What is the state of sacred art today? Not surprisingly, many of us see it as mediocre, impoverished, or in crisis. Yet does not the Church (and I mean you and me) bear some responsibility for the limited quality of religious artwork? When was the last time you visited a church to see a contemporary altarpiece or statue? The low state of sacred art—and I would submit of art in general—is due in part to the limited number of sacred commissions, the fees we are willing to pay artists, and our unwillingness to take responsibility for the arts.

When you commission artists to create original art for the Church, you change them. You give them something they are longing for. Artists are always looking for content; without a clear direction they try to create their own content, often through self-referential narratives. According to John Paul II, “That is why artists, the more conscious they are of their ‘gift,’ are led all the more to see themselves and the whole of creation with eyes able to contemplate and give thanks, and to raise to God a hymn of praise. This is the only way for them to come to a full understanding of themselves, their vocation and their mission.”

To commission a work of art, whether it is a portrait of a family member or a Madonna, is to become a patron. We, as the faithful, need to embrace the role of patron once again. It is rewarding though hard work. Certainly, you can find many examples of original art done in the last decades that are not beautiful. Yet this should not stop us from attempting what we used to be quite good at.

Because we do not want to take risks with artists or spend much money on artwork, what do we do? We buy pre-manufactured art or copies of famous images. This is the bane of art connoisseurs and modernist architects, as it should be, but it is worth knowing why we do it. Copies are recognizable, reasonable, and safe (even if boring). With pre-manufactured art, we know what we will get before we purchase it. Copies of famous paintings, even if mediocre, seem acceptable because of the association with the original. It is hard to believe that we could find an artist that can paint as well as Raphael or sculpt as well as Michelangelo. But this is true in part because we are not giving contemporary artists the opportunity to develop in the way these masters did. Could this help to explain the success of the icon, which is meant to be a stylized image of a saint? In fact, many devotional images have become so “iconic” today (i.e., the Divine Mercy, Our Lady of Guadalupe, or Our Lady of Grace) that we simply want a plaster reproduction or even a photograph of them, rather than commissioning an artist to reinterpret them for us anew.

So given the pitfalls, the economics of it, and the risks of failure, why should the Church commission original art? First of all, to commission art is to acknowledge the importance of art as a living tradition. In patronizing art we speak to modern man through the vitality of the arts. We try to touch hearts and minds through beauty and originality. Portraying religious subjects in art can be likened to a sermon in paint or bronze. Rather than simply reading a classic sermon by Saint Augustine, the priest makes it personal, local, and timely by writing his own sermon (perhaps inspired by a previous text). The process of writing and delivering the sermon will, at times, lead to insights not otherwise thought of. In fact, original art is simply the manifestation of the creative act that all of us seek to participate in, whether it be in writing, cooking, music, or athletics. We seek to do all of these things at a high level, while bringing in a personal aspect.

There is a great need for the faithful, for parish committees, for pastors, principals, and bishops to reclaim their role as patrons of the arts. We can start with sacred art, realizing that it can influence the other figurative arts. On the one hand, patronage means building a new cathedral with an iconographic program like Our Lady of the Rosary in Cleveland and artwork of the quality of the Gesù in Rome. But patronage also means commissioning a marble statue at a side altar or a painting of an Assumption in the sanctuary. Perhaps our family can only afford a new stained-glass window in honor of a loved one, or a new and more appropriate baptismal font. The first step in patronage is generosity towards mankind and towards the Church. The second step entails finding the best artists. The third is pushing the artist to do his best work. Like any other great task, art patronage requires great love and commitment.

Duncan Stroik
Notre Dame, Spring 2015
Sacred Architecture

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Sacred Architecture News

The Greek Catholic church of Saint Basil the Great in Bucharest became the cathedral for the newly established Eparchy of Saint Basil the Great in August 2014. The church was built in 1909 by the Roman Catholic bishop of Bucharest at the time, Bishop Raymond Netzhammer, who wanted the Greek Catholic faithful to have a church for their own rite. In 1948, the Greek Catholic Church in Romania was suppressed, and Saint Basil the Great became an Orthodox church. After the Romanian Revolution of 1989, the church was finally restored to the Greek Catholics in 2008.

A bronze statue of Saint Michael the Archangel was installed outside Saint Patrick’s Church in New Orleans. The sculptor, American artist Cody Swanson, describes his work as “a very Byzantine representation of Saint Michael as a liturgical warrior. He stands before the heavenly throne with a paten that reflects the image of the Risen Christ as revealed by the ‘Volto Santo’ of Manoppello.”

For the first time, a private group was allowed to use the Sistine Chapel for a commercial event. Organized by the Porsche Travel Club as the highlight of a four-day tour of Rome, the event included a concert by the Accademia di Santa Cecilia and a gala dinner. A portion of the proceeds were given to charities working with the poor and homeless.

A new painting entitled Crowning of the Virgin Mary by Raúl Berzosa covers the ceiling of the Santa Maria Reina Oratory in Málaga, Spain. The 1,500-square-foot painting was completed in nine months for a cost of $125,000.

To mark the six hundredth anniversary of the founding of the University of Saint Andrew in Edinburgh, Scotland, a silver mace was presented to the university by Archbishop Leo Cushley. It was presented on Saint Andrew’s Day, November 30, 2014, and symbolizes the Church’s ancient and ongoing support for learning. The mace was designed by master-silversmith Jon Hunt in consultation with Professor John Haldane and crafted by Edinburgh jewelers Hamilton & Inches. It is in silver with rose-gold details and has an enamel and gold Saint Andrew’s Cross motif atop the crown. The coats of arms of the university and of Pope Francis are engraved on the mace, and it is inscribed with the dates 1413–2013.

A transparent roof was installed over a church in Corbera d’Ebre, Spain. Heavily damaged in the Spanish Civil War, the church will now once again be a functional space. The project cost €740,000.

A bronze bust of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Science for its headquarters, the Pius IV Casina in the Vatican Gardens. Italian sculptor Fernando Delia created the bust. Pope Francis was present for its unveiling and gave an address with themes including the complementarity of science and faith, man’s privileged place in creation, and Benedict’s great love for the truth in all forms, including philosophy, theology, and the sciences.
The Benedictine monks of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Chicago celebrated the installation of an icon of Christ the King and the dedication of a new altar last summer. The altar was dedicated by Francis Cardinal George († 2015) and contains relics of Saint Benedict and Saint Vincent.

A new wing of the Pontifical North American College seminary in Rome was dedicated in early January, the first major addition to the seminary in more than sixty years. Three American cardinals joined Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, for the dedication ceremony. Each room on each floor of the new ten-story building was blessed, culminating in the dedication of a new chapel named for Saint John Paul II. The chapel contains a relic of the cassock the pope was wearing when he was shot in Saint Peter’s Square in 1981, as well as stained-glass windows of Saint John Paul II, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Archbishop Fulton Sheen, and Father Michael McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus. The 36,000-square-foot building was funded by a $8.5 million gift from the Mulva family of Oklahoma.

A new bridge connecting Mont Saint-Michel to the mainland in Normandy, France, was completed by Dietmar Feichtinger Architectes in 2014. The 2,500-foot-long bridge is the centerpiece of a $285 million project to create a new form of access to the island. It includes lanes for shuttle buses with pedestrian paths on either side, and will replace the 135-year-old causeway that first connected the island to the mainland. The new bridge is elevated to allow water to flow freely underneath. It is hoped this will help remove a build up of silt around the island.

Pope Francis commissioned three showers to be added to the public restrooms near the colonnade of Saint Peter’s Square after learning from the Papal Almoner that the homeless of Rome have difficulty finding a place to bathe. The renovated facility opened in February and also includes a barbershop where haircuts and shaves will be offered to the homeless on Mondays. Other showers will be built in ten parishes around Rome, all paid for by Vatican charitable funds.

The official image of the Holy Family for the World Meeting of Families 2015 was unveiled by Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. The image, measuring four feet by five feet, was painted by artist Neilson Carlin and depicts Mary, Saint Joseph, the child Jesus, and the Blessed Virgin’s parents, Saint Anne and Saint Joachim. The seal of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the seal of Pope Francis, and the year MMXV complete the golden-framed image. The World Meeting of Families will take place September 22–27, 2015, in Philadelphia.

The Cathedral of Saint Paul in Saint Paul, Minnesota, celebrates its centennial in 2015. Several events are planned throughout the year.

“Teaching chapels” for liturgical instruction and practice are part of the new addition to the Pontifical North American College seminary in Rome.

Construction continues on New Mount Carmel in Cody, Wyoming, including a chapter house and individual hermitages for the Carmelite monks of the community. A new chapel is also planned.

“Teaching chapels” for liturgical instruction and practice are part of the new addition to the Pontifical North American College seminary in Rome.
The Archdiocese of Berlin recently held a design competition to remodel the interior of the Cathedral of Saint Hedwig in Berlin. Completed in 1773, the church was remodeled in the 1930s, only to be destroyed by bombing in World War II. A rebuilt modernist interior was completed in 1963. It will be renovated again based on the proposed design of Sichau & Walter GmbH Architects and Leo Zogmayer, the winners of the competition. In the upper church, the altar will be moved to the center with seating arranged around it. The crypt below will become a baptistery with an immersion baptismal font in the center. A separate Blessed Sacrament chapel will be located in a small, domed chapel attached to the back of the cathedral. A final budget for the project has not yet been determined by the archdiocese.

The Benedictine monks of Norcia, Italy, commissioned local artist Fabrizio Diomedi to paint a large crucifixion scene on one wall of their refectory. The prior of the community, the Very Rev. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B., notes that “the refectory is a place of spiritual as well as physical nourishment. This gift of beauty has been donated by a special group of benefactors, to whom we are most grateful.”

The National Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan, was elevated to a minor basilica by Pope Francis. It is the second minor basilica in Michigan and one of eighty-two across the country. The church was first built in 1926 and is named for Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who was canonized in 1925. The original structure was damaged by fire and rebuilt by architect Henry J. McGill between 1931 and 1936. An octagonal nave with the altar in the center seats three thousand on two levels. The church also includes an Art Deco limestone tower with a 28-foot-tall crucifix sculpted by Rene Paul Chambellan.
A new chancery for the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter was blessed and dedicated in February. The chancery is located next to the church of Our Lady of Walsingham in Houston, Texas, which is the principal parish of the ordinariate. William Cardinal Levada, prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, officiated at the dedication. He was accompanied by Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, archbishop of Galveston-Houston, and Archbishop Emeritus Joseph Fiorenza. The two-story stone chancery includes a great hall, conference rooms and gathering areas, an inner courtyard, and offices for the ordinary. Monsignor Jeffrey Steenson, and his staff. The project was designed by Jackson & Ryan Architects.

The Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln at Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana is one of the many ecclesiastical designs of Bro. Adrian Wewer, O.F.M.

A conference in Indianapolis honoring the life and work of Bro. Adrian Wewer, O.F.M., concluded the centennial celebration of the death of this Franciscan brother who designed a hundred churches, friaries, hospitals, and college buildings across the country. Wewer’s projects include Conception Abbey Church in Conception, Missouri, completed in 1893; Francis Hall at Quincy University in Illinois, completed in 1898; and the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln, completed in 1907.

To be in Limbo, a sculpture created by the artist group Steinbrener/Dempf & Huber, hangs in the Jesuitenkirche in Vienna. A homage to René Magritte’s painting Le Château des Pyrénées, the 8-meter-tall, 500-kilogram plastic rock is intended to be a traveling installation that will appear in shopping galleries, museums, and outdoor public spaces, in addition to churches.

Saint Walburge Church, whose 309-foot-tall spire makes it the tallest Catholic parish church in the United Kingdom, is now a location of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest. Priests from the Institute will assist the parish priest, allowing the church to be open each day for Mass. This was not possible previously, and the future of the building was uncertain until Bishop Michael Campbell of Lancaster announced this agreement last April.

A reverent exhibition “Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea” was recently on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. The exhibit offered a rare opportunity to see more than sixty masterworks from the Renaissance and Baroque periods from collections throughout Europe and the United States. The subject of Mary was depicted through painting, sculpture, textile, metalwork, enamel, and stained glass. Six thematic sections explored the themes of Madonna and Child, Woman and Mother, Mother of the Crucified, A Singular Life, Mary as Idea, and Mary in the Life of Believers. Excerpts from Scripture, hymns, and Marian prayers supplemented the visual content. The depictions of Mary beautifully illustrate the teachings of the Catholic Church. (Summary written by Natalie Zmuda in Washington, D.C.)

On January 3, 2015, the Diocese of Raleigh broke ground for its new Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral. Bishop Michael Burbidge thanked those who have supported the $41 million project so far. He also blessed the site and the laborers who will construct the cathedral. Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane, members of Clancy & Theys Construction Co., and five hundred other members of the community were present at the ceremony.

Bishop Michael Burbidge of Raleigh celebrated the groundbreaking of Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral in January.
News

The Stations of the Cross of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore underwent a restoration to remove layers of accumulated grime. Nancy Pollak of Art Care Associates and Sian Jones of Art Conservation Services worked together to bring the artwork back to its original beauty. The ornate frames were also restored and re-gilded by Studio Gilders of Baltimore. First installed in the basilica in the mid-nineteenth century, the stations were placed in storage during a renovation in the 1940s. When the basilica was restored in 2006, the stations were returned to the walls. The cost of the work for each station was approximately $5,000, according to Msgr. Arthur Valenzano, rector of the basilica.

Two portraits of Pope Francis by Italian artist Roberto Ferri have been accepted by the Governorate of Vatican City and will be installed in the entrance of the governorate and the Sala della Consulta in the Vatican.

Saint Mary Help of Christians Church was dedicated on February 2, 2015, in Aiken, South Carolina. The new 900-seat church had a $9 million construction cost. In a reflection given to the parish the evening before the dedication, the architect of the church, James McCrery, noted, “The church building named for [Mary] should emulate her and be a true ‘Help of Christians.’ Thus this church is designed to foster faith, hope, and charity in the souls of those who see her and visit her.”

Saint Paul Catholic Church, designed by Henry J. Schlacks in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood, underwent a transformation of the unexcavated crawlspace below the church into a new parish hall. The building was also made fully handicap accessible. Jaeger Nickola Kuhlman & Associates served as the architect for this project, which features a new 5,400-square-foot gathering space, meeting rooms, kitchen, bathrooms, and decorative main entry doors. New windows also provide natural light and ventilation to the lower level. The design of the new stair and elevator under the existing choir loft features brick arches and marble flooring that blend in with the original interior design of this historic church. The construction budget for the project was $1.75 million.

On the Solemnity of Christ the King, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore dedicated the altar of a new adoration chapel in the crypt of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In his dedication homily, the Archbishop related how the monstrance on the altar came into the possession of the National Shrine after being discovered by a fisherman in a nearby reservoir. The marble altar in the small, eight-seat chapel is modeled on two of the side altars in the main church, and an octagonal baldacchino on the altar shelters the monstrance. Rohrer Studio, Baltimore, was the architect of record for the project.

A historic altar designed by Patrick Keeley and originally located in Holy Trinity Church in Boston was relocated to the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Manchester, New Hampshire. The cathedral was also designed by Patrick Keeley.

A restored historic altar was installed in the 1894 Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Manchester, New Hampshire. Egan’s Church Furnishings and Restorations carried out the renovation of the high altar and two side altars, and also repaired damaged plaster in the sanctuary walls and ceiling while creating a new decorative color scheme.

The restored historic altar was installed in the 1894 Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Manchester, New Hampshire. Egan’s Church Furnishings and Restorations carried out the renovation of the high altar and two side altars, and also repaired damaged plaster in the sanctuary walls and ceiling while creating a new decorative color scheme.
A Gaudí Cultural and Spiritual Center will be built in the city of Rancagua, Chile, and will include the Our Lady of the Angels Chapel, based on sketches the Catalan architect created before his death in 1926. It will be the first building by Gaudí outside Spain. Angélico Aranda, a Chilean Franciscan friar who wrote to Gaudí in 1922 requesting a design for a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, will be buried in the crypt of the chapel. In addition to the chapel, the Cultural and Spiritual Center will also include an exhibition gallery of Gaudí’s work and two large public plazas. Christian Matzner is the architect for the $7 million project.

The St. Colman’s Society for Catholic Liturgy has released the list of speakers for this year’s upcoming summer conference, to be held in Cork, Ireland, July 4–6. The theme will be the priesthood of the baptized, with the title “A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation: Aspects of the Priesthood of Baptism.”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has fourteen temples under construction around the world, including six in the United States, located in Utah, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Colorado. A new temple in Payson, Utah, is scheduled to be dedicated on June 7, 2015. Architectural Nexus of Salt Lake City is the architect of the 89,900-square-foot project. A new 22,000-square-foot temple in Indianapolis will be dedicated on August 23, 2015. MHTN Architects is the architect. Both new temples are designed in a Neo-Classical style and faced with light-colored stone.

In an article published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the United States of America, researchers confirmed a long-held belief that the durability of ancient Roman concrete is due to unique properties of its volcanic ash-lime mortar. By analyzing the mortar found in Trajan’s Market (AD 110), similar to that used in other imperial-age buildings such as the Pantheon, the researchers learned that a mineral called strätlingite formed in the mortar because of a reaction over time between the lime and volcanic matter, and this mineral resists microcracking and preserves cohesion at the micron scale.

Timothy Cardinal Dolan of New York has announced the conclusions of a multi-year pastoral planning process for the archdiocese called Making All Things New. In November 2014, the Cardinal announced that forty-eight parishes will merge into twenty-four new parishes with Masses and Sacraments celebrated at both churches of each parish. Sixty-four parishes will merge into thirty-one new parishes with Masses and Sacraments celebrated at just one of the churches of each parish. On May 8, 2015, Cardinal Dolan announced that an additional thirty-one parishes will merge into fourteen parishes. Of those, eleven will continue to use two church buildings. All changes will take effect August 1, 2015.

A "snow altar" constructed by students of Wyoming Catholic College during their annual week-long winter camping trip includes a high altar, ambo, and altar rail.

A new cathedral is under construction in Kericho in southwest Kenya. Designed by the British firm John McAslan + Partners, the construction budget for Sacred Heart Cathedral is $3 million and the expected dedication date is May 24, 2015.

A new Mormon temple in Payson, Utah, is one of six currently under construction in the United States. The St. Colman’s Society for Catholic Liturgy has released the list of speakers for this year’s upcoming summer conference, to be held in Cork, Ireland, July 4–6. The theme will be the priesthood of the baptized, with the title “A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation: Aspects of the Priesthood of Baptism.”

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King Richard’s: Making churches look like churches

St. Teresa of Avila’s Dedication – December 2014
Another Look at The Rood Screen in the Italian Renaissance

Marcia B. Hall

The omnipresence of rood screens in Italian churches was not recognized when I reconstructed the structures in the Florentine churches of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce in the early 1970s. In this study I synthesize the material on the Italian rood screen published since then and address some of the questions left unresolved by earlier research. I restrict myself to the Italian tramezzo, the most generic term in Italian. Of course there were Lettnern, jubés, and rood screens all over Europe in the late Middle Ages, but they are on the whole better studied than their Italian counterparts, which at this stage need to be understood in their own context. What distinguishes the Italian screens studied here from those in the Eastern Orthodox churches, and those cathedral screens in Germany and France discussed by Jacqueline Jung, is that the Italian screens are to be found exclusively in monastic churches and therefore functioned as an extension of clausura. In addition to protecting the privacy of the religious community, the screens had other functions: they served to segregate three populations, for laywomen were separated from laymen; at least in Florence, they provided a stage for the presentation of the sacra rappresentazione; and the screens preserved the mystery of the liturgy.

The dictionary definition of tramezzo is simply “partition”; Giorgio Vasari, for example, uses the term in that sense to describe a division in a secular room, as well as for the partitions in churches. The absence of a specialized term may help account for the fact that as late as the 1970s it was not recognized that many of the major churches in Italy had once looked very different, and that their present and familiar appearance was the result of renovations in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The few tramezzi that survived these renovation campaigns misled scholars into thinking they knew what the term meant. Donal Cooper pointed to the use of pergola and pulpittum in documents to denote choir screens, and even in media ecclesiae to denote their location. The use of local nicknames for tramezzi, such as barco (boat) in Venice, or names derived from the appearance of particular tramezzi, such as ponte for the structure in Santa Maria Novella, which was solid and pierced by three arched openings like a bridge, tended to obscure the situation further.

Three basic arrangements were possible. The first is exemplified by Santa Croce in Florence (fig. 1) and the second by the Frari in Venice (fig. 2), both Franciscan churches. The Trecento construction in Santa Croce, shown in my reconstruction, is the earlier and more elaborate. Here the tramezzo was a deep structure, supporting a balcony above, from which the Gospel could be read, sacre rappresentazioni and special liturgies could be performed,
Articles

and the organ accommodated. The tramezzo spanned the entire church, aisles included, and was pierced by three doors. The Gothic pinnacles reached to a height of more than fifty feet (almost seventeen meters) and chapels were placed beneath its vaults across the front of the lay section of the church, like those we find on rood screens in other parts of Europe, especially Germany. The tramezzo, including the foundations required by such a massive stone construction, was part of the original fabric. A similar structure, though perhaps not quite so visually impressive, was an original part of the early Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence (fig. 3), which then served as a model for other churches of the order, such as Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice and Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome. Both these structures were separated by half a bay from the friars’ choir, which was in the nave, enclosed on three sides and open to the altar.

The screen in the Frari in Venice, built in 1475, was a single partition in the nave only, and served as the front part of the choir enclosure in the usual place in front of the high altar. Such single structures seem to have been the typical solution in smaller churches, and especially those of a single-nave plan. In the case of the huge Frari, the compromise design may reflect aesthetic preferences of the later Quattrocento.

The tall, deep tramezzi with three openings, such as those in Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce in Florence, seem to have been peculiar to the largest mendicant churches that had three naves. As will be shown, in monastic churches of single-nave design, it was more common to find a simple wall running transversally, cutting the church in two as definitively as did those deep structures, but requiring only one door in the center.

Donal Cooper has recently added a third plan, typical of Umbrian Franciscan churches, which were built on the model of the upper church of San Francesco, Assisi. In this design the choir was placed in the apse behind the high altar and a tramezzo usually bisected the nave, as in those churches with choir enclosures in front of the high altar.

Functions and Typology

One purpose of the tramezzo is revealed in the English word rood screen: it supported the rood, or crucifix, which was placed on it or hung over it to face the congregation and was the principal image visible to the faithful gathered in the lower church (the part nearest to the façade entrance). We see from the back a rood installed on the tramezzo in the fresco in the upper church at Assisi, Saint Francis at Greccio. A second function was to separate the sexes, as we see in the same fresco, where the women are gathered outside the enclosure. In addition, it screened the monks or friars and the laity from seeing each other when the religious were entering or leaving their enclosed choir. This was stated in the chapter general of the Dominican Order in 1249 when all the local priors were ordered to construct a separating intermedia (tramezzo).

Intermedia does not describe a structure of the scale or complexity found in Santa Maria Novella. The scholar of Dominican architecture, Gilles Gérard Meersseman, appears to be correct in

Figure 3: Plan showing ponte of Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Function 4: Plan of Michelozzo’s San Marco, Florence, 1450
assuming that in the early churches the choir was placed in the *cappella maggiore* unless there was not enough space, in which case it was transferred to the center of the nave. In those early days in the thirteenth century, the mendicant orders were growing so fast that they could hardly keep up with the pace: Meersseman records that there were 144 friars at Sant’ Eustorgio in Milan in 1297. In such instances the friars needed not only an enclosing choir screen, but also a second screen that would allow them access from their cloister to the choir. Checking the plan of churches with tramezzi, one finds that the door to the cloister was on the choir side. In trying to reconstruct the location of a tramezzo, therefore, one should always look for that door as a guide to how much of the upper church (that is, the part nearest the high altar) would have been occupied by the choir. Meersseman’s speculation that the doors separating the two churches were locked before the office seems justified by various kinds of evidence—for example, Albert van Ouwater’s painting *The Raising of Lazarus* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen Gemäldegalerie), taking place inside a choir, where we see prominently displayed a lock on the door to the outer (or lower) church.

It is not surprising that the friars wanted privacy inside their choir, for it was not used only to chant the offices. According to the historian of the Dominican liturgy, William Bonniewell, after the “Salve” procession of the friars to the outer, or lay, church and the conclusion of Compline, the *hebdomadarium* (with an assistant if necessary) made the rounds of the choir and administered discipline to the bare backs of the friars. The ceremony was performed in memory of Saint Dominic’s custom of scourging himself every night. Humbert, the fifth master general of the Dominican Order, urged that the discipline should not be administered gently, “lest we become like certain nuns of whom it was said that they scourged themselves with the tail of a fox.”

Antoninus, archbishop in Florence in the middle of the fifteenth century and a Dominican, stated that laymen were free to circulate around the upper church when the friars were not in their choir. Did this include women? This question is still not resolved, but the evidence has been accumulating, which may allow us now to make a judgment. The same chapter general of the Dominicans of 1249 was quite specific in banning women from the areas flanking the choir. But did that mean at all times, as it seems, or only when the choir was in use? There is no mention of the transept area. Was it also included in the ban? I raised the question years ago of whether the women of families who owned the prestigious chapels in the upper church were allowed access to them. As it seems unlikely that the women of these families would never have been permitted their use, I would suggest that certainly the prohibition was enforced when the choir was in use, but that the friars were lax about imposing that restriction at other times on the matrons of powerful families who were major donors to the church. Donal Cooper has suggested further that by the fourteenth century the prohibition may have been relaxed; for example, some women are recorded witnessing their wills in the friars’ choir. But scholars agree that women could access the upper church only when no service was being held. Nevertheless, it is clear that the lower church was considered that of the women, and not only in Dominican and Franciscan churches.

Sant’ Agostino in Siena is described in a document of 1382 as divided into the *chiesa di sopra*, with its altars and choir, and the *chiesa delle donne*, and the two were divided by a wall in the middle. The lower church is often termed the women’s church, as Cooper indicates.

In the other Dominican convent in Florence, San Marco, the church was designed with three separate spaces, for the friars, laymen, and laywomen—and this was as late as 1436 (fig. 4). The construction of the church was undertaken by Cosimo de’ Medici, who chose Michelozzo as his architect. The friars’ choir was placed in the usual location in front of the high altar, but in a kind of pre-chancel. It was separated from the upper nave by a wall with a central door. This area between the choir and the tramezzo was designated for laymen. In the women’s church outside the tramezzo there were four altars and benches for hearing confessions. Thus Michelozzo created in a single-nave church a division of space that functioned in a way similar to the much larger three-nave mendicant churches.

San Marco is exceptional. A typical solution for single-nave churches is represented by another Florentine church, Ognissanti, which until very recently belonged to the Umiliani. The single partition was like that in the Fra’ri. The screen there has been reconstructed by Irene Hueck in order to understand how some important paintings might have been displayed on it (figs. 5-6). Her alternative reconstructions show the great *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels* of Giotto placed either on the top of the tramezzo or above an altar on it, facing the lay church. In either case we find a simple partition dividing the upper nave (space reserved for the clergy) from the lower nave of the laity (fig. 7).

Just how the laity were deployed in these single nave churches is not entirely clear. Antoninus stated in his *Summa* that laymen were not allowed to mix with the clergy in their choir when they were saying divine office. I have always assumed that there would be what was called in the English churches a “walking space” between the tramezzo and the choir enclosure, even when the tramezzo was only a partition. Hueck’s reconstruction, based on careful research and a number of references, does not allow for such a walking space. The problem this arrangement raises, liturgically speaking, is that anyone passing through the door would enter directly into the choir, which surely would not have been allowed. If laymen were allowed in the upper church when the choir was in use, they may have entered through a door on the side of the church. The door in the tramezzo would have been used primarily for processions on certain occasions when the friars would pass through the lay church and into their own. Cooper’s plan of San Francesco, Arezzo, shows such a walking space between tramezzo and choir enclosure.

Another arrangement, which conflicts with that indicated by the term *chiesa delle donne*, is suggested by linking together two contemporary references to the function of the choir enclosure. Francesco di Giorgio Martini in his architectural treatise of the 1470s says that the side walls of the choir were enclosed in order to shut off the laity to the left and right. A document from San Francesco in Bologna described the north aisle for the women (called *chorus dominarum*), while the men were congregated in the central...
nave and the south aisle. Thus it is possible that in these large three-nave churches the women entered through the gates in the north aisle of the tramezzo and were segregated in that area. In that position they would not have been visible either to the friars or to the laymen. Such a division of the men and women in the north and south sides of the nave seems to have been common in Byzantium.

In some small single-nave churches, the choir was not even enclosed, as was the case in San Michele at Badia a Passignano, where the choir stalls were placed along the side walls of the church and probably across the back of the dividing wall. In this case it seems certain that the upper church was entirely reserved for the clergy and was off-limits even to laymen.

Sacre Rappresentazioni in Florence

The double-storied tramezzo had a unique function: it was used in Florence as the stage for the performance of sacred plays. This material has been studied by Nerida Newbigin, on whom I depend for what follows. Certain confraternities were responsible for the annual production of sacred plays on the appropriate feast. For example, in the Carmelite church, the Ascension was performed; in Santo Spirito, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; and perhaps in Santissima Annunziata (and later in Santa Felice), the Annunciation. These were highlights of the year and were obviously a focus of civic pride, for there were instances when the performance was repeated for the benefit of a special diplomatic guest.

These performances continued throughout the Quattrocento, but died out toward the end of the century. In Rome, the famous performance of the Passion play was staged in the Colosseum, not in a church.

Twenty-five years ago, before recent research on the icon and the iconostasis, it was startling to acknowledge that the congregation in the lower church could not have seen or even heard much of the liturgy performed at the high altar. This is acknowledged by the stipulation of the Dominican chapter general of 1249 (referred to above) that windows might be made in the screen that could be opened to permit the laity to view the elevation of the Host. Today it is recognized that the rood screen was intended to function in a way similar to its Byzantine counterpart: it screened the mystery of the performance from the laity and substituted an iconic image, the rood, for their contemplation. Luther complained that this mystification revealed the Church’s arrogance toward the laity: “They take every precaution that no layman should hear the words of Christ, as if they were too sacred to be delivered to the common people.” The Counter-Reformation quietly acknowledged this and began tearing out the rood screens all over Catholic Christendom.

There is now evidence for tramezzini—similar to those I reconstructed—in numerous mendicant churches. For example, in the Dominican provinces of Italy, Cannon lists twenty-three churches where screens were “located within the nave, a considerable distance west of the presbytery, allowing room for the choir stalls between the..."
I had uncovered examples in other mendicant churches in my original research. They have now been found in numerous churches—not only Franciscan and Dominican, but also Carmelite and Servite—in the large urban centers, such as Naples, Milan, Bologna, Rome, and Venice, where the three-nave churches were built to accommodate a large community of friars and a large congregation of faithful. They are more likely to be found in parish churches, though they may not have been as deep as those we have found in cathedrals, though they may have been as deep as those we have found in parish churches, though they may not have been as deep as those we have discussed and may not have been used to separate women from men.

Questions that remained unresolved in the 1970s were how extensive was the use of tramezzi, and in what kinds of churches did they appear. No subsequent research has been directed to these questions, but by inference one can now come closer to satisfactory answers than was possible twenty-five years ago. Evidence of tramezzi, either of the single wall or double structure, has been found in at least one church of the Cistercian, Valombrosan, Camaldolese, Cassinese, and other types of Benedictine orders, and in each of the mendicant orders—so it seems safe to say that it was a typical feature of pre-Trent monastic churches in Italy. Cooper’s recent research tends to confirm this conclusion because even those churches in Umbria with retrochoirs that he examined had tramezzi.

There remains the question of churches that were not monastic. The baptistery in Verona, San Giovanni in Fonte, which was a three-nave Romanesque building, had a tramezzo, though the fact that it was torn out well before Trent may indicate that it was regarded as superfluous. In my opinion, it is a misnomer to call choir enclosures in cathedrals tramezzi because their low walls were not intended to provide privacy for the religious.

Relation to the Council of Trent

It has been noted that the tramezzi were removed in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I connected Duke Cosimo de’ Medici’s order to remove the tramezzi in Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce with his desire to conform to the spirit of the Council of Trent (1545–63). No one has questioned this conclusion, and scholars now routinely give the Counter-Reformation as the reason for the removals of the tramezzi. One should note, however, that not a single word in the decrees or the discussions of Trent refers to rood screens, nor are they mentioned in Carlo Borromeo’s *Instructions fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* (1577), which lay out detailed rules for the renovation of church buildings in the wake of Trent. One would expect to find mention there, since every detail of the church building is spelled out, and, furthermore, he was especially keen on separating the sexes. Borromeo’s silence on rood screens may reflect the fact that he was addressing himself not to monastic churches but to secular churches. Trent’s concern to care for the laity and to eradicate any basis for the Protestant accusation that the Roman Catholic Church was elitist and only concerned with the clergy was evident in the early sessions of the council and consistently reiterated throughout the deliberations.

There is direct evidence that visibility and access were motives guiding one post-Trent renovation. Contemporary documents refer to the new choir to be constructed in Carlo Borromeo’s own cathedral in Milan. In 1572 Martino Bassi claimed for his plan (which was not accepted) that it would give great ornament and majesty to the church and the city because one would see and hear the divine offices equally well from all parts of the church. One of the purposes of the raised stage of the tramezzo was, after all, to proclaim the Gospel, because it was the only place in the church from which both the clergy and the laity could be addressed at the same time. The presence of a lectern or ambo on top of many tramezzi, even the single-wall type, attests to this function. Such a location for the ambo can be seen in the fresco by the Assisi Master, *Saint Francis at Greccio*, where we are viewing the screen from inside the choir. There is an ambo atop the tramezzo in the church at Vezzolano, as well (fig. 10).

Rome

It seemed appropriate to make Rome a primary focus of research for this study, since it appeared likely that Rome itself might have led the way to the removal of rood screens, and that Duke Cosimo in Florence might have been following that lead. This does in fact appear to be the case. I hoped that by studying later documentation about the removals, it might be possible to reconstruct the original plans of the Roman churches, as I had done for the Florentine churches. Results are not conclusive, because the documents are maddeningly obscure, but interesting new evidence has emerged about the reasons for renovation. For example, renovations were undertaken well before the close of the Council of Trent in both the Dominican Santa Maria sopra Minerva (fig. 8), and the Franciscan Santa Maria in Aracoeli. Oddly, however, the transfer of the choir in Santa Maria sopra Minerva was not undertaken for liturgical reasons. What may have provided the model for all subsequent remodel-
ings was motivated by the rather more worldly concern that the new papal tombs should be seen from the nave. In 1547, the tombs of the two recent Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII, who had died in 1534, were in touch with Duke Cosimo in Florence, who was kept well informed of the progress of this Medici project. This model would have been in Cosimo’s mind when, seventeen years later, he ordered the renovation of the Dominican church in Florence and then the Franciscan church as well.

It is important to recall that Rome provided a model for a retrochoir in the Augustinian church of Santa Maria del Popolo, which had been in place since the construction of the church in the 1470s. The design, which allowed for an open and unified view of the whole church, might well have been in the minds of those who worked on remodeling Santa Maria sopra Minerva and Santa Maria in Aracoeli.

The evidence for the renovation of the Franciscan church of the Aracoeli is similarly incomplete (fig. 9). A tabernacle for the host was installed in front of the much-revered altarpiece by Raphael, now called the Madonna di Foligno. Some reformers much earlier in the sixteenth century, such as the bishop of Verona, Giovanni Matteo Giberti (1495–1543), seem to have felt that the tramezzi were an impediment to lay participation in the liturgy. In churches where he had jurisdiction, Bishop Giberti had the reserved host moved from side altars and placed in a tabernacle on the high altar, where it became the focus of devotion. Such tabernacles—and one was ordered as part of the renovation of Santa Croce in Florence—would obviously be without purpose if the high altar was screened from the worshipers’ view by intervening walls. In the Aracoeli, a decade after the installation of the new tabernacle, the pope ordered that the nave be cleared of all altars, tombs, and tabernacles that obstructed free access to the high altar. The apse was enlarged into a rectangular chancel and the choir removed from the nave to this new location. A new high altar was set up, giving pride of place to the Byzantine icon, the Aracoeli version of the Madonna Avvocata, and Raphael’s altarpiece was removed and sent to adorn a nunery in Foligno.

Thus both the Dominican and Franciscan churches in Rome had been renovated shortly before Cosimo initiated his program in Florence along the same lines. Although there is no specific mention in the records (which date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) of a rood screen either in the Minerva or the Aracoeli, it seems likely that some protection must have been provided for the friars.

The only tramezzo I have found in Rome was inserted into the first Dominican church there. The beautiful fifth-century basilica of Santa Sabina was given by the pope to the friars early in the thirteenth century because Saint Dominic had stayed there. The changes made in the church to accommodate the friars included the construction of a cloister and a tramezzo. From the laconic description of the tramezzo when it was removed in 1586/87, it sounds as though it was a simple transverse wall, but this does suggest a model that one would expect to find copied in the later mendicant establishments in the same city.

Surviving Decorated Tramezzi

The tramezzi that were not torn down seem to have been preserved either because they did not completely impede lay participation in the Mass, or because they were decorated with sculpture or painting that would have to be destroyed—both conditions present at the Frari in Venice. The provincial Benedictine church of Vezzolano was decorated with Romanesque sculpture along the top of the tramezzo (fig. 10). Much of the polychromy on this sculpture was preserved and it has been recently restored.
kind of decoration is unusual in Italy and much more common north of the Alps, as Jacqueline Jung shows. In the Florentine churches the decoration was usually the responsibility of the patrons of the private chapels—for example, the relief of Saint Martin on the Baroncelli Chapel or the fresco by Domenico Veneziano in the Cavalcanti Chapel, both in Santa Croce.

Another group of tramezzi has survived in the fifteenth-century Observant Franciscan churches in northern Italy—in Lombardy, Piedmont, and the Tessine (Switzerland)—because they were covered with frescoes. These churches were single nave in plan, but departed from the norm in having a dividing wall that reached all the way to the ceiling, forming a diaphragm arch. Their tramezzi were deep, supported on an arcade with recessed chapels flanking the central door. This wall provided a large surface on which was frescoed typically the Passion of Christ, centering on the Crucifixion—for example, at Santa Maria delle Grazie at Varallo with frescoes by Gaudenzio Ferrari (fig. 11). In several instances the space was partially opened up after the Council of Trent and visibility gained by removing the rear wall and transferring the chapels under the tramezzo to other locations.

The question of initiative has recently resurfaced. It is clear in the case of the Florentine Dominican and Franciscan churches that it was Duke Cosimo, and not the orders, who ordered the renovations. For Venice, however, Modesti has found that there was an Apostolic Visitation in 1581 examining all the churches to determine whether the choirs interfered with the liturgy. There was a clear mandate on papal authority to enforce uniformity and assure visibility in all churches. The wide expanse of dates at which renovations were made all over the Italian peninsula had suggested to me that the decision was left to individual churches, but the evidence from Venice provides a different explanation. For Venice, however, Modesti has found that there was an Apostolic Visitation in 1581 examining all the churches to determine whether the choirs interfered with the liturgy. There was a clear mandate on papal authority to enforce uniformity and assure visibility in all churches.

The wide expanse of dates at which renovations were made all over the Italian peninsula had suggested to me that the decision was left to individual churches, but the evidence from Venice provides a different explanation. There in certain cases orders were issued that the choirs and tramezzi should be destroyed, but not infrequently these orders were not acted upon. In the Dominican church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, for example, it was not until 1682 that the demolition was carried out. Thus, there may have been widespread initiatives in the last quarter of the Cinquecento that scholars have not yet discovered. Modesti’s documentation provides us with a rich new body of material and suggests that scholars should search for evidence of comparable Apostolic Visitations in other regions.

To summarize, then, it was always acceptable to put the choir behind the altar. It was only when the friars became too numerous to be accommodated that it proved necessary to resort to the choir in the nave. The requirement of the chapter general of the Dominicans for an intermedia seems to demand more than a choir enclosure, because it specifies that the friars should not be seen en route to the choir. It is evident that in at least some friaries the friars treasured this privacy, for when Vasari renovated Santa Maria Novella he was ordered on the request of the friars to build a passage linking the new retrochoir to the cloister so that they would not be seen, and this was as late as 1564.

The Retrochoir

Although the retrochoir had been used only intermittently prior to the Council of Trent, it was the preferred solution after the council. Most of the tramezzi in existing churches were torn down and the choirs transferred behind the high altar after Trent. The cliché to explain these renovations, used not only by Vasari but universally, that the tramezzo impeded the view of the church, covers both the liturgical reason for their removal and provides an aesthetic excuse. There is substantial evidence that an aesthetic preference had already developed by the 1470s for unified churches without interrupting rood screens.
noted the compromise plan in the Frari in Venice (1475), and the retrochoir designed for Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (also 1470s). One can add the renovation of Santissima Annunziata in Florence, begun in 1449, where a tribuna with retrochoir replaced the old tramezzo (fig. 12). The motive was certainly aesthetic, reflecting Quattrocento enthusiasm for central plan design all’antica, whether or not it suited liturgical needs. The tramezzo and existing choir in the nave were torn down. Behind the high altar was designed a rotunda with radiating chapels, at the center of which the choir was placed. Although this was an elegant Renaissance central plan, it did not function very well, and access to the choir was a problem. James Ackerman pointed out, in the later Quattrocento, retrochoirs were being built simultaneously with new tramezzi. He cites in Venice San Michele in Isola, where a tramezzo was built in 1469 or a little later, in which the congregation was squeezed into one and a half of the five bays.6 At Castello a tramezzo was belatedly added in 1524, even with the choir behind the altar, and in Badia a Passignano the tramezzo was constructed and commissioned for it in 1549. In new church construction after Trent, Palladio’s example in his San Giorgio Maggiore, designed in 1565, and II Redentore, designed in 1577 (figs. 13-14), provided a model that would be followed in many Baroque churches.

Conclusion

We should ask what the function of the tramezzo was when the choir was behind the high altar. Certainly it could shield the religious as they proceeded between their cloister and choir; Cooper’s discussion of double-faced altarpieces indicates that they were not successful in screening the retrochoir. Recent research makes it clear that segregation of the sexes was an important part of the tramezzo’s raison d’être.6 More research needs to be done on the process by which the sexes were eventually allowed to worship side by side if we are to understand what happened after the tramezzi were demolished, and how this issue may have affected the decisions whether or not to raze them.

It is also clear that we need to see more research examining specific religious orders and geographical areas. We need to know more about the typical arrangement in cathedrals and other churches officiated by canons (who were not cloistered), so that we can separate issues of privacy from segregation of the sexes. And a major question remains unanswered: like other research in this field to date, this study has been able to shed very little light on the question of the origin of the Western rood screen or its relation to its Byzantine counterpart.

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Endnotes


2 E. Doberer, the authority on German screens in particular, has created a catalogue of types that can be generally applied; see Doberer, “Der Lettner,” in Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für vergleichende Kunstforschung in Wien 9 (1956); 117ff. The above article is an updated version of “The Tramezzo in the Italian Renaissance, Revisited,” Sharon E.J. Gerstel, ed. Thresholds of the Sacred (Washington, D.C., 2006), 215-232. I wish to thank Joanne Allen for the updates to literature since 2006.

3 Donal Cooper, “Franciscan Choir Enclosures and the Function of the Double-Sided Altarpieces in Pre-Tridentine Umbria,”
Sacred Architecture Issue 27 2015

30  M. Luther, “A Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the
The Gothic Screen
(above, n. 10), 25, 36; cited by R. Gaston, ed. C. Maltese
25
[100]
2006]
J. Warb
A Social History
Renaissance Florence:
York, 1944), 162-64.
Jung, “Seeing through Screens” (above, n. 9), fig 2.

8  Numerous such roods have survived, e.g., Giunta Pisano
[219]
37  Cistercian: Costello (A. Luchs, Costello: A Cistercian Church of

12  Jung, “Seeing through Screens” (above, n. 9), fig 2.
20  James Ackerman uncovered a tendency, beginning with SS.

36  For example, San Niccolo in Oltrarno in Florence—see G.
35  The foundations of the tramezzo in Santa Croce were
34  On Versino, see now J. Barbara, “Sacred Spaces and the
40  Feste D’Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in Fifteenth

57  See M. M. Ghedini, “Il tramezzo nella chiesa dei santi
San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome, 555–614, and later

219  Il francescanesimo in Lombardia

10  G. Meersseman, “L’architecture dominicaine au XIIIe siècle:

demolished in the mid-Quattrocento, is discussed below.

Religious Poverty, Visual Riches

Sacred Architecture

8  Numerous such roods have survived, e.g., Giunta Pisano
Bologna, Castiglione di Castelfidardo (Vasari, “Life of Cristofano
Gherardi,” 5:288).

2006), fig. 1.

1550 e 1568
vite de’ più eccelenti pittori, scultori ed architettori: nelle redazioni del

50  Reforma prettendantina della Diocesi di Verona: Visite Pastorale

35  The foundations of the tramezzo in Santa Croce were
34  On Versino, see now J. Barbara, “Sacred Spaces and the

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40  Feste D’Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in Fifteenth
In contemporary art history, modernist theory has always maintained that the goals of figurative arts, both sacred and secular, were a linear objective of achieving similitude—the likeness of the object or image perceived. With the invention of the photograph, this presumed goal was not only achieved but pictorial realism and the photo became quasi-synonymous. This Darwinian thinking is perhaps why those artistic achievements of naturalism and idealism of form began to all but disappear from both secular and sacred art. This linear thinking held that, with the invention of the camera, all art was free from its former goal of copying the model, from a goal of exactitude with what was considered an idealized form. Compounded with the advent of pictorialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the line between photography and art became all too close. Then, with the dawn of impressionism, both it and realism soon replaced the naturalism of painting or drawing from life, along with invention and any use of idealism. The New Realism was king.

As wonderful a tool as the camera is, it remains a recording device for a moment in time. Since its invention, many of our saints, blesseds, and venerables have been captured as they were in time. Yet pictorialism and modernism proved to be a bad mix for depicting the modern saint in eternity. With the camera, we are confronted with realistic images of what the saint actually looked like. Modernism reinforced this actuality with iconoclastic removal of the halos, auras, aureole, mandorla, and nimbi; the exclusion of signs and symbols of divine luster; and the absence of personification of figures. This has led to a secular language dependent on realism to mark and make identity. However, we as artists and architects need to make identity visible again by means of form, space, light, and color. Just as the photo does not include likeness, neither does the literal use of light as form include image. Between the two, a new iconoclasm was introduced to Catholic art. Misinterpretations of Sacrosanctum Concilium on the use of “contemporary artists” sealed the fate of an idealistic representation of our saints.

But for the artist of sacred art, image was never an issue of similitude to the actual physical attributes or portraiture, but rather of the appearance of a saint as it is transfigured within the likeness to God. In other words, a re-unification of image and likeness to God prior to the Fall. Thomas of Celano gives us a vivid description of the face of Saint Francis of Assisi—perhaps the first time a saint is described in such vivid detail. Yet our images of the Poverello are based more on his likeness to God and his doing the will of God, as opposed to any physical attributes described by Celano. Perhaps Saint Clare of Assisi, who knew Francis throughout her entire life, offers us a better description here:

We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing.

Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ; rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God’s compassionate love for others.1

The relationship of image to likeness and likeness to image is reciprocal—a good and noticeable exchange, and a recognizable exchange. Scripture tells us that Adam recognized the atomic design in Eve’s image, and Adam said, “This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man” (Gn 2:23).

But due to original sin, our first parents lost this likeness to God. Did Adam and Eve know the will of God before the Fall? Certainly they knew of God’s will for them not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Was their likeness to God their knowledge of the will of God? Was their fear, their nakedness, not only their loss of likeness to God but the loss of their ability to intimately know the will of God? Left without the knowledge of the will of God, without the likeness of God, we retained image and were given free will to choose the will of
God and to choose His likeness.

If we are made in the image and likeness of God, then as Christian artists, and in particular as those who make devotional paintings and sculptures, how do we discern image from likeness? The great early Church theologian Saint Irenaeus examined the difference between God’s image and His likeness, and later theologians developed the idea further.

The image was the human’s natural resemblance to God, the power of reason and will. The likeness was a donum superadditum—a divine gift added to basic human nature. This likeness consisted of the moral qualities of God, whereas the image involved the natural attributes of God. When Adam fell, he lost the likeness, but the image remained fully intact. Humanity as humanity was still complete, but the good and holy being was spoiled.

Our representations of the sanctified have to factor in those elements that contain both image and likeness of God—namely, those aspects that are both human and divine. We are assured that this will render something that is both like us and not like us at the same time. If likeness of God remains unimaginable and unattainable in a photo, then it is not the image but likeness that we desire. The irony here is that the more and more we emphasize the physical image and the actual appearance, the less and less we capture the spiritual likeness and holy transformation.

Christ, Who is fully human and fully divine, for the most part has been historically portrayed to the best of the artists’ abilities. Yet from the earliest of Christian imagery to the late nineteenth century, depictions of Christ fully human and fully divine were shown in art by the use of something both actual and implied, by means of worldly light and shade, color and space. But most of all, before the photo, Christ was depicted as clothed in human form with physical, visible attributes transformed and re-presented to reveal invisible truths of unimaginable form.

Of course, the Theotokos in her Immaculate Conception must also have retained both divine image and likeness. This is revealed at the Annunciation and again at the Visitation, when Saint Elizabeth, despite seeing no visible image of Christ, recognized, through Mary’s radiant holiness, that the person of Christ dwelt within her cousin. And the Baptist jumped for joy as he also recognized this hidden presence of the Second Person of the Trinity. Perhaps it is what Saint John Paul II expresses when he writes: “The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it.” The plight of the “invisible” unborn is exactly this; if it is not visible, then it is not a person.

It is this very fusion of image and likeness that those makers of sacred art are commissioned to accomplish. It must not be one without the other. If we do not admit the presence of a corporeal body, how do we acknowledge incarnation, birth, death, and rebirth in Christ? As Catholics, our art and architecture must acknowledge that it was through matter that we are saved, but it is not matter that has saved us. The depiction of only matter conveys no transformation and therefore no transcendence.

We cannot expect the photo and photorealist forms, which are by their very nature so time-bound, to take on the cloak of immortality, transformation, and transcendence. This is partly due to the fact that the photo is a memento, a recorded moment of the past. Having no present or future, it is locked into the time and place, a static moment when the shutter was clicked. The image of God is His creation and is of matter. The likeness of God entails a transformation to more greatly reflect and participate in the divine nature. Realism, and in particular photorealism, contains matter only, but not divine likeness—for that likeness...
Theology of the Body

limitations of the photographic arts in graphed pontiff to date, explores the cannot serve as devotional art. Although inspirational for some, these or Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ Jesus of Nazareth stills from Zefferelli’s “The Seven Last Words of Christ,” or self-portraits of Fred Holland Day in “The Seven Last Words of Christ,” or stills from Zefferelli’s Jesus of Nazareth or Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. Although inspirational for some, these cannot serve as devotional art.

Saint John Paul II, the most photographed pontiff to date, explores the limitations of the photographic arts in his Theology of the Body:

Is it possible to also put films or the photographic art in a wide sense on the same level? It seems so, although from the point of view of the body as object-theme, a quite essential difference takes place in this case. In painting or sculpture the human body always remains a model, undergoing specific elaboration on the part of the artist. In the film, and even more in the photographic art, it is not the model that is transfigured, but the living man is reproduced. In this case man, the human body, is not a model for the work of art, but the object of a reproduction obtained by means of suitable techniques.1

Certainly, with the decline of usage of our Catholic signs and symbols, we become more and more reliant on the physical attributes they bore in time rather than their sacred attributes in time and eternity. Thus, the absence of sign and symbol merged with photorealism becomes a form of iconoclasm. Have we allowed the signs and symbols—we’ve attributes of the sanctified—to all but disappear to the point whereby we can only recognize our modern saints by how much our art resembles their last photo?

When our saints are represented in photographs or photorealist paintings, those depictions blur or obscure the relationship of image and likeness. Further, we are more likely to be attracted, and thus distracted, by the arifice used. But where photorealist images fail the most is in their making us think of the model in time and not the saint in eternity. When our saints are represented only as they appeared in life, or as in their final photos, then we are recapturing only a momentary physical appearance—their image in time—and excluding their invisible likeness to God outside of time and into eternity. Although the photo may be inspirational, it remains in essence non-devotional.

But we cannot blame realism or modernism for all this. Some of this must come from our blurred perception within ourselves. Our freedom to re-create our saints and Christ to be more like us than unlike perhaps is at the heart of this. Pope Benedict XVI warned, “When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God.”2

For Christians, and Catholics in particular, to depict Christ in flesh is not an anthropomorphism of an idea nor is it the personification of an abstract. Not only do we use human flesh to depict the Incarnation, but the Church also uses the human body in personifications of faith, hope, charity, etc.

When making images for devotion to Christ, the Son of God, we as Catholics are charged with the responsibility of depicting the Word Incarnate, clothed in the very flesh He created. Saint John Damasene makes this clear to us in his apologia for the use of both paintings and sculptures:

I do not adore creation more than the Creator, but I adore the creature created as I am, adopting creation freely and spontaneously that He might elevate our nature and make us partakers of His divine nature. Together with my Lord and King I worship Him clothed in the flesh, not as if it were a garment or He constituted a fourth person of the Trinity—God forbid. That flesh is divine, and endures after its assumption. Human nature was not lost in the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so flesh became the Word remaining flesh, becoming, rather, one with the Word through union. Therefore I venture to draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes through flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead. I paint the visible flesh of God, for it is impossible to represent a spirit, how
much more God who gives breath to the spirit.”6

On the other hand, if divine images become so personalized that one portrays the godhead doing everything human and mundane, then the relationship becomes overtly casual and overly confident. We see this in images of Jesus playing soccer with the kids, standing behind us as we stare at the computer monitor, or being beside the vet while examining our pet dog. It gets worse with the anti-corporeal, flat cartoon images, overly simplistic makeshift covers, and pseudoicons done in a borrowed and falsely conceived Byzantine style. These all hearken to flatness without any theological basis or reason. When images are represented as flat silhouettes, they again fail us as the form becomes so alienated that we must say it is too much not like us in image, and nothing in terms of likeness. Whether trivialized through photorealism, the feigned naiveté of cartoon versions, or disproportioned silhouettes, as our Catholic art and architecture become anti-corporeal and flatter and flatter, should it be any surprise that many Catholics consider the Most Blessed Sacrament a mere “symbol”?7

But considering the camera, what are we now to do with our canonized saints who were photographed in their lifetimes? With Popes John Paul II and John XXIII, we now have extensive videos of two canonized saints. As contemporary artists, we may feel challenged and held accountable for those photo images bearing their “likeness” in time. But we must be mindful that these photo documents are not their likeness in eternity. Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, Saint Pio, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Edith Stein, Blessed Miguel Pro, Saint Frances Cabrini, Saint Gianna Molla, and Saint Théophane Vénard—all were photographed. However, we are still being called to represent them not solely in their image but moreover in their likeness to God.

With the advent of the camera, so many of our modern saints are portrayed in devotional art as they appeared in their last photos. And so we see Padre Pio as the hunched octogenarian, and the same for Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. But even though we have photos of Padre Pio as a young man, can we now permit ourselves to portray him as the young saint, as the twenty-three-year-old who bore the wounds of Christ? Can we begin to accept the image and likeness of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta as the young woman of twenty-seven when she heard “the call within the call”?8

We see the shrines dedicated to Saint Gianna Molla, containing both paintings and sculptures, with many still based on her photo. Yet her unseen “likeness” comes from her will to follow the divine will. She prays, “O Jesus, I promise You to submit myself to all that You permit to happen to me, make me only know Your Will.” When based solely on the photo or the realist portrayal of the artist’s model, these images speak more of the saints’ outward appearances (their image in time) than their inward reality (their likeness to Christ in eternity).

Our task then as artists and architects is to foster a careful balance of the actual and the implied, the average and the ideal, the image and the likeness. In religious works, this likeness then comes from our saints submitting their will to the will of God. Yet if we are left with only image, then we have the mere proportions of the human figure, their corporeal shell. Our saints are transfigured in doing the will of God. As they represent God’s ideal, we as artists are called to idealize our saints. We are now called to incorporate those signs and symbols in portraying individuals whose images were recorded via photography but whose likeness to God in eternity has yet to be portrayed. As God Himself is perfection, our depictions of His saints—His own Masterpieces, signed with His signature at Baptism—must be depicted as perfectly as possible. His saints, who through grace achieved heroic virtue in their lives and were sanctified, now reflect that perfect reunion of being made in both “the image and likeness of God.”9

Anthony Visco is founder of the Atelier for the Sacred Arts in Philadelphia. He is known for his reliefs, sculpture, and mural paintings across the United States. www.anthonyvisco.org

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In October of 1925, G.K. Chesterton was invited to address the opening of an exhibit at the gallery of the Royal Architects Society in London. Chesterton’s friend J.C. Squire, who introduced him, said that while Chesterton was not an architect he could at least be considered as a great edifice. Delighted with this description of himself, the three-hundred-pound Chesterton began his speech with the suggestion that all architects should consider dressing up as pieces of architecture, as Shakespeare has a character who plays a wall in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The absurdity of the act would illustrate the idea that fashion has no place in architecture. It is the very nature of a fashion that it does not last. The “succession of fashions is in itself a succession of failures. For when men have made really dignified and humane things they have always desired that they should remain; or, at least, that some relic of them should remain.” But fashion is an entirely destructive thing, a negative thing, “It is as if a man were perpetually carving a statue and smashing it as soon as he carved it.” It never achieves its effect. “It is simply instability and discontent.”

An observer of all things, this was Chesterton: humility and humor mixed with startling insight, an observer who had something profound and provocative to say about whatever he observed. The fact that he had been asked to speak to the Royal Architects Society is an example of the respect he commanded from men of every field. Indeed, in his wide reach he seems to personify a paradox: though he is always in everyone else’s field, he is never out of his own.

Chesterton calls architecture “the alphabet of giants . . . the largest system of symbols ever made to meet the eyes of men.” While most of us have the sneaking suspicion that most art is supposed to mean something, there is an almost universal instinct that of all the arts, architecture especially has something to say, something to proclaim, because, well, it is big. “The size of a building is the most obvious thing to say about it; it is meant to be the most obvious thing to see in it . . . meant to be self-evident, and therefore simple; a colossal commonplace.” Yet, in spite of their size, the symbols that are presented by this gigantic art form remain elusive. It is a language that few people can read, symbols few can even see. It is another Chesterton paradox: sometimes a thing is too large to be seen.

If all of architecture cries out with meaning, sacred architecture cries out the loudest. And yet its meaning, which is the meaning about ultimate things, is lost in translation, in fashion, in forgetfulness. It was while walking through someone else’s field—in this case literally—that Chesterton once found a surprising object lesson about the history of sacred architecture and how it relates to all art and all culture. He was near the ruins of an old abbey, some distance from its crumbling walls, when he came upon, half-sunk in the grass, something that looked like the head of a slain dragon. It was a gargoyle. As someone who was always looking to find more meaning rather than less meaning in man’s creative endeavors, Chesterton saw in the goggle-eyed creature a fanciful symbol of the three stages of art that every society seems to go through: growth, zenith, and collapse.

In the first stage, a primitive priest is told by his people “to build a great tower, pointing to the sky in salutation of the Sun-god.” So he builds a magnificent temple, decorated with carefully selected gold and gemstones—something that he feels is worthy of the god: well-ordered, perfect, untouchable. Then pirates attack because they have a certain fondness for gold and jewels. The common people, however, rise up and fend them off. But as a result, they have a different attitude toward the temple because they have a different attitude toward the god. Whereas the former, classical style was perfect and admitted no imperfections, there arose a more romantic style that reflected a Creator who was not so remote. He had come down from the sky, just as the sun descends in a bloody sunset every evening, leading to a glorious resurrection the next day. This was a god who had touched the
earth and given it life—full of struggle and energy and sacrifice and beauty and even homeliness, but full of life. The priest, now very old, recognizes the need for a more elaborate and profound architecture to express all these things, and he proclaims, "All the exaggerations are right, if they exaggerate the right thing. Let us point to heaven with tusks and horns and fins and trunks and tails so long as they all point to heaven. The ugly animals praise God as much as the beautiful."5

And under the new inspiration they planned a gorgeous cathedral in the Gothic manner, with all the animals of the earth crawling over it, and all the possible ugly things making up one common beauty, because they all appealed to the god. The columns of the temple were carved like the necks of giraffes; the dome was like an ugly tortoise; and the highest pinnacle was a monkey standing on his head at the sun. And yet the whole was beautiful, because it was lifted up in one living and religious gesture as a man lifts his hands in prayer.5

"This," says Chesterton, "was the Gothic, this was romantic, this was Christian art; this was the whole advance of Shakespeare upon Sophocles."6

But then comes the third stage. Some argument arises. Someone throws a stone at the priest, hitting him on the head, causing him to lose his memory. He looks at all the carved creatures, the "frogs and elephants, monkeys and giraffes, toadstools and sharks, all the ugly things of the universe which he had collected to do honour to God." But he has forgotten why he had collected them. The original design, the original object has been lost to him. And so he simply piles up the ugly creatures into one heap, and the rich and influential citizens elbow their way past the crowd and applaud and exclaim, "This is real art! This is Realism! This is things as they really are!"

And that, says Chesterton, "is the only true origin of Realism. Realism is simply Romanticism that has lost its reason. . . . It has lost its reason; that is its reason for existing."8

The old Greeks summoned godlike things to worship their god. The mediaeval Christians summoned all things to worship theirs, dwarfs and pelicans, monkeys and madmen. The modern realists summon all these million creatures to worship their god; and then have no god for them to worship. Paganism was in art a pure beauty; that was the dawn. Christianity was a beauty created by controlling a million monsters of ugliness; and that in my belief was the zenith and the noon. Modern art and science practically mean having the million monsters and being unable to control them; and I will venture to call that the disruption and the decay. The finest lengths of the Elgin marbles consist of splendid horses going to the temple of a virgin. Christianity, with its gargoyles and grotesques, really amounted to saying this: that a donkey could go before all the horses of the world when it was really going to the temple. Romance means a holy donkey going to the temple. Realism means a lost donkey going nowhere.9

These are the three stages of art that Chesterton saw when he looked at the fallen gargoyle staring up at him from the ground: the classical, the romantic, and the realist. The classical is pagan, with an emphasis on form; the romantic is Christian and keeps the form but emphasizes content; and realism, which is the degeneration into secularism, is a reaction against both form and content that ultimately rejects both. Chesterton says that although history shows that the arts of a great people have always gone through these three stages, it does not mean they must always go through them. "The first stage is an impulse which is often accepted; the second is a discovery that
is often made; the third is a disaster which is not always avoided. We can refuse any of the stages; but unless we definitely exert our will we generally pass through them."

Architecture, especially sacred architecture, is not accidental nor can it be bound by trends and fads. It is an act of the will, which is both its glory and its peril. If it does not rise above everything, especially the ephemeral, it will certainly fall below everything. The church architect, more than any other artist, must obey the two great commandments to love God and to love his neighbor, and if he fails at either, so does the church building fail as a church. Worshippers not only desire, but are entitled to beauty and reverence in their holy places. But they also desire and are entitled to communion with each other. Like the cross, like the commandments, both the vertical and the horizontal must be part of the architectural design. This was best achieved, according to Chesterton, in the Gothic, which he calls "the mysticism that is in man made manifest in stone." He goes even further to press his claim. When Christ’s disciples were trying to rebuke the children who were showing their natural noisiness at a great moment, Christ turned to them and said, "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Lk 19:40). 

Chesterton says, "With these words He called up all the wealth of artistic creation that has been founded on this creed. With those words He founded Gothic architecture." Chesterton praises the Gothic for its exuberance and energy and wild creativty, but at the very same time affirms that the style is still a product of careful design, proportion, and that fruit of the Holy Spirit: self-control (Gal 5:23).

The first Gothic arch was really a thing more original than the first flying-ship. And indeed something of its leap and its uplifting seems to make architecture akin to aviation. Its distant vaulted roof looks like a maze of mathematical patterns as mysterious as the stars; and indeed its balance of fighting gravitations and flying buttresses was a fine calculation in mediaeval mathematics. But it is not bare and metallic like the Eiffel Tower or the Zeppelin. Its stones are hurred at heaven in an arc as by the kick of a catapult. . . . The whole building is also a forest of images and symbols and stories. There are saints bringing their tales from all the towns and countries in Europe. . . . There are a thousand things in the way of fancy and parody and pantomime; but with the wildest creative variety it is not chaotic. From the highest symbol of God tortured in stone and in silence, to the last wild gargoyle flung out into the sky as a devil cast forth with a gesture the whole plan of that uplifted labyrinth shows the mastery of an ordered mind.

Just as he was sent into a reverie after seeing a gargoyle in the grass, Chesterton had another sort of vision when he once sat looking at the facade of a medieval cathedral, and was suddenly startled by something he saw. There was a row of moving vans in front of the church, and they started moving all at once. It caused an optical illusion which made it appear that it was the church that was actually moving, and the vehicles were standing still. The experience inspired him to compose an article entitled "The Architect of Spears." Not spires. Spears. Because what he saw in that fleeting instant was the Church on the march. Years later, in a rare visitation to his own writings, he reflected on that early essay and his vision of the Church Militant, of stone coming to life, not like a statue, but like a crowd. He envisioned the Church awakening, "not as one thing but as many." There was something in the way all the various elements of Gothic art "are allowed to cluster almost in confusion, which suggests that if they could speak..."
and improve on a Roman aqueduct with scientific appliances. But you cannot build a Gothic Cathedral with servile labour. People who want to work in that way must put up with the Pyramids and the Eiffel Tower.”

Even though there are certain things that can be done better by machinery, the danger is that machinery replaces craftsmanship and artistry. And it produces things that nobody wants. “Machinery is being used to produce ornament that nobody ever looked at and architecture that nobody wants to look at.”

Though the medieval model should stand for liberty, Chesterton foresees that it will come to stand for law, and there will be a reaction against it because it represents moral order. But moral order does not mean rigidity and legalism. It simply means sanity. When the divine order is rejected, it will be replaced with a man-made order, a purely rational order. And Chesterton predicts that the error of purely rational architecture will lead to an opposite error: “a school of irrational architecture.” He says prophetically, “I fancy that the futurist taste in the arts will in the case of architecture be not only towering but toppling; in short, top-heavy. It will not only be Egyptian rather than Greek; and cease to be classic in the attempt to be colossal. It will not only pass from Rome to Babylon. It will pass from Babylon to Babel. The only fault in the structure of the Tower of Babel was that it fell down.”

Though the Gothic vaults soar to heaven, they are not top-heavy. And they are full of light. For the other great gift from the Gothic is the glory of stained glass.

The visible clue to the Middle Ages is colour. The mediaeval man could paint before he could draw. In the almost startling inspiration which we call stained glass, he discovered something that is almost more coloured than colour; something that bears the same relation to mere colour that golden flame does to golden sand. He did not, like other artists, try in his pictures to paint the sun; he made the sun paint his pictures. He mixed the aboriginal light with the paints upon his palette.

Chesterton laments that the art of stained-glass is being lost. It is a purely Christian art form. Just as the east and west are literally the difference of night and day, so is Western faith different from Eastern agnosticism, and Christian stained glass different from Oriental fireworks. “The Christian windows are solid and human, made of heavy lead, of hearty and characteristic colours; but behind them is the light. The colours of the fireworks are as festive and as varied; but behind them is the darkness. . . . The rockets of ruby and sapphire fade away slowly upon the dome of hollowness and darkness. But the kings and saints in the old Gothic windows, dusky and opaque in this hour of midnight, still contain all their power of full flamboyance, and await the rising of the sun.”

The stained glass is part of the breathtaking beauty of the Gothic. There is a connection between beauty and joy. Chesterton says, “Wherever there are happy men they will build beautiful things.” The gargoyles crawling on the exterior may be ugly, but they are smiling. Chesterton points out, they smile “because they are Christian.” The ugliness of the gargoyle is not evil. It is comic.

The Gothic craftsmanship is full of comedies and tragedies of common life, and especially of common lives connected with the erection and use of the church. It is full of
carvings of masons climbing up ladders or falling off ladders. It is full of pictures of priests, not only depicted in the act of preaching, but caricatured in the act of practising the very opposite of what they preached.24

Chesterton says that men do not produce such art in order to become joyful. They are joyful, and so they produce such art. “Men do not dance in order to be happy. They dance because they are happy. . . . Art is not the mother, but the child of beauty.”25

Contrast the styles found in the Gothic and the Modern: lovely versus unlovely. Beauty has been sacrificed to utility. It is spelled out in the alphabet of giants. Chesterton says of modern architecture: “Its practical dwelling must not be beautiful.”26

The work of the architect, as of any artist, is a reflection of his conception of the universe. And as, Chesterton says, “A man’s conception of existence is the only important thing. Upon this depends whether he will paint a gorgeous picture or a sad one. Upon this also depends whether he will paint a sad picture or merely jump over London Bridge.”27 What makes the large symbols of the practical, rationalist, realistic modern architect so difficult to read is not that they are too large, but that they no longer mean anything. Whether ordered or disordered, the loss of significance and the loss of sanity have led to self-destruction, which is not very practical at all, especially when giving people a place to pray.

Chesterton is President of the American Chesterton Society, publisher of Gilbert magazine, and co-founder of Chesterton Academy. He has written and lectured on G.K. Chesterton for over twenty-five years.

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China’s Tale of Two Churches: Epic Building in an Era of Destruction

Anthony E. Clark

The opening lines of Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities describes well China’s state of sacred building in recent decades: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness . . . it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.” Recent months have seen an unprecedented amount of church destruction as the state seeks to reassert its socialist line. Local officials recently affirmed the party’s dominance over “backwards religion” by removing the steeple cross on a majestic Protestant church near Shanghai, in Wuxi Village. A parishioner welded it on again the next day—he was promptly arrested for operating an “unlicensed welding business.” Authorities have removed or threatened to remove more than 130 crosses on other churches. In Pingyang County, party officials reduced a Catholic church to debris. While one Chinese church suffers the whims of party hostility, another is built or restored with extravagant support.

For motivations even unknown to local Christians, a series of new church projects and restorations have been initiated in some of China’s most Christian regions. Among the most high-profile projects today is the restoration of the magnificent former bishop’s residence adjacent to Beijing’s largest Catholic church, the French Gothic former cathedral church dedicated to Christ the Savior. Confiscated during the Maoist era, the handsome buildings and elaborately appointed chapel were simply covered to be reused as a school. Several years ago the state returned the bishop’s residence to the Diocese of Beijing and has begun careful restoration with government funding. Some Catholics suppose that this restoration will function to demonstrate the party’s “good will” toward religious practice, and become a gem in the city’s architectural landscape.

Before his death, Shanghai’s bishop, Aloysius Jin Luxian, tirelessly wrote letters to Catholics around the globe outlining his wish to rebuild his shattered diocese. Bishop Jin’s efforts were more successful than he expected; not only was he able to restore the churches of his diocese that had been seized during the 1960s, but he was also able to commission the construction of new Catholic facilities, mostly built in styles sympathetic to structures erected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Shanghai diocese gained an impressive seminary complex at Sheshan, the Qing Pu Catholic Preparatory School, the Holy Mother Convent for elderly sisters,
the Congregation of the Presentation of Mary, the Xu Guangqi Catholic Research Center, a multi-storied chancery that rises above tall spires of Saint Ignatius Cathedral, and several other Catholic structures such as a popular retreat center and a publishing house. Other dioceses in Shanxi, Hebei, and Guizhou are actively building new churches, almost exclusively in classical Western styles, as funding increases from state and private sources. Chinese Christians remain committed to erecting beautiful churches in Romanesque, Baroque, and Gothic styles that elevate the soul to God, embody the Church’s organic architectural heritage, and express the permanence of the Christian faith in a context that is as hostile to the presence of religion as it is committed to demonstrating tolerance for its practice.

China’s “tale of two churches” is laden with complexities; as this report comes to print, thousands of Chinese Christians lament the recent state demolition of the massive Sanjiang church near Wenzhou, while others celebrate the impressive new Church of the Sacred Heart outside of Taiyuan, in Shanxi. Dickens also wrote: “I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss.” Most often we hear of church destruction in the news, but as many churches are rising from the ground, China’s Christians “make all things new” by perseverance as they seek ways to create sacred spaces where destruction had seemed to prevail.

Dr. Anthony E. Clark is an Associate Professor of East Asian history at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, and his research centers on the history of Western missionaries in China. He is an author of several academic and popular works, including books and articles on Chinese historiography, cultural interaction between China and the West, and the history of Sino-Western religious and cultural representation during China’s late imperial to early modern era.

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2 Ibid., 50.
“Touchstone exemplifies, in my mind, true ecumenical conversation and cooperation. I look forward to receiving each issue and usually find myself reading each issue in its entirety. Certainly, Touchstone has helped me to think more deeply about many aspects of the Christian faith and of its practice in a pervasively secularized society.”—Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke

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Starting Again from Zero?
Why Modernist Architecture is Not Suitable for the Liturgy
Ciro Lomonte

Ronchamp

When, in 1955, the veil was lifted from the church of Ronchamp after five years of construction, the first reaction of the international architecture establishment was one of entire bewilderment. The man who had become the symbol of rationalist architecture, he who had defined the house as a machine for dwelling and had projected enormous buildings for thousands of people—thus eradicating, so to say, the wisdom of the European city that had matured for centuries; he, Le Corbusier, now overturned his whole argument without previous alert, in a single “subversive” gesture that seemed to contradict all that he had theorized up to that point.¹

The history of Ronchamp offers numerous points of departure for a reflection on the hostile—rather than indifferent—atmosphere in which works of sacred architecture were created in the twentieth century. The case of Notre Dame du Haut turns out to be emblematic, as Le Corbusier is the innovator who most profoundly marked the development of architecture in that century.

Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (his true name) was the son of a Swiss Calvinist pastor. He started his career as a painter and founded the Purist Movement together with the painter Amédée Ozenfant. When he started to design architecture, he decided to adopt a pseudonym in order to distinguish his architectural activity from his work as a painter. He chose the name of one of his remote ancestors, Le Corbusier, a Cathar who had escaped from France during the crusade against their sect.²

However, Ozenfant persuaded him to call himself Le Corbusier. In medieval times, this term designated those who cleaned the excrements of the ravens off the cathedral roofs. Ozenfant in fact considered his architect friend to have received the task of purifying the art of construction from the ornamental “excrements” of the Academy of Fine Arts.

Le Corbusier wanted to create a new tradition by wiping away all precedents, specifically Catholic tradition. For this reason, the actions of Fr. Marie-Alain Couturier, O.P., seem hard to understand: it was he who involved Le Corbusier and other non-Christian artists in the realisation of works of sacred art, as he considered it better to commission a genius without faith than a believer without talent.³ But these were not geniuses without faith, they were artists with a precise, ideological anti-Catholic intent.

¹ Starting Again from Zero? Why Modernist Architecture is Not Suitable for the Liturgy, Ciro Lomonte, Sacred Architecture, Issue 27, 2015
² Sacred Architecture, Issue 27, 2015
³ Sacred Architecture, Issue 27, 2015
steps of the creation of the so-called Modern Movement allows for a more profound understanding of a precise iconoclastic will, in open contrast with Catholic doctrine. The universal influence of this tendency is striking and noteworthy.

The War on Ornament

In 1919, the architect Walter Gropius founded a revolutionary school of architecture, the Bauhaus, which opened its courses in Weimar with a program of prophetic and dark tenor.

The young architects and artists who came to the Bauhaus to live and study there, and to learn from the Silver Prince, spoke of “starting again from zero.” This phrase was heard all the time: “start again from zero.” Gropius gave his consent to any experiment they had in mind, as long as it was in the name of a pure and clean future. Even new religions, such as the Mazdanan. Even new, healthy diets.

It must be doubted whether having made a clean sweep of all the knowledge of the past contributed to true progress. The flood that has overwhelmed traditional culture was a catastrophe of epochal nature. Today it is impossible to design without trying to cure the damages wrought by this disaster, even more so as we treat sacred buildings.

Architectural decoration (or ornament) had been created to express the religious convictions of man. This intention was explicitly declared by the famous treatise of Vitruvius. In Greek and Roman art, decor served to express the contents of a religious mythology that transformed the perfection of creation into anthropomorphic idols, rather than recognising therein the mark of the one Creator. The beauty of that art resided in the idealisation of the aesthetic qualities of man and of nature.

The New Iconoclasm

The reaction of the Modern Movement to Eclecticism did not aim at destroying the previous works of art, as had been the case at the time of the Second Nicene Council, which in 787 had to forcefully reaffirm the non-idolatrous value of the images of Christian worship against those who doubted it. The artists of the Bauhaus had the intention of creating a new art, putting an end to the decorative caprices of the Academy of Fine Arts.

Before them, Adolf Loos had already started that battle. In 1908, in his famous article ‘Ornament and Crime’, Loos held that architecture and applied arts were to make do without any kind of ornament, which he considered “a phenomenon either of backwardness or degeneration.”

This principle was expressed in a more radical way by the genial representative of the Modern Movement, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who was first a teacher and then, from 1930 to 1933, director of the Bauhaus.

Mies had the intention of cancelling all reference to the past: he searched for a radical innovation that would exalt the Modern construction methods by solely attributing to the structural skeleton all the formal value of the architectural organism in its integrity.

Rationalism was not the only current of Modernist architecture, but it can be said to have prevailed over all the others because of a greater internal coherence concerning the premises of the avant-garde. Rationalism was the architectural equivalent of Gnosticism at the beginning of the twentieth century.

“Gnosis is a knowledge that knows,
and the message of which can thus be summed up: he who is enlightened no longer listens [...] because he now has seen.”9 Considering the major theses of gnosticising thought, we encounter more than one aspect of kinship with the architectural avant-garde. Gnosticism is Manichaean: the positive principle was to be found in the spirit, while the negative one resided in matter—and was thus to be fought.

But what was considered to be the source of the authority of the group? Well, the same as that of all other religious movements: direct access to the numinous which was, in this case, Creativity. Hence the rise of a new form of document: the art manifesto. There were no manifestos in the art world before the twentieth century and the development of the artists’ communities. The Italian futurists promulgated their first manifesto in 1910. This was followed by a flood of movements and isms. One manifesto was published after the other, day and night. The manifesto was nothing other than the Decalogue of the confraternity: “We have gone to the top of the mountain, and thence have brought the Word with us, so that now we declare that...”10

The Gnostic actually considers himself the “chosen one” who knows the negative value of matter and knows how to turn towards the entirely spiritual and impersonal One (different from the God of Christianity) from which the world would have descended by emanation.

The premises of Mies van der Rohe have similar roots. One of his mottos was “less is more.” Reducing all construction to the essential is a way of aping the simplicity of the Subsistent Being. The confusion of the essence of a work of architecture only with its structure (without function and beauty) means to imitate the Essential Being while falsely considering that the Pure Act was absolute passivity instead of fullness and richness of life. Indeed simplicity in God is absence of composition, not minimalism. This is a spiritualism similar to that of the Gnostics.

Affirming that in order to obtain “sincerity” in the architectural project, “one must reject any form that is not upheld by the structure”, he sought a functional beauty of architecture which explicitly confused the Thomistic concept of truth (adaequatio rei et intellectus) with that of beauty (omnia quae visa placent).

Vitruvius, on the other hand, had stressed the importance of reconciling structure, function, and form when trying to realise a work of architecture.

All of these must be built so that account is taken of strength, function, and beauty (firmitas, utilitas, venustas). Account will have been taken of strength when foundations are carried down to the solid ground and materials are wisely and liberally selected; of function when the disposition of rooms of each kind is flawless and presents no hindrance to use and when each element is assigned to its suitable and appropriate exposure; and of beauty when the symmetriae have been calculated correctly so the relative measurements of the members will give the work a pleasing and elegant appearance.11

In order to understand profoundly what Vitruvius meant by symmetry, we have to remember that he referred to the proportions of the human body. The perfect human body, by the canon of Greek art, can be inscribed into a circle (with the arms and legs stretched out) and into a square (with the arms open and the legs closed).

Theosophical Architects

The process that led to the birth of the avant-garde and the successive affirmation of the Modern Movement has many aspects. There are, however, two constants: on the one hand, Gnostic...
rationalism which sometimes shows forms of anarchism or communist egalitarianism, and, on the other hand, alchemical esotericism.

The first modern group, the Arts and Crafts Movement, was founded by William Morris in the very period when he intensively frequented the house of the English parapsychologist Annie Besant, then president of the Theosophical Society. Morris himself sometimes presided over the sessions of the Society.

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by Henry S. Olcott and Helena Petrovna Hahn Blavatsky for the study of spiritual phenomena. Theosophy claims to be a super-religion and to teach the core of absolute truth contained in all religions, considering pantheism constitutive of all religion and interpreting creation itself as a pantheistic phenomenon.

The painter Piet Mondrian became a member of the Theosophical Society in 1909. Probably Theo van Doesburg had a Theosophical formation as well. The main person linking Theosophy and the architectural avant-garde was the Dutch architect J.L. Mathieu Lauweriks, secretary of the Theosophical Society from 1913 onwards. Having received an invitation to teach at the Academy of Arts at Düsseldorf in 1904 directly from Peter Behrens, who in contemporary Germany was one of the most respected architects, he unfolded a remarkable influence there. Behrens himself was under the influence of Lauweriks, at least in the design of the crematory of Hagen, in which the front of San Miniato was taken up as a model of mysteriosophic harmony, geometry, and numerics. The Expressionist Hans Poelzig was the head of a lodge connected to the University of Cologne. Many of the disciples of the Bauhaus were Theosophists. For Gropius himself, the Bauhaus was to be an esoteric lodge.

In 1917, Theo van Doesburg founded the journal De Stijl in Leyden, Netherlands. This name also designates, by extension, the group of artists and architects that had gathered around it and gave life to the movement of Neo-Plasticism. The architects J.J.P. Oud, G. Rietveld, and C. van Eesteren, the painters P. Mondrian and B. van der Leck, and the sculptor G. Vantongerloo were a part of it. De Stijl undertook the elaboration of “a new sense of beauty,” founded on the search for the universal against the individual, the rational against feeling, and cosmopolitanism against nationalism. Following the poetics of Neo-Plasticism, the new world would no longer have curved lines, as those were too personal. The compromises the early Bauhaus had made with ornament were unacceptable for De Stijl, as they reduced the forms to the rectangle and the colours to the three primary ones—red, yellow, and blue—and black and white.

The aim of Neo-Plasticism was to reach the equilibrium of the opposites, overcoming any tragic vision of the world that would stem from a non-equivalence between the opposites themselves. This art represents the beginning of a new life, the sign that anticipates the rational-universal world forged by technology and by the progress of the spirit. Art should no longer occupy itself with the exterior aspect of nature, but with the universal harmony that would make up its essence. This is why Neo-Plasticism was abstract. For the members of De Stijl, that which was spiritual, and entirely abstract, could express the human essence precisely, while that which was sensitive would not reach the level of intellectual qualities, belonging to an inferior degree of human culture. Art should not touch the heart. Any emotion, be it pain or joy, would imply a rupture of harmony, of equilibrium, between man and the cosmos.

Art thus rose as a privileged manifestation of the transformation of man, who from being natural had to become spiritual, and claimed to have a clearly messianic role to play. As Mondrian writes, “Art has assumed the guiding function that religion once held.”

Van Doesburg observed that “it is as false to identify the essence of thought with contemplation as it is wrong to identify contemplation with the sensitive representation of nature. This last concept is of classical and Roman-Catholic origin, and Protestantism has always fought it.”

So De Stijl was in the strain of Protestant iconoclasm. These artists came to hold that for the twentieth-century man, the image symbolising the Godhead meant nothing short of this:
profanation of the divine and of the absolute.

Steiner and Anthroposophy

Many of the teachers and students at the Bauhaus were linked to a person that should be treated more keenly. I refer to Rudolf Steiner, born in Kraljevica, Croatia, in 1861, and who died at Dornach (Basel) in 1925.

Though having pursued technical studies in his youth, Steiner, who showed an astonishing predisposition for drawing, changed to philosophy and seriously studied Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, also collaborating in an edition of his works. Having then joined the Theosophical movement, he became secretary of the German section. However, he left Theosophy in 1913 in order to found his own movement, Anthroposophy, based at the Goetheanum that he designed and built in Dornach.

The building in Dornach was destined to serve the representations of the mysteriendrama that Steiner wrote, and was first called “Johannesbau” after the protagonist of these mysteries. The construction of the wooden building started in 1913. In 1917, Steiner baptised it “Goetheanum” during a conference in Basel. In 1922 it was burnt down, possibly by a para-Nazi group.

Following a model that Steiner constructed in the last months of his life, it was reconstructed as Goetheanum II. The project was developed on the basis of detailed verification with small clay models. In its monumental mass, the building conserves the sculptural qualities of concrete, shaped into irregular, continuous surfaces with frequent allusions to human shapes, such as the podium that resembles a larynx, the pillars in the form of shinbones, etc.

The contents of Anthroposophy must, however, be further specified: it is a doctrine that differs from the former Theosophical one in no other way than in the development of the teaching about nature and the destiny of man. Man is conceived as a composite of seven principles or contiguous parts that are in ascending spiritual order (we must not forget that for the Theosophists, everything is spiritual).

The application of the doctrines of Steiner to the fields of painting and architecture determined the theoretical and formal choices of many artists who spent some time at the Goetheanum. Among the members of the Bauhaus who were disciples of Anthroposophy, we may recall those who went to Dornach: Paul Klee in the years 1920, 1937, and 1940; Walter Gropius and the Hungarian painter Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in 1927; Herbert Bayer and Marcel Breuer also in 1927; Max Bill in 1934. The theoretical works of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, two painters who taught at the Bauhaus, were largely influenced by the color theory of Steiner, which in turn derived from the writings of Goethe.

We must keep in mind that for Steiner, architecture was something more than amateur practices following the forms of Expressionism. It was to have thaumaturgical virtues. Steiner intended it to be the place where all the arts are reconciled. Thus it would become a vehicle to assemble...
the harmony of the universe by interior perception, and architecture would thus become a kind of enormous resonator.

**Which Architecture for Liturgy?**

These pages are mostly extracted from a research project of mine. I considered it useful to go back to basics, underlining why Modernist architecture is unsuited to Catholic churches. In accordance with their own ideology, the masters of the Modern Movement have elaborated paradigms that openly contradict Catholic doctrine. The attempts of Rudolf Schwarz, Dominikus Böhm, Emil Steffann, Hans van der Laan, and other Catholic architects show the impossibility of reaching a satisfying result with these kinds of formal languages. The same might be said for rock and pop music when they are used in liturgies. These are musical genres that cannot express and further elucidate the contents of the prayer. Though the texts may be taken from Holy Scripture, the rhythm itself actuates the decision-making process, and it is based on an unreasonable inferiority complex vis-a-vis present-day intellectual contents. This timidity may be justified by the poor grounding of some ecclesiastical representatives in the field of art. But the Church as an institution has no reason to be intimidated: until the nineteenth century, it had always been a pedagogic and not a submissive position as regards men of culture, whom it educated in a formidable way.

The entire world needs the Church to regain its role of mother and leader. Progress has not been positive in all its aspects. Art and architecture, especially, suffer profoundly from immaterialism and should hasten to recover their connection to reality. By examining the history of the formulation of ideas as far back as Descartes (at least), a correct diagnosis might suggest proposals for suitable therapy.

Avant-garde artists have chosen to start again from zero. There is a strong temptation here to imitate their ideas and reciprocalize by erasing their formal language. This does not appear to me to be the most suitable solution. I believe it would be useful to recommence by designing with proportions and ornaments; the latter should evolve by using symbols that are intelligible for modern man. Although this might seem a difficult task, it would give rise to modern churches of great artistic beauty, perfectly suited to the celebration of Catholic rites.
Custom Church Art
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Best references:
- Cathedral of Saint Patrick - NYC, NY
- Cathedral of St. Petersburg - St. Petersburg, FL
- Church of the Epiphany - Miami, FL
- Church of Saint Williams - Round Rock, TX
- Church of Saint Catherine of Siena - Wake Forest, NC
Appreciating the church building as a place where the Christian is at home is to enter into the already and the not yet of Christian existence. Already the Christian has been baptized into and shares the very life of the Trinity, but the fullness and permanence of that life is not yet realized. At the same time, appreciating the church building as a place where the Christian is at home means entering into the kairós (the time of salvation), and not the chrónos (the measured time of the clock).

The Christian, while living in this temporal world, is on pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. Even the words which we use to speak of ourselves proclaim this. The Greek paroikía (which comes into Latin as paroecia and into English as parish) means a group of people who are sojourners in this world. So our days are spent sojourning (i.e., not being at home in this world). A problem arises, however, when we transfer this idea to our participation in the sacred liturgy. So often people think and act as if what they do outside of church is the real world, and what they do in church is just a break from that reality; or they might think of going to Mass as another thing to do (e.g., Catholics go to Mass, so as to give God one hour each week in exchange for the other hours of the week that He has given to us).

A liturgical way of looking at things is, however, quite different. What happens in church is not a break from the real world, but a break from distractions in order to enter consciously into what is really real as the ancient philosophers understand it—moving, if you will, as Jean Daniélou would say, “from shadows to reality.” This, without a doubt, has consequences for the construction of churches.

Christians, I believe, need to feel at home in the church building. In Baptism, they have been adopted as children of God and have received as well a sort of passport indicating that their true homeland is in heaven. For that reason, death is a door and life is changed, not ended. So, what does the Kingdom of God look like or feel like? None of us knows the complete answer to that, but a few reflections on churches and church architecture might be helpful to discover what it means to feel at home in a church.

To borrow a title from Fr. Robert Barron, the church building, I believe, must be “heaven in stone and glass.” If the church building is in fact that, it means that one should experience what it means to feel at home in church. A number of years ago, I realized this in a very personal way.

When going home to visit my family, I would customarily first stop into the church where I was baptized to pray some of the Liturgy of the Hours before visiting my family. In order not to be disturbed, I would go up into the choir loft and sit in one of the pews hidden away from anyone who might stop in church. On one such occasion, I asked myself why I liked this church so much. The answer came rather quickly and simply: because the Lord is in the center and I feel that I am surrounded by the angels and saints. This church, which goes back to 1852, has the tabernacle in the center of the high altar. Both the high altar and the side altars have remained relatively untouched since they were first installed. The Blessed Virgin Mary is depicted in the center image of the high altar with Saints Benedict and Francis, Saint John Neumann, and Blessed Pius IX. The side altars have statues of Saint Joseph, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint John the Evangelist, and Saint Rose of Lima, among others. In addition, two angels are depicted on either side of the tabernacle bowing in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament reserved there. Finally, there are also the stained-glass windows and the large painting on the ceiling.

I tell that story because a church is a place for both public and private prayer. It is the place of the sacred liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, and often enough it is the place of the private prayer that flows from and leads back to the liturgy. In the church that I have just described, it is easy for one to feel that his true home is the Kingdom of God—with the Lord in the center while all of the angels and saints surround him in worship and praise. To enter there is truly to come home in the most profound Christian sense. The rest of life finds its culmination and integration in what is depicted there—being at home with God and all the angels and saints.

Artistically and architecturally, this integration means that when one is distracted in the sacred liturgy in a church like that, one is distracted into the mystery and not out of it. Instead of counting rows of bricks in a nonde-
script sanctuary, he is distracted into the Kingdom of God with all the angels and saints. Churches like this center one psychologically.

The same centering can often be found in the normal parish church where one enters the front doors and finds oneself enveloped by what speaks to him of being at home—our true and everlasting home in the Kingdom. This feeling of being at home is fostered all the more if one is not torn to one side to genuflect, which gives the feeling that the one Who is most important is not what is central.3

The feeling of being at home is enhanced even more when one reflects on the classic placement of the angels and evangelists in many of our parish churches. So often, in the sanctuary of our churches, angels are depicted because the church is the place of divine worship, and that is one of the functions of the angels. The evangelists are also often depicted in the sanctuary. They are the ones who tell the Christian story, which is, as well, the story of each and every believer. If you do not know the Christian story, you cannot enter into the Christian mysteries. For that reason, churches of the Eastern tradition also have either the Annunciation or the evangelists painted on the royal doors in the center of the iconostasis.

Going home also means being transfigured. One is changed because one is Christian. This is portrayed in an outstanding way in the church of Sant’Apollinare in Classe near Ravenna in Italy. In the apse mosaic, we find a symbolic representation of the Transfiguration of the Lord—with Christ in the center of a jeweled cross, Moses and Elijah on either side, and Peter, James, and John below. Since the figure of Christ is basically just His face, and since it seems small in light of the whole mosaic, one thing that struck me about this depiction is that the closer you get to the cross, the closer you get to Christ. But at the same time, the closer you get to Christ and to the jeweled cross that embraces Him, the closer you are not only to Christ but also to the glory of the cross. The Transfiguration of the Lord depicts a suffering love, a life poured out for our salvation, which is nothing if not glorious.

For the Christian, therefore, being on a journey home means that God allows us to experience here and now, even if just occasionally, a taste of eternity and a life surrounded by all the angels and saints. Entering into a church means being willing to be immersed in and embraced by the kairos. As Christians, when we enter into a church, we attest to the fact that the Christian story is our story, that the Paschal Mystery includes our own personal mystery, and that God in His love and mercy has chosen to transfigure us as His beloved sons and daughters in a glory beyond all imagining.

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Endnotes
3 See Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), n. 69.
I am very grateful for the invitation to speak to you today. I speak not as an expert in architecture, but I speak as a bishop of the Church about your service of the Church through architecture, a service for which I am deeply grateful. Your School of Architecture is renowned for its service of the Church in not only preserving, but in fostering anew, the Church’s rich tradition of sacred architecture. You serve the Church through architecture in a variety of ways. Through architecture, you can serve the Church’s mission of the proclamation of the Word of God, the teaching of the faith, and the New Evangelization through beauty. You serve the Church’s liturgy and prayer. And you serve the Church’s mission of charity. I hope this talk will help you to see how you serve the Church in all these ways.

The Second Vatican Council insisted on the unique character of the vocation of the laity: the vocation to “seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them to the plan of God.” When this vocation is lived out in the architectural profession, when men and women of faith become architects who see their work as a call from God, when they are led by the spirit of the Gospel, their lives and their work can contribute to the sanctification of the world. It becomes a participation in God’s work of creation and is also a means of growth in holiness. The Second Vatican Council taught about the universal call to holiness, a call rooted in Baptism. This call to holiness, of course, requires each of us to follow Jesus Christ, to pray, to listen to the Word of God, to participate in the Church’s liturgical and sacramental life, and to practice the commandment of love in all the circumstances of our life. This call to holiness is also related to one’s profession. It is not lived apart from or separate from one’s profession. Whatever one’s profession, when one’s life is one of faith, hope, and charity — lived also in the workplace — it contributes to the building up of the Church, the communion of saints. Those in the profession of architecture can quite literally contribute to the building up of the Church by building sacred places. They build places where the community of faith gathers to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the sacraments. Sacred architecture can be a powerful instrument for the New Evangelization, especially through beauty. It can help build and nurture faith.

I’d like to give an example of this from my own personal experience. I grew up in a small city: Lebanon, Pennsylvania. My parish was called Saint Mary/’s, its official title was Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish. The parish church affected my own life of faith and growth in the faith as a child. My home parish was founded in 1810 and its original church, like so many in the early years of the Catholic Church in the Northeast and Midwest, was a quite simple brick church, yet quite beautiful inside. By the 1870s, because of immigration, the church became too small. The second church was built and dedicated in 1880. Like so many Catholic churches at that time, it was a beautiful testament to the faith and sacrifices of the immigrant Catholics. It was a beautiful Gothic structure. Upon each side of the church were towers terminating in octagonal spires 132 feet high, topped with gilt crosses. The church was built right in the center of downtown Lebanon, an imposing Catholic monument in a mostly Lutheran community. Irish and German Catholics sacrificed much to build this church, and they adorned it with frescoes, large beautiful stained-glass windows, and a high altar of Gothic art that rose 45 feet from the floor of the sanctuary to the cross surmounting the top. The side altars dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph were also of beautiful Gothic design. The high altar contained statues of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the twelve apostles, and saints to whom the parishioners were particularly devoted, like Saint Patrick. At the center was a prominent statue of Mary being assumed from a tomb into heaven, with angels at her sides.

My family worshipped in this church during my childhood. There I received my first Holy Communion and Confirmation. There we made visits to the Blessed Sacrament whenever we walked downtown. It was our spiritual home. It was a house of God where we experienced sacredness and beauty, where one was naturally drawn to prayer, to lift up one’s mind and heart to God. In 1971, when I was in eighth grade, the church was closed after an engineering report revealed that the church structure was
unsafe. People were shocked—not only the parishioners, but the whole community. Mass was moved to the school auditorium. That’s where I attended all through high school. The decision was made to demolish the church, and people were heartbroken. The beautiful statues and windows were removed from the church and kept for safekeeping in the school basement. Some of these treasures were damaged by a flood during Hurricane Agnes in 1972. What was salvaged was restored and placed in the new church. 

The new church, the third Saint Mary’s Church, was completed and opened in 1974. The new church incorporated the beautiful stained-glass windows from the old church and some of the statuary. But the architectural style was completely changed. Following the fashion of the time, it was built in a fan shape and did not even have a center aisle. Its exterior was bland and no longer soared upward to heaven. Without going into further detail, I think you get the picture. I share this with you because I want you to know how this affected the community and even my own faith life. No longer when I entered the church was I moved to contemplate heavenly realities. I could still pray, but it wasn’t as natural in the new church. The building didn’t draw me into prayer like the old church. Still, the Blessed Sacrament was there—but it was off to the side and not in the center. It was deliberately made and positioned to be almost identical to the ambo or pulpit. I share all this to impress upon you the spiritual vocation you have as architects, how what you do in building churches impacts people and their spiritual lives. I don’t blame anyone for what happened at my home parish church. It was the 1970s and there was a lot of confusion. Confusion in theology and about the liturgy. This confusion and the trendiness of the times did much damage, damage that naturally flowed into the area of church art and architecture. In this era of the New Evangelization, I believe we have entered into an exciting time for the Church. Pope Benedict’s hermeneutic of continuity, not rupture, is taking hold in theology, liturgy, and architecture. All this will lead, with the help of God’s grace, to a new springtime for the Church and hopefully a discovery or rediscovery of the faith in the lives of many. You have a part to play in this exciting venture of the New Evangelization.

In his famous Letter to Artists in 1999, Pope Saint John Paul II wrote of how “the human craftsman mirrors the image of God as Creator.” He stated: “With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of His own surpassing wisdom, calling him or her to share in His creative power.” I think this applies very well to architects. Using your God-given gifts, your work can be a creative artistry, giving form and meaning to the natural elements of the earth. This is truly a sharing in God’s creative power. You thus mirror the image of God as Creator.

In his Letter to Artists, Saint John Paul wrote a paragraph in which he speaks specifically about the service of architects to the Church. He wrote: “The Church needs architects, because she needs spaces to bring the Christian people together and celebrate the mysteries of salvation. After the terrible destruction of the last World War and the growth of great cities, a new generation of architects showed themselves adept at responding to the exigencies of Christian worship, confirming that the religious theme can still inspire architectural design in our own day. Not infrequently these architects have constructed churches which are both places of prayer and true works of art.” I am not sure which architects and churches the Holy Father had in mind. But I am grateful for this school of architecture here at Notre Dame and all that you do to promote the building of churches that are both places of prayer and true works of art. Yes, the Church needs you, needs the talents and ingenuity of architects who proclaim and serve the mystery of faith, whose works proclaim the truth, goodness, and beauty for the celebration of the Church’s liturgy. The results were amazing: basilicas like Saint John Lateran and old Saint Peter’s, and many others. The art (paintings, mosaics, sculptures) filled these churches, raising the hearts and minds of Christians to the mysteries of our faith. These great buildings were functional for the liturgy, but, as Saint John Paul II wrote: “the functional is always wedded to the creative impulse inspired by a sense of the beautiful and an intuition of the mystery.” The Holy Father said: “From here came the various styles well known in the history of art. The strength and simplicity of the Romanesque, expressed in cathedrals and abbeys, slowly evolved into the soaring splendors of the Gothic. These forms portray not only the genius of an artist but the soul of a people. In the play of light and shadow in forms at times massive, at times delicate, structural considerations certainly come into play, but so too do the tensions peculiar to the experience of God, the mystery both awesome and alluring.” This art and architecture helped form the culture as it became a culture more and more imbued with the Gospel. This continued in the Renaissance. Great artists and architects like Michelangelo, Bramante, Bernini, Borromini, Maderno were “rendering visible,” as John Paul wrote, “the perception of the mystery which makes of the Church a universally hospitable community, mother and travelling companion to all men and women in their search for God.” We see this in the “new” Saint Peter’s Basilica and its colonnade, “which spreads out from it like two arms open to welcome the whole human family.”

I mentioned the adoption and adaptation of classical architecture for
Sacred Architecture

Christian churches. And then the continuing development and evolution of various architectural forms: the basilica, the Romanesque, the Gothic, and then the Renaissance and the Baroque. All these forms had an order to them and were able to reflect God’s creative activity, bringing order from chaos. God is the giver of order, not disorder; harmony, not disharmony. In my opinion, some modern forms of architecture have moved in a direction that does not reflect order, thus leading to a certain expression that does not sufficiently serve the Christian vision of things, let alone the Church’s liturgy. Some forms of modern architecture do not seem to me to be suitable for church buildings. Unlike Greek or Roman architecture, which expressed ideas of perfection, beauty, and truth and were indeed compatible with Catholic teaching, some architecture today does not seem to be compatible. Attempts to make them compatible have often revealed problematic theological views. The great treasure of Christian art and architecture was born from faith within the Church. When there is a crisis of faith, like in our culture today, this can also be seen in its art and architecture. We see this in some churches today, and we’ve seen it in recent decades even in the celebration of the liturgy in some places. The sense of the transcendent and the sacred can be lost. It is imperative that we recover the sense of the sacred, in the celebration of the liturgy and in church art and architecture. Truly sacred art and architecture, like the liturgy, and also liturgical music, must be oriented to God, not to the self. Catholic art and architecture should be in continuity, like the liturgy, with the tradition of the Church through the ages. A church should lift one’s gaze and one’s mind to God, not to ourselves gathered together to worship Him. Beautiful church architecture indeed invites people to lift their minds and hearts to God. When I studied in Rome for seven years I visited hundreds of churches there, not out of mere curiosity, but because they were places where the art and architecture lifted my spirit to God.

In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI traveled to Barcelona, Spain, to dedicate the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia. During that visit, Pope Benedict praised the architect, Antoni Gaudí. I would like to share with you some of the things the Holy Father said about Gaudí and the Church of the Holy Family. First of all, Pope Benedict said Antoni Gaudí was “the soul and the artisan of this project.” It was his Christian faith that motivated and inspired him. The pope said that Gaudí conceived the church he was designing as “a monument of praise in stone to God.” I believe that is the true spirit that should inspire architects of churches today—to build churches that are monuments or hymns of praise to God.

Gaudí, a very gifted architect and a man of deep faith, sought to bring the Gospel to people through his architecture. “Gaudí conceived of and projected the Church of the Holy Family as a profound catechesis on Jesus Christ.” That is why he built, for example, the three porticos of the exterior of the church. They are, Pope Benedict said, “a catechesis on the life of Jesus Christ, a great Rosary, which is the prayer of ordinary people, a prayer in which are contemplated the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of our Lord.” Gaudí wanted the church and its exterior to be a home for all, for ordinary people. His faith also inspired him to charity. “He designed and financed from his own savings the creation of a school for the children of the workers and of the poorest families of the neighborhood.” Gaudí said: “The poor must always find a welcome in the Church, which is an expression of Christian charity.” We thus see the authentic faith of this architect, a faith expressed in charity.

Pope Benedict said that the Church of the Sagrada Familia “reflects all the grandeur of the human spirit in its openness to God.” He called it a “splendid work—full of religious symbols, delicate in the interlacing of its forms, fascinating in its play of light and color—as if it were an immense sculpture in stone, the result of profound faith, of the spiritual sensitivity and artistic talent of Antoni Gaudí.”

Pope Benedict said that inspiration came to Gaudí from “the three books which nourished him as a man, as a believer and as an architect: the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture, and the book of the liturgy. In this way he brought together the reality of the world and the history of salvation, as recounted in the Bible and made present in the liturgy. He made stones, trees, and human life part of the church so that all creation might come together in praise of God, but at the same time he brought the sacred images outside so as to place before people the mystery of God revealed in the birth, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” What a great lesson for church architects—to use the books of nature, Scripture, and the liturgy in designing and building churches. All of these books lifting us toward the Author of these three books, “to the One who is Light, Height, and Beauty itself.”

In his Letter to Artists, Saint John Paul II wrote that “the theme of beauty is decisive for a discourse on art” and
“the artist has a special relationship to beauty.”

He wrote: “In a very true sense it can be said that beauty is the vocation bestowed on him or her by the Creator in the gift of ‘artistic talent.’”

The artistic vocation as architects is a great service to the Church and her mission when your talents are used to serve truth, beauty, and goodness.

The Second Vatican Council spoke of the “noble ministry” of artists when their works reflect in some way the infinite beauty of God and raise people’s minds to Him. At the end of the Council, the Council issued a message to artists and appealed to artists in these words: “This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration!”

When we work on plans for new churches or restorations of churches in our diocese, I always ask the planners to list beauty as a number one priority in their planning. This is because I believe that churches should speak of the mystery of God’s beauty. The world needs God, needs beauty. It seems that some artists and architects purposely eschew beauty as the legitimate end of art. This is part of a bigger cultural crisis in the West: currents of secularism, relativism, and hedonism. Some art is not only not beautiful, but mocks beauty and even mocks God. There are ideologically driven movements that assault tradition and Christian culture. They have found their way into the world of art and even architecture.

Beautiful churches contribute to the creation of a society and a culture that is not forgetful of God. At a time when many seem to try to build their lives without God, a time of increasing secularism, we need churches that remind us of our origin, purpose, and destiny: God and heaven. They should reflect a Catholic worldview. Our churches should not be stripped of the imaginative elements that uplift the human spirit. They should inspire the faithfull. Heresies from the early Church, like iconoclasm, seem to reappear throughout history. I think about how mosaics, statues, stained glass, sacred vessels, vestments, and art within churches built of noble materials and in harmonious design not only speak of our Catholic faith but also can lead us to contemplation. A good question to ask is: “Do our churches lead us to an encounter with the living God Who is Truth and Beauty itself?”

Churches should be places of encounter between God and man. That’s what the liturgy is, but the place where the liturgy takes place serves the same sacramental end. The Church teaches in the Catechism that “Christians construct buildings for divine worship. These visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ.” They are to be houses of God, temples or dwelling places of God (after all, Catholic churches house the Blessed Sacrament), and houses of prayer. They are not auditoriums or theaters. They are places built for divine worship. They should be worthy of their end. They should point us to heavenly realities, the heavenly liturgy, and, through beauty and images, connect us to the angels and saints in praise of the most Holy Trinity. Our churches should offer a foretaste of heaven.

Architects and artists use the matter of the earth, material elements, in their work. But this matter, created by God, can be used to reveal heavenly realities. The Second Vatican Council taught that “Church buildings are to be signs and symbols of heavenly realities.” Through the material world, therefore, we can connect to spiritual realities. This is part of the Catholic vision, teaching, and theology of sacramentality. Church buildings are to be sacramental signs. This is something that should be reflected in Catholic architecture. The world was created for the glory of God, Vatican I proclaimed. Saint Bonaventure explained that God created all things “not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and to communicate it.” So artists and architects of churches can use the materials of earth to give glory to the Creator and to show forth His glory.

I’d like to finish by returning to something I mentioned at the beginning of this talk: the call to holiness. When you use your gifts to serve the Church and the building up of God’s kingdom on earth, this becomes a means to your own growth in holiness, your sanctification. You can bear witness to Christ through your work done with a spirit of faith, hope, and charity, thus revealing the infinite richness of the mystery of Christ. Your own spirituality, your own prayer life, is essential. Prayer becomes a stimulus also for using your gifts in architecture to serve God and His Kingdom on this earth. It is important that we live an integrated life, not two parallel lives: a spiritual life and a secular. Everything we do, including our work, enters into the plan of God. I wish to encourage you to live such an integrated life: your prayer, your faith, your work, your state-in-life vocation—all united through your intimate relationship with Christ in the Church. I pray that you allow yourselves to be guided interiorly and sustained by the Holy Spirit in your work. The Church needs you and your work for the great venture of the New Evangelization. At the Visitation, the Blessed Virgin Mary exclaimed: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” May your lives and your work as architects proclaim the greatness of the Lord and help all of us to rejoice in God our Savior!
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How did medieval audiences experience beauty in a work of art? Mary Carruthers argues that two obstacles have impeded scholarly accounts of this experience. First, Romanticism viewed the aesthetic as a charmed world constructed by the artist’s imagination, playing free of cultural conventions. An audience, by suspending disbelief and submitting to the artwork, would be initiated into the world of the artist’s intention. Second, most scholarship mistakenly constricts this intention by a narrow account of the medieval imagination—and hence of medieval aesthetics—as concerned only with “divine, theological Beauty.” According to this account, medieval artefacts were conceived and experienced entirely in terms of “a pastorally motivated moral teaching.”

Such an approach (rather rationalist, I would add) makes artefacts fungible with purely informational messages. Early- and high-medieval architecture, visual arts, and worship are thus dissolved into congeries of pictographs, at once obscure (as coded belief systems), over-cluttered (a babble of messages), and banal (edifying or subversive of moral improvement). In Carruthers’s analysis, medieval aesthetics has been wrongly collapsed into a flat didacticism; scholars are so inclined to leap to divine Beauty that they neglect the medieval experience of beauty in sensory encounter with human artefacts.

Carruthers’s concerns ground her own de-theologized methodology. The medieval imagination indeed ascended from artificial to divine beauty, but Carruthers wishes us to attend to the first stage of this itinerary—medieval reflections on experiencing beauty in encountering the human artefact. “Human arts,” she claims, “were composed and experienced on the model of classical rhetoric,” wherefore “it is to rhetoric and not theology that one should go first to understand [the] character” of this experience. A rhetorical approach directs our focus not to some authorial intent to signify but to a triad of intentiones—that of the artist as rhetor, that of the artwork as rhetoric, and that of the audience as juror. Intentio is an intellectually informed bent of the will, more desire and orientation than conceptualization. The artefact’s is the most important intentio: it is less significance than persuasion, presenting not a charmed world but a play on the real world. Beauty is experienced in one’s pleasure-drawn inclination to consent to this artefact as a true statement about the world. Shaped by the artist’s intentio, the intentio of the artefact plays upon its jurors’ dispositions, “bending” their intentiones toward its own and leading them on a duc tus, a pleasurable journey that re-gathers the world into some new understanding. Beauty (pulchritudo) is etymologically and experimentally “skin deep,” she says, known in the persuasive experience of the artefact’s rhetoric of self-presentation.

In a flow of word studies, Carruthers explores medieval descriptions of this persuasion: the words dulcis, suavis, honestus, decorus, utilis, formosus—and, yes, pulcher—describe one’s experience of an artefact as pleasing and persuasive, one’s consent to its duc tus. What, then, did the medievals think made an object bea utifully persuasive? Often, it was its mixture of materials, colors, styles, and subjects. Not decadent, such post-Constantinian tastes reflected ideas about rhetorical diversity as medicinal. The varietas of an artefact rebalances the humors, dispositions, and affects of its audience: carved on a choir stall, a privy-squatting monk is neither a subversive marginal gloss nor a moral lesson but a prescription for laughter, restorative of the humoral balance that supports the will in prayer. But varietas also conduces to duc tus: the coruscating swirl of materials, colors, and images that adorns the Romanesque or Gothic church is not conspicuous consumption but a means whereby “the audience is fully drawn into the work.” Confronted with “so much beauty” in the “House of God,” wrote one Theophilus in 1120, “the human eye is not able to consider on what work first to fix its gaze.” The walls are a “kind of paradise,” and at the center is the “representation of the Lord’s Passion,” whereby one is brought to compunction (compungitur). Always excessive, the donus Dei escapes domestication or mastery by its audience—and so, failing as a rationalist sign, it succeeds superibly as a rhetorical persuasion.

While upending old modes of evaluation, Carruthers’s book sometimes suffers from a coruscation that, being textual rather than visual, can feel directionless and without thesis. She also brushes against (without discussing) the ascetical bent of medieval rhetorical duc tus: for the medievals, a balanced intentio is rooted in Christ, just as Theophilus sets the Cross at the center of a paradisiacal varietas. It is by a duc tus echoing Christ that variety can regather the mind in balanced perfection rather than scatter it in dissipation. Yet earthly beauty is not here reduced to a bare sign. For (as Carruthers briefly suggests) the rhetorical triad echoes divine creation: for Augustine, God’s intentio patterns the created order after His Wisdom, so that creatures’ intentiones are partial echoes of His own. The Christian, regathering these intentiones around the sweet rhetoric of Christ, is bent again toward the life of God. This permits human artefacts also to be granted their proper intentio even within a theological interpretation. We can see the varietas of an edifice like the New Cathedral of Saint Louis, Missouri, not as an archaic misstep of liturgical excess, but as a beautiful duc tus re-presenting the beauty of earth. It speaks of God, not by becoming a rationalistic sign of distant divine Beauty, but as a persuasive regathering of His own rhetorical glory.

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Endnotes
1 Carruthers, 8.
2 Ibid, 18.
3 Ibid, 49-54.
4 Ibid., 181.
5 Ibid., 193.
Gothic Style Suited to the Modern Age


Reviewed by Evan McWilliams

G eorge Frederick Bodley (1827–1907) was one of the most influential architects of the later nineteenth century, so it is surprising that no substantial modern publication covering his life and work existed until Michael Hall’s George Frederick Bodley and the Later Gothic Revival in Britain and America became available in late 2014. Hall has published on Bodley before, though never on the scale of the present book, and his years of research into not only the man but the larger social context in which he lived and worked have informed a truly stimulating, scholarly publication. George Frederick Bodley is not a biography, nor is it an analysis of built works; it is both of these, with the addition of the often-missing but truly essential element of context.

What Hall has set out to do is to place Bodley within the larger narrative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century design. The quote chosen to head the preface is clear: George Frederick Bodley was, during his own day, considered by some to be “the most distinguished architect of our time.” That he came to be known only to the “cognoscenti of the Victorian Society,” as noted architectural historian Gavin Stamp put it in his recent review of the book for Country Life, is, for Hall, a sin from which the established canon of nineteenth-century architecture needs redeeming. He has more than succeeded in this aim.

The desired reintegration of Bodley’s work is effectively structured, with the chapters being arranged largely chronologically. However, the approach is not merely to present a simple timeline but to set up the necessary background of Bodley’s personal philosophical and stylistic development, so that the works themselves come to speak a language rich with wider cultural nuance. Thus, chapters on Pre-Raphaelite architecture and Anglo-aestheticism tackle subjects as diverse as sacramentalism, sexual politics, and music. The integration, albeit necessarily brief, of concepts normally beyond the discourse of the average monograph make for a remarkably lucid understanding of Bodley’s buildings as living things rather than heaps of stones set one atop the other.

In addition to cultural analysis, Hall presents the practical side to Bodley’s practice. The discussion of associated craftsmen and building firms who made possible the works of an architect is seldom found, but Hall’s meticulous account of the involvement of others in Bodley’s vision of a refined Gothic style suited to the modern age demonstrates that no man, however creative, is capable of realizing such masterworks alone. The inevitable tensions involved in these partnerships make possible the works of an architect capable of realizing such masterworks alone. The inevitable tensions involved in these partnerships make for thought-provoking reading.

Perhaps even more captivating is the chapter “Principles of Design,” in which the fundamental ideas that informed Bodley’s practice are set out. By asking the larger questions of intent and meaning, Hall provides a structure of ideas into which Bodley’s works individually may be grafted. One is enabled to envisage how an abstract idea such as “breadth,” “variety,” or “refinement” may produce a building as glorious as the memorial Holy Angels, Hoar Cross, or as austere as the monastic church of Saint John the Evangelist, Oxford. Bodley was also the first architect of the National Episcopalian Cathedral in Washington, D.C. In going beyond the tangible to the largely intangible thought-world of Bodley himself, Hall has done a great service to the reader. No building by Bodley will ever look quite the same to one who has taken in such thoughtful discourse.

No work of this quality would be complete without copious illustrations, and Hall has indulged the reader’s curiosity by providing both excellent photographs of extant works and fascinating renderings of unbuilt projects. Plan drawings are provided for major works as well, and this exceedingly practical addition goes far toward making the written analysis that much more clear. Occasionally one wishes for more illustrations, but such additions, however interesting, would have made an already-large book (at 508 pages) completely unwieldy.

As it stands, George Frederick Bodley and the Later Gothic Revival in Britain and America may be considered one of the finest monographs on any English architect produced in a very long time. It compares very favourably with Geoffrey Brandwood’s Temple Moore: An Architect of the Late Gothic Revival (Paul Watkins Publishing, 1997) and Anthony Symonds’s Sir Ninian Comper: An Introduction to His Life and Work (Spire Books, 2006). All lovers of the architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would be remiss in not having Mr. Hall’s book on their shelves.

Evan McWilliams (MA, Architectural History, Savannah College of Art and Design) is currently completing his PhD at the University of York on a topic related to the late Gothic Revival.
The flood of new scholarship on Spanish Rome in the early modern world is certainly impressive if not somewhat bewildering, particularly since Elias Tormo’s two-volume *Monumentos de españoles en Rona* (1940) generated very little interest on the topic. Yet within the last fifteen years, many scholars have brought to light the rich contribution that the Spanish nation and community in Rome have brought to the Eternal City, making the subject ripe for further examination. Jack Freiberg’s wonderful new book, *Bramante’s Tempietto, the Roman Renaissance, and the Spanish Crown*, makes the compelling case that Spanish patronage in papal Rome in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries resulted in some of the city’s most important architectural commissions, culminating in Bramante’s extraordinary Tempietto. Described by Fra Mariano da Firenze in his Rome guide of 1517 as a “large marble ciborium embellished with columns,” Bramante’s diminutive temple marked what was believed at the time to have been the site of Peter’s crucifixion. Situated in the first cloister of the Franciscan monastery of San Pietro in Montorio on the Janiculum Hill, the Tempietto is an exemplary monument that has received widespread admiration throughout history, even though—as Freiberg argues—its association with the Spanish nation has largely been overlooked. Built under the Borgia papacy of Alexander VI (a Spaniard from Játiva near Valencia) and commissioned by the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel in 1502 on the tenth anniversary of the conquest of the kingdom of Granada and inaugural explorations of the New World, Bramante’s Tempietto is a powerful symbol of Spanish political and spiritual ambition. Freiberg’s excellent book, then, reframes the Tempietto from the perspective of cultural politics, situating it within a vast web of Spanish associations that extends far beyond the structure’s seductive architectural form.

This book appears at the quincentennial of the death of Donato Bramante (1444–1514), and though centered on the Tempietto, it also considers the Roman churches of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and San Pietro in Montorio, where Spanish interests were highly concentrated. Yet Spanish patronage in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries extended far beyond the immediate reigns of Ferdinand and Isabel, or the Borgia papacies of Callixtus III and Alexander VI. They embraced ancient rulers like Hadrian, whose family came from southern Spain. His villa just outside of Tivoli was the site of several excavations during the papacy of Alexander VI, and as Freiberg notes, “The Hadrianic architectural model provided the opportunity to draw a connection between the Tempietto and Spain’s imperial heritage traced to the reign of a Spanish emperor who had advanced the authority of Rome and was believed to have assisted the spiritual progress of the Empire toward Christiani ty.” Several ancient Roman monuments that would have inspired the Tempietto in form and iconography are also examined, including the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, whose dedicated Sibyl (Albunea) was linked to Christian prophecy. According to legend, she had envisioned the coming of Christ during the reign of the “pacific bull” (Augustus, who established the Pax Romana). Pope Alexander VI changed his family escutcheon when assuming the chair of Peter, replacing an agrarian ox with a peaceful bull. In this sense the Catholic monarch Ferdinand could be seen as a Renaissance Augustus charged with instituting the *pax Christiana*.

Christian sources for the Tempietto are discussed as well, including the Roman examples of Santa Costanza, Santo Stefano Rotondo, the mausoleum of Theodoric the Great in Ravenna (who ruled in Spain as regent for his grandson, the Visigoth prince Almacaric), the Holy Sepulchre complex and Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and even Brunelleschi’s dome for the cathedral in Florence. All of these support the claim that the Tempietto—in its centralized plan, peripteral colonnade, and dome raised upon a drum—was fundamentally a Christian martyrium, a synthetic structure that fused elements of classical and Christian architecture to honor the site of Peter’s martyrdom and proclaim the political and spiritual aspirations of Spain’s Catholic monarchs. It follows, then, that nearly every aspect of the Tempietto’s architecture and decoration assumes new significance in Christian reinvention. The Doric columns, decorated metopes, shell niches, balusters, and geometric pavement on the chapel’s interior all contribute to reinforce the perception of the structure as a symbol of triumph. In legacy too, the Tempietto leaves a lasting mark on Western culture that far exceeds its conventional stereotype as the jewel of Renaissance Rome, as it became the source of much imitation, not just in Italy but in Counter-Reformation Europe as well. In paintings, engravings, portrait medals, ephemeral displays, and tabernacles, the image of the Tempietto was regularly enlisted to represent the Church and Catholic victory.

More than anything, Freiberg’s book reveals how Bramante’s celebrated monument to the Petrine origins of the Roman Church is situated at the center of a coordinated program of arts that exalted Spain’s role in the quest for Christian hegemony. *Bramante’s Tempietto, the Roman Renaissance, and the Spanish Crown* is a work so rich in scholarship that it leaves the reader begging for more—more text, more images, more color, and certainly more on Spanish Rome.

From the Publishing Houses


Ignatius Press has begun the project of putting together a Collected Works series of the writings of Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI). This volume is the first to be published and brings together his writings on the liturgy. He himself expressed a desire for it to be the first published, because, as quoted in the introduction, “The liturgy of the Church has been for me since my childhood the central reality of my life, and it became the center of my theological efforts.” The collection begins with the full text of The Spirit of the Liturgy, followed by numerous articles, homilies, and other writings that explore the history and significance of the liturgy, as well as recommendations for celebrating it today.


Throughout the two millenia that have passed since Christ’s death, the Church has preserved many relics believed to have been associated with his life and Passion. The locations of these relics have become pilgrimage sites and they are enshrined in beautiful reliquaries and churches. Each section of this book is dedicated to a different relic, describing its history, current location, and scientific studies investigating its authenticity. Well-known objects and sites, such as the Shroud of Turin and the Shrine of the Holy Sepulchre, are included, as well as less well-known objects, such as the Tunic of Argenteuil and the Holy Coat of Trier.


This collection of essays explores the urban history of the city of Rome. From its foundation in the eighth century BC, the organization of public space within the city has been integral to its identity. The book focuses on five periods—Antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, and Modern—and finishes with three essays on contemporary perspectives and debates.


This book is an enlightening study of the Rococo art and spirituality that spread throughout Europe and South America in the eighteenth century. Gauvin Alexander Bailey attempts to address misconceptions about the Rococo, such as its seeming lack of a spiritual basis and its excessive decadence. He traces the artistic movement’s beginnings in France and subsequent spread to other countries while showing that there was a parallel development and spread of populist French spiritual writings at the time. Incorporating several case studies, this book shows that the Rococo was much more than an aesthetic style.
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