MATER ET CAPUT

O God, look how your prayerful people makes song ring out in your temple to honor the Church whose feast we gather to celebrate. This house rises up and is rightly dedicated to you, here your people receive from the altar your consecrated body and drink of your holy blood...This is the place truly known as the Court of the heavenly King, the shining gate of heaven that welcomes all those in search of life’s homeland. Christe Cunctorum

It is a poignant and even sobering experience to visit the cities of the dead we call cemeteries. To remember and to want to be remembered is a human urge, as is the desire to provide a fitting marker or monument for those who have passed on. Whether large or small, stepping stones or tomb stones, temples or obelisks, each marker is a monument to someone. In November, we particularly remember the saints who guide us on our way along with the souls whom we pray will join them in heaven. Constructed for permanence, these monuments to the dead are signs of hope and faith in an eternal home.

Much of the great art and architecture produced by mankind down through the centuries reflects the human impulse towards memorializing. Temples, palaces, churches, chapels, equestrian sculptures, altarpieces, and frescoed ceilings have all been commissioned by individuals and communities interested in remembering or being remembered. Even during the modernist hegemony in the twentieth century, this monumental impulse continued to inspire architects to build museums, skyscrapers, and houses which would immortalize their patrons.

The early Christian basilica is a monument to the greatest of men, the son of God. The atrium space, the monumental façade, the processional interior, the raised sanctuary with its altar and columnar screen are all designed to help remember the teachings of the Messiah, his life, his sacrificial death, and his resurrection. The church, rather than turning its back on death, becomes the ultimate monument to the awareness and conquest of death.

November is also a month in which we celebrate a feast dedicated to a building. In the feast of the Basilica of St. John Lateran we are reminded of the primary early Christian monument. While there were places of Christian worship since the time of the apostles as well as earlier basilica types, the Lateran is the oldest church in the world still serving its original purpose. As the first church commissioned after the legalization of Christianity, the Lateran is the first among equals and mater et caput. Pope St. Sylvester and Constantine saw the basilica as a worthy monument to the Most Holy Savior, giving it a size similar to the largest of public structures, thus ennobling body of Christ to gather there in remembrance and expectation.

The Lateran Basilica is the exemplar of the Christian church building, a living monument which is continually being embellished and beautified. Down through the centuries this memorial to the Savior took on additional dedications to St. John the Baptist and to St. John the Beloved just as it took on artistic and architectural additions. In its cruciform plan and its rich iconography, the Lateran Basilica expresses beautifully the Pauline description of the body of Christ. The wonderful marble Cosmatesque floor from the Medieval period is complemented by a rich gilt and coffered ceiling designed by Pirro Ligorio in the Renaissance. A Gothic high altar and baldacchino with multicolored marbles, gold, paintings, and reliquaries of the heads of Peter and Paul is the exclamation point of the lofty interior.

In 1649, Francesco Borromini encased the ancient colonnade in baroque walls with giant pilasters, arches and marble aedicules of the twelve apostles following Durandus who stated that “the piers of the church are bishops and doctors, who specially sustain the Church of God by their doctrine.”

The transept or crossing is the location of a magnificent Blessed Sacrament chapel completed for the Jubilee Year of 1600, with frescoes of the Ascension and the history of Constantine and the basilica. The vibrant colors and radiant gold complement nicely the medieval mosaic of the Savior and six saints by Iacopo Torriti, which may have been a partial restoration of a Constantinian mosaic, restored again and moved in 1886. Historically, the transept or north entrance has been the way in which most pilgrims coming from the direction of Saint Mary Major and Saint Peters entered. Constructed by Domenico Fontana in 1586, it is a double arcade with twin bell towers from the twelfth century. The piazza in front has the largest and most ancient Egyptian obelisk in Rome. Nearby to the north entrance is the octagonal baptistery, also constructed by Constantine, which has been embellished over the centuries and is traditionally the site of Constantine’s own baptism. One of the most important additions to the basilica is its main Eastern façade designed by Alessandro Galilei in 1735 as a result of a major competition. The Large composite columns on pedestals and pediment over the central bay provides a fitting entry loggia and a papal loggia above while referring to the façade of St. Peters. It is here that the famous quotation in Latin is inscribed “The most holy church of the Lateran, the mother and head of all the churches in the city and the world.” On the roof are twelve doctors of the Eastern and Western Churches while the two Saints John flank a larger pedestal upon which stands the image of the risen Savior.

The Basilica of St. John Lateran is a worthy monument to Christ’s triumph over death, it is a marker of a holy place in which the faithful of all times have celebrated his sacrifice. We are reminded of the life of Christ in the walls, in the artwork, and in the artwork of the saints whose lives are intertwined with the Savior. The faithful down the centuries have honored this King by building this monument, restoring it, and embellishing it with stylistically differing, though harmonious, parts. Is it not right and good that we who remember our loved ones through monuments should also construct our finest monuments to the one who became obedient to death, death on a cross.

Duncan Stroik
Fall 2003

On the cover: Interior of San Ignazio, Rome, Italy.
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Actor Mel Gibson recently helped finance the construction of a 9,300-square-foot Mission-style Catholic church complex in Malibu, California, that is not affiliated with any diocese. Gibson recently completed filming “The Passion,” a film that has garnered much press which portrays the last 12 hours of the life of Christ, and was filmed in two dead languages: Aramaic and Latin.

A controversy is brewing at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Alexandria, Virginia. The pastor, Rev. John C. Cregan wants to spend $425,000 to renovate the church and add a chapel behind the altar for the tabernacle. An Italian artisan has been commissioned to carve the tabernacle and apply 24-karat gold leaf to it. Several unhappy parishioners, who feel the money would be better invested in programs benefiting the needy, have written to parishioners urging them to give money directly to local charities instead of funding the renovation of the church.

The Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, located in Nashville, Tennessee, are growing and planning a $35 million project to renovate their motherhouse and provide an addition that will more than double its size. The motherhouse, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971, sits on a hill overlooking downtown Nashville.

The Brush Creek Restoration Committee has reported its first major contribution to an appeal for financial assistance to restore the church where Father Augustine Tolton was baptized. Father Tolton, born in 1854 in Brush Creek, west of Hannibal in Ralls County, Mo., was the first recognized African-American priest in the U.S.

Construction on St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Keller, Texas, was recently completed at a cost of $3.5 million. The church, constructed of limestone, can seat up to 1,700. The project was carried out by the architects Richard Flores and Eric Horstman. If attendance is any indication of success, the church is fairing pretty well, receiving 7,000 visitors each Sunday.

The Catholic Church and Rome's La Sapienza University have signed an agreement to offer a master's degree in church design and planning. The program, which will be offered through the university's School of Architecture, is designed for architects and construction engineers. The intention is to offer formation to young people with a bachelor's degree, which will enable them to design and plan these buildings but also to foster dialogue, explained Roman architect Giuseppe Mongelli, director of the master's program. The course, which runs from November to July, is sponsored by the Diocese of Rome, the College of Architects of that city, Roman construction associations and a lighting company.

St. Paul's Church in St. Paul, Oregon, the oldest Catholic church in the Northwest Territory, was restored after an earthquake by DiBenedetto Thomson Livingstone Architects, P.C., a firm based in Portland, Ore. The church, which received extensive damage from the earthquake, was rebuilt using the original bricks at a cost of $1.4 million in 2000. The work received an International Masonry Award.

A group of churchgoers in Detroit is trying to bring the first regional mass transit system to the Motor City area. MOSES, which stands for Metropolitan Organizing Strategies Enabling Strength, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that teaches lay and clerical leaders how to organize people and/or raise money in order to influence public policy. Detroit is the only major U.S. city that still does not have a mass transit system.

Elaborate sound and video systems are rapidly becoming the worship enhancer of choice. "Worship is a form of entertainment," said Al Perry, technical adviser for media ministry at Fort Foote Baptist Church in Fort Washington, Md. "If people are not entertained, they don't feel like they're participating." Megachurches are most likely to spend megabucks for audio-visual equipment—the 3,000-seat Evangel Temple in Upper Marlboro, Md., and the 1,500-seat McLean, Va., Bible Church each spent about $800,000, said George Sauer of DMX Music in Rockville, Md.
“Who wants to sit in church if you’re uncomfortable?” said Laurie Wuerfel of Perrysburg, Ohio, as she sat in the bur- gundy theater-style seats at Cedar Creek Church in suburban Toledo. “I grew up in a Catholic church, and I hated sitting in those benches.” Some denominations are beginning to move away from pews. Chairs with cupholders, plenty of space, and padding are finding their way into churches where clergy say the seat can be as important as the message. The current trend of theater-style seating is a throwback to a movement in the mid-19th century, when Protestant churches in America modeled their buildings after theaters with sloping floors and individual seats. Irwin Seating, one of the world’s biggest seat makers, jumped into church seating in the past year, after installing seats in places such as Carnegie Hall and the Atlanta Motor Speedway. The company is hoping to expand its reach into denominations such as the Roman Catholic church. “We’re never going to sell there until we develop a kneeler option,” Lundberg said. “What you fight is really tradition.”

For 51 years, the Hudson, Massachusetts, woodworker Lloyd DuBois has been making furniture “Lloyd’s way,” following traditions passed down by New England craftsmen who pouried their souls into the mahogany and pine they shaped into altars and pews found in churches across New England. DuBois despairs of a modern culture enamored with standardized products for mass consumption and he envisions a future when Americans rediscover the beautiful utility of hand-craft ed goods.

A study entitled the “American Religious Identification Survey” found that “as the Hispanic population grows in the United States, so does the percentage of those who do not identify themselves as Catholics or followers of any other religion,” reported the Tucson Citizen recently. The paper noted that Hispanic Americans who stop identifying themselves as Catholic generally retain certain cultural and external practices associated with the Church, such as making the Sign of the Cross when passing churches, keeping rosaries in their cars, and displaying images of the Virgin Mary.

The Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul, Minnesota, is receiving a new roof and a cleaning of the entire stone exterior—more than 167,000 square feet—in a 30-month, $35 million project, while smaller churches like St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Phoenix are conducting similar campaigns. This will for preservation is related to many new projects being built in traditional styles that convey a sense of permanence. “The intent is to incorporate the feeling and features of the traditional church into a modern, technologically capable building,” explains Ethan Anthony, president of HDB/Cram and Ferguson, a Boston-based architectural firm currently working on several neo-gothic new build projects. So what possesses some church leaders to forgo the efficient, money saving technologies modern design and construction offer? According to Anthony, it’s because faith and spirit still have their place. His clients “want glass and shadows and color and all those things that make them pray. If everything is revealed and there’s no ambiguity, their imagination has nowhere to go.”

The Vatican issued a new instruction for parish priests that prescribes Eucharistic adoration and an intense prayer life as a preventative cure for priestly “disaffection, disillusionment or even failure.” It said the priest’s fundamental challenge was to foster among his parishioners a consistent spiritual life in conformity with church teaching. It recommended encouraging visits to church to pray before the Shrine of St. Alphonsus, Baltimore

The first memorial monument to those who died at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 will be sculpted by Texan artist John Collier. It will be housed at a Catholic parish near Ground Zero. Collier’s theme is “resurrection.” “As grand as any secular memorial might be, it can only say, ‘Remember,’” said Collier. “But our Lord offers more. He offers resurrection, which is the hope of the dead.”

The new Vatican Museums website was unveiled June 24 in the Holy See Press Office by Cardinal Edmund Szoka, the chief administrator of Vatican City State. Cardinal Szoka, an American, recounted that when Pope John Paul II inaugurated the new entrance to the Vatican Museums on Feb. 7, 2000, he called the museums “one of the most meaningful doors that the Holy See opens to the world,” through which is expressed “the renewed will of the Church to dialogue with mankind through art and culture, making available to everyone the patrimony entrusted to her by history.” To visit the museums, go to www.vatican.va

The Sistine Chapel is the new home to a 787-pipe organ with 14 registers. The organ, which cost more than $443,000, was donated by the Liechtenstein-based Peter Kaiser Memorial Foundation and built over a six-month period by the Swiss organ manufacturer Mathis Orgelbau. Herman Mathis, director of the company, spent 16 nights in the Sistine Chapel tuning the organ in preparation for the dedication and blessing. He would arrive at 7 p.m. after tourists were long gone from the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel, and would work until 7 a.m. After all that work, Mathis said the blessing ceremony was the time for him to say farewell to the instrument. “Saying goodbye, it is appropriate to make a wish,” he said. “My hope is that it fulfills its obligation” of “creating an atmosphere at the service of the faithful so that they can better sing, pray and listen to the Word, experiencing the great mystery of God.”

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An appeals court has ruled that towns can prevent houses of worship from opening in residential areas in an attempt to control traffic and noise. The ruling by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Oct. 16, 2002 overturned a lower-court ruling that struck down a local zoning law in Abington Township, Pa., that permitted kennels, riding clubs and golf courses — but excluded churches — in residential areas. Although churches once were seen as an integral aspect of most neighborhoods, “we do not believe land-use planners can assume anymore that religious uses are inherently compatible with family and residential uses,” the judges said.

Opponents of the renovation of Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester, New York, lost the battle to stop renovation plans calling for replacing the cathedral’s marble altar with a new one to be located in the nave on a raised platform, as well as relocating the tabernacle to a chapel and removing the baldacchino over the high altar and the pedestal under the pulpit. Father John Mulligan sealed the doors of Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester, N.Y., after Mass on June 29, 2003. They will remain closed until August 2004 as workers renovate the interior and build an addition and new parking lot. Rochester denied landmark status to the cathedral, allowing the $6 million to $8 million project to go forward. “I don’t want to worship organ pipes,” one man was quoted as saying, an apparent reference to plans to place a pipe organ behind the main altar. But the newspaper said a recent poll showed that 80% of parishioners support the renovations.

When Grace Church and its burgeoning congregation and expanding ministries voted to erect a new 4,500-seat church on a 62-acre site in Eden Prairie, Minn., they turned to Hammel Green and Abrahamson Inc. (HGA), Minneapolis, to design a multipurpose worship center that would honor the congregation’s vision, support its educational goals, and incorporate theatrical and performance capabilities. HGA divided the $48 million project into a multi-function worship space and a three-story, 166,800-square-foot education/administrative building, both of which were completed last summer. Inside the heart of the church, the viewer encounters a theater-in-the-round worship area supported by three tiers of retractable seating and a highly sophisticated stage and sound system. Finally, to make parishioners feel truly comfortable, the church will eventually offer a total of 3,000 parking spaces on site.

A cross overlooking Ventura, California, violates the separation of church and state, according to Stan Kohls, a member of the Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Kohls may file a lawsuit against the city of Ventura because the cross is located on public land. However, city attorney Bob Boehm argues that the cross, though maintained by city funds, has the character of a historical monument, since Father Junipero Serra is thought to have placed a similar cross atop Mission Hill on Easter morning, 1782. Though crosses have been placed there since the 1800s, including the current one in 1912, it is uncertain that Serra ever placed a cross there. The result of the Ventura case could decide the fate of crosses on public land in other parts of California.

The world’s first inflatable church opened its doors at the Christian Resources Exhibition in Esher, Surrey. It was designed by Michael Gil, an entrepreneur who believes it could give Christianity a boost by letting ministers transport their ministry and church to various communities. The church, which is 47 feet high and costs £2,000 a day to rent, can be inflated in three hours and can seat 60 people.

The Vatican’s latest statistics show a continuing decline in the number of priests in the world, but an increase in the number of seminarians. Meanwhile, the worldwide Catholic population reached 1.06 billion at the end of 2001, an increase of nearly 1% from the previous year. The Vatican said the number of priests declined by 111 during 2001. That reflected...
a decrease of 778 in religious order priests and an increase of 667 diocesan priests. The number of seminarians increased 1.5% during the same period from 110,583 to 112,244. Overall, the number of people involved in the Church’s pastoral workforce rose from 4.1 million to 4.27 million in 2001. That included 4,649 bishops; 405,067 priests (138,619 religious order priests and 266,448 diocesan priests); 29,204 permanent deacons; 54,970 non-priest religious men; 792,317 religious women; 31,512 deacons; 139,078 lay members of secular institutes; 29,204 permanent priests (138,619 religious order priests and 54,970 non-priest religious men); and 792,317 religious women.

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Pope John Paul II told leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church that diversity does not necessarily lead to tension, especially if people are united by a common faith in Christ. He designated a church near the Trevi Fountain for liturgical use for the city’s Bulgarian Orthodox community. The Catholic Mass will continue to be celebrated in the Church of Sts. Vincenzo and Anastasio, but Orthodox liturgies will be celebrated there every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

According to Francis Cardinal Arinze, head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacrament, the Vatican is planning on releasing a document on the Mass, which will encourage the far wider use of the “old Mass,” the Tridentine rite Mass, in Latin, throughout the Roman Catholic Church. Citing a need to “respond to the spiritual hunger and sorrow so many of the faithful have expressed to us because of liturgical celebrations that seemed irreverent and unworthy of true adoration of God,” Arinze stated the document will effectively end “the do-it-yourself Mass.”

The leaders of Iraq’s Christian churches are calling for a new constitution that guarantees the equality of all Iraqi citizens and protects religious freedom. One passage of their declaration states: “Guarantee our right to profess our faith according to our ancient traditions and our religious norms; the right to educate our children according to Christian principles; the right to organize ourselves freely, to build houses of worship and, according to our needs, to build places for cultural and social activities.”

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Kansas City, Missouri, renovated by C. Frenning & Associates, Inc., was dedicated February 22, 2003. In order to revitalize the Cathedral and to accomplish other significant projects, Bishop Raymond J. Boland launched a fundraising campaign that raised $24.1 million, of which $7.5 million was used to fund improvements to the Cathedral, in addition to $1.5 million from other sources.

Capuchin Franciscans have set up a Catholic Center in the Citadel Mall in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where they offer daily confession. A manifestation of the growing trend among both Protestants and Catholics to bring the faith to consumers at their local shopping malls, the center has served more than 22,437 people and heard more than 2,200 confessions in the last six months. On an average day, approximately 17 individuals receive the sacrament of reconciliation and at least 73 people attend the two Masses held in the chapel.

According to some, the Italian word “cappuccino” may have originated from the brown color of the Capuchin religious habit worn by Father d’Aviano and others of his Franciscan order. Even if the friar didn’t mix the first cappuccino himself, it may have been named in his honor. According to history, retreating Turkish soldiers abandoned several hundred bags of coffee beans when they left the Vienna battlefield. Finding the drink too bitter, the Austrians added milk and sugar. However, most Christians called coffee the “devil’s drink,” and when its popularity grew in Europe some priests wanted it banned. In a change of events, Pope Clement VIII decided to try it in 1600 and found it “delicious.”

The Catholic Church in Latin America is becoming more secular and the growth of megacities may be playing a roll. “Unfortunately, the tendency in Latin America is still [toward] an uncontrolled, unpredictable growth of large cities at the cost of rural areas and small towns,” said Bishop Jorge Jimenez Carabajal, president of the Latin American Bishops’ Council. “The future of the New Evangelization in Latin America, thus, is closely tied to the cities.”

How are the venues chosen when the pope travels? Never an easy task logistically, the large crowds His Holiness draws call for open spaces. Sometimes for lack of a better location airports are used. Stadiums are usually a better alternative. However, a square in the city is the ideal. People feel at home. They can say: The Pope has come here and has celebrated Mass with us.

According to the National Trust website, urban houses of worship are listed as one of the 11 sites on the “Most Endangered Places” list for 2003. The site states: “Whether churches, synagogues, meetinghouses, or mosques, America’s historic urban religious structures are among the nation’s most significant cultural treasures.” They are “falling victim to changing demographics, limited capital budgets, and soaring real-estate values.”

In 1931 William Randolph Hearst purchased parts of the Cistercian Abbey of Santa Maria de Ovila in Guadalajara, Spain, which was established in 1181, with the intention of having them dismantled and shipped back to the United States to use in the construction of his Wyntoon Castle in northern California. Financial difficulties stopped the project and Hearst gave the stones to San Francisco, in exchange for the cancellation of a debt. Now, after years of effort, the stones will once again be in Cistercian hands. Cistercians at the Abbey of New Clairvaux in Vina, California, who first heard of the stones in the 1950s, have finally acquired them after they sat in Golden Gate Park for 50 years weathering fires, theft, and vandalism. Upon completion, the Santa Maria de Ovila chapter house will be the oldest freestanding building in the United States west of New York. The project will cost approximately $4 million and is expected to be completed in mid-2004.
The St. Augustine Cathedral in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, is currently being renovated in a $4.5 million project. Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport intends for the renovation to be "faithful to the original Gothic spirit of the cathedral." He has enlisted the services of church architect Henry Hardinge Menzies of New Rochelle, New York. A four-ton baldachino with bronze pillars and a 500-pound statue of the Archangel Gabriel blowing a trumpet on the pinnacle will highlight the new altar.

St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston is "Building to Bless" through construction of several new buildings: a church, parish hall, kitchen, and cloisters. They are also expanding facilities for nurseries and educational and youth activities. Two 80' spires weighing approximately 61,000 pounds each will be lifted into place by a single crane and secured to 108' 6" towers. The octagonal steel spires are 20' square and covered in lead-coated copper shingles. Designed to complement the commanding gothic church, the twin 188' 6" towers will become a landmark in this area of Houston clearly visible from the 610 Loop. The spires were fabricated by M.C.T. Sheetmetal, Inc., who will oversee their installation. The architects for the project are Jackson and Ryan Architects of Houston.

A $3.5 million renovation was recently completed on Phillips Church, the 103-year-old church of Phillips Exeter Academy located in Exeter, N.H. The architect/artist Michelle Honig-Szwarc was commissioned to design a massive stained-glass window that contained no religious symbolism of any kind. "We wanted the space to be as welcoming as possible, to those from the most fervent believer of a particular faith tradition to the most fervent atheist," said Peter Greer, English teacher and chairman of the Phillips Church Program Planning Committee.

A $42 million project is underway to restore Trinity Church, the masterpiece designed by Henry Hobson Richardson which sits in Copley Square, Boston. The architectural firm Goody, Clancy & Associates has been enlisted to oversee the project. Among the goals of the renovation are the resealing of the 372-foot-high central tower, the stabilization and replacement of some of the 4,200 pilings that support the church, and a thorough cleaning of the English, French and American stained-glass windows found in the church. "It's a very expensive undertaking, but the people who were here before us created a masterpiece, and we're determined to make sure it's treated appropriately," said Keith N. Morgan, a Trinity parishioner who is also a professor of American and European architecture at Boston University.

The Vatican recently issued a warning to bishops and priests about the dangers of online confession (one big concern being hackers). Some leaders worry the developments are making religion too easy and encourage parishioners to be lazy. Critics worry worshippers will get too comfortable praying from home.

The Vatican Museums opened an exhibit of more than 50 new works of contemporary art in May 2003, selected from 360 works acquired between 1980 and 2003 by artists from the 19th and 20th centuries. "People sometimes wonder what they've strayed into," Micol Forti, curator of the Vatican's contemporary art collection, said. According to her, the juxtaposition of modern art and the Vatican's medieval architectural setting is not always a happy one. Although the transition from 500-year-old frescoes to more abstract works by artists like Marc Chagall and Paul Klee can be jarring, museum officials insist that modern art belongs here, too. Pope Paul VI launched the idea of the contemporary art collection in the Vatican. But unlike Renaissance popes, Paul VI did not have the world’s best artists at his call. Nor did he have large funds to commission works like Raphael’s School of Athens or Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel.

How fast is the Church growing? The Vatican’s Central Office of Church Statistics released a report entitled “The Catholic Church: An Entity in Slow but Constant Growth.” Since 1978, the number of Catholics in the world has risen from 757 million to 1.06 billion — an increase of 40.2%. This is, however, considered “slow” growth.
because the overall world population increased 45.8% during the same period. What some Vatican experts find disconcerting is the ratio of laity to priests, which has steadily increased in many parts of the world. The study found there were 1,797 lay people for every priest in 1978 and 2,619 lay people per priest in 2001. The experts cautioned that in some parts of the world the low replacement ratios combined with the aging priest population could easily create “serious difficulties in the near future.”

Eduardo Esparza, a former hairdresser from Dubina, Texas, has recaptured his faith through restoring the exuberantly painted decorations and murals of churches in central and south Texas. A self-proclaimed ecclesiastical artist, Mr. Esparza helps maintain many of the lavishly decorated Texas churches built by communities of Czech, German, and Hispanic immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ernesto Hernandez, director of the 1907 Chapel of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, where Mr. Esparza has restored wall paintings and sculpture, said, “He’s like this spiritual Don Quixote, traveling dusty country roads, taking care of old chapels.” Mr. Esparza is found at Sacra Familia Studios in Austin, Texas. nazereth@awesomenet.net

After a restoration of more than four years on the outside and two years on the inside, the impressive neo-gothic structure of St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Oratory of the Immaculate Conception in Wausau, Wis., built in 1891 and destroyed internally by a fire in 1953, was brought back to even more than its original splendor. It is a very rare example of a complete medieval interior in the finest Bavarian Gothic, based on a chapel in the Blutenburg Castle in Munich, Bavaria. The designer for the renovation was Abbé Alexander Willweber, who is a member of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest. According to Msgr. Michael R. Schmitz, Vicar General of the Institute, the Oratory is an image of Heaven. Many new faithful have been attracted as well. Even the mayor of the city recently became a Catholic in the Oratory.

The Vatican Grottoes issue of the Roma Sacra series, published July 1, 2003, was written by Bishop Vittorio Lanzani, the delegate for the administration of St. Peter’s Basilica. Released only in Italian, the guidebook reveals the treasures of the grottoes under St. Peter’s Basilica, and will eventually be released in English, as has been done with two previous issues on the art and architecture of St. Peter’s Basilica.

In Birmingham, Alabama, a parish church destroyed by fire has been rebuilt in a more traditional style, the Associated Press reported. St. Francis Xavier Church, destroyed by lighting in 2001, used to be a 1970s-style A-frame building. Parishioners decided to reconstruct the building in a “classic” church design, with a 92-foot bell tower, 27 stained-glass windows and porcelain tile floors. “What was popular in 1970 isn’t popular anymore,” said parishioner Janet Harrod. “The classic and Old-World [style] will speak to people 100 years from now.” The pastor, Father Patrick Sullivan, said that the lightning strike might have been a “blessing in disguise.”

The Blessed Angelico Chair of Sacred Art in Rome, active since 2001, is renewing its activities this academic year in order to become an international center of sacred art. The chair is the initiative of the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelicum. In statements to the Vidimus Dominum news agency, the university explained that the objective of the center “is to study historically the influence of sacred art in past culture, and ... to analyze the theoretical points of view that can renew its significant presence in the era of globalization and multi-cultures.”

John Paul II consented to the erection of the new archiepiscopal exarchate of Odessa-Krym, Ukraine. According to the custom of the Eastern Churches, the decision was made by the synod of bishops of the Catholic Ukrainian Church, and received the consensus of the Pope — a pledge of its communion with the universal Church. The new exarchate, will cover the southeast of the country, regrouping the regions of Odessa, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Kirovohrad, and Crimea (Krym in Ukrainian). It has a population of 8,712 million inhabitants, with 70,000 Greek Catholics served by 11 priests.

A controversial mosque in Nazareth was demolished on July 1, 2003 by Interior Ministry demolition crews, along with Israeli police, the Jerusalem Post reported. The Shahab A Din Mosque, still in the early stages of construction, has been a source for controversy which ultimately fueled Islamic riots in April 1999, and interreligious strife in Nazareth since, the newspaper said. The Nazareth District Court upheld last week the city’s District Court’s ruling that the illegal construction of the site must be flattened. Christians said the mosque would pose a direct threat to the Basilica of the Annunciation, obscuring its view from the main drag.

Santiago Calatrava has withdrawn as architect of the $80 million, 1,800 seat Christ the Light Cathedral in Oakland, California. A member of the selection committee indicated that the split derived from Calatrava’s frustration with the slow pace of the project and the Cathedral’s concerns about potential cost overruns. The archdiocese is expected to announce a new architect in mid-November.
Remember that you are the guardians of beauty in the world. May that suffice to free you from tastes which are passing and have no genuine value, to free you from the search after strange or unbecoming expressions. Be always and everywhere worthy of your ideals and you will be worthy of the Church which, by our voice, addresses to you today her message of friendship, salvation, grace and benediction …

Message to Artists. Pope Paul VI.

In 1970, the Archdiocese of Atlanta hosted a Worship Congress at which popular liturgical designer Robert Rambusch spoke. In one of his lectures, Mr. Rambusch claimed that “everyone is for church renewal until they see what it looks like, and then they balk. What we are doing is redefining. Who are we as people of God?” Mr. Rambusch is a director and fellow of ARC: the Society for the Arts, Religion and Contemporary Culture, a multicultural arts organization which has had seminars on the religious art of Andy Warhol (1998) and the Andean concept of Reciprocity (1998). Rambusch is described as “a liturgical artist whose works grace churches throughout America. Lecturing widely and irreverently on objects of reverence, he challenges the conventional.”

Rambusch, in his typical irreverent tone spoke once of the Last Supper: “A lot of people think Christ had an altar rail at the Last Supper — he did not ... But altar rails came in and we started kneeling. Standing represented a resurrectional theology — kneeling a penitential one.” Aside from the strange assumption that Christians began to kneel only after the communion rail was invented, pitting standing against kneeling is not only absurd, it is a devious way to set two compatible concepts against one another in order to “redefine” how we worship. What is evident from his lectures and designs is that he makes things up. He stated that one “problem with Americans is that they are immigrants and feel they must build great shrines for religion. The National Shrine in Washington is great for pageantry, but it destroys community ... it is destroyed any time you have over 300 or 400 persons worshipping.” Again, aside from the quip that it is a problem that Americans are immigrants and want to build shrines (didn’t Catholics always want to do this?), Mr. Rambusch has obviously ignored the social history of great shrines like Chartres, Notre Dame, or Canterbury.

Mr. Rambusch is more recently noted as liturgical design consultant for the renovation of the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Detroit, Michigan, completed in 2003. He was part of a new building committee reformed in 1997 by Adam Cardinal Maida, which included Msgr. Anthony Tocco as organizer, internationally renowned architect Gunnar Birkerts, and Fr. Timothy Pelc as architectural and liturgical critic. These four commanded the helm of the renovation of Blessed Sacrament. What is apparent, after reading the literature surrounding this project and conducting personal interviews, is that these men shared the same vision. A vision which aims at Making All Things New that is, embracing “passing tastes” and “strange or unbecoming expressions,” pitting complementary concepts against one another; and inventing a new wheel.

Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Detroit was organized as a parish in 1905 by Fr. John Connolly who eventually raised funds to build a church by 1912 and saw to the planning of a Norman-Gothic structure designed by architect Henry A. Walsh of Cleveland. It was initially completed in 1915 without the two towers at the entry, which were added in 1951 under the direction of local architect George Diehl. Detroit became an archdiocese in 1937 and a year later Archbishop Edward Mooney named Most Blessed Sacrament the Cathedral with permission from Pope Pius XI. Thirty years later, under the leadership of John Cardinal Dearden and in the name of Sacrosanctum Concilium, Blessed Sacrament was “one of the first Catholic Cathedrals in the nation” to remove the altar rail, separate the tabernacle from the altar, create a Eucharistic chapel, and relocate the choir to the sanctuary.
were done “in a temporary fashion,” the cathedral again began planning for an extensive renovation. Gunnar Birkerts, a Lutheran architect originally from Latvia and formerly with the office of Eero Saarinen, was invited to design the new interior. His initial conceptual sketch revealed a radical alteration to the sanctuary and transepts. A new undulating wall, “the scrolls of the Torah,” was inserted and wrapped the interior like a ribbon hiding the detailed Gothic work, including the reredos and high altar. Although not pursued further at the time, when the cathedral planned its extensive renovation in 1997, they once again called on Birkerts.

Though a veteran modernist architect, Gunnar Birkerts claims a distaste for anything dogmatic. By giving “each building its own theoretical base” he seeks to free himself from “the imposition of a set structure on any design” and believes that “the theory can be deduced” from the resulting forms he creates. Readers of Sacred Architecture will be familiar with the contradiction in terms which is constantly utilized by modernist architects; i.e., the dogmatic belief that an architect should never follow anything dogmatic. The idea of creating rules without organic reference to the known Good, True and Beautiful is a bit like a Cartesian mind game attempting to create its own past, present and future.

In the new design, Birkerts came up with a scheme for the cathedral, this time claiming a use of light as a construction element. In the side aisles, for instance, the new “prism windows” as they are called “open the church to the community and to the outside.” The lighting in general, “changes entirely the ambience of the whole space.”

With walls now pierced by reflective glass prisms, light replaces the fortress-like darkness of the original Gothic design. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone (Isaiah 9:1).

After visiting the renovation and reviewing archival photographs going back to the 1930s, it is hard to tell that the interior or is substantially brighter or that the original Gothic design had had a “fortress-like darkness.” The new directional lighting highlights different aspects of the interior, church life and so we wanted some light to come in to that cathedral …

Here we have the medieval Church pitted against the modern Church in order to justify the new lighting scheme. And despite Tocco’s claims, Birkerts did not change the nature of the Gothic cathedral even with the added lighting and other novel insertions. In fact, it is remarkable how the Gothic church that exists still overpowers the intruding elements simply by beauty of form, scale, and proportion. The new elements more look like a Star Trek set inserted into the crossing of a venerable Gothic church.

The crossing is where Birkerts made most of his changes; the new organ placed in the former location of the high altar and reredos, the new stone free-standing altar, and the most curious elements — heavy angular stone forms on either side of the sanctuary for the ambo and cathedra. According to Birkerts these are to be a symbol of strength and size, a metaphor of Peter the Rock. “I chose to put these big rocks on the altar [sic] and attach the liturgical points to it so the Cardinal is really seated on the foot of this rock or on the rock.” These forms were Birkerts’ “search to bring a 20th century gothic into the 21st century.” He claims to be paraphrasing the Gothic.

According to Fr. Timothy Pelc, “These rock-like focus points are intended to recall Christ’s promise to Peter.” They also “evoke Mount Tabor near Nazareth, the traditional site of the Transfiguration.” The new stone inlay floor of the sanctuary, according to Pelc, “reads like a colorful glacial scree that builds up at the base of a mountain range.” The cathedra is likened to the “seat of Moses” on Mount Tabor from which the bishop “proclaims Christ as the light of humankind.” However, instead of paraphrasing the Gothic architecture, the new white marble and the angular forms work against the verticality, lightness and consistent language of the Gothic. Still, Birkerts maintains that the design carries “allegiance to gothic geometry … I think it is asserting itself in a way through the manipulation of form in a new way and in the choice of color which is contrasting to the dark space and enclosure … this is opening up and bringing in reality and all that.” When Msgr. Tocco was asked why such a radical concept for design he stated, “The concept was Gunnar Birkerts and when you get Gunnar Birkerts you’re going to accept the ideas that he has knowing that some of them might go counter to the [Gothic] design.”

Blessed Sacrament Cathedral at the installation of Bishop Donovan-Bishop Donnelly — 1954
Most Blessed Sacrament is the location of the tabernacle. It is not visible on entering the church, and only after walking to the steps of the sanctuary can the Reservation Chapel be seen in the southeast transept. It would have seemed logical to have the Blessed Sacrament as the focal point of a church named in His honor.

After all the poetics and justification for the design, and all the money and time that went into this project, the end result still reflects a contradiction in ecclesiology and architecture. The older church architecture still reads more coherently than the new, and the two do not speak the same language. If they cannot be reconciled, wouldn’t it have been better to just build a new and consistent cathedral for the ecclesiology of today? Msgr. Tocco offered this observation: “No question that’s what everybody would have preferred and my first question to Cardinal Maida was, ‘Are you sure you don’t want to build a new cathedral?’ But we knew what that cost would be … so we took this old pathetic cathedral and it had’t been touched in 50 years — and we turned it into one of the jewels of the diocese.” According to Tocco, Cardinal Maida was determined. “No, we’re going to use this Cathedral and we’re going to make it new.” He said, “the Cardinal loved the architecture of the cathedral.”

Ironically, the National Parks Service and the archdiocesan publications make it clear that the cathedral was a jewel before the renovation (not pathetic) although it did have water damage and needed to be cleaned.

The Cardinal loved the architecture, but told the architect that “he was only really protective of the stained glass … that all the other architectural developments could be changed or eliminated or whatever needs to [sic] to bring this church into the 21st century.” The architect wanted to contrast with the Gothic but he wanted to have allegiance to it. The committee wanted to put big rocks and a mountain range in the sanctuary to help remind us of Petrus but put the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament out of view in a church named for Him. The lighting was supposedly changed to connect us all with the community, to “reality and all that,” yet did not perceptibly change the interior light levels. It seems that all the words used to describe this project are contradiction enough to dismiss the fifteen-million-dollar renovation as rather pathetic in itself. But beyond the actual building, the language surrounding this project serves as a self-condemnation for modernist interventions in general. Fr. Pelc, in an article in *Faith and Form* in 1987, stated that “Catholic Christians, in the main, now know that they can never be comfortable celebrating one type of ecclesiology in a building that silently screams another.” In other words, traditional architecture cannot be reconciled to the new liturgy. Is traditional architecture obsolete then? Msgr. Tocco believes that we still have room for it:

“I would have said yes ten years ago, but I’m not sure that in the climate of the church today that’s necessarily true. We have a lot of areas where we’re not only looking forward, we’re looking backward as well … it is much easier to do liturgy in a church that is designed with the new directives for art and architecture, where people can gather around the altar, where sight lines are better, where there are not so many barriers, where you don’t have a thousand things pulling them away from the altar, where the sound system is good, where the word and music are integral to the building itself.”

This sounds strangely like a condemnation of the renovation itself. Msgr. Tocco was asked the following question as well: Will people outside the Catholic Church be confused when they see two completely different ecclesiologies, two contradictory languages of Catholic architecture? “Well, I think people are confused. When they see cathedrals in Europe that are centuries old, they come back thinking those are really magnificent churches. They walk into a church that’s contemporary and they say, ‘Well, what is all this about?’ And unless there is someone like me to tell them, ‘A church that is built today should look like there is something missing until it is filled with people; when it’s filled with people and they are worshipping the space justifies itself because the people are the Church and the space of the church needs to embrace the congregation.”

People may be confused because the liturgical and architectural experts are confused. The hierarchy is confused because they listen to the liturgical and architectural experts. John Senior, professor of literature at the University of Kansas, in his book *The Restoration of Christian Culture* points out that “the rage for novelty and informality in everything today is a sure sign of our spiritual emptiness.”

Modernism with all its novelties eventually takes us away from our only hope. By removing the “accidental and incidental forms” of the Christian culture, it “has worked to disconform us from the love of God.” Msgr. Klaus Gamber, writing about the Catholic liturgical and architectural revolution, noted something similar. “To constantly change a ritual and to abolish almost completely time-honored customs and traditions is synonymous with robbing a person of his religious home and thus shaking the foundations of his faith.”

Fr. Pelc says of the renovation of the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament that “The peaks of the mountain-like formation begun in the sanctuary reach over the tabernacle in the Reservation Chapel”.

For more information, see *Sacred Architecture*.
Sacred Architecture, “This is us. This is now. This is who we are.”

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Notes:
4. Murphy, Harry, Two Architecture Sessions.
5. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
11. From an interview with Gunnar Birkerts, quoted with permission, August 6, 2003.
15. Pelc, Transfiguration.
16. Birkerts Interview.
17. Tocco Interview.
18. Pelc, Looking for Michelangelo refers to the change in liturgical focus from the vertical to the horizontal as implied by the author.
19. Tocco Interview.
20. Birkerts Interview.
22. Tocco Interview.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
28. The author was able to get in the side door of the Cathedral in the early afternoon to find it completely empty, and exited at the main entry only to find that the doors were locked when trying to reenter. Down the street, in contrast, was the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul—designed by Ralph Adams Cram—with doors wide open, people praying inside, and the original high altar, choir, pulpit, and communion rail intact. 

"Five white stone mountain-range formations rise from the floor of the Cathedral marking specific areas for liturgical activity." Reservation chapel to the right.

Sanctuary of Cathedral in 1930
As the Old Testament begins with the Creation of the cosmos and the New Testament with the Incarnation of Christ, the Judeo-Christian world is reminded how the act of making becomes central to our faith. The act of imitating Creation and its Creator has been with humankind since the earliest of all recorded forms and images, and so as architects and artists, we recognize ourselves as the “created,” imitating our Creator in this great attempt to pay homage to our God, to our “Cause without Cause.” Thus what is “man made” begins as a small part, a means to seek and find our selves at first as separate from our Maker. Yet the second and greater part is to make in order to seek and find ourselves again within the greater “God-made” whole, our communion. Our hopes are that what we make will fuse with what we believe, and both process and product will bring all closer to our Maker. To imitate Creation is to celebrate the very entry of the Mystery into its own Creation.

To make sacred art is to wed one’s faith with one’s aesthetics in hope, to bring even closer “the created” to our Creator, to shorten the real or imagined gap between “the called” and the Caller. When the artist answers, when this invitation is met successfully, a covenant is formed; the work is sanctified. This covenant is then extended from God to artist and from artist to fellow believers and finally, back to God again. It is this covenant that we wish to explore here. As faith and aesthetic works combine, the work in turn is employed to reflect those beliefs. As culture becomes infused with and by our trust and hope in God, sacred art becomes an indeterminate good, a means by which we may come together and witness the meeting of heaven and earth. Thus, sacred art can never be the same give and take between artist and society as secular art.

As Catholics in America, since the Sixties we have witnessed the wholesale destruction of beauty, of figurative sacred art, in particular classical architecture, statuary, and representational painting. As a result, the reciprocity between our origins and our beliefs seem, all but absent, as if a covenant that once was never existed. These acts, conscious or unconscious, present certain and profound questions not only of aesthetics but also of faith. They now need to be asked and hopefully answered.

First of all, can and did sacred art produce a covenant? What does covenant mean here? How does it differ from the secular “give and take” between artist and society? Does this covenant exist before the art is ever made? Can there be a covenant without value? Can there be a faith without an aesthetic? Can there be sacred art without a willful belief in beauty? Finally, did modernism break the covenant?

All these questions need to be and have been asked in one way or another for the last thirty years. Yet before answering such vital questions, perhaps some discussion of the sacred art of our past and present would help. Although the Church does not have or claim an official style, it has always held that its art and architecture should actively participate in its meaning and its message. Our architecture, sculpture, and painting may indeed be external examples of our faith, extensions of a covenant. Thus, they were never intended to be outside of our worship, at least not until Modernism.

All classicism, with its painting, sculpture, drawing, and architecture, has always been and remains a figurative and representational language. If it is not literal, it is metaphorical as the language of “embodiment.” Our body’s design, reflected in bilateral architecture thus becomes an extension of body Creation. If the Church has or has yet to choose the classical mode as its official messenger, its preference is clear; in sign and symbol, classical art and architecture have always been corporeal and representative. But more importantly, what is the role of this corporeal sacred art in the Church? Why do we choose the body to reveal the invisible? For the Catholic Church the role and reason of using both the body and its corporeal architecture is triune. Combined, it is when and where the denotation, connotation, and implication join in order to embrace the entire faith.
As Catholics, cross-culturally this triune reason has remained the same for these two millennia; it is presence, witness, and transcendence. As guideposts, they together give the church artist the tools to make works that assist the faithful and guide them to the covenant. Much like its matrix architecture, the function of religious statuary in the church is to provide an experience of presence, give a sense of witness, and lead to a state of transcendence. In order to accomplish this, the classical has continually been employed as the best means. The four attributes of presence are:

1. It must be whole, its members interrelated, nothing incongruous, a self-contained entity.

2. It must show a proportionate likeness to what is recognizable, what is knowable about the known. It must have similitude.

3. Its poise, position, and the composition of place must appear to be a result of its thought.

4. It must contain both the average and the ideal.

To be whole, a self-contained entity must have its members interrelated. Nothing appears incongruous as its members and their relativity part to whole have an intelligible proportion. This use of proportion takes on a greater role when and where we find it in sacred art. Everything in Creation is made in proportion to itself along with a proportion to everything else in the universe. As there is nothing without proportion, whether it is matter or void, light or dark, sound or silence, and time, proportion remains an idea in the Mind of Creation.

Alberti speaks to us of “membratura" or the memberedness of a building or body. In representational sculpture and painting, this interrelatedness becomes mandatory. In it we become emblematic of the Mystical Body. We are using the body not only as sign here but also as symbol.

Second, a proportionate likeness to what is recognizable gives reassurance as to what is known and what is knowable about the known. In sacred and secular art, likeness or similitude is the desire to have some likeness apparent to which some value has been assigned. Sacred art, perhaps more than any other art form, has for millennia struggled with this concept of likeness and for very good reasons. How do we represent the unseen without making the visible recognizable?

Classical proportion is the desire to know the comparative relationship of one part or member to the whole, and to its other members; in as much as this is resplendent in sacred art and architecture, there can be no better metaphor for the Church itself. How much is this desire of the part to know its whole like the desire of the faithful to know its part within the “Mystical Body.” Thus, everything good seeks to take on a divine proportion because everything has a divine purpose.

Third, poise, position, and the composition of place must appear to be a result of its thought. The placement, arrangement, and composition of sacred art need to reflect their purpose and role in our faith. Just as our liturgy has an order, so must our art assist the liturgy in that order. Here, the physical place has meaning and, through placement, the object helps direct us to the sacred within. St. Ignatius Loyola urges us (Spiritual Exercises, 1548) “to see with the eye of the imagination the corporeal place where the object one wishes to contemplate is found.” He calls this “composition, seeing the place.” However, when and where composition of place is not combined with purpose, when what we place in the center is not central to our faith, then content and context are no longer reciprocal and the covenant is compromised.

Like its secular partner, modernist liturgical art and architecture became overly dependent on place in order to achieve a sense of content. Just as placing sculpture outdoors didn’t make it public art, placing it inside a church didn’t make it liturgical. The abandonment of bilateral symmetry discarded the body and made our architecture non-representative; statues cannot be replaced by non-objective works and still be considered statues. Their content and placement must assist us in finding the order within the work, the sacred within ourselves.

Lastly, all representative painting and sculpture contains both the average and the ideal in varying degrees of proportion, one to the other. The Cimabue crucifix, a Franciscan commission, provided a model for both painters and sculptors alike. This notion of gravity, the sense of human weight, of compound convex forms of its members, reinforced the message of the Poverello that one could find the flesh of Christ in one’s nearest neighbor. But above all, it contained something of the average and the ideal in its form. Commissioned in 1252 by the Franciscans for the church of Santa Croce in Florence, it was a shift not only from the Christus Triumphant of the Medieval model to the Christus Patiens of St. Francis, but also to an anatomical model that opened the door for sculptors as well as painters. Anatomy had remained buried in the antique now to be unveiled and reinvented through Franciscan spirituality.

The need to demonstrate the effect of gravity on body weight, of convex form, of a greater sense of the average and the ideal gave the artists of the Quattrocento a means to depict the Incarnation. For the artist this means that seeking and finding the average and the ideal in every portrayal is a human attempt to imitate the union of the human and the divine. We the average, the human, seek unity with the ideal, the divine, just as God has revealed the humanity of Christ to all Creation.

If beauty is at the heart of the covenant, it not only speaks of a particular saint or scene from the life of Christ in stone or paint but it draws the whole of humanity into itself to witness its covenant. After all, more people have “witnessed” the Sistine Chapel Ceiling in the past fifty years than in the past five hundred. Yet the idea of witness was always present in classical church art and architecture. Witness differs from presence in the sense that the interior...
A corporeal likeness that is sopra or transmundane in order to show “unlikeness.”

Throughout the centuries, this figurative language has been much more a history of our spiritual evolution than our cultural evolution. It is the language of witness in which the experience of the subject is internalized in the viewer. As we go from early Christian to Renaissance, from Rococo to contemporary classicism, the variety of manifestations have provided us with pictorial, sculptural models from the most static to the most dynamic. The artistic and spiritual goals were to make the best for the Best; the goal always to bring witness. We only have to look at the wall paintings of the first century catacombs and see their resemblance, or lack thereof, to the works of Pompeian frescos. Of course the quality is lacking here but their place never compromised the covenant. The awkward drawing and modeling are crude. Yet we can witness the intention that this was the best offered here. After all, this “underground society” could not employ the best artists of their time openly. But as the early Church was searching for her artists within the flock, the work was to be done by believers, not “hired hands.” There is no sense of feigned naiveté in these works, as the experience of the viewed is offered to the viewer.

But presence and witness are nothing and incomplete if they do not lead us to transcendence. For it is here that the cycle, the triune purpose is revealed. It is here where our covenant becomes realized as artifice, and faithful and Godhead take their rightful place. The four attributes of transcendence are:

1. The ability or quality to use the visual to express the invisible.

2. The work should inspire a personal transformation in order to inspire communal transfiguration.

3. A corporeal likeness that is sopra or transmundane in order to show “unlikeness.”

The awkwardness in representing and expressing the Logos Incarnatus. Without figurative representation we would lose this sense of inclusive embodiment, this sense of the corporeal, and of ourselves within the Incarnate Christ. There can be nothing bodily alien to us here less it loses credibility to our own sense of body. With it we find our place as “living stones” with Christ as the Corner Stone. Thus our bodies as well as our being become evidence that this covenant to make and to make holy exists before the art is ever made.

If the covenant is to speak, the conversation must be ongoing. It must look like the action is still with us, that this silent drama still speaks. Sacred art must be given a voice by artist and architect and speak for all of us. Yet, what is said must be modeled on the Living Word, that is, the voice that can never be meaningless, never be non-objective, and never be non-representational, a voice that cannot be self contradictory. As Donatello spoke to his sculpture of the prophet Habakkuk, his Zuccone, he didn’t simply hit the statue with his mallet and say “Parla!” (“Speak!”). Better, he commanded it, “Favela! Favela!” (“Tell the story!”) Tell the story in hopes that it, in turn, might speak to others.

All life forms “push out,” that is they are convex, full as well as multidirectional in their cross sections. They have a credible impact on the senses and are realized through the senses. Convexity is a sign and tells us that the form is alive, still living, still growing, still breathing. As the columns of the Orders push out, full with en-tasis, they imitate the convexities and surface tension of living flesh, of ripe fruit, the fullness of life itself. This idea of fullness has always been a hallmark of the classical order in Western art and architecture. As the figures of the medieval world were designed as integrated elements of church architecture, mainly in relief, in clustered columns, and in portals, the figures of the Cinquecento became entities in themselves, fully developed in the round, many appearing to be the same size and in the same air as the worshippers. There was no sense of alienation here.

Concavities interior within the body's skeleton make room for convexities and provide an analogy to the concave interiors of Catholic classical architecture. With their domes, their niches, their naves and their sanctuaries, these interiors are designed to be filled with murals and mosaics, sculpture, and reliefs. But more importantly, they are to be filled with us, with our bodies and most importantly, the Holy Spirit, as we are told in the Constitution of the Church, He “fills the Church, which is His Body and His fullness, with His divine gifts, so that she may grow and reach all the fullness of God.” (The Dimensions of the Church, Avery Dulles).
4. Its message is neither depleting nor depleted but ongoing and endless.

As Alberti speaks of “istoria” to mean the sum of our observations and experiences, works that are transcendental take our spiritual memory, our history, and our spiritual experiences and render them new. We see beauty and truth as new because they make us new. The ability, or quality, to use the visual to express the invisible precludes all sacred art. As the Invisible entered its own creation, took on flesh, and became visible, we are called to make visible so that the faithful may return to the invisible again. Here is where what speaks of beauty will speak of truth. If sacred art is to have a moral aesthetic it must have a visual aesthetic. In his address to artists on the function of art, Pope Pius XII recommends, “Seek God here below in nature and in man, but above all within yourselves. Do not vainly try to give the human without the divine, nor nature without its Creator. Harmonize instead the infinite with the eternal, man with God, and thus you will give the truth of art and the true art.”

When we say that a work should inspire a personal transformation, its goal then is to make us feel and realize our place in the Mystical Body. Once this connection to the Mystical Body is accepted by artist and viewer communal transfiguration is realized. From Francis of Assisi on, figures painted and sculpted took on their natural fullness, their biological wonder. Part of this was due to his Canticle to Brother Sun. What St. Francis did was quite different from the pagan anthropomorphism of the Greeks or Romans and beyond the simple personification of the elements. “Brother Sun,” “Sister Moon,” “Brother Fire,” “Sister Water,” and of course the birds, his “Brother and Sisters of the Air,” were all part of one Creation along with Adam and Eve and most importantly, Christ. Never before had personification in art taken on such impact to include all humankind in one family along with all else created. By renaming them in familial terms, Francis made all Creation one family, something the pagan personification of gods and goddesses could never accomplish, since it was something it could never intend. As Catholics we can experience both the personal and communal transformation. Our “family” is demonstrated, the invisible community is realized through a visual means.

To make a corporeal likeness that is transmundane is to show nothing less than the “Body Electric,” our likeness now to our anticipated Resurrection in Christ. As artists, we have discovered and will continue discovering the means and metaphors by which this is attained. The image is a simulacrum and represents the subject’s characteristics though not a reproduction. We make a world that resembles ours but is different from it. Thus our works, our paintings and sculptures become like prayers and perform much like intercessions between the intelligible world and the perceptual world. The human figure although a focal point, becomes a sublime means to a spiritual realm.

If the Poverello of Assisi gave us the inspiration to depict our human body and the Body of Christ as it was created, again it was Ignatius of Loyola who gave us the courage to flex our muscle. If you thought the flesh of the Quattrocentro was bad, take a look at Counter-Reformation art! Like Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius tells us nothing of art but gives us an armature in his Spiritual Exercises. He instructs us, “to look at people with the eyes of imagination, to smell and taste the infinite sweetness of God, to celebrate ornament and buildings of the Church, to celebrate images and venerate them for what they represent.” Looking at the four parts of the Exercises we begin with the contemplation of our sins, on to the life of Christ, the Passion, and finally the Resurrection and Ascension. As the exercises begin in the dark, in tenebrae, we begin to witness secularization of the transcendental in art and vice versa. The theme of metamorphosis becomes central to Catholic art and architecture. But more importantly it is the use of the mundane, the use of worldly body and the senses to reveal the divine: how much is this like the Incarnation itself?

But before religious or devotional art can be sacred, it must be beautiful and true. Beauty and truth here comprise a reciprocal relationship in that what speaks of beauty also reveals truth and what reveals beauty speaks of beauty. Here the visible and invisible validate each other as what has a visual aesthetic gives way to a moral aesthetic. The irrational space of the mannerist meets the rational of the high Renaissance. The null space of the eastern icon meets the tenebriest void of Counter-Reformation art.

Can there be faith without an aesthetic? Can there be faith without a value? Without an aesthetic, without beauty, the covenant could hardly exist. As Genesis tells us, God made it and said it was good. God as Maker, as Artist, sees his creation and places a value on it. It also tells us two things: that work is good and working well is good. This value and this Creation is ongoing. The Master Artist is still at work on his Creation of which we are part. Tommaso Campanella in his “De sensu verum et magia” of 1604 writes: “The world is the statue, the image, the living temple of God, in which He has expressed his gestures and written His concepts; He has adorned it with living statues, simple in heaven, but complex and weak on earth; but they all lead to Him.”

This idea of Creation as “art,” as God’s own “living statute,” the earth as His First Daughter, the orb as His favored shape, has always been with us. Now the Imator Dei is complete. We as artists imitate God as Artist.

In closing, as presence, witness, and transcendence are realized, this covenant made in paint, carved in stone or cast in bronze, becomes a relationship of reciprocity between origin and belief, the continuity of that belief, and the reassurance of that belief in the future. It allows us to project our faith in time, which is hope. These works of sacred art then take their place and simply sit side by side with the history of the Church, with the history of the faithful. As sacred art looks toward the covenant, it is the covenant between the artist, the faithful, the Church, and the Holy Spirit that produces the true soul, the revealed meaning of the work. By means of this covenant, great sacred art continually reveals something about us as it continually reveals something about the mysteries of our faith. Its speaks to us, with us, and for us in our ongoing metamorphosis, our ongoing sacred conversation.

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The dissatisfaction that many Roman Catholics have expressed concerning the renovation or construction of church buildings within the last thirty-five years has often been attributed to the eye of the beholder. In liturgical circles it has been said that Catholics need more education so that they may better understand the documents and the spirit of Vatican II. The Council brought about a new approach and emphasis so that they may better understand the spirit of Vatican II. The Council brought about a new approach and emphasis. At the very least, the renovation and construction of many churches has taken the dinner away from a starving lion. The former diet has been replaced with vitamin pills that contain all the necessary nutrients, but little of the taste and flavor that would have made dinner such a meaningful and cultural event for Catholics. In light of such lack of flavor, the lion has responded with his claws. The human response to the new diet, whether it is real or perceived, is to take action. While liturgists and architects were about the business of trimming off the fat and providing what they believed would be a more nutritious, albeit bland, diet-conscious and sometimes minimal dinner, some Catholics have decided to create a dinner of their own. The wonderful thing in their minds is that at their dinner, in their private sacred space, they will neither be told what must or must not be present for it to be truly sacred, nor will they be told what or how much they can eat or how it will be flavored. They have made these choices, drawing from their history, their culture, and their Catholic identity.

It has not necessarily been the raison d’être of the liturgical movement to place the concern for Catholic identity in the forefront of liturgical renewal. As that movement entered the new millennium, it faced the rejection of its methodology. Many Catholics had always refused to be enthusiastic about the reform as it was presented to them. Finally, liturgists received a great boost from some of the American bishops in the form of a seeming lack of confidence. The reaction of liturgists has moved from the initial grave disappointment to a call to promote the reforms at all costs. War language has now replaced the former journey in loving devotion to liturgical reform.

Amid the dust created by the current struggle for reform has risen up, or as I prefer to say “resurfaced,” a construction of “house chapels.” This is not truly new, as indeed “nothing is new under the sun,” but rather it is a striking reappearance of the manor chapels found in Europe in the pre-Reformation era. In those times, the wealthy, who often lived in the country, built lavish chapels on their estates and often were buried there. These chapels became monuments to the history of their families. One would never think that there would be a return to such a practice in this age, where distance is no longer a barrier. Yet it has returned in the United States and elsewhere. Upon interviewing the owners of various chapels, it became evident that the personal chapel met a need that was not addressed in the local parish. Religious symbols were important to them and brought them closer to God. In some cases the owners wished to preserve the visible elements of what they had seen in their churches before the reform. They had even “rescued” from destruction what they felt was sacred to them. They then gave what was sacred to them a place in their homes.

Preservation is not a new concept. There are many such examples of the faithful storing in their homes — tabernacles, crucifixes, Stations of the Cross, baptismal fonts, sanctuary lamps and the like — only to produce them proudly on a priest’s visit to retell some of their sacred history. In the 1970s, Catherine Doherty’s community in Combermere, Ontario became a refuge for such artifacts, waiting for the day that their value would become known. In the early 1980s, many people purchased much of what had been preserved, reclaiming these noble accoutrements. Church renovators appealed to the past as they searched for more rich and noble materials to replace transitory decorations created in the mid to late 1960s.

John Henry Cardinal Newman once said: “Granting that the forms are not immediately from God, still, long use has made them divine to us; for the spirit of religion has so penetrated and quickened them, that to destroy them is, in respect to the multitude of men, to unsettle and dislodge the religious principle itself.” The preservers of sacred things have reacted to what they see as the widespread desacralization of their churches. They have been safeguarding the sacred, taking it underground for a time, as if they lived in a state of religious persecution. As they erect a house chapel, these Catholics restore and make holy again the tangible objects of their faith identity.

Three examples of house chapels created in recent years will be noted here, although many others exist and more are currently being created.

A house chapel in Minnesota, built circa 1975, includes a round tower and a stairway. An eighteen foot altar made from old timbers was brought from Germany. The family allows the occasional priest visitor to say
Mass there, but no tabernacle has been allowed by the local bishop. The family has also created a small chapel in their winter home in Florida.

A chapel has been created at a new residence in Nebraska. Here is found a vaulted nave, a domical sanctuary, a marble high altar, Corinthian columns, bronze crucifix and mahogany woodwork throughout. It has been used for prayer as well as special liturgies.

A chapel has been constructed and attached to a house in St. Paul, Minnesota. The sanctuary contains a tabernacle from Barcelona, upon an altar that is of traditional style, so that Mass may be said with the priest’s back to the congregation. The dimensions of the chapel are 18’ wide by 25’ long, the sanctuary being 10’ X 10’. The Polish artisan Lech Polawski created the altar rail. It was the intention of the family to also use the chapel as a burial site, but local restrictions precluded that possibility.

When Catholics create a chapel in their homes, they make a proud statement of the elements that are important for them in a sacred space. A strong distinction is made between the latter-day term “worship space,” which may tend to deemphasize the domus Dei, and “sacred space,” which con-secrates a place for sacred use. The structural renovation of a church building that focuses chiefly upon ritual action, i.e. the sacred space, clearly does violence to how so many Catholics perceive their identity. They will reach out to protect that identity, and if they fail, they will create it elsewhere in some form. What I would propose is that a “sacred place” needs to be created, established, and then made permanent by those who fashion the domus Dei. It is my belief that the house of God and the ritual carried out within, as presented to us in recent Church documents and proposals, form no dichotomy. Permanency may take many forms and ironically may even include change. When the Catholic identity of individuals and a group is engaged and respected, when concern for persons surpasses concern for any reform, and when the past and present are respected rather than seen as opposing positions, renovation or construction will no longer become a battle ground. Such a wedding in the liturgical reform, which creates or renovates church buildings and all they contain, would emphasize the permanency, nobility and art elements of the past, used in such a way that the mission of the post-conciliar Church may advance in spirit and in truth with the conscious, living and active participation of its members. These words have been the rallying cry of the reformers. Such advancement in the Spirit, that blows where it will, may take the reform and the reformers alike to a new level and methodology in reformation.

The building, its parts, and what occurs there, especially in the light of this passing world, focuses the people of God on the mysteries of the Kingdom. The baptized should see the symbols of their faith assisting them in their journey.

It may be said that St. Peter strove to become the first Christian architect in proposing that he build the first house for the Lord. At the Transfiguration he uttered it well: “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” If one does not have that sentiment come to mind on entering a church, if one is not encouraged by the good and noble striving of the People of God who have used the best gifts that have been received, that building could be in vain. Perhaps the dream of every architect, builder and liturgist would be to overhear a slight change in Peter’s enthusiastic words. Faithful pilgrims would enter such a church, and be so inspired by what has been created, as well as what occurs there, that they would not fail to pray: “Lord, it is good that YOU are here!”

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P eople often ask me what texts one should read in preparation for designing or renovating a Catholic church. I typically recommend starting with Church documents such as Sacrosanctum Concilium, the General Instruction on the Roman Missal, the Rite for the Dedication of a Church; and a few paragraphs each from the Code of Canon Law, the Cathechism, Opera Artis and Pope John Paul II’s Letter to Artists. In addition to these documents, I suggest turning to well-written tomes on the history of architecture, to be accompanied by books written specifically on the principles of church architecture, such as O’Connell’s Church Building and Furnishing1, Roulin’s Modern Church Architecture2 and Rose’s Ugly as Sin.3 While the Church documents define the liturgical and canonical requirements for sacred architecture, the latter books help to interpret these documents in the light of architecture, both historic and contemporary. As well, the document from the American bishops, Built of Living Stones,4 purportedly offers a little bit of both and can serve as an introduction to the topic of Catholic architecture for a pastor or building committee.

There is much to appreciate in Built of Living Stones (BLS hereafter), for it includes many of the requirements from liturgical law while highlighting a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration when building a church. Issued on November 16, 2000, BLS does not claim to be Church law but rather offers helpful guidelines; as the Preface states, BLS “contains many of the provisions of universal law governing liturgical art and architecture and offers pastoral suggestions.”5 The guidelines found in BLS were developed over a four-year period by a task group of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, chaired by Bishop Rodimer. Its drafting saw no little controversy, including one of the liveliest debates by American bishops in recent memory. The first draft of Built of Living Stones, entitled Domus Dei, was heavily flawed and repeated many of the mistakes of the notorious Environment and Art in Catholic Worship (EACW hereafter), a booklet published by the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy in 1978.6 Fortunately, many of the recommendations by the bishops were taken into consideration in the final editing of BLS, and the document was re-written by the task group, which included among others Rev. James Moroney, secretary of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, and Rev. Brian Hughes, an architectural historian from the diocese of Sioux City.

The first chapter of BLS concerns the theology of the church building and—refreshingly—treats it as more than a functional structure for the liturgy. One of the important debates in modern times has been whether the church building is a domus Dei or a domus ecclesiae, and BLS rightly points out that it is both and therefore must be “expressive of the presence of God, suited for the celebration of the sacrifice of Christ, as well as reflective of the community that celebrates there.”7 It acknowledges that the church building signifies and makes visible the Church in a particular place, which is the reason that from early times Christians have called their buildings “churches” and not “meeting houses.” Since churches are also houses of worship, they must be suited to sacred celebrations, dignified, and beautiful. BLS makes the significant point that “church buildings and the religious artworks that beautify them are forms of worship themselves,” which is quite a tonic to the conventional wisdom that the building is merely a container for the liturgy. However, following this rather nice introduction, BLS falls into what might be termed a “ritual functionalist” viewpoint, in which church architecture is determined almost solely by the liturgical rites. The document enumerates five “liturgical principles for building or renovating churches,” including designing buildings in harmony with church laws and serving the liturgy, fostering participation in the liturgy, recognizing the different roles of the building or renovating, and fostering the culture of time and place, and ensuring that the church be beautiful and raise people’s hearts and minds to the Author of all beauty. At this point it becomes clear that the prejudices of EACW and Domus Dei are very much still alive: BLS emphasizes the local, the contemporary, and the diverse over the universal, the historical and the unifying. While it is certainly true that the Church has produced a great variety of art and architecture over time and place and will continue to do so, it is also true that early Christian basilicas, Spanish missions, and Byzantine churches and icons continue to speak to modern man across time and culture. Just consider the number of Japanese tourists who love to visit St. Peter’s and the Sistine Chapel yet have little interest in visiting Ronchamp or the church of the Autostrada. Even more crucial is the

St. Bartholemew church in Columbus, Indiana has been promoted as an example of a church which follows the guidelines of Built of Living Stones
cause the altar is Christ\textsuperscript{10} as well as the place of sacrifice and the table around which Christ gathers the community to nourish them.\textsuperscript{11} However, BLS is a bit confusing in this regard, implying that relics should be placed in the floor under the altar, whereas Church law indicates they should be placed under the mensa (or top stone). As evidenced in architectural tradition, the altar should be the center of attention in a church, which is best accomplished when the design of the interior and the altar work together to emphasize the altar. One of the least successful aspects of church architecture since the Second Vatican Council has been the banal sanctuaries and freestanding altars which are too small for the size of the church and look rather silly, somewhat like a folding chair placed in a throne room. One of the best ways to return prominence to the altar is to raise it on steps, make it as wide as one-eighth of the nave, and cover it with a baldacchino or tester, as was employed in the early basilicas (as well as in the liturgical movement of the twentieth century). On the contrary, BLS claims that a highly elevated altar might cause “visual or symbolic division from the liturgical assembly.”\textsuperscript{12} In making this statement, BLS dispenses with the benefits of prominence, sightlines, and transcendence that a raised altar can afford, while ignoring examples from architectural history and the basic desire of the laity to see the altar and the action of the mass. While most architects will provide wheelchair access to the sanctuary in a new church, the notion that the altar needs access by ministers or others in wheelchairs is highly questionable (except perhaps in retirement homes for priests).

The recommendations for the design of the baptistry are even more speculative, and it comes as a surprise that there is more written about the baptistry than any other element of the church. While BLS notes that it is customary to locate the font either in a special area within the church or in a separate baptistry, the booklet’s recommendation is to place the font in the central aisle and design it to emulate the altar and sanctuary. While the font can certainly be thought of as the place of sacramental entry into the Church, by overemphasizing its design and location, one lessens the distinctiveness of the altar and the preeminence of the sacrament called Blessed. It has been popular among liturgists to locate the font at the entry of the church to emphasize the common priesthood of all believers and to deemphasize the ministerial priesthood of the ordained (which is most visible in the sanctuary). However, not only does the placement of the font in the central aisle tend to treat it like a glorified holy water font (that is, as a sacramental rather than the sacrament), it also creates a competition with the altar and tabernacle. Along with the fact that there is little basis for this location in church documents or in Catholic Tradition, such a placement of the font creates numerous practical difficulties for solemn processions, especially during weddings, funerals, and even baptisms.

The six criteria for designing a font listed in BLS exhibit some of the most obvious limitations of the liturgical-functional theory of architecture, including the notion that the “location of the baptistry will determine how, and how actively the entire liturgical assembly can participate in the rite.” This seems to ignore the ancient and poignant symbolism of the catechumen or
child being baptized outside of the church proper. In this way baptism is seen clearly as the sacrament of initiation necessary for entering the Church.

In recent decades, the font has been enlarged and moved out of a baptistry and into the church, while at the same time the tabernacle has often been moved out of its place of prominence in the sanctuary and put in a type of baptistry outside of the nave. Presumably this swap was due to a misreading of the 1975 GIRM, alongside the creation of a false dichotomy between the “active presence” of Christ at the altar and the “static presence” of Christ reserved in the tabernacle. However, the writings of Pope John Paul II, the 1983 edition of Canon Law, the 2000 edition of the GIRM, and the sense of the faithful have helped to put most of these ideas to rest. Not surprisingly, the location of the tabernacle was the topic of greatest interest in the bishops’ discussion of the Domus Dei draft in 1999. Among those criticizing Domus Dei for its treatment of the Blessed Sacrament chapel were Archbishops McCarrick, Rigali, Sheehan, Chaput, and Cardinals Bevilacqua and Hickey. While somewhat reflecting the bishops’ concerns, BLS still seems to favor the chapel of reservation, though it acknowledges that Church law requires that it be “integrated with the church and conspicuous to the faithful.”

It also rehashes the modernist concern that the tabernacle “not draw the attention of the faithful away from the eucharistic celebration,” which has never been born of canonical documents and assumes that the laity cannot do the liturgical equivalent of walking and chewing gum at the same time. This is unfortunate. BLS points out that it is preferable that the tabernacle should not be on the altar of celebration, but omits the allowance for the tabernacle being placed on an existing high altar (though reading the footnotes and GIRM 2000 #315 will make this clear).

The majority of chapter two is spent describing the numerous rites and functions that will occur in a church, with the belief that planning for all of these individual elements—such as veneration of the Cross, the altar of Reposition, the paschal candle or the holy oils—will add up to a well-designed church. This may be due to the sad fact that in the past few decades the Church has built functional-looking buildings which do not function. Yet the document reads as if designing the house of God is like designing some sort of commercial kitchen where we have to make sure that each spiritual implement and appliance is in its place. There is no evidence that the architects of our historic churches spent a lot time worrying about these things, because a well-designed church, like a well-designed room, naturally accommodates a multiplicity of elements and rituals.

One of the most disconcerting developments during the past few decades has been the design of churches as semi-circular or fan-shaped theaters, following the lead of Protestant denominations. Interestingly, one of the stated goals of many of the large mega-church buildings has been to make people feel as comfortable and anonymous as if they were going to a show, without any need to participate. BLS seems to acknowledge this trend when it recommends “parishes will want to choose a seating arrangement that calls the congregation to active participation and that avoids any semblance of a theater or an arena.” On the other hand, the document sounds like it is advocating the theater model when it states that “ideally, no seat in the nave would be located beyond a point where distance and the lighting level of the sanctuary severely impede the view of and participation in liturgical actions.”

Yet one of the most transcendent and attractive aspects of the great cathedrals such as Chartres or St. Peter is their great length, their side aisles, and their light and shadow. And while BLS does offer some caution about placing the choir in or near the sanctuary, it makes no mention of the acoustical benefits and American tradition of the choir loft.

BLS acknowledges the significance and the diversity of pious devotions, which are central to the life of Catholics and should be fostered by the design of churches. However, BLS overstates the case that specific devotions are unique to various ethnic communities, whereas in point of fact, there are a large number of Catholic devotions such as the Stations of the Cross, devotion to the Blessed Virgin in the Rosary, and devotion to Christ in the Sacred Heart or the crucifix. Images of the saints and scenes from their lives remind us that we are joined with them in the Mystical Body of Christ and should be a part of the design of a church. The crucifix, stained glass, paintings and sculpture are often those elements of the church which are most inspiring for the lay faithful and should be beautiful, of high quality and beauty and respectful of traditional iconography. No one likes to see their mother portrayed in an ugly fashion, and Catholics are no different. Yet the discussion of images in BLS also includes some liturgical-functional tendencies, such as the recommendation that images depict saints for whom devotion currently exists and, if saints are only venerated by a few, to remove their images. This sentiment does not sufficiently reflect the Communion of Saints and the reality that the longer a church stands, the more it reflects the devotions and saints from a variety of times. On the contrary, one of the rich aspects of historic churches is the presence of sacred art and saints from all different periods, giving one a sense of the longevity and great richness of the Body of Christ.
Chapter three of BLS is a pithy essay concerning art which repeats many of the concepts from the previous chapter as well as developing a few new ones. It begins with an address by Pope Paul VI in which he states that "art is meant to bring the divine to the human world, to the level of the senses, then, from the spiritual insight gained through the senses and the stirring of the emotions to raise the human world to God, to his inexpressible kingdom of mystery, beauty, and life." BLS points out the necessity for the artist to understand and reverence the liturgy and to be respectful and supportive of the doctrines and practices of the Church. However, one can go further than that. Following Sacrosanctum Concilium, artists who desire to make religious or sacred art should see themselves as serving God’s glory and "engaged in a kind of sacred imitation of God the Creator," which implies that the artist should be a person of faith. Faith, coupled with a knowledge of symbolism and iconography and the necessity of beauty by the artist, would go a long way toward a restoration of sacred art. BLS states that it is the responsibility of the Church to educate itself and in our churches than with the presence of sacred art.

The final chapter of BLS, "Building a Church: Practical Considerations," is written to introduce pastors and parishioners to the building process and the different roles such as the bishop, the diocese, the pastor, the parish, the architect, and the contractor. Most priests today will probably get the chance to be consulted on the design of their church, and certainly everyone should have a chance to be heard early on in the process. However, at some point, after the schematic design has been proposed and accepted by the people and the diocese, the pastor will have to make specific decisions about colors, materials, and managing the budget. The old joke that a camel is really a horse that was designed by committee rings true for many of our building projects, especially churches built in the last decades. BLS seems to take the bureaucratic approach and recommend more committees than are necessary, including committees to study furnishings, seating arrangements, the chapel of reservation, devotional items, artwork, and landscape design. There is no question that the parish or the building committee should educate themselves before commissioning an architect. The recommendation that the parish embark on a self-study and liturgical education is admirable; however, what parishes and pastors would really benefit from is a course in church architecture appreciation. One of the difficulties today is that dioceses have made requirements that a parish have fifty percent of their monies in hand before they break ground and that they payoff their mortgage in five years. If banks had requirements like that, very few parishioners could own their own homes. Dioceses and Catholics in general need to return to the ideal of our forefathers: constructing a church is a long-term spiritual investment, and a worthy building could take fifteen or twenty years to pay off. This ideal has the added benefit of allowing more than one generation to participate in building and paying for the church.

Interpretation in Light of Buildings

One of the most basic expectations of a document on art or architecture is that there be concrete examples to express particular principles. A document on architecture without citations of buildings is like a theology text which does not quote the Bible. For the Catholic faithful, principles of church architecture are interpreted in the light of actual buildings. A good example of this is John Paul II’s Letter to Artists of 1999 in which the Holy Father refers amply to the Church’s patrimony of art and architecture: "When the Edict of Constantine allowed Christians to declare themselves in full freedom, art became a privileged means for the expression of faith. Majestic basilicas began to appear, and in them the architectural canons of the pagan world were reproduced and at the same time modified to meet the demands of the new form of worship. How can we fail to recall at least the old Saint Peter’s Basilica and the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, both funded by Constantine himself? Or Constantine’s Hagia Sophia built by Justinian, with its splendours of Byzantine art?" One expects to find a reference to the his-
tory of architecture in BLS, especially since the Church has helped to write much of that history over the past two millennia. Again, John Paul’s letter is full of that sensibility, a Catholic sensibility of a document immersed in the Tradition. However, on this score BLS gets failing marks. There is almost no awareness of the history of architecture, whether explicit or implicit; and examples of church architecture are more likely to be found on a shelf at a bookstore than in this document. These shortcomings are due to the fact that this is not a document with a love, nor even an appreciation, of Tradition, but rather a well-crafted essay of a rubrical nature. That being said, it comes as no surprise that BLS includes no pictures of architecture per se.

Evidently during the drafting of BLS, some argued that to include images would slant the document in a particular direction, whether toward traditionalism or modernism. The images of minimalist churches were, of course, one of the great weaknesses of EACW. For a document to be Catholic and to uphold the highest standards, it would be wise if it included images of a variety of churches and altars from a spectrum of time periods, styles, and countries. This is, of course, one of the glories of the universal Church: it is ever ancient and ever new. These examples could all be drawn from the finest churches throughout the world as agreed to by people of good will, thus discrediting the mediocre, the average, or the merely recent. (It is interesting to note that in his Letter to Artists, the one place that Pope John Paul II does not use specific examples is in reference to church architecture after Vatican II.) While I appreciate the fact that BLS does not have illustrations slanted toward modernism as its predecessor EACW had, the lack of examples points out an inherent limitation of the document. An essay on art and architecture which leaves out images and examples is incomplete, and anyone who reads BLS will need to supplement it with history books and other books on church architecture.18

In conclusion, I would acknowledge that Built of Living Stones is more faithful to Church documents and an improvement over the 1977 document Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. While it includes many provisions of universal law, which are quoted or footnoted, it makes many points which are simply pastoral suggestions and are not binding.19 In general, BLS seeks to be flexible, offering a variety of solutions to design issues, but these should not be analyzed nor taken too seriously. There are some major lacunae, such as leaving out the important subject of historic preservation of art and architecture.20 BLS can be rightly criticized as emphasizing numerous non-architectural issues, while saying very little about architecture. For example, one of the most cherished and important aspects of church architecture, its exterior design and siting, is almost totally ignored by the document. It is my hope that architects and pastors, building committees and bishops, will not ignore the exterior of the house of God, and will go beyond the limitations of BLS by studying the catechisms written in stone throughout history. BLS is a step forward in the writing on church architecture, but by itself it offers little hope that we will build churches worthy of the Almighty once again. For that to happen, we will have to look to the pastors, the bishops, the laity, and the architects who are bringing about a new renaissance in church architecture.

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5. Ibid., p. 3.
8. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1180; Rites for the Dedication of a Church, ch. 2, no.1.
10. RDCA, ch. 4, no.4.
12. Ibid., p. 23.
15. Ibid.
16. Pope Paul VI, Address to the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Art in Italy (December 17, 1969).
18. Such as Michael Rose’s recent book, Ugly as Sin.
THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Michael Enright

Those of us who work among the Hispanic immigrant population are shocked at how rapidly these immigrants are losing their faith. Still, if the truth be told, the same thing happened to the Germans and Irish and Poles who populated our cities and built the Church in the late 1800s and early 1900s. There is a problem. If it were not for the Catholic immigrants who continue to arrive here, we would look like Europe. We would be changing all our churches into museums. I suspect there are some concrete, easily understandable reasons why Catholics tend to become less Catholic over generations. These reasons connect to the “American dream,” and there are a few problems with the way we are living that dream out these days. There is a direct connection between people’s choice of where to live and their faith life. There are spiritual and ethical dimensions intimately connected to where you lay your head down to sleep at night. The Catholic Church has not yet taken on this discussion. We should.

This is where the rubber hits the pavement for nearly everyone. And I am surprised I haven’t heard much talk about the question. After the decision about who you will spend the rest of your life with, the next most important question has to be where you will live. The place you choose will affect your life in the most concrete and immediate ways. It will affect how many hours you spend in the car or maintaining your home. It will affect where your children go to school and whom they grow up with as friends. It will affect your financial future and the future of your immediate and extended family.

Before addressing the spiritual costs associated with the way we live, I would like to offer in a capsule form a few of the other costs. There has been some decent writing on this topic and for a fuller treatment the interested reader could look at “Suburban Nation, The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream,” or perhaps, “The Geography of Nowhere.” Both these books point to an upsurge in interest in what could be called “people friendly environments.” The authors outline a few of the effects of living our American dream the way we are. What are some of these effects? The one that perhaps resonates most with our culture these days are the environmental costs associated with our lifestyle. We are wildly paving over some of the most fertile land in the world, building huge mansions in the middle of nowhere, running roads out to these mansions, and spending hours in our cars each week to get to our country estates. We are using up the environment at an unprecedented rate and are energy hogs with respect to the rest of the world. As a result of our dependence on petroleum we are deeply concerned with events in the Middle East and anywhere else in the world we can find oil. Some people, concerned with the environment, have moved toward thinking we should use hydrogen to move our cars and solar or wind power for our homes. Others are beginning to wonder whether we might want to make some more fundamental changes to our lifestyle. Perhaps we should find ways to live that require less energy and create a lifestyle that is more environmentally friendly.

Another effect that has caught the attention of some people is perhaps more self-centered. People are beginning to wonder about the economic cost of the dream, and whether what we are doing will be financially sustainable over the long haul. Housing starts, according to the government’s January 2003 figures, had risen to the highest level in nearly 17 years (1.85 million per year at January’s seasonally adjusted rate). Home building has replaced auto manufacture as the engine that drives the economy, but thinking people are beginning to wonder in any industry, for a while the demand for any product exceeds the supply. Over time, the supply rises to meet the demand, and then the market becomes saturated. Our population is pretty well stable right now, and will soon begin to shrink. How long can the housing industry put up 1.85 million units a year and hope to sell them? We are building new homes like maniacs. And once the market is saturated, what will happen to the value of homes

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already built? People have been startled by what happened to the equity they had built up in the stock market. Part of the dream is to get ahead based on your home purchase ... to build some equity for your future. Imagine what might happen if the real estate market crashed. Thinking people are wondering if this may be coming down the road.

A third effect has to do with family life. Part of the dream is the promise of the good life. Aside from a pretty lawn and room for a swing set in the back yard, the dream promises improved family life. The soccer moms are wondering about these improvements. In old neighborhoods, you might send your kids out to play. They might play ball in the streets, or perhaps the alleys. If they were adventurous they might go to the park. Nobody had to drive them anywhere. They might run into kids who were a different color. When you needed a gallon of milk you might send your daughter to the corner store. If you had to pick up your dry cleaning you’d go for a walk. Going to grandma’s house meant heading upstairs or across the street.

If you’re living the dream you spend around an hour driving to work and an hour going home. On average, American dreamers spend the two hours we got off when they invented the eight-hour workday alone in our cars. Getting some milk means getting in the car. Visiting grandma, who lives alone in her castle, means dealing with traffic. When the kids get old enough to drive, each one will need a car. At least then mom will get a break, and not have to drive the kids everywhere. Still, someone will have to pay for these cars, insure them, and put gas in them. It would make life better if both parents went to work. At least that way you could make the house and car payments and have a little left over for an occasional vacation. All this means that families are pretty well exhausted at the end of the day, placed under extraordinary pressures by the dream. Where is that good life promised your family?

Having said all that, perhaps the most important effect of embracing the dream is the deadening of the spirit that
accompanies it. And this is the effect writers are leaving out of the discussion, so far. I have heard preachers blasting off on our materialistic culture. On our self-centeredness. On our isolation and individualism. All of these things are problems, I think. When I look at the individuals, though, I wonder. As far as I can tell, my brothers and sisters living in the suburbs are not materialistic, self-centered, moneygrubbers seeking safety in splendid isolation. They are people trying to make ethical decisions in a culture that has gone a little crazy. I think they would like to live the values of the Gospel, but there are a couple of reasons they cannot.

The first is that they have no time or energy. Religion takes time and energy. Altruistic behavior takes time. From my own experience, when you are in a hurry you don’t notice or take action to help a stranger. And their time and energy are eaten up. A whole lot of people are running like crazy and just barely keeping up. Being exhausted and having no time is probably the same reason school boards and all kinds of other voluntary organizations, including our parishes, suffer from lack of participation. People are truly tired and many times do not have the time to take care of their immediate families, let alone extend themselves to care for strangers.

The second is that they do not live in communities. If you are living the dream, you may know a couple of neighbors, but a couple of neighbors is not a community. A community includes both strangers and friends. There are people you might run into on your sidewalk and people who live next door. There are old ladies who stop to chat on a summer evening when you’re sitting on your front porch. There’s the guy in the corner store who knows your name. There are kids making noise and maybe there’s a town drunk. The Liturgy of the Catholic Church assumes that we gather as a community of believers. The Sunday Mass assembly is a group of people who have had some contact with each other during the week. If they have not had that contact the Liturgy gets overloaded with first creating a kind of “pseudo-community” that comes together only to worship, then trying to move that pseudo-community through the rituals that sanctify us.

What can the Catholic Church do to help? There are a couple of things I would like to suggest. First, I think we should begin to think and talk about these realities. As I pointed out earlier, the decision about where to live is perhaps the second most important decision made in the lives of ordinary people. Until now, we have not found a way to inform that decision with the values of the Gospel. As my brother asked me once, “How come I never hear about this stuff in church?” We need to do some hard thinking about the relationship between the built environment and the Body of Christ ... beyond shaping worship space there is a critical need to shine the light of the Gospel on our whole living environment and these essential decisions people have to make.

Once we have some clear thinking done about these issues, we need to move to the second step. The second thing the Church can do is begin to make the case, so to speak, for our cities. I suspect the Church could form a partnership with mayors, for example, and other interested people (environmentalists? New Urbanists?) and perhaps put together a couple of Television spots. Imagine the ad ... a family sitting in a living room watching TV. The father tells his young son, “Timmy, your grandma’s program is on. Why don’t you tell her?” Timmy goes to the phone and calls Grandma, who lives alone, and tells her on the phone, “Grandma, your program’s on.” In Version II of the same scenario, Timmy goes over to the staircase and shouts, “Grandma, your program’s on.” She shouts back down, “Thanks Timmy. I’ll be right down.” Or perhaps the family runs out of milk. The kid pours out the last of the gallon and shouts to the living room, “Ma, we’re out of milk.” In Version I the mother pulls a long face, finds her car keys, and heads out to the store for milk. In Version II, Timmy gets sent over to the corner store, passing a few people who greet him by name, and buys the gallon of milk from the owner, who knows him by name. At the end of these ads, there could be a kind of tag line. “Brought to you by the coalition for reasonable living,” or some such.

We need to begin to discuss the ethical and spiritual implications of our lifestyle choices. We have to take a critical look at the way our built environment affects the Body of Christ ... not so much the individuals as the whole Body.

Then we have to begin to get the word out. If we can do these things, perhaps we can begin to move toward building something that more closely resembles the heavenly Jerusalem.

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ECCLESIA DE EUCHARISTIA

Encyclical letter of his holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, men and women, in the consecrated life and all the lay faithful on the eucharist in its relationship to the church.

From Introductory Summary:

The celebration of the “Mass” is marked by outward signs aimed at emphasizing the joy which assembles the community around the incomparable gift of the Eucharist. Architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature and, more generally, every form of art demonstrate how the Church, down the centuries, has feared no extravagance in her witness to the love which unites her to her divine Spouse. A recovery of the sense of beauty is also needed in today’s celebrations.

From Chapter 5:

49. With this heightened sense of mystery, we understand how the faith of the Church in the mystery of the Eucharist has found historical expression not only in the demand for an interior disposition of devotion, but also in outward forms meant to evoke and emphasize the grandeur of the event being celebrated. This led progressively to the development of a particular form of regulating the Eucharistic liturgy, with due respect for the various legitimately constituted ecclesial traditions. On this foundation a rich artistic heritage also developed. Architecture, sculpture, painting and music, moved by the Christian mystery, have found in the Eucharist, both directly and indirectly, a source of great inspiration.

Such was the case, for example, with architecture, which witnessed the transition, once the historical situation made it possible, from the first places of Eucharistic celebration in the domus or “homes” of Christian families to the solemn basilicas of the early centuries, to the imposing cathedrals of the Middle Ages, and to the churches, large and small, which gradually sprang up throughout the lands touched by Christianity. The designs of altars and tabernacles within Church interiors were often not simply motivated by artistic inspiration but also by a clear understanding of the mystery. The same could be said for sacred music, if we but think of the inspired Gregorian melodies and the many, often great, composers who sought to do justice to the liturgical texts of the Mass. Similarly, can we overlook the enormous quantity of artistic production, ranging from fine craftsmanship to authentic works of art, in the area of Church furnishings and vestments used for the celebration of the Eucharist?

It can be said that the Eucharist, while shaping the Church and her spirituality, has also powerfully affected “culture”, and the arts in particular.

50. In this effort to adore the mystery grasped in its ritual and aesthetic dimensions, a certain “competition” has taken place between Christians of the West and the East. How could we not give particular thanks to the Lord for the contributions to Christian art made by the great architectural and artistic works of the Greco-Byzantine tradition and of the whole geographical area marked by Slav culture? In the East, sacred art has preserved a remarkably powerful sense of mystery, which leads artists to see their efforts at creating beauty not simply as an expression of their own talents, but also as a genuine service to the faith. Passing well beyond mere technical skill, they have shown themselves docile and open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The architectural and mosaic splendours of the Christian East and West are a patrimony belonging to all believers; they contain a hope, and even a pledge, of the desired fullness of communion in faith and in celebration. This would presuppose and demand, as in Rublev’s famous depiction of the Trinity, a profoundly Eucharistic Church in which the presence of the mystery of Christ in the broken bread is as it were immersed in the ineffable unity of the three divine Persons, making of the Church herself an “icon” of the Trinity.

Within this context of an art aimed at expressing, in all its elements, the meaning of the Eucharist in accordance with the Church’s teaching, attention needs to be given to the norms regulating the construction and decor of sacred buildings. As history shows and as I emphasized in my Letter to Artists, the Church has always left ample room for the creativity of artists. But sacred art must be outstanding for its ability to express adequately the mystery grasped in the fullness of the Church’s faith and in accordance with the pastoral guidelines appropriately laid down by competent Authority. This holds true both for the figurative arts and for sacred music.

51. The development of sacred art and liturgical discipline which took place in lands of ancient Christian heritage is also taking place on continents where Christianity is younger. This was precisely the approach supported by the Second Vatican Council on the need for sound and proper “inculturation”. In my numerous Pastoral Visits I have seen, throughout the world, the great vitality which the celebration of the Eucharist can have when marked by the forms, styles and sensibilities of different cultures. By adaptation to the changing conditions of time and place, the Eucharist...
offers sustenance not only to individuals but to entire peoples, and it shapes cultures inspired by Christianity.

It is necessary, however, that this important work of adaptation be carried out with a constant awareness of the ineffable mystery against which every generation is called to measure itself. The “treasure” is too important and precious to risk impoverishment or compromise through forms of experimentation or practices introduced without a careful review on the part of the competent ecclesiastical authorities. Furthermore, the centrality of the Eucharistic mystery demands that any such review must be undertaken in close association with the Holy See. As I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia, “such cooperation is essential because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church” (101).

52. All of this makes clear the great responsibility which belongs to priests in particular for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is their responsibility to preside at the Eucharist in persona Christi and to provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community directly taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church, which is a part of every Eucharist. It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation there have been a number of abuses which have been a source of suffering for many. A certain reaction against “formalism” has led some, especially in certain regions, to consider the “forms” chosen by the Church’s great liturgical tradition and her Magisterium as non-binding and to introduce unauthorized innovations which are often completely inappropriate.

I consider it my duty, therefore to appeal urgently that the liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity. These norms are a concrete expression of the authentically ecclesial nature of the Eucharist; this is their deepest meaning. Liturgy is never anyone’s private property, but it is the celebration of the Eucharist, or the community in which the mysteries are celebrated. The Apostle Paul had to address fiery words to the community of Corinth because of grave shortcomings in their celebration of the Eucharist resulting in divisions (schismata) and the emergence of factions (hairesis) (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34). Our time, too, calls for a renewed awareness and appreciation of liturgical norms as a reflection of, and a witness to, the one universal Church made present in every celebration of the Eucharist. Priests who faithfully celebrate Mass according to the liturgical norms, and communities which conform to those norms, quietly but eloquently demonstrate their love for the Church. Precisely to bring out more clearly this deeper meaning of liturgical norms, I have asked the competent offices of the Roman Curia to prepare a more specific document, including prescriptions of a juridical nature, on this very important subject. No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality.

THE ROLE OF MEANING ON THE CEILING

Michelangelo and the Pope’s Ceiling
by Ross King, Walker & Company, 2003
373 pages, $28.00

Reviewed by David Mayernik

For readers familiar with Ross King’s popular Brunelleschi’s Dome, his new book Michelangelo & the Pope’s Ceiling comes as a welcome sequel. The title makes both the point of continuity with his earlier treatment of Florence’s Duomo and a distinction—the great ceiling was the pope’s, not Michelangelo’s; or so one might surmise. But in fact, the new book treats the ceiling fresco as very much a largely technical challenge for Michelangelo on the order of Brunelleschi’s dome, and in that treatment lies the book’s merit. As a window onto the pope’s (or the Church’s) role in shaping the ceiling’s meaning, however, King has less to offer.

The book definitively debunks long-held myths about a much-loved work of art and its creation. For example, King will finally, one hopes, have corrected the image of Michelangelo’s supine position under the fresco: in fact, as has been well-documented for years, he painted the curved ceiling while on a scaffolding that approximated the shape of the vault; which means he worked standing, albeit bent and uncomfortable, under the upper reaches of the fresco. He also, King acknowledges, depended on the assistance of several assistants and “sub-contractors,” and while nothing about this diminishes Michelangelo’s Herculean achievement, it does make it more realistic.

Inevitably, any book on the Sistine Chapel ceiling must recall Irving Stone’s novel The Agony and the Ecstasy (which King mentions finally on the last page of the Epilogue), and Michelangelo & The Pope’s Ceiling does strive to develop narrative pace out of its documentary approach. It is decidedly, though, not a novel (there are no invented dialogues or undocumented scenes), but is rather more akin to popular treatments of the history of technology like Dava Sobel’s Longitude. That book too, though, gathers shards of historical data into something like a plot, and King’s plot requires a hero, various nemeses and rivals, and sub-plots; for the former we have the artist himself, toiling tirelessly between various distractions often created by his principal nemesis, the prophet Isaiah on the Sistine Ceiling
the pope. Indeed, King’s Julius II is as bellicose, belligerent, and devoid of spirituality as Martin Luther could have ever cast him; as much obstacle as generator of the frescoes, Julius and his circle of advisors offer here little more than realpolitik propaganda to the ceiling’s content. While King benefits much from the scholarship since Stone’s novel, humanist clerics like Egidio da (Giles of) Viterbo or Tommaso (Fedra) Inghirami mostly float tantalizingly off the margins. The suppression of their undoubted role for the great artist, who King admits at the same time was not proficient in Latin (the definition of “illiterate” for Renaissance humanists), requires the suspect conclusion that Michelangelo himself determined much of the ceiling’s detailed iconography (he does discuss the probable role of iconographers at the beginning of his story, pp. 60–63, but leaves it there). One could, without recourse to the scholarly studies upon which King depends, leave the rest of the book with the impression that the Church surrendered the rhetorical potential of its most important chapel’s ceiling to an artist at liberty to explore his personal psychoses (p. 134), play rude practical jokes (p. 173), and even indulge in skepticism about the papal court’s domi-
nant Weltanschauung (p. 174). In addition to the undoubted role of humanist iconographers, what is missing too is any sense of Michelangelo’s own deep spirituality.

The relative absence of the role of meaning on the ceiling detracts from the book’s real subject, the technical virtuosity required on the vast curved vault painted in the most challenging of media, buon fresco. King is generally very good on the workings of the fresco technique, about which much has been re-learned in the last half-century. Apart from some minor errors (dangerously hot lime would never have been present on the scaffolding as he implies [p. 85], since the lime for the plaster would have been slaked at least months if not years earlier to improve its workability; and the contention that a giornata could span twelve to twenty-four hours [p. 49] is an exaggeration, a giornata allowed by the drying plaster more on the order of eight to twelve hours) King is convincingly knowledgeable on the rudiments of the technique, and one would have to look to a technical manual (like Ralph Mayer’s The Artist’s Handbook) for a more thorough discussion of the subject. But something he does stress, the advance preparation required by the fresco technique, is belied by the story of seeming improvisation he tells as the content of the fresco unfolds throughout the book. Actually, it is clear from the fact that Michelangelo began the fresco at the so-called Entry wall (the entry for the public, whereas the many cardinals in attendance in the chapel would have entered from the Altar wall), where the Biblical narrative concludes, that the narrative structure was fully worked out at the beginning of the painting process, since the scenes of Creation were the last to be painted; thematically overlaid over the narrative scenes moving eastward down the center of the vault are the Sibyls and Prophets flanking them, whose chronology runs counter to the Genesis stories. The dense web of iconographic connections on the ceiling, what the later sixteenth century iconographer Annibale Cambi would call disposizione, demanded thorough pre-planning, and implicitly therefore papal approval, for the sacred space so important to the Church’s hierarchy. While that pre-planning would not have precluded improvisation and development of form and detail, it does accord with the importance of the rhetorical role these frescoes, like all the others in the chapel, would have served. Indeed, that rhetorical function was more important than their decorative role, and John Shearman in his collection of essays Only Connect ... is excellent on the careful calibration of meanings Raphael would bring to his slightly later tapestries for the same space. Those tapestries acknowledged that the real audience for the art of the chapel was the college of cardinals within the chancel as much as the dignitaries relegated to the outer precinct. In fact, King is decidedly off the mark when he suggests these frescoes would “illuminate stories for the uneducated” (pp. 202–3)—there would rarely have been many illiterate, much less uneducated, spectators in the Sistine Chapel. It was for a deeply knowledgeable, and highly cultured, audience, that Michelangelo created his great masterpiece, and it is in that sense that it was truly “the pope’s ceiling.”
The City as a Place of Redemption

Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith
by Eric O. Jacobsen, Brazos Press, 2003
189 pages, $16.99

Reviewed by Kathryn Schuth

The reporters of today’s newspapers have brought new catch-phrases and words to common culture: sprawl, sense of place, mixed-use development, and Traditional Neighborhood Design. Certain architects, planners, developers, and citizens across the country have joined in a new movement, named New Urbanism, full of city values and passionate pleas for urbanity and civility as we build and reform our blocks, neighborhoods, districts, cities, and regions. But what does this have to do with you, if you are a Christian citizen, or an associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Missoula, Montana, like Eric Jacobsen who writes, “To most Christians, the idea of urban planning seems as relevant to faith as the current additions to the American Kennel Association’s list of approved dog breeds — interesting to some, but certainly not vital to faith.”

As part of the Christian Practice of Everyday Life series, Eric O. Jacobsen’s book, Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith, attempts to bring New Urbanism to the attention of all Christians, whether leaders or laymen. Jacobsen connects the New Urbanist bridge to Christianity by discussing the role of cities biblically, the role of the Christian within the city, and spelling out the “markers of the city,” or for what it is exactly that Christians and cities should be striving.

Sidewalks in the Kingdom begins by tracing the path Americans have chosen for their cities, while being distracted by the false gods of individualism, independence, and freedom. As false gods, these goals “consistently fail to deliver what they promise,” and have embraced choices of isolation, in one-acre lots and in our cars, in removing ourselves from the problems of the city, and the problems of the people within it. In fairness, Jacobsen then devotes much effort to looking at biblical cities to seek how a Christian should be responding to this culture of isolation. He concludes, keeping in mind the New Jerusalem promised in the book of Revelation, that the city is a place of redemption, a place of restoration from our sinful humanity, and a place that God is using for good. The city is important to us, because it is a place that is important to God.

Jacobsen continues to explain that while there are currently many Christian ministries within the city, the focus has been two-fold: to create a separation from what is “worldly,” and to create institutions of a local store, or during a stroll around the neighborhood.

The second half of Sidewalks in the Kingdom is devoted to describing the six distinct markers of the city: public spaces, mixed-use zoning, local economy, beauty and quality in the built environment, critical mass, and the presence of strangers. Not every city includes each marker, but these markers describe our “impressions of the communities in which we live, whether or not they qualify as cities.”

Those who have been exposed to the New Urbanism will likely find Jacobsen’s discourse familiar and straightforward. However, there is a powerful call to consider this call from the design world from a Christian perspective. Public spaces create informal relationships, combat isolation, and allow for sharing and discourse. Mixed-use zoning enriches community and allows for incidental contact among friends and strangers. A simple focus on design elements, like sidewalks, allow for the human element of our built environment, where the predominant design efforts of our current built environment are a combination of “modernist hubris” and “capitalist reductionism.” Both of these design efforts lack a human or community-building imprint, as well as removing the value from craftsmanship. As Jacobsen puts it: “What is at stake with regard to human imprint is the doctrine of vocation… The kinds of working situations that are created out of standardized plans and uniform construction limit the potential for true enthusiasm in our work.” In conclusion, Jacobsen ponders the church’s role in New Urbanism, and in our cities. He offers three ways the church offers its services: as stewards of the built environment, and through direct political involvement.

Sidewalks in the Kingdom offers up many resources for those interested in learning more about New Urbanism, and is a convincing argument for the involvement of Christians in the formation of the built environment, and especially our cities.

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Devotion to Liturgy

Great Altarpieces Gothic and Renaissance
Caterina Virdis Limentani & Mari Pietro-giovanna, The Vendome Press
421 pages, $150

Reviewed by Thomas M. Dietz

The importance of sacred art in the Catholic liturgical tradition is evident through the great altarpieces of Medieval and Renaissance Europe, where the decrees of the Council of Lyons codified the tradition of priests facing ad orientam and the liturgical necessity of devotional artwork on the altar. While altarpieces were found in churches during a period of several centuries, the authors of this book bind the scope of their study to the most important altarpieces of the 15th and 16th centuries.

Limentani, one of two authors working together on this project, provides a brief explanation of the altarpiece in the introduction. The author notes that the secularizing Napoleonic laws were principally responsible for the scattering—and frequent dividing—of the painted paneled altarpieces throughout Europe, necessitating the study and physical reconstruction of many of these altarpieces. She then focuses on the liturgical history leading to the creation of the altarpieces, the proper linguistic derivations of the terminology used, and a “systematic theory” of a polyptych’s origins. This systematic theory focuses on the donor’s objectives, the placement of the polyptych within a space, and the arrangement of the various panels of a polyptych. The donor receives his own section before the introduction concludes with evaluations of the more overly physical considerations of any given altarpiece: including the techniques, compositions, symbolism, and stylistic selections chosen.

Limentani and Pietro-giovanna then provide a series of individual essays covering thirty of the most important and noteworthy altarpieces of Europe. The wonderful thing about this book is that there is no need to view it as a necessarily sequential anthology. A reader can feel quite comfortable jumping about from altarpiece to altarpiece, reading and exploring only those essays of an immediate interest, knowing that within an essay’s text the relevant facts will be covered. The authors compose each essay individually and concisely, noting only the information necessary to understand the particular altarpiece in question, typically in no more than three pages of text. Depending on the altarpiece, the essay may address issues involving the artists, the contract arrangements, the patronage, or the artwork’s dedication, as well as other information; however, all the essays discuss the imagery of the altarpieces and their composition. The autonomy of any given essay is partially necessitated by the reality of two separate authors contributing independently on the various altarpieces. But while this book could appear disjointed due to its dual authorship, the obvious high quality of the compilation betrays no disunity. The writing is clear and surprisingly enjoyable to read, combining the essays with wonderfully formatted illustrations into an elegant collection.

This book takes great care to diagrammatically describe the altarpiece compositions, citing the imagery represented in the panels and noting their dimensions in metric. Enlargements of important elements of the altarpieces have been judiciously selected to ensure their proper appreciation, and additional artwork relevant to the consideration of the altarpieces has been included. Of the folding triptychs where the exterior panels have remained intact, the authors elected to use gatefolds to impart the experiential quality of the altarpieces to the readers. As such, one can physically see the relationship established between the exterior and interior panels, in both the opened and closed positions. This formatting feature remains the most singularly unique aspect of this book, adding an additional level of enjoyment beyond the already noteworthy quality of the images. Unfortunately, the Ghent Altarpiece is unquestionably among the most famous altarpieces represented, and yet the gatefold feature was not applied to it, apparently because the vertical dimension of the altarpiece was too elongated to allow for the proper page formatting. Given that the book itself is already an oversized format, it would seem logical that consistency in the formatting of the altarpieces for the gatefold pages would have taken precedence, even if this required modifying the dimensions of the book itself. Additionally, both the Coronation of the Virgin Altarpiece by the Bressanone Workshop, and the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald, were too complex in their movements to be represented by the gatefold feature. Despite this limitation, both altarpieces remain liberally illustrated. Additionally, the compilers take great care to describe the Isenheim Altarpiece’s multiple arrangements clearly through the standard series of diagrams.

In the end, with so few shortcomings to note, this collection rightly stands among the most important art books of the year: a legitimate scholarly endeavor with beautiful large-format illustrations that will be a cherished addition to any book collection.

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**The Church from the Eucharist**

**The Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration**

Most Reverend Raymond Burke

**Introduction**

In Chapter Five of his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, our Holy Father takes up the question of the dignity with which the Holy Eucharist is to be celebrated. The heart of the liturgical rites of the Eucharistic celebration is found in the account of the Last Supper, found in the Gospels and in Saint Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. (cf. Mt 26:26-30; Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22:14-20; Jn 13:1-17; and 1 Cor 11:17-34)

At the Last Supper, Christ gave the Holy Eucharist to the Church. In anticipation of His Passion and Death, He handed over His life for us sacramentally.

Our Lord’s celebration of the Last Supper was both simple and solemn; it is the foundation and model for the liturgical rites which have developed in the Church down the Christian centuries. He commanded the Twelve to renew His Last Supper in each community of believers until His Final Coming: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

In a certain sense, the whole history of the Church may be described as the story of the Apostles’ obedience to our Lord’s commission to them at the Last Supper. (cf. Lk 22:19; and 1 Cor 11:24) (No. 47a)

**The Anointing at Bethany**

To understand the richness of the liturgical rites surrounding the Holy Eucharist over the centuries, the Holy Father refers to the account of the anointing at Bethany. Mary, the sister of Lazarus whom Christ had raised from the dead, anointed Jesus with a most precious oil shortly before His Passion and Death. Some disciples, most notably Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, objected strongly to her gesture of great reverence and love. Judas and others saw it as a waste of resources which could have been used to care for the poor. Our Lord responds to their reaction in what may be for some a surprising way. He teaches that the anointing by Mary is an act of profound reverence for His body, the instrument by which He has carried out our redemption. He in no way calls into question the responsibility which is ours to provide for the poor but indicates what is prior to our care for the poor and inspires it most fully, namely our love of Him, our devotion to His person.

Mary’s act of generous respect and love is imitated by us in the care which we take to have only the most fitting place for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and to use the best vessels, linens and furnishings for the Eucharistic celebration. The Holy Father reminds us of our Lord’s command to the disciples to prepare the Upper Room for the Last Supper. The Church’s special care for the celebration of the Eucharist reflects her faith in what takes place at the Eucharist; it reflects her deep reverence for our Lord Who is both our Priest and Victim in the celebration of the Mass. (No. 47b)

In reading the history of our parishes which are celebrating their 100th or 125th anniversary of foundation, I am always impressed by the great sacrifices which were made by the faithful, most of them immigrants with very little means, to have a parish church. It was not at all uncommon for farmers to mortgage their farm in order to make a pledge toward the building of a fitting parish church. They had the faith of Mary at Bethany. The beautiful art and architecture which has been associated with our churches and their altars and other furnishings down the centuries is for us an inspiration to consider the great mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

**Sacred Banquet**

The Holy Father rightly asks: “Could there ever be an adequate means of expressing the acceptance of that self-gift which the divine Bridegroom continually makes to his Bride, the Church, by bringing the Sacrifice offered once and for all on the Cross to successive generations of believers and thus becoming nourishment for all the faithful?” (No. 48) The Eucharist is indeed a banquet at which Christ feeds us with His true Body and Blood. But recognition of the heavenly Food of the Holy Eucharist halts any tendency to a familiarity which would fail to recognize the true Body and Blood of Christ. The Holy Eucharist is not adequately described as a banquet or meal, for it is a sacrificial banquet, a sacred banquet in which we partake of the holiness of God Himself. Our Holy Father reminds us that the Bread which we receive is truly the Bread of Angels, the Body of Christ, and, therefore, cannot be approached except with a profound sense of humility, the sense of our own unworthiness because of our sins.

When we pray at Mass and, most especially, when we come forward to receive Holy Communion, there is at once a sense of God’s great intimacy with us, inviting us to participate in the mystery of His Son’s Suffering, Death and Resurrection, and a sense of great awe before the presence of God Himself. That is the...
reason why our churches are not built as meeting or banquet halls. It is also the reason why we should be very attentive to the manner of our dress and our comportment at the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Banquet. (No. 48)

Liturgical Law

The outward aspects of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist express our interior devotion, in imitation of Mary at Bethany. For that reason, the Church has developed liturgical laws which govern the fitting celebration of the Eucharist. The law which safeguards the minimum respect for the Holy Eucharist is paralleled by sacred art, sacred architecture and sacred music, developed to express and to inspire faith in the Holy Eucharist.

The Holy Father evokes the rich history of sacred architecture, beginning with the churches in the home. The developments in design of churches and of their altars and tabernacles is not merely a reflection of the great art of various periods of the Church’s history but, most of all, a reflection of the profound faith in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. The examples of quality craftsmanship and original art in the building of churches, and especially of their altars and tabernacles, from the first days of the Church is a wonderful story of faith in the Holy Eucharist. In visiting beautiful churches, one notes how the various furnishings have been beautifully crafted. Special attention was fittingly given to the production of beautiful vessels to contain the sacred species and beautiful linens on which to place the sacred species or to cleanse the sacred vessels.

In the same way, sacred music has developed down the Christian centuries to lift the minds and hearts of the faithful to the great mystery of faith, which is the Holy Eucharist. Gregorian Chant is, of course, the greatest jewel in the body of music written specifically for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. As is the case with sacred art, there is a rich history of beautiful music written for the celebration of the Mass. (No. 49)

The Holy Father refers to a certain competition in sacred art and architecture between the East and the West. He reminds us especially of the strong sense of the mystery of faith expressed in the sacred art of East. It is a call for all of us to make certain that the Church is above all else “a profoundly Eucharistic Church.” (No. 50)

Inculturation

The Holy Father also reflects upon the legitimate desire of the Church in new places to employ the “forms, styles and sensibilities of different cultures” in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, so that it can truly be spiritual food for all peoples. (No. 51a) The proper term for the rooting of the Catholic faith and practice in a particular culture is inculturation. Clearly, it is a delicate process because there may be elements of the local culture which need purification and transformation before they can serve the Eucharistic mystery.

Inculturation must always be secondary to respect for the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, lest the greatest treasure of our faith be obscured or, even worse, disregarded. Any experimentation in inculturation must be reviewed by Church authority with the involvement of the Holy See “because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church.” (No. 51)

The Responsibility of Priests

Priests act in the person of Christ at the Holy Eucharist and, therefore, bear a heavy responsibility for its worthy celebration. They are “to provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church which is part of every Eucharist.” (No. 52)

The Holy Father speaks frankly of abuses which have entered into the celebration of the Holy Eucharist because of “a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation.” (No. 52)

He begs that the liturgical law pertaining to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist be faithfully observed. He reminds us that the Sacred Liturgy is never the private possession of the priest or the community, and speaks of the deep suffering caused to the faithful by abuses introduced into the celebration of the Mass. Our observance of liturgical law is a fundamental expression of love of Christ and of the Church.

Conclusion

Because of the importance of the fitting and dignified celebration of the Holy Mass, the Holy Father, with the help of the Roman Curia, is preparing a special document on the matter. He concludes Chapter Five of Eclesia de Eucharistia with words which should inspire our own great care in approaching the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Banquet: “No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands: it is too great for anyone to feel free to treat it lightly and with disregard for its sacredness and its universality.” (No. 52)
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