Sixties and went the whole route: beard, sandals, protest, leafletting for feminism, and all the rest... [I]f a parish like this and a person like me can be turned from foolish liturgical experimentation, it can happen anywhere to anyone. Don’t give up! For instance, if they have taken the kneelers out of your church, go to the front and kneel on the hard floor. You’ll be amazed how many will join you. That’s what’s happened here.

Inspired by this well-publicized move, by Father Simon many other pastors have restored the tabernacle to prominence in their churches. This, as he attests, was simply “moving furniture,” but it restored the kind of prayerful reverence in his church that he and many others desired. With the tabernacle located directly behind the altar on the building’s main axis, the two elements work together as one: the tabernacle was returned to an extension of the altar, which is the focal point of the church, just as the Blessed Sacrament is an extension of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Since the reserved Sacrament is an extension of the Mass, it logically follows that, architecturally speaking, the tabernacle ought to be situated in direct relationship to the altar, whether on the altar or behind it. This arrangement has ramifications far beyond interior design. Ultimately, it is a matter of devotion and worship. In the words of Pope John Paul II, proper devotion to the Blessed Sacrament will inevitably lead to a fuller participation in the Eucharistic celebration: In his letter on the 750th anniversary of the Feast of Corpus Christi he wrote, “Outside the Eucharistic celebration, the Church is careful to venerate the Blessed Sacrament, which must be reserved… as the spiritual center of the religious and parish community. Contemplation prolongs communion and enables one to meet Christ, true God and true man, in a lasting way… Prayer of adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament unites the faithful with the paschal mystery; it enables them to share in Christ’s sacrifice, of which the Eucharist is the permanent sacrament.”

Tying in to this theology of the Eucharist is the crucifix, the figural representation of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary, that which is re-presented in an unbloody manner by the hands of the ordained priest at the altar. The crucifix—the corpus of Christ on the cross—was removed from many churches during renovations, and replaced by either symbolic processional crosses or other figures such as the risen Christ or paintings of wheat, sun, and birds. As beneficial as these new symbols may be to some, the res-
oration of the crucifix is integral to a proper restoration of the sanctuary. It is the crucifix which directly symbolizes the whole meaning of the Mass.

Restoration of Sacred Art

Another element especially significant to the restoration of the sanctuary is the restoration of sacred art. Many unfortunate churches were whitewashed thirty years ago in an iconoclastic attempt to remove so-called “distractions” from the house of God en route to reducing the church to a non-church. Others parishes had their statues summarily removed for the same reason. Fortunately, these misguided purges have begun to wane, yet plenty of churches have been left barren and stripped because some pastor, liturgist, or designer was a slave to fashion and bad taste. This is what church designer Francis X. Gibbons called “rape.”

But not all is lost.

With the newest methods of art preservation and restoration, murals and frescoes can be recovered, whitewashed statues can be returned to their original colors, and deteriorated works of sacred art can be restored. Such advances in the art of preservation ought to give hope to many a pastor who desires to bring the sacred back into his church building.

Furthermore, there are, contrary to public understanding, talented artists who can be commissioned to execute beautiful new murals or mosaics in churches that are unable to recover their artistic patrimony.

With regard to statues, icons, and other pieces of “moveable” art, there exists a treasury of old sacred art available at architectural antique shops around the U.S. and beyond. A few calls can put a pastor or restorationist in touch with groups that have salvaged these oftentimes priceless works of art from Catholic churches that have been closed and their churches razed. The same goes for architectural furnishings such as old wooden confessional, sacred vessels, crucifixes, Stations of the Cross, pews, and communion rails. Some of the more well-known internet auction web sites, for instance, offer a steady supply of these beautiful works of art. Unfortunately, these items more often wind up being used for secular purposes rather than in new or restored churches. We’ve all heard of confessional being used as telephone booths in restaurants or ornate hand-carved pews being used for seats in a pub.

Reordering the Nave

The same steps apply to the restoring the nave. Side shrines and Stations of the Cross that have disappeared over the decades can be refashioned anew or purchased from antique dealers and architectural salvage companies. Yet sometimes the destruction of church interiors goes far beyond what was removed. In many cases, it is also what has been added. Wood paneling, drop ceilings with acoustical tiles, and wall-to-wall carpeting are the biggest offenders. Fortunately such materials date the project to the late-sixties and seventies when homeowners were renovating their houses in much the same manner. The use of these cheap materials has dropped out of fashion, D Dó gráías. The removal of such “homey” items will offend few.

Because these materials are so flimsy and impermanent they are easily removed. With any luck they will have preserved what they were once hiding. The removal of ceiling tiles may reveal vaulting, clerestories, or ceiling murals intact and in good condition. Carpet removal can reveal terrazzo flooring or beautiful hardwood floorboards, and the removal of wood paneling can give way to beautiful plaster walls, sometimes decorated with beautiful stenciling or even mosaics.

More difficult to deal with, however, are the modern furnishings that often replaced the traditional ones. These newer furnishings are often at odds with the original design and style of the building.

The seating is another major restoration item. First, in those churches that had the kneelers removed from the pews: install new kneelers! For those churches that have skewed or turned their side aisle pews supposedly to better focus on the altar: turn them back facing forward. And for those churches that discarded the old pews in favor of cheap (or expensive) portable chairs, it would be ideal if new wooden pews with kneelers were to eventually be restored to the church. The fad of homey cushioned chairs will soon pass.

All in all, when restoring an historic church, the parish needs to hire competent restorationists with a proven track record of accomplishments. They must be sensitive to the original architecture of the church, but need not necessarily recreate exactly what existed some time in the past. However, any new furnishings or artwork introduced into the church should be in keeping with the architectural scheme rather
Salvaging Renovations

Some may ask: We’re stuck with this ugly building that looks like a __________ (fill in the blank); what can we do to improve upon the modern design? Fortunately, in some cases there is an easy answer. In E.A. Sövik’s theory of the non-church, he expressed his desire for a building that has a “throw-away interior,” that is, an interior that can be easily altered to suit the needs of the people at any time. Accordingly, the interiors of many of the non-churches built in the latter half of the twentieth century are easily altered. Their “throw-away interiors” can simply be thrown away and new furnishings and works of sacred art can be commissioned.

Of course, the new architect or designer has no obligation to subscribe to the modernist theory of the throw-away interior. On the contrary, he has the obligation of transforming the building into a beautiful church. It can be done, but not by designing another interior that can just be thrown away. The architect has the opportunity to reconnect with tradition in order to create a sacred place that will transcend generations and possibly cultures too.

Just as with the restoration project of a traditional church building, the first task is to properly reorient the interior spaces into a hierarchy of sanctuary and nave. This is more difficult to do with the modernist edifice than with the traditional church building because the floor plan may be somewhat irregular. Churches-in-the-round, fan-shaped theater-style churches, and asymmetrical layouts are three popular arrangements that ought to be corrected.

In this regard, the altar needs to be established at the “head” of the building, in a distinct sanctuary that is elevated above the nave and set off from the congregational seating. Most likely the altar in the modernist church to be renovated is unworthy to be used even for your kitchen table. The opportunity now exists to design a new altar that will establish itself not only as the focal point of the church but will set the tone for the new interior. Every other element of the renovation should lead to the altar in some way.

A new baldacchino or reredos can give the altar the nobility and prominence it deserves, and the close relationship of the tabernacle with the altar is just as important in the renovation of a modernist edifice as it is in the renovation of a historic church. The same goes for other elements and furnishings—pews, sacred art, pulpit, and communion rail. There is no reason that the traditional trappings of a Catholic church cannot be introduced into the modernist building to create a sense of the transcendent and eternal.

Replacement Churches

Of course, if it is at all possible, it is better to begin anew designing a church that can serve as a “city on a hill,” one that through its traditional form and exterior elements has the capacity to carry meaning, inspire, educate, and attract both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Since many or even most of the modernist church edifices do not appear as permanent structures, their buildings can be adapted to another use, one that would serve the parish in another way, for instance, as a school building, food pantry, theater, gymnasium, or parish meeting hall.

Many of the modernist churches, because of their layout and arrangement, lend themselves easily to such a transformation. Not a few people have entered one of these new churches or non-churches and exclaimed, “my, this looks more like a gymnasium (or a theater, etc.)” If it looks like a gym or a theater, chances are it can easily be converted into a gym or theater while a new church, designed in continuity with the Catholic tradition of church architecture, rises nearby. These are properly called “replacement churches.”

In fact, a pastor or bishop can easily save face by telling a parish that the current modern facility they are using as a church was only intended as a temporary solution until a time came when parishioners could help build a permanent house of God that would speak equally to generations of Catholics to come. Well, the time has come.

Finally, perhaps the greatest opportunity comes when a new parish is established. The pastor, architect, and parish can start at ground zero, so to speak. The parish has the great advantage of hindsight. It can look back over fifty years of ugly, uninspiring church designs in order to avoid building a facade that will pass away even before the current generation has died out. There is that opportunity to connect with the tradition of creating transcendent vessels of meaning that will not only look like a churches but will be churches in their essence.

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Notes:
1 “I’ve often said after I did that job,” said Francis X. Gibbons, the man who designed the renovation, “that I raped St. Mary, Star of the Sea.” (John Rivers, “Churches try to retrieve grand trappings of past,” Baltimore Sun, May 21, 2001.
3 John Paul II, “Letter on the 750th Anniversary of the Feast of Corpus Christi,” no. 3.
GEM OF THE BOSTON ARCHDIOCESE:
ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA

Milda Richardson

St. Catherine of Genoa on Spring Hill in Somerville, Massachusetts—designed by the Boston firm of Maginnis, Walsh and Sullivan over the period 1907-1920—is a seminal building in the development of early twentieth-century Roman Catholic church architecture in America. With its sand-grey brick and glazed white terra cotta exterior, St. Catherine became a paradigm for the promulgation of the Italian Lombardian style, which was advocated by Charles D. Maginnis (1867-1955) because of its association with Early Christian architecture, the flexibility of the style, and the design possibilities of using brick rather than more costly stone carving typical in Classical or Gothic buildings.

Often referred to as the “gem of the Boston archdiocese,” St. Catherine of Genoa owes its generously-funded commission to members of the O’Brien family, especially to Hugh O’Brien, the first Catholic mayor of Boston (1884) and uncle of the pastor, Rev. James O’Brien. As secretary to the Bishop of Hartford, Rev. O’Brien had traveled extensively in Europe studying churches and collaborated very closely with Maginnis on this project, making changes to the plans almost daily. The success of the endeavor was due in part to the fact that both Maginnis and O’Brien shared a similar architectural philosophy: the belief that this building should connect American immigrant Catholics to the European Catholic aesthetic and spiritual experience.

Although the original conception included a campanile to the right of the facade, its elimination from the plan allows one to focus more on the symmetry of the facade, which is loosely derived from the church. As was common in America, the plan included a lower and upper church to accommodate double masses for the growing numbers of Catholic immigrants—although the entrances to the lower churches were usually subsidiary. Maginnis decided not only to make the lower entrance prominent, but also incorporated it into the vertical axis of the facade, composed of the two central arched entryways and rose window, each element on a discreet plane. The horizontal axis consists of an open arcade, decorative cornice, and inlaid panels. A life-size terra cotta figure of Christ, modeled by Hugh Cairns, stands at the crossing of the axes, under a projecting archway. The resulting cross functions as the organizational principle for the sculptural plasticity of the facade as a whole. Delicate accents of the white glazed terra cotta trim enliven the overall surface.

Paying homage to the intricate brickwork seen throughout the Boston area since the era of Charles Bulfinch, the exterior of this steel-framed building is artfully laid in common bond, 1:5, with simple geometric motifs (repeated on the interior) of rubbed brick throughout the wall spaces to relieve potential monotony. The upper section of the gable is emphasized with projecting courses, which allow for a play of light and shadow. In his desire to convince leaders of the Catholic Church that the Church had established itself firmly on American soil and, therefore, it was no longer necessary to build big to make an impression, Maginnis argued strongly for small parish churches built of brick: “Such is the alchemy of art that an unpretentious brick church with the mark
of gifted hands upon it, may have more artistic value than the cathedral."

The supreme artistry of the lavish interior, recently restored by J.W. Graham Inc., reflects the architect’s leadership role as founding member of the Catholic Federation of Arts, the Liturgical Arts Society, and the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts. The eclectic interior, based on Byzantine precedents, is a premier example of liturgical arts in the Boston area. In the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement, Maginnis firmly believed—and worked to convince his patrons—that the architect should be responsible for all aspects of a church design, including the coordination of the liturgical furnishings, to achieve a total unity of the arts. To this end Maginnis insisted on working with master craftsmen of international repute; for example, Angelo Lualdi, who carved the Stations of the Cross in white alabaster, with the provision that the models for the stations were never to be used again.

Johannes Kirchmayer, trained in Oberammergau and also associated with the architects Ralph Adams Cram and Henry Vaughan, carved the pulpit, five pictorial panels, and smaller liturgical objects. The marriage and death of St. Catherine are depicted on the large panels carved in low relief on the rear wall of the church. The panel above the altar in the Holy Family Chapel shows Mary with the Christ Child and St. Joseph standing behind them holding a carpenter’s tool. The facade of St. Catherine church itself appears as a detail in the background. The pulpit was erected to the memory of parishioners who served in World War I. Kirchmayer carved the patron saints of the Allies around the pulpit, with St. Catherine representing the United States. Throughout his carvings, Kirchmayer used gold, touches of color, and different shades and textures of wood to highlight details.

Both Rev. O’Brien and Maginnis were enthusiastic about exploring modern materials, particularly the creative possibilities of stucco to effectively emulate stone as had been done in Europe at significantly less expense. The interior—essentially a basilica plan with barrel-vaulted ceiling—is sheathed with Rose Tavanelle marble up to the height of the gilded Romanesque cushion capitals, adorned with eagles, lions, birds, shields and engravings of verses from the Psalms. The entire wall surface above is decorated with elaborate designs in stucco modeled by Hugh Cairns, who also prepared the models for the stone carving and woodwork, which was executed by Irving and Casson. The ceiling coffers in dull green and gold contain the main color scheme, which is repeated in the muted gold of the aisle domes and throughout the detailed carvings of plant motives, interlace, and arabesque patterns. Together with the ornamental bands and cornices, the complex grisaille and multi-toned designs result in a deeply layered surface texture which envelopes the interior. Touches of blue and red hint at Romanesque vibrancy.

For Maginnis, worship at the altar was a fundamental architectural demand. In his words, "The lines of the interior must contrive to secure a befitting aspect of solemnity—an atmosphere which shall stimulate religious emotion and comprehension of the mystery that the altar is theologically the Church, because it represents Divine Presence." Maginnis designed every detail to focus on the semi-circular apse containing the alabaster and onyx altar, modeled by Hugh Cairns, with flowing vines and birds copied from the sarcophagus of Archbishop Theodore at Ravenna. The altar contrasts effectively with the deep hues of the purple and gray Fleur de Pech marble used in the freestanding curved colonnade behind the altar and the bookmatched marble slabs of the sanctuary walls. The columns of the colonnade are made from the cores of the strongly veined marble nave columns which had been cored and split to fit around the steel posts. Maginnis tipped the sanctuary arch to create an uninterrupted flow from the nave to the sanctuary space and downward over the apse painting of God the Father with his arms outstretched in blessing. Enthroned Christ in a nimbus, and the Dove of the Holy Ghost. The figures of Mary, the Archangel and saints are arranged around the edge of the semicircular dome, which was painted on canvas by Alexander Locke, a pupil of John LaFarge. The gold-plated bronze capitals of the columns rising from the center of the reredos were made by Tiffany Studios. The upward thrust of the small gold baldacchino dome over the tabernacle, with mosaics by the Waldo Brothers, creates the perfect balance of this masterful interior.

St. Catherine represents a collaboration between two men who shared spirituality and piety, one bringing resources to the project, the other providing design talent of uncommon quality.

Milda B. Richardson is an art historian who lives in Boston. She is presently working on a monograph on the work of Maginnis and Walsh.
IDENTITY AND LONGEVITY

Michael Enright

As a member of the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Commission for Sacred Art, I have noticed a couple of areas of church design that are frequently overlooked in the planning.

In presenting these concerns, I have purposely avoided the thorny issues of tabernacle placement, baptismal fonts, altar and assembly, etc. Liturgists and designers will probably be arguing about these questions half an hour after Christ comes again! In the meantime, the two issues below need to be addressed before any consideration of the interior designs for churches. They should be addressed because they are not “changeable” elements in design. Once the building is up, you can change the interior all you want, but you cannot go back and make structural changes.

The first area of weakness in church design has often been whether the building “looks” like a Catholic church. During the past couple of years, architects have come to our commission with designs that do not read as churches. Too frequently the modifications suggested at the commission have been something like, “Why don’t you add a tower here?” or, “Can you include some kind of a sign that identifies this as a Catholic church?”

There is an inherent weakness in a building that needs a sign to be identified as a Catholic church. There is some debate among designers about exactly what defines a church, and still more debate about what defines a Catholic church. Still, it is not impossible to design a building that clearly identifies itself that way. The architect only needs a tiny dose of humility and common sense. What I have seen too frequently is a building that the architects have managed to “sell” to the pastor and building committee, but that doesn’t look like a church and cannot be identified as a Catholic church without signage. A church is not a place for architects to feed their egos.

The second area of weakness in these designs has often been that they are not permanent buildings. One of the questions pastors, dioceses, and building committees ought to ask architects is, “How long will this last?” A church building ought to be built to last longer than the architect who designed it. It seems that no one asks the longevity question at the outset, and then the parish is stuck with a building that needs excessive maintenance from the day it’s built. Many of the flaws in current design lead to new buildings that — almost immediately after the dedication — need new roofs, flashing repairs, or replacement of mechanical systems. Some require aero-

St. Stanislaus Kostka, Chicago, Illinois,

batics to do something as simple as change a light bulb. These buildings are put together with the assumption that someone will always be there to caulk expansion joints in the brick, the maintenance people will always remember to oil the little steam pump in the basement, the ushers will always be sure to keep the snow off of the carpet in the vestibule, etc.

Why not eliminate as many maintenance problems as you possibly can in the original design? Many of the designs I’ve seen make assumptions about continuous maintenance and the desire of pastors/staffs to keep up with this maintenance that are unwarranted. Some of the designs make assumptions about the longevity of mechanical systems that are simply asinine. A pastor of a parish I know told me about an air handler in his church that had to be changed, but couldn’t be. The mechanical room was under the sacristy and there was no way to take out the old air handler without demolishing the back of the church.

There are horror stories like that repeated all over the Archdiocese of Chicago, and, I’m sure, around the country. Stories about churches that were dysfunctional from the day they were dedicated, about roofs that leaked after the first rainstorm and have been leaking ever since, about light bulbs that are never changed because you’d have to tape wings on the maintenance man to get to them, about boilers that can’t be fixed or pumps that can’t be accessed.

Architects and designers should remember that someday someone will be stuck with their designs. I remember being newly ordained and going to a parish on the north side of Chicago. The church was built in the mid-sixties, an “in the round” church with low windows on three sides. The windows were some special kind of glass and black cement. There were a couple of problems, though. The building was oriented incorrectly on the site and the windows were dark blue. The place was always dark, even on the sunniest day. People couldn’t see well enough to read the liturgy.

Furthermore, these “special” windows couldn’t be opened. The designers had figured that the parish would always be able to run the air conditioner. I figured it had to be broken—that was the only reason I could imagine that the pastor would subject himself and me to the experience of celebrating Mass in this place. The sanctuary was raised a few feet from the floor of the church, and the roof rose above the sanctuary. Heat being what it is, on a hot summer day with a full church it was nearly unbearable to celebrate Mass there. One day I was walking with the maintenance man in the back rooms of the church and noticed the compressors for the air conditioning. I asked him how long they’d been broken. “Broken?” He looked at me and smiled. “They work just fine. It’s just that they cost too much to run.” I had some choice thoughts about the people who designed a church with windows that couldn’t be opened.

Someday the new church you’re contemplating may be in a poor neighborhood. The pastor may not be able to afford to run the air conditioners or pay a maintenance person to scoop the leaves out of the gutters or check the flashings on the roof every week. The building should remain standing and be usable!

These two concerns—the readability of a church design as a Catholic church and the mechanical-structural integrity of the building, are the easy ones. Yet they have not been addressed! Before we even begin the discussion on interior design, let us be sure the building will still be here looking like a church when future generations decide that our tabernacle and font need to switch places.

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Rev. Michael Enright is a pastor in Chicago.
The style of church building in an age reflects many things, not least how the universe is perceived by that age. Just as the Gothic cathedral can be read as a micro-cosm of the medieval universe, so can the contemporary church building be read as a model of the contemporary universe. Therefore the argument for adopting “current norms for the design of liturgical spaces,” for example, is also an argument that the church building should model the universe that this age thinks it lives in. In this relativist age, that universe is inherently materialist and deeply hostile to the Divine.

The modern age is said to have begun in 1915 with the publication of Einstein’s general theory of relativity. The body of ideas which constitute modernism may have been around prior to that date, but it took relativity to give the body its form and cosmic context. In response to the already famous Michelson-Morley experiment which showed that light does not obey Newton’s absolute laws of motion, Einstein dismissed the absolutes. From that moment on, the universe would be a purely subjective affair. All points of view would be equally valid and value would be ascribed by the observer alone.

The relativist universe is therefore —

(1) boundary-less, because every part of it and every place in it has equal value and boundaries, and divisions between places are unnecessary.

(2) homogeneous, because without boundaries and divisions, places merge together into one vast space that is the same throughout.

(3) directionless, because in unbounded, homogeneous space there’s nowhere special to look and no particular place to go.

The result of all this is a universe that is empty and meaningless. Since there is no objective truth or reality to be found out there, since infinite and unbounded space has room enough for every possible point of view and yet none of them can raise a stir in all that emptiness, the only direction to look is inwards.

It is often argued that in the medieval or, more accurately, the Ptolemaic universe the Earth was positioned at the center of things, and therefore people in the Middle Ages must have believed that everything in the universe revolved around Man and the Earth. The argument continues that we in the Modern Age know the truth: we and our planet are truly nowhere and utterly insignificant in a universe that extends towards infinity in every direction.

But in the Ptolemaic universe the Earth appears diagrammatically to be the central sphere among all the spheres. But if the diagram is read three dimensionally, the Earth’s real status as the furthest sphere from God becomes apparent. In the Middle Ages the Earth was believed to be at the lowest point in the universe in keeping with Man’s fallen status. It is the modern universe—where the only valid truths are those which originate in human consciousness—that is truly human-centred.

Modernist church design is—

(1) boundary-less, since every attempt is made to diminish or dispense with divisions between parts of the building. This is most obvious in the merging of the sanctuary and the body of the church both visually and by generating a traffic between the two with lay people frequently entering the sanctuary and the priest leaving it.

(2) homogeneous, since the typical...
The contemporary Church

preference over—or even excludes—the

community in which the immanent takes
directional, closed, and inward-looking.

circles are essentially non-

ing the priest to face the people creates a

not been reordered, the mere fact of turn-

one; and even in a church building that has

ward, and the sanctuary and altar are

tinct impression is of one single space that

can be taken in at a glance.

(3) directionless, since there’s little
to attract the eye or move the body for-
ward, and the sanctuary and altar are
pushed forward into the body of the
church with the people gathered around.
This configuration is, in effect, a circular
one; and even in a church building that has
not been reordered, the mere fact of turn-
ing the priest to face the people creates a
circular form. Circles are essentially non-
directional, closed, and inward-looking.

The result of this is an inward-looking
community in which the immanent takes
precedence over—or even excludes—the
transcendent. The contemporary Church
worships in relativist space, space which
has to—by its very nature—exclude or
radically diminish the concept that any part
of it may be special or worthy of being set
apart, that any part of it may be sacred.
And in the absence of any meaningful
space without, the only option is to look in.

The influential “Environment and Art
in Catholic Worship” (EACW), produced by the American Bishops’ Committee on
the Liturgy in 1978, summed up as much as
any document could the post-Vatican II
style of church building. In this document
the Council’s emphasis on Christ’s presence
in the community at worship is fur-
ther explained and EACW goes as far as ac-
tually making “the assembly the primary
symbol of worship.”

The liturgical environment, claims
EACW, draws on the “community’s recog-
nition of the sacred,” and “it’s own expres-
sion,” more than on liturgical or theological
principles. And so there it is, in black and
white—as well as in concrete, steel and
glass—the relativist church, so emptied of
the transcendent that the people are its first
source of meaning.

It wasn’t until after the Second Vatican
Council that the Church adapted the lit-
urgy to the modernist style. For the first
half of the twentieth century, new churches
were built which were unmistakably mod-
ernist but which retained traditional litur-
gical forms.

The Bauhaus School was founded in
1919 in Weimar, Germany by the architect
Walter Gropius. Many important modernist
styles were taught in order to create a clean,

cylindrical form, pure style for a clean, pure future. Styles and traditions were considered obsolete and the talk was of “starting from zero.” A
new aesthetic was to be found through the
use of honestly expressed materials. All
forms of decoration were out.

The architect Le Corbusier published
“Towards a New Architecture” in 1923, a
text which was to become one of the twen-
tieth century’s most influential works of ar-
chitectural theory. The spatial principles
which inspired them were laid out in the
text: “A great epoch has begun. There ex-
ists a new spirit.... There is no longer any
question of custom, nor of tradition.... The
Styles are a lie....”

The message was clear. The past was
dead and the future wide open.

Just as relativity had freed universal
space from absolutes, so architectural space
was to be liberated from traditional con-
cepts. New construction methods employ-
ing steel and reinforced concrete allowed
greater spans to be achieved without so
much solid masonry. Space could now
“flow” because there was no longer any
need to restrict an activity to an area en-
closed by heavy walls. Free flowing space
could be multi-functional and open-plan.
Sliding doors and partitions allowed activity
areas—or zones—to be closed off and
opened up again as the need arose.

No longer was a building to be consid-
ered in terms of connected but individual-
ly defined spaces, but as an expression of
unbounded, egalitarian space. Light-
weight curtain walling and extensive areas
of glazing helped lighten the perimeter of
the building, and the city was to be liber-
ated by abandoning traditional patterns of
streets, squares, avenues, courtyards, etc.
By raising buildings off the ground on col-
umns, or “piloti,” space could also flow un-
derneath them.

One of the most frequent complaints
people make about the contemporary
church building is that “it doesn’t look like
a church,” which to the modernist, at least,
will only be evidence of “a sentimental at-
tachment to outmoded concepts.” After
all, if we’ve been freed from the limitations
of traditional forms, who’s to say what a
church should look like?

Part of the modernist project has been to
turn to the ancients for inspiration. Easter
Island statues, Mayan temples, the Acropolis, all demonstrate the purity of “primary” forms like cubes, pyramids, spheres, and rectangles which have an inherent beauty due to their geometry alone. This tendency to look to the farthest past in order to develop a style for the future is a feature of much modernist art.

Similarly, the model of the early Church is often held up as the example to follow when new churches are commissioned or a reordering is proposed. The contemporary liturgy requires an authentic and relevant setting, it is claimed, one that reflects the simplicity and togetherness experienced by the first Christians as they came together in each others’ houses or in the simplest of buildings.

But the first Christians lived in a directional, bounded, and hierarchical universe. It was Aristotle who proposed that the boundary between the earthly realm (which was subject to change and decay) and the celestial realm (which was immutable and eternal) lay at the orbit of the moon. The division of the universe into Earth and Sky was further emphasised by the distribution of the elements. Below the moon was air, earth, fire and water, whereas above the moon was the fifth element, or “ether.”

The astronomer Ptolemy of Alexandria, who died around A.D. 180, mapped out the orbits of the celestial spheres. From the Earth upwards was the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the “Stellatum,” or sphere of the stars. Then came the Primum Mobile, the “First Mover;” and beyond that—beyond the ninth sphere—lay the Empyrean, the abode of God.

It was God’s love that caused the Primum Mobile to turn, which then transmitted motion down through the spheres, which made music as they turned. This was a universe moved by the love of God. Like the nine choirs of angels, the spheres increased in perfection the closer they were to God. The furthest sphere—the Earth—was also composed of a different element than the rest of the universe.

It is difficult to imagine a universe more different from ours. To the Medievals, direction really mattered—up and down had absolute value. Theirs was a transcendent universe that inspired movement and aspiration. Where you were in the hierarchy was a crucial matter and every part of that hierarchy was occupied.

This was also a universe that died its death. But was that death as much the result of a human desire to climb from the bottom of the cosmic pile as of the discovery of new scientific facts? As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, the universal model of an age is as much a product of the psychology of that age as of its scientific knowledge.

When the appetite for a new or modified universe becomes strong enough, the scientific phenomena to justify it will turn up—or so the argument goes. This is partly because science isn’t nearly as fixed in its theories as it seems. For example, there isn’t enough matter in the universe to satisfy the laws of gravity which are supposed to govern the forces between planets and stars and keep the galaxies moving. But it is generally assumed that gravity is this universal force because it is convenient for the contemporary world to do so.

Similarly the Doppler effect, which explains why the pitch of a car horn changes as the car passes, is employed to explain the red shift observed in light waves coming from stars in the most distant galaxies in the universe. This red shift is supposed to indicate that these galaxies are moving away from us, which leads on to the expanding universe and the big bang theory. But doubts have been raised that the phenomena observed are entirely due to red shift effects. But again this puts too much doubt into the prevailing scientific mind.

The call for the re-sacralization of the liturgy is often heard these days. But this cannot be achieved without the re-sacralization of space, without a reawakening of the concept of a sacred universe. The contemporary mind set might favour relativism, but this will not last forever. Meanwhile popular culture has moved into space by reworking the myths and setting some of its most popular adventures beyond the planet.

The Church does not have to accept the relativist universe. It is acknowledged that the liturgy suffers from too great an emphasis on the immanent. To redress the balance in favour of the transcendent, the Church has first to reclaim sacred space.

Moyra Dooley is an architect and journalist living in London.
On Monday, 1 October 2001, the Holy Father dedicated the new, permanent Synod Chapel, located next to the Vatican Synod Hall. The Chapel has reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, providing synod participants with an area for adoration and prayer during the synodal assembly. Upon arrival and before departing from the morning and evening plenary sessions, the Holy Father with his small entourage and the General Secretary make a visit to the chapel.

The design and furnishings of the synod chapel are meant to communicate and celebrate the theological concepts of collegiality and communion underlying the Synod of Bishops. Its design and furnishings draw their primary inspiration from two biblical passages: Acts 2:1-4 and John 20:19-29, which treat the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the apostolic college gathered in the Upper Room or Cenacle.

Though born at the cross, the Church has consistently taught that her initial venture into the world was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire upon the apostles, gathered in the Cenacle, with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Since this is a particularly powerful event in the life of the apostolic college as a group, and thereby the Church, the design of the chapel wishes to recreate visually the experience of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-4). The inset stained-glass window in the ceiling portrays the Holy Spirit as a dove on a triangular golden field to recall the Blessed Trinity, the source of communion in the episcopate and in the Church as a whole. The movement of the glass in various tones of red, yellow and orange highlights the outpouring of the Spirit in tongues of fire which made the apostles eloquent witnesses to Christ. Fire’s property of light and heat also corresponds to enlightenment (wisdom) and courage (zeal), elements which characterized the mission of Peter and the apostles.

According to biblical evidence, the Cenacle or Upper Room, the site of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as seen above, was also the room in which Jesus celebrated the Passover meal at which he instituted the Sacraments of the Priesthood and the Eucharist. The setting of the Cenacle therefore is linked to the shared episcopal dignity and the principle of unity of the episcopate and the whole Church. A central kneeler recalls the Holy Father, Successor of St. Peter, surrounded by benches and kneelers symbolizing the eleven remaining apostles. The intention is to gather the episcopal college “in and around Peter,” yet all facing the tabernacle and the mystical presence of the Lord, who stands in the midst of the college and breathes forth his Holy Spirit on them (cf. Jn 20:19-29).

In lighted niches at the rear of the chapel stand two bronze statues of Sts. Peter and Paul, the patron saints of the Church of Rome. They are symbolic of the universality of the Church in Peter’s mission to the Jews and Paul’s to the Gentiles (cf. Gal 2:7).

The frosted design on the sliding glass door of the chapel states the synodal character of the chapel, with a central mitre bearing the apostolic keys to signify Peter and eleven mitres, positioned around the central mitre, completing the symbolism of the apostolic college. To continue the theme of the unity of the apostolic college, the altar-support is suggestive of the prow of a boat. The New Testament contains many passages in which a boat provides the setting for significant experiences for the apostles as a group.

The boat is also used as the symbol of the entire Church, oftentimes called “the Bark of Peter.” In this sense, the cross with its bronze figure of the suffering Christ conveniently completes the mast to Peter’s humble fishing boat. The wind-swept movement to the sculpture, including the shroud-like pieces of cloth behind the cross—a hearkening to the shroud and resurrection—is a further association with the work of the Holy Spirit, Who provides the “wind” for the sails of Peter’s Bark.

The simple bronze tabernacle bears the customary shafts of wheat and grapes for the Eucharist. An added feature is the symbol of the fish, indicative of Peter the fisherman and the mission of the apostles as “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19; Mk 1:17). The design is also continued in the candlesticks and sanctuary lamp. The fish is also the ancient symbol of Christ.

The Marian statue, entitled Our Lady of Hope, recalls Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, gathered in prayer with the Apostles in the Cenacle. She extends her hand to marvel at the wonder of God’s grace, to welcome the flame of the love of the Holy Spirit, to nurture it so that it may burn constantly and brightly. As true handmaiden of the Lord and His Gospel, and image of the Church, Mary is Mother of the Apostles and their successors. In effect, the apostles, gathered around Mary in the Upper Room, were as if looking into a mirror, a mirror in which they saw their own reflection as the Church, the perfect “Bride of Christ.”

M. Sis. John A. Abruzzese is Secretary General for the Synod of Bishops.
How can anyone oppose a cry room (a.k.a. a “family room”) in a church? Young parents want it to avoid being embarrassed by an unruly child and to be with understanding people struggling with the same problem. Children like it because they can play their games and not be called to account. Prayerful people encourage it so they won’t be bothered by the problems of children. And most priests favor it because it’s a physical place to isolate major distractions at Mass.

However, as a priest for thirty years and a pastor for more than half of them, I oppose cry rooms on theological grounds. Vatican II identified the Church as the “people” of God (Constitution on the Church, Ch. 2). A “people” is not just calm adults and well-behaved children. When young children are segregated out of the assembly into a cry room, the assembly lacks its full identity as a “people.” We enter the Church through baptism, so a baptized child belongs to the Church as much as the old lady aggavated by misbehavior or the old man concerned about the “smells.” The Church is “catholic,” which means she embraces all ages as well as all nations. The Church doesn’t segregate by race or language (i.e. non-Spanish speakers are royally welcomed at a Spanish Mass), and in the same way the Church loses her visible catholicity when she segregates her assemblies by age.

Another theological reason for opposing cry rooms is that the gospel is promised “to your children” (Acts 2:39). Dividing the children from the assembly removes them from the space where that gospel is given. A “family room” puts pressure on families to use it and teaches the children that they’re not held to the same standards as everyone else. There aren’t two Churches (one for adults and the other for families with unruly children) so there shouldn’t be two places where the one Church assembles for her public work (Constitution on the Liturgy #10).

A third and more practical reason for opposing a cry room is that the space it takes can be put to other uses. No church ever has enough storage or devotional space. By taking up an assigned and specific location, a cry room “clutters” the worship space of a community and usually has its own clutter (and unpleasant odors) as well.

Of course, there has to be an emergency place for an unruly child when there’s no other way to establish control. That place should have doors to isolate its distractions from the assembly, glass windows to provide the parents and children visual contact with what they came to see, and an audio system to let the family hear what they’re missing. However, it should be a temporary place, like a vestibule, which has other uses so that once an unruly child starts behaving the family can return to the assembly. That family—parents and children—belong with the rest of us. They’re a visible part of the (gospel) people that we are.

Rev. Peter P. Dobrowski is pastor of the church of St. Margaret Mary in Bullhead City, Arizona.
CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 991/01/L

June 30, 2001

His Excellency
The Most Reverend Rembert Weakland
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Your Excellency:

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has now completed its attentive study of the planned renovation of the Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist in Milwaukee, which was occasioned by doubts that the project would conform to the relevant canonical and liturgical norms for the ordering of Catholic churches and, in particular, cathedrals, and with this letter it wishes to communicate its conclusions. In reaching this decision, this Dicastery has been most sensitive to Your Excellency’s concern that all unnecessary delays to the project be avoided.

The first serious obstacle to approving the planned renovation of the Cathedral is the incongruity of the proposed floor plan with the architectural structure of the church, that is to say, the general layout of the church with its nave, apse, and natural presbyterium is evidently pre-established by the architectural style. Perhaps in the case of a new church construction there could be more latitude for decisions about the layout of the church, but this becomes much more restricted in an existing church like the Cathedral.

Moving to the particular points in law, having clarified the doubts concerning the conformity of this project with the relevant canonical and liturgical norms, it is the judgment of this Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments that:

1. Contrary to the norms of the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, 1975, nos. 257-258, 262 (cf. also Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, 2000, nos. 294-295, 299), the presbyterium, in accord with the proposed reordering, would lose its internal coherence, as well as a position where attention is naturally focused in the Cathedral. The proposed configuration, in placing a new and visually imposing organ over the altar is an attempt to find a remedy by diverting attention from the oratory with respect to the rest of the Cathedral. This difficulty has already been recognized and the proposed addition to the plan of a corona over the altar is an attempt to find a remedy by diverting attention from the organ. However, it is the opinion of this Dicastery that this provision fails sufficiently to address the grave problem introduced by the organ’s placement in the apse.

2. The proposed relocation of the tabernacle in what is presently the Baptistry in order to create a Blessed Sacrament Chapel does not, in contravention of can. 938, [section] 2, offer to the people of God a placement in which is truly conspicua, since only with some investigation might the chapel be found. Furthermore, it has been determined that this chapel, as a result of its modest dimensions (estimated at 15 ft. x 20 ft., i.e., approximately 28 sq. m.), does not satisfy the requirement that the chapel be ad privatam fidelium adorationem et preceptionem idonea (Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, 2000, no. 315) since it would restrict to so few the number of the faithful who might actually take advantage of opportunities for private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

3. According to the requirement of can. 964, [section] 3, and in light of the recent authentic interpretation of can. 964, [section] 2 (cf. Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, Responsum ad propositum dubium, approved by His Holiness, July 7, 1998, Communicaiones 30 [1998] 27), except for a just reason to the contrary, the confessions of the faithful are to be heard in confessional. Consequently, the proposed reduction of the number of confessors from four to two, seems to be insufficient to meet the needs of the faithful, especially in light of Your Excellency’s testimony as to the large number of the faithful that not infrequently participate in ceremonies at the Cathedral.

4. It is not consonant with the requirement of can. 1187, nor the established tradition, that in or immediately adjacent to the Cathedral there should be images of persons be incorporated whose cult has not received the necessary approval and extension in law by the Holy See.

As a further point, it would seem to this Congregation that the ancient and venerable high altar together with its baldacchino should be retained, given also that it is a most suitable location for the reservation of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Not unrelated to the foregoing are regrettable instances of statements in the fund raising pamphlet entitled The Cathedral Project which are inaccurate in asserting that several of the changes have been required by the liturgical law (cf. pp. 16, 20-21).

In light of the foregoing, this Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments hereby remarks the plan for the interior renovation of the Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist to the renewed consideration of Your Excellency, bearing in mind the need for the project to be revised in accord with the above-cited canonical and liturgical requirements. This Dicastery awaits Your Excellency’s considered response in this matter.

With every good wish and kind regard, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Jorge A. Card. Medina Estévez
Prefect
Michael Rose brings us an expanded analysis of the plight of contemporary Catholic church architecture and a detailed prescription for its recovery in his second book, Ugly As Sin. Broader in scope than his earlier The Renovation Manipulation, this book will even more effectively increase the confidence of the movement to halt the wreckovations of traditional churches, and the hope of those awaiting a renaissance in new church design. It is written elegantly and is accessible to the layman. Clear and simple explanations are provided whenever architectural and liturgical jargon cannot be avoided. Nonetheless, the book is just as useful to the professional architect. To the pastor and bishop it is indispensable and ought to be required reading; if not better to understand church architecture, at least better to understand the flock.

Rose trenchantly initiates the reader who senses instinctively that something is amiss with Our Lady of Suburbia, yet cannot quite put his finger on the problem. Using the example of Notre Dame in Paris to flesh out his argument, Rose tells us that good church architecture incarnates the Faith. To that end, there are three essential laws of church design: verticality, permanence, and iconography.

The verticality of the proportions of the architectural elements (such as windows, columns, etc.) as well as the spaces of the church building both encourage the soul to aspire and give room for the spirit to ascend. The permanence of the church building gives witness to the timelessness of the Faith, doing so in several ways: through the literal physical durability of the structure; through the general massing, which ought to lend the appearance of stability; and through the architectural forms themselves, which can convey a sense of permanence by situating themselves organically within the continuity of a tradition. Finally, the good church building is iconic: it speaks about specific doctrines of the Faith.

Having laid this foundation, Rose provides a detailed formal analysis, first of a traditional church, then of a modernist church, looking through the eyes of an imaginary pilgrim. He shows how the traditional church clearly preaches the doctrines of the Faith, while the modernist...if for one reason or another [the church] is reserved for the Liturgy, it will sooner or later be thought of as the “house of God”; and then it will be thought of as a holy place; and then other places will be seen as profane or secular.

Believe it or not, much of the Church hierarchy in the United States embraced such thinking, effectively spelling the death of church design.

The diagnosis complete, Rose prescribes ways to breathe life back into church design. He calls for the restoration of churches that were “marred by fashionable renovations.” This means returning the altar rail, removing the drop-ceiling added in 1973, and hauling the Stations of the Cross out of the old confessional-cum-storage closets. He calls for the renovation of churches that were not beautiful to begin with (pretty much everything built after 1965). And in the worst cases, where a church was built with little more permanence than a Red Cross tent in Afghanistan, he calls for adaptation to another use and the construction of an entirely new church. The hiring of a good architect, of course, is essential in all cases, almost as important as the elimination of the liturgical design consultant. To that end, Rose supplies us with a list of architects and artists who have shown themselves capable of designing churches worthy of the worship of God.

To his credit, Rose suggests returning to the celebration of Mass ad orientem in those churches fortunate enough still to have the old high altar. The new Missa contra Deum posture, mistakenly taken to be fruit of the Council, does make keeping the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary a bit difficult, since it means the priest turning his back to God. Perhaps out of piety, Rose dissimulates the clear connection between contemporary church design and the liturgical movement, which has fought tooth and nail to remove verticality, permanence and iconography from the liturgy, to replace them with horizontality, change, and vague sense-experience. He states, for example, that we must return the tabernacle “back to its original position in the center of the sanctuary, behind the altar.” When was the tabernacle ever behind the altar? It’s been on the altar, or over the altar, for as much as
the past thousand years or so (not counting the last 30 years in Latin Rite churches), but never behind.

One can understand his impulse, of course, which is to get us away from the ever-not-so-present reservation chapels, which in their typical post-Conciliar form—a closet containing a tabernacle on a pedestal, and two chairs in front—have been an unmitigated pastoral disaster. The arguments presented for the reservation chapel have often been specious, most dishonestly when St. Peter’s is trotted out as the model for commemorating the tomb of St. Peter, and with unusual site conditions, it is no model for your typical parish church. What always goes unsaid, of course, is that (1) the Blessed Sacrament is reserved there on an altar of celebration; and (2) that a Blessed Sacrament Chapel is traditional only for cathedral, conventual and collegiate churches—precisely due to the problem of the bishop or abbot having his back to the Blessed Sacrament!

Let’s face it, the wreckovation elite are brilliant for having found the appropriate physical form for the new liturgy and ecclesiology, not as they were envisioned by the Council Fathers, but as they are now widely understood and practiced. Sacrosanctum Concilium, for example, does not imply the need to spend a single dollar on renovations, yet we are faced today with legislation which explicitly forbids the reservation of the Sacrament on an altar. For a full restoration of our architectural traditions, liturgy and ecclesiology must in some sense take the lead.

Should Rose have brought this point out explicitly? Perhaps it is wise that he did not. For now, his book already represents a great deal of progress. Indeed, the modernist edifice, or “skin for liturgical action,” is already crumbling. For the rest, we take hope in recent efforts in the Church to spawn a new—ahem, old—liturgical movement.

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NOTES:
1 See Edward Anders Søvik, Architecture for Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973), pp. 18, 36, 48, and elsewhere.

**UNEARTHING THE CHRISTIAN HOLY LAND**

Ancient Churches Revealed

Reviewed by David S. Heit

Ancient Churches Revealed is the third volume of the Israel Exploration Society’s “The Holy Land Revealed” series. This volume presents the excavated early Christian churches of the Holy Land, modern day Israel, and Sinai, Egypt. Like the previous books, Jerusalem Revealed and Ancient Synagogues Revealed, Ancient Churches is primarily drawn from articles which previously appeared in the Hebrew quarterly Qadmoniot. Most of the articles were written by the archaeologists who performed the excavations discussed. Although the editor claims the book represents “the wide spectrum of the field of Christian archaeology: liturgy, tradition, history, architecture, art, and epigraphy,” as a result of the material’s origins, the book presents the subject with a predominantly archaeological perspective, looking at the building sites as artifacts and fragments.

The book begins with four brief essays that place the ancient churches within a larger world view politically, theologically, and artistically. The individual excavated churches are then presented, divided into chapters by geographic regions. The last chapter is dedicated to monasticism in the Judean desert and Sinai.

It is the introductory essays which will probably be of the most interest to architects or other non-archaeologists. The first essay discusses the Roman Emperor Constantine’s focus upon the Holy Land after his conversion, which accelerated early Christian church building in the region. It also discusses the two main church typologies—the basilica and the centralized church—and their origins in secular (mostly Roman) building types. The second essay discusses the Christian liturgy of the Byzantine period, arguing it had developed from—and therefore possessed many parallels with—Jewish practices of the time. The third essay returns to discuss in greater detail the Constantinian churches. Finally, we are presented with a summary of the crusader building boom of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, when Christian Europe temporarily rescued the Holy Land from the Muslims. In the end, these essays are informative and useful to obtain a general understanding of early Christian church building in the region, but no more so than overviews offered in many other period- or style-centered architectural survey publications (the Taschen series comes quickly to my mind). Disappointingly, neither the introductory overview, nor any other part of the book, attempts to synthesize new perspectives or conclusions about early Christian church buildings from the individual excavations catalogued, though specific sites are frequently mentioned. And while the book is abundantly illustrated, the majority of the photographs and drawings are in black and white. Most are photographs or diagrams documenting archaeological excavation sites and the artifacts unearthed there. Very few attempt to reconstruct the building as an architectural whole, or communicate the beauty the structure once likely possessed.

In the end, Ancient Churches Revealed has unearthed many individual artifacts, but it fails to successfully piece them together to reveal their ancient splendor.

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David S. Heit is a practicing architect in South Bend, Indiana.

Reviewed by Renée Ryan

A Catholic church is a place of worship and sacrifice. However, in her description and analysis of the Roman church of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, The Geometry of Love, Margaret Visser overlooks this. Her book takes the form of a walk through the church, its crypt, and its grounds. As the author elaborates on the major features and smaller details of the church, she gives its general history, and also what she sees as the basic tenets of the Christian faith. However, her own understanding of the importance of the Incarnation is deficient, and this has ramifications for her explication of the architectural elements of the place.

Our first clue that Visser’s grasp of Christianity is not entirely firm comes when she states what she sees as its main mystery. She pronounces, “It takes only two words to say the most mind-boggling article of Christian belief there is: God cares.” It would be kind to call this an understatement. The paradoxical and scandalous center of Christian belief cannot be expressed as mere caring. It is rather that God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son, and that this Son took on human flesh. Christ’s death on Calvary is the sacrifice of the Mass, which takes place in the Christian church. This affects the way that humans articulate the space of a church.

Visser’s appreciation of the dynamics of the space around the altar also indicate an unsteady grasp of the Faith. “At the heart of Christianity,” says Visser, “is a shared meal, together with everything meant by sharing a meal.” Today the priest is not separated and turned away from us, she says, but is brought “down to the people’s level and face to face with them. The symbolism stresses sharing and dialogue.” The mentally physical nature of the Eucharist and the transcendent dimensions of the Mass. For her, personal communion is not the meeting of a man or woman with the person of Christ—in his body, blood, soul, and divinity—but with God as “simple” food and drink, and as “infinite vastness.” While she does say that the altar is the place where God and man meet, there is no mention of the altar as an opening to the heavens.

This essentially non-sacramental vision of a church carries over into her understanding of baptism—that baptism is not an indelible mark, but that the baptized infant can decide later whether he wants to remain in the church. It also extends to what is otherwise the main strength of the book. Visser’s information from history, politics, archaeology, and hagiography is comprehensive. In the final chapter, The Geometry of Love could have been a great book. It is filled with information about the early Christian church and interpretations of the architectural meanings of a church. It is interesting for basic historical and archaeological facts, but it fails when it attempts rigorous analysis. Visser’s church is not a place for worship and sacrifice, but for communal meetings and individual psychological comfort. Thus, the hardest truths of Christianity are neglected, and it is difficult to see precisely how the space around the altar is different from that of the dinner table.

Renée Ryan is a graduate student in philosophy at the University of Leuven in Belgium.
In no less than six years the Roman Church will celebrate the centenary of St. Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. Sarto's encyclical boldly identified and aggressively prosecuted a heresy whose virulence the Church had never seen before. Indeed, the Pontiff was not intemperate in applying to Modernism the epithet, “synthesis of all heresies.” Its treachery was singled out from all the errors of the centuries because its treachery was unparalleled. Other heresies set out to mangle one or two truths of holy religion. Modernism’s goal was to bury religion itself.

As Richard Weaver has taught us, ideas do have consequences. The particularly pernicious idea of Modernism soon began to show its influence upon every portion of the Church’s life. Since the principal tenet of Modernism was the apotheosis of man and neutering of dogma, every sign that bespoke the supernatural had to be surrendered. Because one of the most potent signs of the supernatural is the Church building, radical redesigns became de rigueur. These new configurations were not mere new modern styles, they were styles proselytizing modernism. They shocked, they disturbed, they intentionally broke with every architectural and artistic tradition that incarnated the Faith of our Fathers. And as the assumptions of modernism became more regnant, so did church architecture become more sterile, more jarring, more unsettling. Just as medieval cathedrals were monuments to faith, many of the new churches of these last hundred years became monuments to the death of faith.

The aggressiveness of this project reached a fever pitch in the last thirty years. Finding itself safely entrenched, an emboldened modernism threw its erstwhile discretion to the wind and proclaimed itself boldly—particularly in art and architecture. That mighty engine which carried the Faith so powerfully would now undermine it just as powerfully.

It is a calamitous story, but some of these calamities’ worst enormities were perpetrated against the signs most precious—and in a certain sense, most necessary—to Catholics: their Churches, their art, and—most tragically—their sacred liturgy. This baneful collapse possessed a certain inevitability, because *lex orandi, lex credendi*: what one believes shapes how one prays.

And if I may add to the venerable formula—*lex aedificandi*. The way in which one believes and prays determines the shape and style of the places where one prays.

Who would teach this ancient truth to a modern world ossified in its secularity? Children, of course. Not exactly children, but very young men and women. God surprised the world with the voices of young scholars who refused the tyranny of the decadent status quo. These men and women possessed an appreciation of the deep metaphysical and dogmatic truths underlying the symbiotic unity of dogma, prayer, liturgy, and architecture. Like an unexpected army come to rescue prisoners long thought lost, came these troops of young Catholics: terribly bright, spirited, and intending no pause till they achieved triumph for Holy Church. They carried their new Old Wisdom like proud medieval knights on horseback with banners unfurled, flapping against the winds.

These Catholics are conspicuously young because orthodoxy in the twenty-first century is principally a youth revolution—a Woodstock in reverse. Modernism is an ideology of the old seeking eagerly to justify both its vice and its ennui. Orthodoxy is the adventure of the young who are hungry for the adventure which is *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Those passionate for the truth are always young—*Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*. Each one of this new company of Catholic artists and scholars have devoted much time to articulating the implications of this ontological unity for liturgy, prayer, and art. Each stands in the forefront of a fresh generation of artists, artisans, and thinkers who are excitedly poised to ignite a new Counter-Reformation. They are the advance legions of the Johan Pauline New Evangelization.

Like the Berninis and Michelangelos before them, they have been enchanted by the dogmas and liturgy of the Church and are generously laying before her the bounty of their talents. Each one knows, after all, as goes the Church—so goes our world.

*Rev. John A. Perricone is the Director of ChristiFideles and serves at St. Agnes parish in New York City.*

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