We need a new Counter-Reformation in sacred art and architecture. What was the Reformation’s effect? First, it preached iconoclasm, the rejection of the human figure in religious art. Second, it reoriented worship, so that people gathered round the pulpit rather than the altar and the baptismal font became more important than the tabernacle. At the same time, it lessened the distinction between the clergy and the laity, creating more equality and decreasing hierarchy.

Third, the Reformation taught a functionalist view of worship, rejecting anything “unnecessary.” The altar should not have anything on it, for example, and churches should be designed according to seating capacity, with sight lines like a theater. Fourth, it elevated the quotidian over the sacred. Churches are thought of more as meeting houses than sacred places. They’re designed to be intimate rather than awesome.

These churches did not, to put it another way, express the Terribilità, the awesomeness of God. What have we been living through for the past sixty years? A second reformation, only this one came from within. All four of those points characterize mainstream Catholic church building since 1960.

And what do we need in response? A second counter-reformation. One that learns from the first Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries how to make a creative and serious response to the iconoclasm, functionalism, egalitarianism, and “quotidianism” of our time.

The New Counter-Reformation

And not just in our church-building and our ideas of church architecture. In the Counter-Reformation bishops were commanded to return to their dioceses and to take care of their flock, to become the chief teachers of the diocese. Priests were to celebrate mass daily, laity go to mass and receive Communion more often, and better preaching and more confession were promoted. Eucharistic adoration was emphasized through the joining of the tabernacle to the altar, as well as the forty-hours devotion. There was a new emphasis on catechesis and education, including the invention of the seminary for the training of priests.

These developments pushed the Church to renew her commitment to making her churches and her liturgies as beautiful as the Faith itself. She employed art, architecture, music, and liturgy to draw all to the church and then to uplift their minds to those things that are eternal. Elizabeth Lev brilliantly tells the story of Counter-Reformation Art in her new book, *How Catholic Art Saved the Faith: The Triumph of Beauty and Truth in Counter-Reformation Art.*

We need an architecture today that can do the same in response to the second reformation. It must symbolize the antiquity, universality, and beauty of the Church, as Vignola’s Gesu and Palladio’s Redentore did in the sixteenth century. This will mean an employment of art and architecture that is evangelistic and catechetical. Buildings that are icons on the outside, large and beautiful, with warm yet awe-inspiring interiors that are foci of the community. Churches must express for modern people the Terribilità.

We need a recovery of ancient principles and a restoration of what is timeless and classic. The basilica form and the baldacchino, for example, as well as altar rails, side altars and shrines, solemn confessional, a place set aside for baptism, and saints buried beneath the altar or relics visible for veneration.

The sanctuary should be set apart, raised up to be the most beautiful part of the church. It should be the focus and the identity, liturgically and devotionally.

We need to revive the iconographic program, the creation of a narrative within the whole building. We can’t settle for the “America formula” of a crucifix above the altar, Mary on the left, and Saint Joseph on the right. Churches need to be like a good book that can be re-read, like a good symphony listened to over and over, with new things always seen or discovered.

That means the commissioning of custom art should be a priority: durable and high-quality materials shaped by highly skilled craftsman and top-quality artists and architects who can employ inventiveness in developing the tradition. No copies or regurgitation. No off the shelf statues. New paintings, sculptures, mosaics, and murals push the artists to develop new and authentic ways of expressing the timeless truths.

Not Antiquarian

This does not mean antiquarianism, employing a particular style, or trying to go back to a golden age, whether the 1950s or a Romantic notion of the Middle Ages, as wonderful as those times were. It means creating churches that are traditional yet contemporary, universal yet local, Roman yet catholic—both/and, not either/or. Churches that combine unity with diversity and learn from the local character, express modern saints, and inventively develop the tradition.

Like the great artists and architects of the Counter-Reformation, we must once again promote the faith of the Catholic Church through beauty.
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Sacred Architecture News

New Tower, Westminster Abbey
In June, Westminster Abbey gained its first major addition since 1745. A new seven-story stair tower by historic preservationist Ptolemy Dean leads into the abbey’s triforium (a gallery above the arches of the nave, choir, or transepts), whose view twentieth-century poet John Betjeman called “the best in Europe.” The design is based on a motif found in the abbey and is built out of leaded glass windows. The triforium was previously used for storage, but now houses the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Galleries, designed by McInnis Usher McKnight Architects. The galleries were designed to take advantage of natural light in a way that prevents damage to the artifacts. The stair cost $23 million and the whole project $40 million.

Saint Jude Church was dedicated in Fredericksburg, Virginia, on July 14, 2018.

Out of the Funeral Home, Virginia
Saint Jude Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, was dedicated in a Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael F. Burbidge on July 14. The church, which seats 750 and cost $10 million, was designed by O’Brien and Keane Architects and built by Whitener & Jackson, Inc. The altar contains first-class relics of the twelve apostles. The church is the parishioners’ first after fifteen years of celebrating Mass in a funeral home chapel and various retail locations. Of the church’s design, pastor Fr. James Hudgins commented, “We wanted to demonstrate that our faith is enduring, iconic—it’s something that our ancestors would recognize and our children will be proud of.”

Armenian Saint’s Statue, Vatican Gardens
Pope Francis blessed a new bronze statue of Saint Gregory of Narek in the Vatican Gardens. The Pope had named the tenth-century Armenian monk a doctor of the Church in 2015. The short ceremony included a gospel reading, a prayer composed by Saint Gregory, and Armenian hymns. Present at the ceremony were Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, Armenian Apostolic Catholicos Karekin II and Aram of Cilicia, and Armenian Catholic Patriarch Gregoire Pierre XX of Ghabroyan of Cilicia. Before the ceremony, the Pope met and exchanged gifts with the president and the Catholicos.

Marrying Outside the Church, Baltimore
On Valentine’s Day (also Ash Wednesday) 2018, the Archdiocese of Baltimore began a twelve-month trial period in which couples may wed outside churches—though not in casinos, bars, and nightclubs, or on boats. They must notify the priest at least six months before the wedding. The priest then takes the request to the archdiocese for approval. The archdiocese’s chancellor, Dianne Barr, says the new policy is meant to encourage couples to continue participating in the Church’s sacramental life.

Homily at Chartres
Robert Cardinal Sarah offered a Pontifical High Mass at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres following the annual Paris-Chartres Pilgrimage. Over 15,000 pilgrims were said to participate in the pilgrimage. In his homily, Cardinal Sarah encouraged the pilgrims to look at the cathedral: “Your ancestors built it to proclaim their faith. Everything, in its architecture, its sculpture, its windows, proclaims the joy of being saved and loved by God. Your ancestors were not perfect, they were not without sins. But they wanted to let the light of faith illuminate their darkness.”
A computer rendering of Saint Boniface Catholic Church converted into condominiums

**Church Into Condos, Chicago**
The Chicago Plan Commission has approved the transformation of the vacant 116-year-old Saint Boniface Catholic Church into condominiums. The plan, spearheaded by Stas Development and Space Architects + Planners, saved the church from being demolished. The plan includes partitioning the interior of the church into seventeen condominiums. The arched windows and exterior limestone columns will remain, while the towers and thirty-five-foot ceilings will be incorporated into penthouses. Frescoes and graffitii will be used as decoration in common areas. Prices for the units are expected to exceed those of Chicago’s Noble Square.

**New Church, Oklahoma**
The new church of Saint Francis Xavier in Stillwater, Oklahoma, was dedicated in a March 11th Mass that drew 1,100 people. The church and its parish hall, administrative offices, educational wing, and youth center were designed by Franck & Lohsen Architects and built for $22 million. The nave seats 676 with 141 additional seats in the choir. “We built this place to last for a very long time — not just to maintain the Catholic presence in Stillwater … to maintain and grow,” said the pastor, Fr. Brian O’Brien. “There are a lot of people in the area who grew up Catholic who now go to a different church or don’t go to church at all, so the idea is we have this place.” Although the church does not have stained glass windows, he said they plan to acquire them over the next few years. The church houses first-class relics of Bl. Fr. Stanley Rother, an Oklahoma priest beatified in 2017. The first church was built in 1899 for $645.

**Disposing of Churches, Vatican**
In November, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Culture, the Italian Bishops’ Conference, and the Gregorian University in Rome will host an international conference entitled, “Does God not live here anymore? Disposal of places of worship and integrated management of ecclesiastical cultural assets.” The conference aims to provide guidelines for revitalizing and repurposing abandoned church buildings to avoid their being misused and falling into disrepair. Gianfranco Cardinal Ravasi, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, said, “One cannot enter indifferently into a space that still breathes the wreaths of incense and preserves the echo of liturgical songs.”

**Japan’s Hidden Christians**
UNESCO has added to the World Heritage list twelve sites connected to the history of the “hidden Christians” in Japan, particularly those who were persecuted under the Tokugawa shogunate from 1630 to 1867. The sites in southwestern Japan include Nagasaki’s Oura Cathedral, built in 1864 in memory of seventeen Japanese Christians and nine European priests who were crucified. Ten sites are Christian villages along the coast or on remote islands where Christians secretly maintained the faith despite intense persecution — villages portrayed in the recent movie *Silence*. Local celebrations attended by hundreds included setting off firecrackers and chanting ancestral prayers. Emiko Yoshimura, leader of the congregation at the Sakitsu Church, stated, “They cast a spotlight on predecessors who kept their faith. I was able to witness a great day.”

**Saint Francis Xavier Church**
Saint Francis Xavier Church was dedicated in Stillwater, Oklahoma, on March 11, 2018, built not just to maintain but to grow the Catholic presence there.

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**News**

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Green Cemetery, Washington, D.C.
The Archdiocese of Washington partnered with the Nature Conservancy and the Washington, D.C., Department of Energy and the Environment in a green infrastructure project at Mount Olivet Cemetery. The bioretention project involved replacing the cemetery’s unused roads with gardens that capture stormwater and prevent it from reaching the Anacostia River. The director of the D.C. Department of Energy and the Environment noted that religious institutions own some of the biggest pieces of land in the area and he hoped this would be the first of many cooperative green projects.

From Crystal to Christ, California
Christ Cathedral, known as the Crystal Cathedral when it was the home of televangelist Robert Schuller, will be dedicated on July 17, 2019. Major renovations are needed to make the building more suitable for Mass. Los Angeles-based architecture firm Johnson Fain and contractor Snyder Langston are leading the renovations, which are estimated at $72 million. The Diocese bought the campus in 2012 for $57 million. In anticipation of the dedication, Bishop Kevin Vann of the Diocese of Orange County has declared a “Holy Year of Preparation.” The year will give the diocese’s 1.5 million Catholics “an opportunity to participate in this historic endeavor in a tangible way.” Vann encouraged Catholics to spend the next year attending Eucharistic adoration, offering their sufferings for the souls in Purgatory, and going to daily Mass.

New Outdoor Altar at Fatima
The Shrine of Fatima in Portugal received an outdoor altar as part of the celebrations for the centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three peasant children in 1917. The altar was designed by Paula Santos Arquitectura with interventions by João Mendes Ribeiro, Fernanda Fragateiro, and Filip Moroder, who created the image of Christ behind the altar. The structure includes a 600-square-meter fiberglass roof cantilevered over the altar. Below the altar are a sacristy and a chapel. The architect said it has “a grand scenographic importance in a sacred place.” Other changes were made at the same time, including better handicapped access to the old basilica.

Dominicans Create New Church for Students, Virginia.
The Dominican Friars of Saint Thomas Aquinas University Parish in Charlottesville, Virginia, broke ground on a new church that will seat 1200. Replacing a 1995 Newman Center that was starting to fall apart, the church will serve the Catholic students of the University of Virginia. The design, chosen to fit in with the university’s historic architecture, was designed by Cram + Ferguson Architects and Train Architects and is being built by Alexander Nicholson for $11 million. The pastor, Fr. Joseph Barranger, stated: “Students are elevated by what is beautiful. We tell the story of our faith through the building itself, as churches did for centuries.” The new church is planned to open in fall 2019.

A rendering of the new church in Charlottesville, Virginia

A new bronze statue of Saint Louis Bertrand was installed at a namesake church in Louisville, Kentucky. The statue, an original, was designed by Mazzolini Artcraft. Drawing from Christian iconography, the statue portrays Louis holding a crucifix with a gun handle and a chalice full of snakes. These symbols refer to two failed attempts on the saint’s life. Saint Louis, a Dominican, was a missionary sometimes called the Apostle of South America.

The new outdoor altar stands in front of the basilica at Fatima.

A new bronze statue of Saint Louis Bertrand was installed at a namesake church in Louisville, Kentucky. The statue, an original, was designed by Mazzolini Artcraft. Drawing from Christian iconography, the statue portrays Louis holding a crucifix with a gun handle and a chalice full of snakes. These symbols refer to two failed attempts on the saint’s life. Saint Louis, a Dominican, was a missionary sometimes called the Apostle of South America.

Donald Cardinal Wuerl blesses the completed cemetery grounds.

Archbishop Michael Jackson and Assistant Commissioner Pat Leahy present the recovered relic of Saint Laurence O’Toole.

Saint’s Heart Found, Dublin
The 800-year-old preserved heart of Dublin’s patron saint, Saint Laurence O’Toole, was found undamaged in a park by Irish police. The heart was stolen from Christ Church Cathedral in 2012 when the thief cut the bars of the iron cage enclosing the small wooden reliquary. A spokeswoman for the Anglican cathedral said, “It’s completely bizarre. They didn’t touch anything else. They specifically targeted this, they wanted the heart of Saint Laurence O’Toole.” The thief lit two candles on an altar before leaving.
Original Lamb Revealed, Ghent

Restoration work on the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck—also known as “The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb”—has removed 500-year-old overpainting on the lamb. Forty-five percent of the original altarpiece had been painted over in the sixteenth century, and restoration began in 2012. The overpainted lamb “neutralized Van Eyck’s intense and humanized identification of the lamb into an expressionless animal, seemingly unaffected by what was about to come,” explained a professor of art at Ghent University. Van Eyck’s original lamb has “large, frontal eyes with which it intensely involves the spectator at the ultimate sacrificial scene.”

Sheen’s Remains, New York and Peoria

The Superior Court of New York has again ruled in favor of Joan Sheen Cunningham’s request to have the remains of her uncle, Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen, transferred from the Cathedral of Saint Patrick in New York City to the Cathedral of Saint Mary in Peoria, Illinois. The judge noted that his “final resting place would not have been his final concern.” Sheen had served as an altar boy and was ordained in Peoria. The Diocese of Peoria hoped the transfer would be “the next step towards bringing Venerable Archbishop Sheen’s beatification to completion.” The Archdiocese of New York will appeal.

New Abbey, California

The Abbey of Our Lady of New Clairvaux in Vina, California, was dedicated in a private ceremony in July 2018. Designed by the late David Richen, the church took twenty-five years to complete and cost approximately $3.5 million. It incorporated stones from the chapter house of the twelfth-century Spanish Cistercian Monastery of Santa María de Óvila. Newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst brought the stones to California in 1931 to use in his private residence, but they were later abandoned in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park and given to the abbey in 1994.

Choir Restored, Spain

The fifteenth-century New Cathedral of Plasencia in western Spain restored its choir. The sixty-seven-seat choir was built by sixteenth-century sculptor Rodrigo Alemán using over a thousand carved pieces of walnut. Historic preservationists Kalam carried out the restoration work, which included disassembling, laser cleaning, removing waxes and non-original finishes, applying protective varnish, and reassembling each of the pieces. The restoration took sixteen months to complete. The thirteenth-century Old Cathedral next door now houses a museum.

Historic Lutheran Church Can Be Repaired, Milwaukee

In May 2018, the oldest Lutheran church in Milwaukee was gutted by fire during construction work on the roof. Although there were no injuries, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church’s roof and one of its spires collapsed. The damage is estimated at $13 million. Engineers have determined that the structure is stable enough for reconstruction and does not have to be demolished. The church was founded by German immigrants in 1847 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.
Institute Saves Church, Chicago
The Shrine of Christ the King, located in Chicago’s Woodlawn neighborhood, received a new roof after three years of being exposed to the elements. The Shrine, a 1923 church designed by Henry Schlacks, lost its roof in a fire in 2015. At first considered for demolition, the church was deeded to the Institute of Christ the King for its repair. The congregation raised $2.2 million that the National Fund for Sacred Spaces and the National Trust for Historic Preservation matched with a grant of $250,000. There are no reports on when Masses will resume inside the church.

Historic Church Restored, London
The church of Corpus Christi in London’s Covent Garden district reopened during a week of celebrations, concluding in a Pontifical High Mass celebrated by Vincent Cardinal Nichols and a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament in Covent Garden. The church, built in 1874 and renovated over the last five years, was the first English church to be dedicated to Corpus Christi after the Protestant Reformation. Cardinal Nichols called the newly reopened church “a glimpse of heaven and an embrace of God’s mercy, peace and calmness in the midst of a busy city.”

The Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist
in Norwich, United Kingdom, has received a new cathedra designed by London-based Russell Taylor Architects. The cathedra—the bishop’s chair—is a classical chair with arms in the shape of volutes and a high back crowned with a broken segmental pediment. The diocesan arms are carved into the back of the chair and gilded. The black Frosterley marble and Ancaster limestone used in the chair are the same types of stone used throughout the cathedral and its recent additions.

Altars - Stained Glass
Design - Interior Painting
Mosaic - Liturgical Furniture
Pews - Custom Statuary

Vincent Cardinal Nichols and sacred ministers kneel in the renovated sanctuary of Corpus Christi in London.

A new bronze altar by sculptor Federico Severino was dedicated at Santa Maria ad Martyres (the Pantheon) on May 13, 2018, the 1409th anniversary of the Pantheon’s dedication as a Catholic church.
Martyrs’ Church Dedicated, Egypt
The Church of the Martyrs of Faith and Homeland in the village of al-Our, Egypt, was dedicated on February 15, 2018, the third anniversary of the execution of twenty-one Egyptian Copts in Libya. Thirteen of the martyrs came from this village. The dedication was led by Bishop Benvnotious, Coptic Orthodox Bishop of Samalout. The church, which has a traditional Coptic tower, was built by the engineers of the Egyptian Armed Forces and paid for by the Egyptian government. The ground floor, which will eventually contain the martyrs’ remains, has a library, a reception room, and rooms for social services. The chapel is on the upper floor. As he anointed the altar, Bishop Benvnotious called the martyrs “an example for us to hold on to our faith and to Christ regardless of the circumstances.”

The new Church of the Martyrs of Faith and Homeland in al-Our, Egypt, is dedicated to the twenty-one Copts martyred in February 2015.

The Councils’ Popes, Rome
An art exhibit in the Capitoline museums in Rome entitled “The Popes of the Councils in the Modern Era: Art, History, Religiousness and Culture” displays thirty pieces paying homage to the popes of the last three Church councils: Pope Paul III for the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Pius IX for the First Vatican Council (1869), and the recently canonized Pope Paul VI for the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Bible Museum, Washington, D.C.
The Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., opened in November 2017, built at a cost of $254 million. The 430,000-square-foot museum was designed by SmithGroupJJR and built by Clark Construction Group. Permanent exhibitions are housed in the 1923 former Terminal Refrigerating and Warehouse Co. building. A curvilinear roof addition made of glass and steel provides views of the National Mall and other Washington landmarks. The museum includes three floors of permanent exhibitions, research laboratories, libraries, a lecture hall, a theater, a ballroom, visiting scholar residences, classrooms, offices, and a rooftop garden and restaurant.

Teenage Converts, World
A study commissioned by a British evangelization research group found that visiting churches is one of the top reasons teenagers in England decide to convert to Christianity. Thirteen percent cited their visits to churches, sometimes as part of school trips, as the reason for their conversion. That percentage outnumbered those who converted because of youth groups, attending weddings, and speaking with other Christians. The report explained that “The influence of a church building was more significant than attending a youth group, going to a wedding, or speaking to other Christians about their faith.” A Church of England bishop explained the results: “[Church buildings] give a sense of stability and also the sense that the Christian faith has inspired people to build these extraordinary buildings.”
Daprato Rigali Studios craftmanship creates a focused design to emphasize the Church’s source and summit.

Marble has been in use within churches and temples for many centuries due its durable, classic and aesthetic qualities. Since the 20th century, Daprato Rigali Studios has specialized in various types of marble fabrication, alteration and restoration, creating custom marble works catered to your vision.

St. Vincent de Paul church, Fort Wayne, IN
The men who built the cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres did not have diesel engines, or lightweight metals like soft aluminum or firm titanium, or steel girders. The men who built Europe’s greatest Gothic church did not have cranes that could tower a hundred feet in the air without toppling, while lifting pre-formed blocks of concrete. They did not have computer models. They did not have the calculus. Most of them assuredly could not read.

They had to fit stones atop one another precisely to be both balanced and beautiful, and that meant that the stones had to be cleanly and accurately dressed, shaved with saws, cut to fit. Their carpenters had to know how to build safe scaffolding from the hewn trunks of hardwood trees, to soar ten or twelve stories in the air, supporting the men who, with sledges and pulleys and main strength, set in place the stones of lovely arches, springing on each side at exactly the same oblique angle from the pillars beneath, to intersect one another at a point clinched by the keystone.

Art and Craft

It is not enough to say that Chartres Cathedral is a great work of art. A sketch by Rembrandt is a great work of art. A single rib of a single pillar at Chartres is a great work of craftsmanship. A single panel of one of the lesser stained glass windows along the nave gives us art at its finest. Chartres is a magnificent symphony of countless works of sculpture, glazing, tiling, carpentry, masonry—and poetry and theology too.

It is more than a museum or a collection. In a museum, one work is displayed next to another because it happens to have been created by the same person or in the same country or at around the same time. But every work in Chartres has to do with every other.

I would say that there is nothing like it in the world, except that in fact there are things like it—all the other great cathedrals of the Middle Ages are like it, all over Europe; and thousands of churches, too, some of them the special churches for orders of priests, like Santa Maria Novella, the Dominican church in Florence, and some of them just the principal church for a small town or a village. At the Great Exposition, every entry boasted an inventor, but if you visit many an old church in Europe, you will see frescoes or sculptures created by “the Master of Anytown,” whose name no one knows.

What is it that people believe to be most important in our common life on earth? If you went to the Great Exposition, you might suppose that the most important thing is to make machines that turn things, so as to work other machines, to do things we want them to do, or to make things we want them to make. If you went to Chartres, you would not need to suppose, you would simply and readily perceive that the most important thing was to sing with the Psalmist, “I rejoiced when I heard them say, Let us go up to the house of the Lord.”

Drab or Garish

In C.S. Lewis’s fantastical novel That Hideous Strength, when the planet-traveler Ransom prepares to greet old Merlin the mage from Arthurian times, he dons a long red and gold robe. That surprises his friends, but he reminds them that in all other times but our own, “drab was not a favorite color.”

Drab is a favorite color in our day; its companion is garish. I defy any of my contemporaries to name one style of public building that is not now either drab or garish.

Our churchmen have gone along with the movement, mostly drab, but sometimes garish, as witness the big childish banners blaring out a favorite comforting verse (never “It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God”), the glad-handing ceremonies of greeting and peace-wishing, and the priest more comfortable joshing with the attendees than praying with people who are, as he is, as we all are, on the inevitable journey to the grave and in dire need of the grace of God.

When my daughter and I were in Sweden, we stopped in many a rural church built during the Middle Ages and then subjected to artistic reforms.
afterward. Sometimes I saw shadows that looked like water stains emerging through the plaster of the ceilings. I began to suspect that they were not stains or tricks of the light. When I asked a minister about them, he confirmed my suspicion.

Many fresco paintings were whitewashed away in the so-called Enlightenment. It was that same Enlightenment, in its sanguinary French eruption, that smashed priceless stained glass windows in churches and cathedrals across the country. “Four fifths of [man’s] greatest art,” said Henry Adams, was created in those supposedly dark days, to the honor of Jesus and Mary. The Enlightenment destroyed more great art than it produced, and what the harbingers of the *novus ordo saeclorum* did not get around to destroying they slandered.

There was, however, a generally healthy revival of Gothic art and architecture in the nineteenth century, thanks to the efforts of men like A. W. N. Pugin and John Ruskin. When Catholics immigrated to the United States from Italy, France, Germany, Ireland, and Portugal, they did not aim to build trapezoidal meeting houses with clear windows and no representations of the history of salvation. They aimed to build *churches*, and they achieved that aim.

I have seen an inscription on the façade of a Portuguese church in New Bedford reading, in Latin, “The workmen of Saint Anthony’s built this to the glory of God.” I do not think that the inscription implied that they only paid for the construction. They did hire a master builder, but the men did the work—with their hands, their sweat, at risk of life and limb. And these were not rich industrialists but fishermen.

In my home town in central Pennsylvania, the church-builders were Irish coal miners, and they built their Saint Thomas Aquinas Church in Romanesque style, pooling their funds to hire an Italian painter who had done some work on the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington. He came to lowly Archbald, Pennsylvania, and filled the church with paintings, nave and sanctuary, walls and ceiling.

My boyhood church was beautiful. Then came the rage for the drab and the garish, and a good deal of that original beauty was obliterated, spoiled, or pulverized—at considerable expense.
**Drab the Enemy**

Drab, with garish its cousin, is our enemy. Does anyone go to visit the modern neighborhoods of Rome, built in drab? Does anyone take pictures of a new police station or a new post office? The most prominent features of the new county courthouse where we live are enormous glass “walls,” so that you can see into empty waiting rooms and hallways, and a sheltered area surmounted with a big metal fence and rolls of barbed wire.

Our young people are not only starved for nature. They are starved for beauty. Everywhere they turn, their eyes fall upon what is drab or garish: their schools, the fast-food joint, a baseball stadium, and, of course, their churches.

I have seen, in Catholic churches, minimalist Stations of the Cross that cannot even be recognized if you are more than a few feet away. The message they deliver is that the Stations are trivial. I have seen crosses that look as if a modernist Jesus were flying with wings outspread, like a theological pterodactyl. The message is that the Cross was a brief and unfortunate interlude. I have seen a baptismal font with bubbles. The message is that flashy technology is to be preferred before silence. I have seen beautifully tiled floors, their intricate cruciform patterns bespeaking careful and devoted craftsmanship, covered over with a plush red carpet, wall to wall, such as might be used in a whorehouse down on its luck. The message is that we are the newly rich, with bad taste.

It is long past time to get rid of everything ugly and stupid from our churches, most of it visited upon them since the great iconoclasm of the sixties. We must return to genuine art, art that stirs the imagination and pleases the eye, that entices the soul with beauty—even a dread beauty—before a single word of a sermon is uttered.

**Priceless Treasure**

“Where your treasure is,” says Jesus, “there will your heart lie also.” We can tell where a people’s heart lies by where they place their treasure.

In material terms we are by far the wealthiest generation of people who have ever lived on earth. Yet our original accomplishments in all of the arts are meager at best. Renaissance painting and sculpture, music and poetry, are what you get when a vigorous popular and learned tradition that had already been immensely creative meets again the classics of Greece and Rome. Modern art is what you get when you repudiate the people, the tradition, and the classics. Individuals are left to trade upon the stock of their native creativity alone, which is not going to be great.

Why would we care to make our churches beautiful when what goes on in them is slipshod and is not felt to be of even temporal consequence, let alone eternal? We do nothing in the week that is more significant than to serve God by prayer. That is a fact. We have forgotten it. Our hearts skip a beat when someone gives us a surprise ticket to the baseball game. Those same hearts plod along at their usual sluggish tempo when we dress for church.

So we end up with stadiums that will not last twenty years before the owners of the ball club demand new ones. Chartres Cathedral has been standing for eight hundred years.
WHEN WE BUILD,” JOHN RUSKIN FAMOUSLY REMARKED IN THE LAMP OF MEMORY, “LET IT NOT BE FOR PRESENT DELIGHTS NOR FOR PRESENT USE ALONE. LET IT BE SUCH WORK AS OUR DESCENDANTS WILL THANK US FOR, AND LET US THINK ... THAT MEN WILL SAY, AS THEY LOOK UPON THE LABOR AND THE WROUGHT SUBSTANCE OF THEM, ‘SEE! THIS OUR FATHERS DID FOR US!’”

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Beijing is undertaking a substantial restoration and renovation of its most famous church, the Xishiku North Cathedral, in a way that would have contented Ruskin’s sensibilities. Most commonly called Beitang, or “North Church,” the inspiring neo-Gothic church had been the seat of the bishop until 1958. It was turned into a kitchen during the Maoist Era, returned to the Catholic Church in 1985 during the rule of Deng Xiaoping, and is now among the city’s most revered historical treasures. (The extravagant bishop’s residence next door had been transformed into a school and largely gutted and redesigned.)

China’s authorities have decided that the church is so important to the cultural and historical legacy of Beijing that they have provided more than twenty-five million RMB (approximately four million USD) to restore and update the façade and interior. The church boasts the largest Catholic congregation in Beijing.

Scholars of Church history in China have been consulted in order to restore elements of the interior to colors and aesthetic as it first appeared in 1887. Several elements of the renovation are intended to “update the architectural theology of the church to better respond to the life of the Church in the twenty-first century,” noted Father Matthew Zhen Xuebin when we met in mid-January. The pastor of the church and director of the restoration project, he studied liturgical history at Saint John’s University in Minnesota, and was assigned by the ordinary of Beijing, Bishop Joseph Li Shan, to oversee the project.

History of Xishiku Beitang Cathedral

Beijing’s major Roman Catholic churches are more-or-less located in the four cardinal directions. North Church is named after the Holy Savior; South Church (the present cathedral) after the Immaculate Conception; West Church after Our Lady of Mount Carmel; and East Church after Saint Joseph.

Only Beitang survived the Boxer Rebellion during the summer of 1900. All the other Christian churches in the capital were razed, and only some were rebuilt. Local faithful commemorate Beitang’s towering Gothic façade as a testament to Christian survival and endurance during times of political and religious conflict. The first Beitang was erected slightly to the south of the present church, in an area called Canchikou.

It was completed in 1701 on property only a short walk from the Forbidden City, given to two French Jesuit missionaries by the formidable and pro-Western emperor, Kangxi (1654-1722). Charles de Belleville, SJ, (1657-1730) designed this first church in the manner of the Baroque mother church of the Society of Jesus in Rome, the Gesù, which was consecrated in 1584. Unlike the Gesù, it had no volutes or raised section in the center of the façade.

De Belleville, like many of the Jesuit builders in China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was both an architect and painter. The interior included sixteen engaged columns with Corinthian capitals, arched windows, and stunning paintings of the saints composed in the Western style.

In 1827, the first Beitang was demolished after being seized by a court official to add to his private estate. It was not rebuilt until 1867, when the French ecclesiastical architect Bernard Gustave Bourrières (1807-1867) was commissioned to rebuild it in a grander style. Bourrières’ design was decidedly Gothic, as the bishop requested.

Its façade featured two flanking towers, each with two layers of lancet windows and three dramatic pinnacles.
articles that lengthened the visual height of the church. The central gable above the main entrance was surmounted by a cross, and included three niches. A statue of Our Lady of Lourdes occupied the center niche.

The New Cathedral

Eight years after the imposing Gothic façade was consecrated, the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) informed the missionaries that she had decided to expand her retirement villa into the area where the cathedral then stood. After several rounds of negotiations, the next location of a new and even more majestic Beitang cathedral was settled a short distance north.

The builder of the new cathedral was the Lazarist missionary-architect, Alphonse Marie Favier, CM, (1837-1905) who promoted a caractère Français, or essential “Frenchness,” in the spirit of the Beaux Arts. Like so many European architects of the nineteenth century, he was influenced by the Gothic Revival movement largely inspired by the ideas of Augustus Pugin. When he arrived in China in 1870, he brought a strong preference for Gothic architecture, both as an eminently appropriate Christian aesthetic and a visual representation of “Frenchness.”

Favier intentionally exaggerated the Gothic elements of the previous Beitang. The portals and windows of the new church were more noticeably Gothic, adding generous ornament to accentuate its French appearance. The new façade included two towers flanking a tall gable ornamented with crockets, a large number of finial-capped pinnacles, arcades of finial-topped triffoil windows, a heavy-framed, spiked rose window, undecorated archivolts above each of the façade’s three portals, several niches, and gargoyles drain spouts. Favier’s Gothic edifice was stark contrast to the sloped roofs, bracketed beam construction, and Chinese-style latticed window structures that surrounded the towering cathedral.

Among the most controversial features of Western church design in China was the construction of tall towers. Catholic architects considered them necessary elements of a truly Christian edifice, but most native Chinese saw them as domineering symbols of Western conceit. When Alphonse Favier first designed his Beitang cathedral in 1886, China’s imperial authorities limited the height of the two Gothic zhonglou flanking the façade.

Even though the court authorities had signed an agreement on the height of Favier’s plans, once the church was finished the reality of their overshadowing presence was seen, and these same officials came from the palace to “register their protest for their height.” China’s sumptuary laws in 1886 proscribed architectural structures that contested the divine supremacy of the emperor, and Beitang’s new towers seemed to overshadow that prerogative.

In the end, the towers remained as they were, and after the Boxer Uprising (1898-1900) had ended, Bishop Favier was able to obtain permission to extend the towers to an even taller height. The Beitang façade seen today is the one completed in 1901, when the towers were extended to produce a more proportionally attractive façade, adorned with Gothic flourishes that are still admired.

Sinicized Gothic

Despite the cathedral’s recognizable Gothic appearance, when one more painstakingly observes Favier’s majestic façade, she or he discovers that the finials, crockets, and gargoyles more closely conform to Chinese temple design than French Gothic. In fact, I would describe the cathedral’s final design as Sino-Gothic, an admixture of Gothic Revival elements and Chinese details, such as dragon-like gargoyles.
Chinese architectural critics commend Favier’s inclusion of a traditional Chinese terrace (yuetai) in front of the cathedral’s three portals and two yellow-roofed Chinese pavilions (tingzi) displaying memorial stelae flanking the enormous Gothic façade. The front terrace’s balustrade (langan) was constructed with a native Chinese stone called baiyushi, or “white marble.”

Qinghua University architectural scholar Zhang Fuhe describes these Chinese features as a “strong contrast to the church’s Gothic form.” Another Chinese scholar, Zhang Youping, suggests that, “since Chinese materials were used and Chinese workers built it . . . when you look at [Beiting] one perceives its Chineseness.”

This is all to say that when Western architectural scholars describe Beiting’s aesthetic components they do so in Western terms; they view the church simply as an example of Gothic Revival design. Chinese scholars see in the church design a dominant Chinese-ness, more representative of late-imperial temple design than Western church styles.

In the end, Beiting’s architectural legacy embodies Sino-Western cultural exchange rather than a merely Western edifice on Chinese soil. It is precisely this aspect of the church’s design that appeals to Chinese Christian sentiments, and has motivated Beijing’s Catholic archdiocese and the state authorities to restore the church and preserve it for future generations of Chinese Catholic faithful.

Present Restorations

During my recent visit to the site of the cathedral and bishop’s residence, I was provided with a private tour of the entire complex by the rector Father Zhen and Father Simon Zhu Jie, vicar for external church affairs. When the church and bishop’s residence are both finished, Bishop Joseph Li Shan will move into what was originally built for the church’s architect, Bishop Alphonse Favier.

Father Zhen’s vision for the restoration both restores much of the cathedral’s original splendor, while simultaneously updating some of the church’s elements to better facilitate current needs. Every element has taken into serious consideration the values of proportion, use, and sympathy with its original architectural legacy.

Age-related problems had become so severe that repair and restoration had become a pressing matter by the early twenty-first century. The foundation had settled in areas, persistent leaks plagued several areas of the roof, and outdated electrical wiring had all
raised safety concerns as the church has continued to experience more, rather than less, Mass attendance in recent decades. As early as 2012, the Beijing Cultural Relics Bureau had already begun lobbying for major repairs and the restoration of the church, and in 2014 approval was granted to undertake the massive project.

As the work slowly revealed infrastructural elements, more problems than expected required attention. A number of rafters and purlins had rotted due to moisture. Father Zhen noted that as much as two-thirds of some of the rafters and purlins had decayed, and he told me how thankful he is that no-one was ever injured from a structural collapse.

As more and more structural problems were discovered, the costs accordingly increased, but were covered by state agencies. As it stands, all of the church’s structural problems have been resolved, and mostly cosmetic work and final touches remain before the church is restored to its status as the cathedral of the Archdiocese of Beijing. The discovery of painted murals badly in need of restoration proved so costly—estimated at more than twenty million RMB—they were carefully protected to await future attention.

Among Father Zhen’s innovations, which are all in good sympathy with the church’s original Gothic aesthetic, is an entirely new scheme of stained glass windows. Favier’s original windows did not contain images, so this is the first time the church windows display what Father Zhen calls “a catechism in glass.” The newly installed windows, designed and created in collaboration with experts in Hong Kong, trace the history of the birth of the Church, its growth in the West, its movement into China, and finally the history of China’s Catholic Church to the modern era.

The Glass and the Façade

If one is facing the altar, the new stained glass windows to the left illustrate the origin of Christianity, the crucifixion of Saint Peter, and the history of the Western Church. Also represented is the Church’s entrance into China, where there is a representation of the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, which represent China’s northern and southern regions.

On the right side facing the altar, the windows...
focus on the growth of Christianity in China, featuring a splendid image of the Nestorian monument, which was erected in 781 during the Tang dynasty, and acknowledges the fact that the first Christian missionaries were not in fact Catholic, but rather members of the Orthodox Church of the East. Other images in the stained-glass windows feature the mission of the first bishop of Beijing, Giovanni da Montecorvino, OFM, (1247-1328) the Jesuit and Lazarist missions in China, and representations of significant persons in the history of Christianity in China, such as Vincent Lebbe, CM, (1877-1940) and the architect of the cathedral, Alphonse Favier.

One window displays an image of the martyr saints of China who were canonized by Pope Saint John Paul II in 2000. Another window includes Korean Catholics who have a historical connection to the cathedral.

The side chapels, which are no longer in use, have been refashioned for new uses, such as a cry room and a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of China, though at least one of the original side altars will remain in place because of its historical value. The church appointments that were hastily produced in 1985, when Beitang was returned to the Church, have been removed so that furnishings of higher quality can now be installed.

The exterior façade of the cathedral features several niches with makeshift statues that were installed in 1985. These statues will be replaced with more refined and proportionally correct versions as soon as possible.

The Bishop’s Residence

The restoration of Favier’s lavish bishop’s residence—really an enclosed mansion with three dramatic courtyards directly to the west of the cathedral—is also a mixture of Chinese architectural sentiments and Western aesthetic preferences. The courtyards respond to the configuration of traditional Beijing siheyuan (enclosed four-sided court) residences, while the structures themselves resonate more with French ecclesial design.

After the residence was opened as the Beijing Number 39 Middle School in 1958, many of the buildings were changed to accommodate their new use as a school. The buildings and the former bishop’s chapel are being restored as closely as possible to their original appearance based on historical photographs. Perhaps the largest difference between the restored bishop’s residence and what it looked like when occupied by the portly French bishop, Alphonse Favier, is that until the 1940s the various rooms of the mansion were teeming with rare Chinese art, crafts, and furniture Favier collected during his life in China from 1870 until his death in 1905.

Within the sprawling bishop’s residence, the archdiocese has planned to establish a museum dedicated to Beitang and the history of the Catholic Church in northern China. Exhibited in this small museum will be such items as cultural artifacts related to the cathedral and Catholic culture in Beijing, as well as historical photographs that highlight the rich past of Catholicism in the city. The courtyards and structures of the residence will also feature elegant statues of Our Lady, Jesus, and important saints.

As we passed through one of the long corridors leading to the old bishop’s chapel, we passed by what Father Zhen believes to be the white marble base of one of the columns of the Canchikou Beitang; discoveries such as this are being carefully preserved in order to conserve the architectural history of the Beitang complex. The final result of the extensive restorations and renovations of the cathedral and bishop’s residence will return the Beitang cathedral and bishop’s residence, located in China’s bustling capital city, to its former dignity as the country’s center of Catholic culture.

Endnotes

1. For an account of the transfer of the Beitang church, see W. Devine, The Four Churches of Peking (The Tientsin Press/Burns, Oats & Washburne, 1930).
2. For a description of the Canchikou church by a contemporary Jesuit, see Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses, Écrits des Missions Étrangères, Vol. 17 (Toulouse, 1810).

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Hand carved crucifixion scene with 4' 3" corpus and 4' sculptures
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Most of Warsaw’s historic places of worship are post-war renovations, and several are even reconstructions. The reconstruction of Warsaw, once described by the historian Robert Harbison as the “largest war memorial,” is the most comprehensive attempt to rebuild a past reality. The reconstruction of churches was an essential part of it.

But was it religiously successful? Are the reconstructed churches truthful recreations of the ecclesiastical and liturgical space?

Destruction and Reconstruction

In the last months of the second World War, the Nazis deliberately destroyed the city of Warsaw as a punishment for the uprising of 1944. They targeted its built heritage. They destroyed an estimated ninety percent of all historic buildings, including churches. Notable Catholic churches were detonated such as Saint John’s Archcathedral and the adjacent Jesuit church, most of the historic churches in the Old Town, as well as the Church of the Holy Cross, Saint Florian in Praga and Saint Alexander in Three Crosses Square.

During the years of Communism many churches, monasteries and convents behind the Iron Curtain were intentionally neglected or pulled down. Many socialist states after the second World War implemented the ideals of a socialist capital: to design a new city for a new society. This was a society which no longer had a need for places of worship, other than as monuments to an era gone by. These socialist states promoted secularization in the way they treated churches.

In East Berlin, capital of the former Communist German Democratic Republic, the state erased churches from visual memory as part of constructing the socialist city. Either they were obscured from view by placing modern structures in front of them, as was done with Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Friedrichswerdersche Church, or they were pulled down, as was done with the eighteenth-century Trinity Church and a dozen others.

For decades the Lutheran cathedral stood as a damaged relic next to the Palace of the Republic, overlooked by the Fernsehturm, symbolic for the ruined state of religion in the socialist state. Restoration of this church began in 1975, and was only reopened as a place of worship after the re-unification of Germany in the 1990s.

In Poland, however, the socialist regime surprisingly chose to reconstruct Warsaw’s war-damaged historic center soon after the end of the second World War. Other Central and Eastern European countries started doing this at a more
recent date. The German reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, recreating the famous views by Canaletto of the royal capital of Saxony, is a striking example. In the 1990s, restoring this domed church became a symbol for German re-unification.

Rebuilding Warsaw

Rebuilding in Warsaw started in the early years after the second World War. The recently returned paintings by Bellotto depicting the royal capital in the late eighteenth century werelegendarily used as a guide. Now, at various locations in the historic city, paintings by Bellotto are reproduced on site, to illustrate the resemblance between contemporary Warsaw and the royal city during the age of the Enlightenment.

Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780), or Canaletto the Second, was asked to the royal court in Warsaw by Stanislas Poniatowski (1732-1798), who had recently been elected king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For decades the de facto cultural center and residence of the kings had been Dresden. After Poniatowski’s election in 1764, Warsaw regained its position as center of the Commonwealth. As court painter, Bellotto captured the vivacity of the royal capital in his encyclopaedic depictions.

During this period, the appearance of Warsaw changed as buildings were constructed or renovated in the advanced architectural theory of the period, a neoclassicism inspired by French architectural theorists and ultimately by the Italian Andrea Palladio.

In 1753 Abbot Marc-Antoine Laugier published the *Essai sur l’Architecture*. The abbot, sometimes called the first modern architectural philosopher, advocated moving architecture away from retained disorder by using the principles of order. Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, who contributed volumes on architecture to the *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, described Palladio as “the maker of rules by which architecture should be played” and elevated his classicism to model status. These French publications of architectural theory became eighteenth-century guides for constructing good architecture.

The remodeling of churches on the Royal Route, the roads connecting the Royal Castle in Old Town and the royal villas to the south at Wilanow, shows this understanding of Classicism had been introduced in Warsaw.

The Neoclassicists at Work

The new façade for the Church of the Discalced Carmelites, designed by Efraim Szreger and built between 1761 and 1762, illustrates their knowledge of the works by Ange-Jacques Gabriel, Louis XV’s main architect, and Jacques-François Blondel, a professor at the Académie Royale d’Architecture.

In 1786, a new entrance building was begun for the Bernardine church of Saint Anne, a medieval foundation that was largely rebuilt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The project shows understanding of the French guidebooks. It was begun under Ignacy Potocki (1750-1809), an author of the 1791 Constitution and of an influential treatise on architecture which argued that architecture conveys a culture’s values and could be used to better the nation, and was completed by Piotr Aigner (1756-1841), another prominent neoclassical theorist.

The façade is often regarded as the finest example of ecclesiastical Palladianism in Poland. It is a temple front with engaged columns and can be compared to the Church of Santa Maria Nova in Vicenza, Italy, which is attributed to Andrea Palladio in 1578. As in Palladio’s examples the façade has no windows. The new front of Saint Anne’s is partly the result of royal patronage, as the four evangelists adorning the façade were donated by King Stanislas.

The temple front identifies the building as a place of worship. However, the front, a composition of strong and recognizable motives, is not part of the building. It is part of the street. Behind the neoclassical curtain hides an interior in a central European tradition, a baroque space unrelated to the Palladian forms of the front. What happens behind the façade almost remains secondary. The buildings are part of the scenery, as in a Bellotto painting, placed in an urban context.
scenography. Saint Anne’s temple front is part of the street, intended to bring classic order to a chaotic place as Abbot Laugier prescribed.

Spiritual Reconstruction

A second church by Aigner which was reconstructed after the war illustrates that the narrative should be understood as a spiritual rather than a material renovation alone.

Located on the Royal Route, Saint Alexander’s Church in Three Crosses Square was dynamited in 1944. A purist piece of architecture, this church is one of the finest attempts to represent the Pantheon as a Catholic church. Centrally planned parish churches expose the difficulty of uniting a centrally planned space with the Catholic liturgy. An example of this is the Cathedral of Saint Hedwig in Berlin, an eighteenth-century evocation of the Roman Pantheon, where the celebration of the sacred liturgy remains troublesome.

Aigner tried to solve the problem by designing the chancel as a second portico. Approached on the Royal Route from both the north or the south, the church appears as a representation of the Pantheon, with temple fronts on two sides. The church is placed in Three Crosses Square as Hawksmoor positioned his Mausoleum in the grounds of Castle Howard, England, carefully composing a scene.

The church was begun in 1818 and finished some years later. It was restyled and extended in 1886-1894, in a neo-Renaissance style typical of the period. The post-war reconstruction, however, returned to Aigner’s original design. This was a symbolic decision emphasizing what the neoclassical Saint Alexander’s Church represents—a built commemoration of the first Constitution.

An anonymous painting of the original sacred space shows a refined neo-classical interior, yet today that balanced interior has been completely transformed by the addition of a large apse in the style of the Pantheon in Rome. As a reconstruction, the rebuilt version of this interior is deficient.

Other reconstructed churches in Warsaw display a similar deficiency. The exteriors are copies of the original, yet the interiors are lacking the richness and details of altar pieces and the display of chandeliers and sacred images they had before the war. Examples in Old Warsaw of simplified ecclesiastical spaces include Saint Francis’, Saint Martin’s and Saint Casimir’s. The latter is depicted in Bellotto’s painting of New Town Market Square (1778), a fine baroque church by Tylman Gamerski (1632-1706). The basic white interior of today is shockingly unsatisfying.

Church of the Holiest Savior

The church of the Holiest Savior, dominating the lively eponymous square, is located in the southern center of Warsaw. Its two slender towers can be seen from Constitution Square, constructed during the socialist era. The Lady Chapel is an imitation
of a Marian chapel at the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow and contains a sacred image which was honored by Pope John Paul II in 1999. As in other churches in Warsaw during the second World War, notably the church of All Saints, the people of Holiest Savior helped Jews survive.

In 1939, German bombing damaged the roof and towers. In 1944, following the Warsaw Uprising, the Germans dynamited the church, destroying much of the building, including the main altar, the pulpit, and the large chandeliers. Renovation started rapidly after the war, by removing the rubble and making the church ready for worship. Already in 1948 the building could be reopened as a place of worship. Wieslaw Konowicz was the restoration architect.

The government allowed rebuilding the towers some years later. In other socialist capitals, the state pulled down church towers and erased them from visual memory, such as the tall spires of East Berlin’s Saint Peter’s and Saint George’s churches.

Today Holiest Savior is a flourishing house of worship. Its chapels are used for private contemplation and the church is regularly used for celebrating Mass. It is a living place, of which the renewal of the floral compositions which adorn the altars are a living witness.

What makes the reconstruction of this church successful is its purpose. Gamini Wijesuriya argues religious heritage is different from other heritage by its sacredness. Religious buildings are designed to stage a sacred liturgy. Places of worship that continue to be used by a community as sacred places, used for the function they were originally built for, make up what some contemporary conservationists such as Wijesuriya call a “Living Religious Heritage.”

Without a regular celebration of Mass the ecclesiastical space becomes empty, a meaningless relic of the past. Whereas a continuity in purpose makes the church a sacred building.

Churches’ Multiple Meanings

Churches are the containers of many values. They can have multiple meanings, ranging from the historical to the symbolic, from the associational to the aesthetic. The most significant meaning, however, is the religious value that sacred architecture embodies. The ecclesiastical space of some churches in Warsaw may seem unsatisfying. Conventional preservationists may even argue these interiors are failed reconstructions of the original.

The reconstruction of some church interiors, while not exact replications of the originals, are, however, truthful renovations of the ecclesiastical and liturgical space. They are living places of worship, where Mass is celebrated and the altars are ornamented by floral compositions.

Renovating churches is continuity in purpose. Past generations have adapted churches, altered the appearance by adding new façades as was done with the Bernardine church of Saint Anne and the church of Discalced Carmelites. Future generations may decide to adorn their churches, adding sacred images or installing an improved organ, to retain the continuity of a religious building and to continue in the tradition of sacred architecture.
The following is taken from an address given at the “Backing Beauty Reception: Beauty and Public Policy” in London in July 2017, hosted by ResPublica, the Woodland Trust, and the National Trust.

Truth is an absolute. And beauty the means by which it is revealed to us in its most comprehensible form. In John Keats’ words: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Through our connection with beauty, we enjoy a taste of the sublime and both an escape from and a compensation for the inevitable pains and trials of daily life.

Through beauty the common good is nurtured, for humans are spiritual creatures who need much more than their daily bread. Our sense of place is inseparable from our sense of worth and so the places in which we live and the environment around us feeds our individual and communal well-being.

The First Misconception

That beauty is beyond politics or perhaps that politics is beneath aesthetics is the first misconception I want to confront. As their confidence has been eroded, politicians have retreated to where a less challenging, less ambitious, less thoughtful discourse prevails. Nervous about broaching matters about which they feel they can’t do much or don’t want to do much, they have failed to inspire those whose everyday lives have been blighted by the ugliness of the built environment they endure.

In 2005, my colleague Oliver Letwin observed that: “I believe that the disappearance of beauty from the vocabulary of politics is one of the reasons why British politics today so frequently strikes people as desiccated. I believe it is one of the reasons why so many people are ‘turned off’ politics.”

The loss Oliver described is one I have regularly encountered, both in my role as Transport Minister and in the other offices of state I have held. Even the most obvious truth—the advocacy of the pursuit of beauty—is regarded with either disregard or disdain.

In part, this is explained by egalitarian hostility to those who judge the taste of others—for we are encouraged to believe that all is of equal worth regardless of how brutal, ugly or crass it is.

But more than this, we have lost our faith in beauty, because we have lost our faith in ideals. As Pope Benedict lamented: “We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as definitive and has as its highest value one’s own ego and one’s own desires.”

Yet this does not have to be so. Through beauty, our ideals and what is real can be harmonized. Those who dare to make a case for beauty, elegance, grace or refinement are far from a public discourse brutalised by modern media and the consequent zeitgeist. We are forced to live in too many spheres which have been colonised, in Umberto Eco’s terms, by the Empire of Imbeciles. The crass preoccupation with utility becomes imbecilic as it descends to the defense of ugliness.

No one has done more nor suffered more for his advocacy of beauty than His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. As long ago as 1989, he set out in “A Vision of Britain” the defining principles of good architectural design. In 2011, he explained: “We can’t have a future without the past. There has to be a sense of timelessness, a living tradition that helps to maintain [that] sense of identity and belonging.”

More recently, in December 2014, he made the case for the re-connection of design with the natural order. He argued: “Universal principles are expressed in the order of Nature, which can never be ‘old-fashioned.’... Basing designs on the timeless universal principles expressed by Nature’s order enables the full scope of our humanity to be fulfilled, on the physical, communal, cultural and spiritual levels.”

Perhaps the most easily grasped and persuasive counter to the zealous preachers of modernism is the relationship—understood for centuries but now neglected—between the simple, God-given beauty of nature and what man can do. The essence of Prince Charles’ case is that there are timeless principles of good design. Such an argument would for centuries have been regarded as a priori.

Now the wish for art to please—to inspire—has been replaced by a thirst to shock, to alarm. As Roger Scruton has said: “Without the background of a remembered faith modernism loses its conviction: it becomes routinized. For a long time now it has been assumed that ... art must give offence, stepping out of the future fully armed against the bourgeois taste for kitsch and cliché. But the result of this is that offence becomes a cliché.”

Despite popular revulsion with much they have imposed upon us, those responsible—who rarely live where they have wrought havoc—viciously attack anyone who dares to articulate what most people know: that most of what’s been built in my lifetime could be demolished without aesthetic cost, and so bring the seductive benefit of leaving
what was there before to stand proud. Through our appreciation of beauty, we come to terms with ourselves and others, as our senses are elevated by sensory joy. So, understanding the relationship between the built environment and well-being, I embarked on the mission, first highlighted in “The Journey to Beauty,” my speech last year to the Independent Transport Commission, to challenge the character of what passes for acceptable design in much road and rail construction of recent times.

The best is bland. The worst is hideous.

It is true, of course, that different interpretations of beauty have prevailed in different eras, but the abiding idea was once routinely accepted: that what is built should be dignified by style. Yet for at least fifty years, too often and in too many places, utility has been regarded as sufficient by callous architects, crass planners, and careless politicians. It’s not just that form has been shaped by function, but that style has been neglected altogether.

Greed and convenience have subsumed aesthetics. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of industrial wind turbines, collections of which—in true Orwellian fashion—are dubbed “farms.”

As Energy Minister I acted to ensure that wind turbines were constructed in appropriate locations after proper consultation with local communities. Because little could jar more with the natural world or the man-made countryside than these huge concrete monstrosities. Consideration about the impact on landscape became a vital part of the approval process. And, mercifully, we cut the subsidies paid by taxpayers.

While some made a case against the negative impact of turbines on the environment, and a few attempted to make an aesthetic case for such identikit industrial structures, many others simply dismissed my argument as irrelevant. They did so on the basis of the easily grasped, though utterly crass notion, that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

Let’s now, once and for all, be clear. It is not beauty that changes but the ability of the beholder to appreciate it.

This notion that beauty is relative has been used to justify much of the ugliness imposed on our towns and cities by architects, planners, and developers since the Second World War. “Streets in the sky” were never a substitute for real streets, for homes on a human scale, in proportion and in harmony with their environment. A home is not “a machine for living in.” Ironically, these are the words, written in 1923, of the father of modern architecture, Le Corbusier.

Homes are a reflection of our humanity. As William Morris said, “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.” Morris understood that beauty and well-being are inextricably linked. And that a politics that is serious about people’s welfare and happiness must be serious about beauty.

For the ancient Greeks, aesthetic and moral judgments were inseparable. In the nineteenth century, many artists considered beauty to be the vital link between freedom and truth. There can be once again a growing understanding of how aesthetics are a vital part of our judgment of value and worth, for people instinctively understand the connection between beauty and a wider conception of value.

You see it in the love of natural, unspoilt places and the sense of shared ownership we feel for historic buildings. You see it in the protests against the ugly buildings that developers still attempt to foist on communities against their will. You see it in the despair at the way so many contemporary buildings are identikit, lacking any sense of craft or character, built with no consideration of the past and no regard to the future.

The Second Misconception

Indeed, at the heart of modern architecture, like all modern art, is the Nietzschean idea that the past is irrelevant and that we can create our own value system. This is the second misconception I want to bury this evening, and not before time.

It is not for nothing that the “hero” of Ayn Rand’s despicable book The Fountainhead is an architect. Much modern architecture fails precisely because it rejects those principles of design that time has taught us delight the senses.

Where modern design does succeed it is largely by accident. Or because, where form has at least followed function, a building has a high degree of utility.

But, as Edmund Burke noted long ago in an early work on aesthetics, this is not the same as beauty. He understood that there is a great deal in common in what people find beautiful. But this is not related to utility; our appreciation of beauty is an effect “previous to any knowledge of use.”

In other words, we know something to be beautiful before we understand its function. When we perceive beauty, he wrote, our “senses and the imagination captivate the soul before understanding is ready either to join with them or to oppose them.” Our perception of beauty is not rational, it stems from the unconscious; from our deepest feelings and emotions as human beings.

Sir Roger Scruton puts it perfectly. He says: “Beauty is an ultimate value—something that we pursue for its own sake, and for the pursuit of which no further reason need be given. Beauty should therefore be compared to truth
and goodness, one member of a trio of ultimate values which justify our rational inclinations.”

While the solipsism of the architect may be the driving force behind the drive to render much of our public space unsightly, it is our own denial of what our senses tell us that has enabled this desecration to take place. We have become so doubtful about the ability to make valid judgments about aesthetics, and even embarrassed by those who do, that we allowed ourselves to be ridden roughshod over by those who put profit and ego above all else. Too many remain hesitant about making aesthetic judgments.

Respublica’s research has shown that people tend to focus on the details—“less litter and rubbish,” “vandalism and graffiti,” and less “vacant and rundown buildings” as important factors in making an area more beautiful. All these things matter, and we could do much more to address them.

But which buildings will invariably be the shabbiest, the most neglected, and the most disfigured with graffiti? It will be the relatively modern buildings—those built within the past sixty years. Daubing graffiti is a crime, but the greater criminals are those that designed the modern structures which are the daubers’ canvases.

And which buildings are invariably the most-obviously treasured? It is older buildings, shaped by vernacular style, where architects have taken care to be in harmony with the surroundings. Where craftsmen have laboured over detail. A study by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) found that when respondents were asked to name the most beautiful buildings in Sheffield, most cited the two cathedrals.

The Third Misconception

This brings me to the third and final misconception that I want to challenge: that beauty belongs somehow to the past. For it is often considered, sometimes unthinkingly, that it is no longer possible to build beautiful buildings. This is perhaps why increasing regard is given to the beautiful places and buildings that have survived intact.

We have somehow, rather depressingly, come to believe that the supply of beauty is both finite and exhausted. This is perhaps because people assume that it must be somehow dated or even kitsch to build according to the principles of classical architecture. Or because they assume that beauty comes at too high a price, and must be sacrificed for the sake of utility.

Both of these conceptions are false. When the city fathers of Birmingham, Nottingham, and Manchester built great town halls in either the neoclassical or Gothic revival style, they did so because they understood that these styles had endured. They wanted to build something that would last. And they succeeded.

The modernist library in Birmingham’s Chamberlain Square has recently been demolished, just forty years after it was built—what a pity that its replacement couldn’t have been in keeping with its surroundings! No one would seriously consider doing the same to the neoclassical town hall, or to other great public buildings of the Victorian era.

Yet, despite their appearance, these are in other respects modern buildings, built using modern construction techniques. In historical terms, they were built yesterday. There are no good reasons why we cannot continue to build beautiful buildings and public infrastructure.

We spend so much of our time traveling—to work, to see friends and family. We must not resign ourselves to being miserable as we get from place to place. How we treat what is first well designed can make unsightly what was once beautiful. The railway network is rich with buildings and structures of aesthetic value drawn from the dawn of the railway age through to the sym pathetic treatment of King’s Cross. In recent years, however, too often function has subsumed form leaving many of our cities and towns and much of our countryside scarred.

As the great railway stations, bridges, and tunnels of the Victorian era demonstrate, while beauty and utility are not the same, they can be made to work in harmony. One does not have to be sacrificed for the sake of the other.

Indeed, the willful excesses of modern and post-modern architecture are often far more expensive than buildings built and designed according to classical principles.

It is our misconceptions we must now consign to the past. And, in their place, embrace a vision of beauty. To fill our hearts with joy.

We shall doubtless encounter carpers and critics—too difficult, too expensive, too contentious—they will say. We will be tested in our resolve. There can be no surrender. We must triumph.

The future deserves nothing less.

The Rt Hon John Hayes was the United Kingdom’s Transport Minister from July 2016 to January 2018. His full address can be found at www.gov.uk/government/speeches/transport-minister-speaks-at-the-backing-beauty-reception. “The Journey to Beauty” can be found at www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-journey-to-beauty.
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Pictured above: Restored Sanctuary of St. Stanislaus Catholic Church - Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Globalist Architecture in Kenya: The Sacred Heart Cathedral of Kericho
Kalinda Gathinji

My experience of Kenyan sacred architecture left me hoping to encounter more of the rich, vibrant colors of the culture: the patterns and textures of its textiles, the delicacy of its beadwork, and the character of its sculptures revealed, celebrated, and translated into the sacred architecture. What I found instead was that many of the churches are of an austere, minimalist aesthetic which hardly evokes the sacred nature of the space and the vibrancy of Kenyan culture.

The new Sacred Heart Cathedral in Kericho, Kenya, is one of these. The design raises two key questions. First, is the design sacred in that it communicates the Divine to the mortal realm? Second, is it distinctly Kenyan in that it is relatable to the local culture and its customs? Or is it built from the outside of a culture, reflecting the history of colonialism?

Kericho (Kehr-ee-choh) is located on the western side of Kenya, approximately 150 miles southwest of Nairobi. Situated in the highlands, between the Rift Valley and Lake Victoria, the landscape is bucolic with lush tea crops lining its rolling hills. The town itself is largely constructed of low masonry buildings with corrugated metal or tiled roofs. It is home to a thriving Catholic population.

Building the Cathedral

Led by the Bishop Emmanuel Okombo, the new diocese hired John McAslan + Partners of London to design the new cathedral to seat 1500 faithful for a budget of $3 million, funded by an anonymous foreign donor. The old cathedral had been decaying for years.

Bishop Okombo requested that the nave widen as it approaches the altar to maximize the engagement of the faithful in the celebration of Mass. This request led to the unusual trapezoidal or keystone-shaped plan of the building. The roof gets higher and the nave wider as it approaches the altar. Although not a traditional cruciform shape in plan, it does introduce exterior seating areas to either side of the sanctuary which extend along the front of the nave and harken back to the transepts of the traditional Latin cross plan. This reference is identifiable only in plan, as it is not expressed in the massing on the church exterior.

From the exterior, the Cathedral is raised up on a stylobate or base hewn from local gray granite that is gradually enveloped by the topography of the site. The walls are clad in light-colored terrazzo. The roof is the most prominent exterior feature, finished in red clay tile from Nairobi arranged in a subtle pattern. According to the architect, the pattern was intended to be an abstract representation of wheat, representative of the Eucharist and God’s bounty. The sweeping volume of the roof is visible from the surrounding areas and the massing of the building was intended to be an abstract representation of a bird symbolizing the Holy Spirit.

The large roof is supported by a series of triangular concrete A-frames that are arched at the top and get taller as they approach the sanctuary. These frames are supported by large rectangular piers which separate the nave from the side aisles. From the piers,
the frames gradually arch over the side aisles and then cantilever horizontally overhead through the exterior wall to provide deep, shaded porches on either side of the cathedral. Double doors line the side aisles to allow the free flow of air and the movement of the laity to the side porches. In the mild climate of Kenya, many churches open along the exterior to increase ventilation. Functionally, the frames wrap the narthex around the church to accommodate overflow seating, a cry room, and gathering functions. The concrete frame is fully exposed on the interior and is infilled with stained cypress slats with small spaces between them. Light cascades through the slats from the skylights above which are built into a large gap at the ridge of the roof, at times creating radiating beams of light on the wall behind the sanctuary.

All the materials were acquired and fabricated locally. The architects described their goal as creating “a structure that integrated seamlessly with its landscape setting, in both aesthetic and functional terms.” They state that the cathedral is “distinctive and universally welcoming.” With the overview of the design in mind, let us return to the two questions.

Is It a Sacred Building?

First, the question of whether Sacred Heart Cathedral fulfills its sacred purpose. Although technically the building provides an adequate space for the liturgy and attempts to incorporate abstract references to wheat and to the Holy Spirit, it falls short of representing the heavenly realm come down to earth in several ways. First, its theological references are so abstract that they are hardly perceptible to those not familiar with the architects’ intent and thus there is little distinction of the exterior that speaks to the elevated nature of the sacred building within the larger public realm.

In other words, the building could just as easily have been a school. Even the stark light-colored tower with its flat roof directly above a rectangular void fails to communicate the sacredness of the cathedral. Aside from the simple, thin white cross that adorns the top, the tower could as well have been a clock tower for a shopping center. Second, the building offers no celebration of the threshold or entrance into the church that would indicate a transition from the profane to the sacred. The heavy concrete rectangular frame around the main entrance doors and the rectangular window above make the building seem more agricultural than sacred. There are no stairs to ascend nor is there any carving, sculpture, or other sacred representation. The only indication of its being a church from this vantage point is the stained glass in the window, which can rarely be seen from the outside due to the strong equatorial sunlight.

Third, inside, there is minimal aesthetic differentiation between the sanctuary and the nave of the church. The sanctuary is modest and austere, emphasized only by its three risers and wainscoting, all hewn from a beige natural stone. Although the beige stone attempts to raise the importance of the
sanctuary materially, the color is so similar to the rest of the nave that it is hardly perceptible. The height of the wainscoting is low and unmodulated and therefore seems to reduce the wall of the sanctuary to a residential scale.

Within the nave, very little iconography or visual hierarchy inspires the ascent of the laity’s experience toward heaven. The crucifix applied to the blank wall above the altar is largely reduced to silhouette due to the light flooding in through the rectangular window directly above. One might question the theological hierarchy of placing the window with its views to the exterior above the crucifix. This window also interrupts the pattern of light and shadow from the slats on the ceiling and therefore reduces its effect of the radiating light from above.

The tabernacle is uncelebrated and fully recessed in the wainscoting, and curiously located off center to the right of the main altar. Aside from the crucifix, the sanctuary remains completely void of statuary, icons, or adornment to contribute to its sense of sacredness.

The architect’s claim that the Cathedral “honors the faith and frugality of this rural African context” gives one example to their flawed approach. The architect assumes that imitating the culture’s frugality in its new sacred space will inspire the ascent to Heaven. But the laity are in great need of glimpses of Heaven on earth, not just spiritually, but physically as well. As embodied spirits living in a fallen world, we need to engage all of our senses in the contemplation of heaven and its beauty.

For these reasons, the Sacred Heart Cathedral does not fully communicate sacredness to the laity.

Is It Distinctly Kenyan?

Next we must address the question of whether the cathedral is distinctly Kenyan. Kenyan churches can be classified in four categories: Globalist, Traditional European, Adapted Kenyan, and Kenyan Vernacular.

The Globalist examples feature a Modern aesthetic that is hardly recognizable as being Kenyan. The church could just as easily be located in California or Finland. A good example of this is Saint Benedict’s Church in Nairobi, with its modern layering of materials, frames, and floating walls.

Traditional European examples feature Traditional Gothic or Italianate forms that seem at once foreign and at home amongst a smattering of Colonial era architecture. From the buttressed side aisles to the arched trusses supporting the roof, the architecture is very recognizable as Western.

Adapted Kenyan examples take European or Western forms and adapt them to look more Kenyan. All Saints Cathedral in Nairobi is a good example. Examples of Adapted Kenyan feature Western patterns with Kenyan details. Nyeri Cathedral in Nyeri is a good example. Its massing follows a traditional cruciform shape with a bell tower, but the details from the elliptical shape of the arch to the shallow pitch of the roof render it more recognizably Kenyan.

Kenyan Vernacular examples feature distinctly Kenyan and non-western patterns. Examples such as Don Bosco Catholic Church in Nairobi and Saint Joseph’s Church in Kahawa Sukari are of the tholos type: a round shape with the emphasis on the center. Traditionally, many of the pastoral and nomadic tribes of Kenya settled into small villages of circular huts arranged around a central outdoor gathering area, the focus of which was often a fire pit. It is no surprise that Kenyan Christians adapted this type of gathering space for their sacred spaces, with the fire pit at the center replaced by the altar to take advantage of existing cultural customs.

The Sacred Heart Cathedral falls somewhere between the Globalist and Adapted Kenyan categories. While the materials are local, its Modern, minimalist aesthetic reflects a Western identity that very well could have been at home in Texas. The steeply sloped roof is quite uncommon in Kenya and the skylights at the ridge of the roof are extremely vulnerable to the torrents of rainwater common in the short and long rainy seasons.

In other words, the design of Sacred Heart Cathedral, despite attempts at incorporating the culture through the use of local materials and climate considerations, is largely foreign.

The West’s Imposition

While I would argue that Catholic ideals and beauty are universal, what is beautiful in a Western European context can’t be imposed on a non-Western culture. That seems to continue the colonial assumption of superiority and the West’s paternalistic duty to improve a culture it considered lesser.

Sacred buildings ought to be designed from within the culture they are built. The builders should tap into the font of faithful talent to create an architecture and sacred space that connects more directly and personally to the specific community for whom the church is being built, while at the same time maintaining the universality of the faith.

As Kenya continues to emerge, free of its colonial past, perhaps too its sacred architecture can emerge more vibrantly representative of its rich culture, to inspire greater devotion and movement toward heaven.

Endnotes

Drawn to the Holy House of God: 
The Tenth Anniversary of the Dedication of the 
Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Raymond Cardinal Burke

A homily given at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the dedication of the church. It was given on July 31, 2018.

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen. Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, my brother priests, brothers and sisters in the consecrated life, and brothers and sisters in Christ, with deepest joy and gratitude, we recall the ancient and solemn rite by which this church, ten years ago today, truly became the House of God. For ten years now, pilgrims drawn here by their loving Mother, the Mother of God, under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, have received countless graces through their prayer and devotion and, above all, through the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and of Penance.

Here, God has fulfilled perfectly his promise, made during the Prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the New Israel and the New Temple:

Son of man, this is where my throne shall be, this is where I will set the soles of my feet; here I will dwell among the children of Israel forever.

Rightly, we have prayed today with all our heart: “How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God!” Here truly, above all on the altar of sacrifice and in the tabernacle, heaven meets earth: Christ seated in glory at the right hand of the Father pours forth, without measure and without cease, the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

Each time we enter here, we approach, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews, “the heavenly Jerusalem.” Here, we truly keep company with “countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect.” We encounter “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,” the eternal covenant sealed in his blood, which he sacramentally renews for us in the holy

Mass. Christ makes his home with us here, as he made it in the house of Zachaeus, fulfilling his divine mission “to seek and to save what was lost.” He ever makes sacramentally new his sacrifice on calvary and its incomparable fruit, the heavenly bread of his true body, blood, soul and divinity, and he remains with us in the tabernacle. When the Mother of God appeared to Saint Juan Diego on our continent in 1531, she announced to him immediately the purpose of her heavenly visit. She wanted a church to be built, in which, through her special intercession, her children could encounter her divine son. Among her first words to Saint Juan Diego, she declared:

I want very much to have a little holy house built here for me, in which I will show him, I will exalt him and make him manifest. I will give him to the people in all my personal love, in my compassion, in my help, in my protection: because I am truly your merciful mother, yours and all the people who live united in this land and of all the other people of different ancestries, my lovers, who love me, those who seek me, those who trust in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their complaints and heal all their sorrows, hardships and sufferings.

From the time of her apparitions, Our Lady of Guadalupe has never failed to draw pilgrims to her “little holy house,” truly the House of God, built for her by the first bishop of Mexico City, Fra’ Juan de Zumárraga, and made larger with time by his successors. In her “little holy house,” in the church of her shrine in Mexico City, the Mother of God has met and continues to meet pilgrims with all her personal love. Taking them into her arms, she brings them to her divine son who alone is their salvation. She faithfully gives them the counsel which she first gave to the wine stewards at the Wedding Feast of Cana, the counsel inscribed upon the cornerstone of this church: “Do whatever he tells you.” By means of Saint Juan Diego’s tilma, upon which God miraculously wrote her image, she lovingly gazes upon pilgrims and they lovingly gaze upon her, their Mother and their Queen.

The church here was built to further the mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so that many more might know her maternal love and, through her love, know their Savior. It is a special gift from God today that a successor of Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, His Eminence Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, Archbishop Emeritus of Mexico City, has come to be with us and, above all, to celebrate the holy Mass. From the first announcement of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe here, he has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement.

On the occasion of the solemn dedication, at his direction, a piece of the stone of Tepeyac Hill was given to the Shrine and rests under the statue of Saint Juan Diego in the transept. On that occasion, he also presented to the Shrine the statue of Saint Juan Diego, which greets pilgrims as they approach the Pilgrim Center. Your Eminence,
we ask your continued prayers for the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe here, that it may be a worthy daughter of the Insigne y Nacional Basílica de Santa María de Guadalupe at Mexico City. This church exists for only one reason, namely, the mission of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The pilgrim who enters the narthex of the church reads below the fresco depicting the wondrous apparitions of Our Lady her words to Saint Juan Diego which I have just recounted.

Giving thanks today that Our Lady of Guadalupe continues her mission through her Shrine at La Crosse, we thank God, too, for so many graces granted to the pilgrims who have come to this church with faith. Pilgrims have come here to encounter Our Lord at moments of great joy for them: the proposal of marriage, the gift of marriage and the gift of its crown, a child, the beginning of a new endeavor, and other times of joy. Pilgrims have also come in moments of great trial and grief: grave moral struggle, serious illness, marital and family strife, the abandonment of the practice of the faith by a relative or friend, the loss of work, the death of a relative or friend, and other times of sorrow. Our Lady has brought them here to meet Christ, and he has given them his peace and joy, even in moments of seemingly impossible suffering. When pilgrims leave this House of God, they read the words of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Saint Juan Diego, when he was suffering greatly in carrying out his mission:

Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more? Let nothing else worry you, disturb you.8

The Mother of God assures them that the House of God is also their house, the house of the Church, and that, therefore, they have nothing to fear.

Thanking God today for the consecration of this church, we are filled with gratitude to all, living and deceased, who have followed in the way of Saint Juan Diego as messengers of Our Lady: benefactors, volunteers, members and directors of the corporation responsible for the Shrine, the Friars of the Immaculate, the staff and, above all, the executive directors, and all who, in any way, have made possible the great spiritual work which is daily accomplished here. In a particular way, I recall the memory of two persons who joyously participated in the solemn dedication of this House of God and whom the Lord has called to himself. Let us thank God, in a special way, for Mrs. Robert Mary Lucille Swing, the donor of the exceptionally beautiful land for the shrine here, who died on March 13, 2012, and Father Peter Damian Mary Fehlner, first rector of the shrine church, who died on May 8th of this year. May they rest in peace. May God abundantly reward them and all who have sacrificed to be faithful messengers of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

... Drawn here today, the tenth anniversary of the solemn dedication of this House of God, let us lift up our hearts to the glorious Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. Let us, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, offer our hearts completely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so that we remain always in his company and, with Our Lady, lead others to him.

Heart of Jesus, House of God and gate of heaven, have mercy on us!
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!
Saint Juan Diego, pray for us!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

†

His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke is Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. He was bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse from 1995 to 2004.

Endnotes
1. Ez 43:7
2. Ps 84:2
3. Heb 12:22
4. Heb 12:22-23
5. Lk 19:10
7. Jn 2:5
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Book Review

Fra Bartolommeo: The Divine Renaissance, by Albert Elen, Chris Fischer, Bram de Klerck, and Michael Kwakkelstein (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2016) 239 pages, $78.45 paperback

Reviewed by Elizabeth Lev

While any attempt to return the oft-shunned Renaissance painter Fra Bartolommeo to the public eye should be lauded, Albert Elen, Chris Fischer, Bram de Klerck, and Michael Kwakkelstein deserve special mention for *Fra Bartolommeo: The Divine Renaissance*. Written as the catalogue to accompany the eponymous exhibition held in the Rotterdam Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen from October 2016 to January 2017, the book not only highlights the technical skill and careful craftsmanship of the artist, it explores the religious nature and significance of his art, something all too often sidelined in major exhibitions.

Art history has not been kind to this painter, as the opening essay reminds us. Particularly during the nineteenth century, the authors suggest, “his rhetoric and mysticism seemed empty to an irreligious and materialistic public.” Dismissed by many critics, his first and only other monographic exhibition took place in 1996.

Fra Bartolommeo was born Baccio della Porta in Florence in 1473, two years before his more famous contemporary Michelangelo. Raised in the Florence of Botticelli and Ghirlandaio (Leonardo da Vinci was twenty-one and already a master, but not yet well-known), Baccio was apprenticed to Cosimo Rosselli, one of the original painters of the Sistine chapel in Rome, shortly after his return from completing that prestigious commission.

Baccio’s fledgling painting career began during one of the most turbulent times in Florence. The death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the city’s de facto ruler, the French invasion under his unworthy successor, and the rise of the fiery Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola, were not ideal conditions for artistic patronage.

In 1500, two years after Savonarola’s trial and execution for heresy, Baccio joined the Dominican order, taking the name Bartolommeo. Perhaps remembering the success of another Dominican artist from the same convent of San Marco, Fra Angelico, the new friar was encouraged to hone his preaching skills...in paint.

The Rotterdam museum, in possession of 140 of the artist’s drawings, displayed the preparatory sketches next to eleven paintings by Fra Bartolommeo. The catalogue lovingly traces the artistic process from the hastily traced concept, to the thoughtful drawing, to the finished product for each work of art. Fra Bartolommeo emerges from these pages as a careful craftsman, a quality often overlooked in modern art. His drawings served as teaching documents for many later artists, eventually guiding the work of Sr. Plautilla Nelli, the first female painter of Florence (one of the many fascinating and useful pieces of information in the book).

The technical processes and the workshop practices described in the text are intriguing, especially Fra Bartolommeo’s collaboration with another forgotten yet gifted Florentine painter Mariano Albertelli, and their on-and-off collaboration offers interesting insight into partnerships and competitors.

His friendship with Raphael, ten years his junior, reveals a man unafraid of rivalry with the youthful genius. His artistic transformation after a voyage to Venice shows an openness to innovation.

Most engrossing, however, is the ubiquitous presence of Savonarola, much admired by Fra Bartolommeo, and Michelangelo as well for that matter. The catalogue dedicates an entire essay to this influential Dominican who preached repentance to a privileged populace in fifteenth-century Florence.

It is, all in all, a sympathetic portrayal, although the authors convey a tone of excessive reproach toward Savonarola’s Bonfire of the Vanities, during which people brought objects representing disordered passions to be destroyed as an exercise in detachment. In this chapter, however, author Bram de Klerck emphasizes the role images played, particularly in Dominican spirituality, and deftly illustrates how faith and politics were often interwoven in Renaissance art (The Incarnation and The Madonna della Misericordia).

Fra Bartolommeo died at age forty-four on October 31, 1517, the first day of the Protestant Reformation. He was never able to polish his artistic talents in the arena of violent theological controversy, but the Fra Bartolommeo who appears in this text illustrates the significance of the Sacraments (Salvator Mundi), mystic vision (Padre Eterno), and intercession (The Coronation of the Virgin) as compellingly as any painter of the Catholic restoration.

The book takes viewers by the hand to lead them through the daunting world of preparatory drawings and allows the novice to succumb to the fascination of watching the artist’s creative faculties at work. The immediacy of some of the sketches—a smiling elderly woman or a friar rapt in prayer—appear almost as candid snapshots with the feathery pencil strokes. While neither a gripping narrative nor an easy handbook, *Fra Bartolommeo: The Divine Renaissance* engagingly introduces the world of art history and encourages Christians to be proud of one of their illustrious brothers.

Elizabeth Lev is an art historian who teaches, studies and writes in Rome with a special focus on Renaissance and Baroque art. Her most recent book is How Catholic Art Saved the Faith: The Triumph of Beauty and Truth in Counter-Reformation Art.
Postwar Building Boom

The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America, by Gretchen Buggeln (University of Minnesota Press, 2015) 368 pages, $140.00 hardcover, $40.00 paperback

Temples for a Modern God: Religious Architecture in Postwar America, by Jay M. Price (Oxford University Press, 2013) 288 pages, $87.00 hardcover, $34.95 paperback

Reviewed by Stephen M. Koeth, CSC

In the two decades after World War II, American Christians built an unprecedented number of churches as a postwar baby boom and suburban expansion created tremendous demand for new houses of worship. The trend began in 1947, when Americans spent $126 million dollars on church construction, and peaked in 1965 at some $1.2 billion dollars.

This period of feverish church building has, until recently, been largely unexplored by architectural, religious, and urban historians. Among recent books aiming to change this are Jay M. Price’s Temples for a Modern God: Religious Architecture in Postwar America and Gretchen Buggeln’s The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America.

Buggeln holds a Chair in Christianity and the Arts at Valparaiso University. Her book focuses on three influential Protestant architects—Edward Dupaquier Dart, Charles Edward Stade, and Edward Anders Sövik—and seventy-five of the churches they designed in the Midwest. Making impressive use of congregational archives and interviews with founding-era parishioners, she explores the prevalence of the A-frame design from the 1950s to the mid-1960s; the way a vision of the Church as family shaped sanctuary design; the prioritization of fellowship and education in design of the church plant; and a case study of churches in the suburb of Park Forest, Illinois.

Price is professor of history and directs the Public History Program at Wichita State University. His book focuses on the network of architects, consultants, denominational and ecumenical bodies such as the National Council of Church’s Bureau of Church Building and Architecture, professional organizations such as the Church Architectural Guild of America, and journals such as Protestant Church Building, Church Management, and Church Property Administration that promoted a modern aesthetic in ecclesial design. He examines how design styles evolved through the postwar period, highlighting how Modernist styles predominated as architects from the World War II generation exerted increased influence in the 1960s.

Unsurprisingly, certain themes run through both books: the professionalization of church architects; the centrality of the building committee in planning and fundraising; the impact of construction costs on churches comprised of cash-strapped suburbanites; the prevalence of building in stages and the frequent flexibility and insufficiency of “first units”; the focus on creating seven-day-a-week campuses for educational and social programs; and the influence of suburban domestic architecture on church design.

Both Buggeln and Price conclude their books with similar tales about the state of postwar churches in the new millennium. In many instances, the congregations these churches house have aged, have moved on to newer suburbs, or have been reshaped by changes in the neighborhood’s ethnic and racial makeup. The buildings themselves have often aged poorly, requiring expensive maintenance and renovation projects, or being vacated and torn down.

Those that continue to be used, especially among Catholic parishes, have often been renovated to make greater use of “symbols, statuary, decoration, ornament, and woodwork.” That signifies a “modest revolution against the simple forms and opaque symbols of the original buildings.”

Buggeln and Price are both sympathetic to the architects and congregations they study and admirably retrieve for skeptical millennial readers the spiritual and social meaning postwar churches had to the congregations that built them. They depict postwar churches as an attempt by parishioners to respond to an atomic age that they felt demanded a new architecture to proclaim the Gospel amidst a consumerist and media savvy culture.

Yet one of the most salient themes in both texts is the tension between tradition and modernity: the divide between the updated but traditional structures postwar congregations desired and the modernist buildings preferred by newly ordained clergy and young architects. Both writers repeatedly admit that “the general public did not so much demand contemporary houses of worship as resign themselves to their inevitable construction.”

Detractors lamented the “grocery store” and “gas station” churches. “Seldom in history,” Price notes, “have supposedly sacred structures been the object of so many disparaging remarks.”

Buggeln and Price admit that modernist churches were controversial and never garnerered the popular support the era’s other public structures received. That calls into question their contention that postwar churches provide crucial insight into what Americans wanted to say, in stone and glass, about themselves and their faith communities.

Rev. Stephen M. Koeth, CSC, is a doctoral student at Columbia University, working on a dissertation on the suburbanization of American Catholicism.
The subject of half a millennium of historical scrutiny, what more about Leonardo da Vinci and his masterpiece the “Last Supper” remains to be said? In Young Leonardo, Jean-Pierre Isbouts and Christopher Heath Brown challenge the traditional account of Leonardo’s early career. They aim to uncover the real story of the development of this extraordinary artist, shedding fresh light on the context of Leonardo’s early work, and in the end, opening our eyes to the possibility of seeing Leonardo’s masterpiece afresh.

The authors, one an art historian and the other a surgeon who uses his knowledge of faces to analyze Renaissance portraits, published The Mona Lisa Myth in 2013.

Orthodox Narrative

The orthodox narrative of Leonardo’s formative artistic years runs something like this: As an apprentice in Florence, Leonardo distinguished himself as a prodigy, earning the recognition of Lorenzo de Medici, ruler of the Florentine Republic. Lorenzo dispatched him to Milan to serve as the court artist for the would-be duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza. He became the most celebrated artist of the Milanese court, executing ducal portraits, designing sets and costumes for its festivities, and, along the way, painting his masterwork, the “Last Supper.”

Isbouts and Brown maintain the truth is less clear-cut. Young Leonardo approaches the artist not through the art itself—whose obvious genius belies his struggle for approval in both Florence and Milan—but through the lens of the political and art-historical backdrop of fifteenth-century Italy.

Through an explication of the aesthetic expectations of patrons (which Leonardo repeatedly failed to meet) and the decline of the Medici stronghold on Florence, the authors contest both the extent of Leonardo’s Florentine celebrity as well as the terms on which he left for Milan. They also cast doubts on his status in the Milanese court. He didn’t receive any major commissions for years, and when large projects did arise, he was regularly overlooked in favor of Lombard artists.

The greater part of the book is devoted to the form, process, meaning, and circumstances surrounding the revolutionary “Last Supper.” The authors reject the notion of the fresco as the product of his sole, untethered genius. There were fairly strict representational conventions laid out by the Dominicans to which he was expected to adhere. The Last Supper was also an understandably popular theme for a refectory, and there were notable Quattrocento antecedents of the subject.

Leonardo’s Inventions

Yet Leonardo’s version is much less dependent on contemporary precedents than on solutions to problems he had already worked out for himself. It is remarkable just how thoroughly his scheme breaks from the customary arrangement. The architectonic grouping of the figures and the stunning array of emotions captured therein, the cinematic manipulation of light, the perspectival sleight of hand, the painted architecture used as a means of directing the viewer’s focus, and the timing of the “shot” at the climactic moment of the narrative—all of these were inventions overlaid on a program that was more or less defined.

Tracing Leonardo’s development from his earliest work, the authors establish the “Last Supper” as the culmination of decades of artistic exploration. The theatrical lighting seen in the “Last Supper,” for instance, can be found in the dramatic chiaroscuro in some of his early Florentine paintings. His “Adoration of the Magi” displays the same daring transformation of the principal subject and astonishing range of emotional expression that make the “Last Supper” resonate with such force.

Unfortunately, Leonardo’s characteristic inventiveness extended to the medium. Due to a failed experimental tempera paint, very little remains of the original painting.

However, the authors offer compelling evidence that a copy of the “Last Supper” was completed for King Louis XII of France under Leonardo’s immediate supervision. Amazingly, they claim this painting may still be in existence today, in the form of a twenty-five-foot-wide canvas whose patron has never been determined. This revelation, if true, affords an opportunity to see Leonardo’s masterpiece anew, in all its original vitality.

Ultimately, what is the picture of Leonardo’s early life that emerges in Young Leonardo? He was a genius, to be sure, but also an outsider—one whose earliest attempts at revitalizing Italian art were met mostly with rejection. Yet his lack of critical success never deterred his revolutionary vision, nor would his early failures prevent him from becoming the star around which much art of the following century would orbit. Just as Leonardo brought fresh life to a stagnating artistic milieu, so too does this small, eminently readable book bring fresh life to our understanding of his work.

Julian Murphy is a graduate architecture student at the University of Notre Dame.
BOOK REVIEW

FROM THE PUBLISHING HOUSES


Subtitled “How Mass can become a time of grace, nourishment, and devotion,” this book begins with the author’s small son saying “Eating donuts after” when asked what is his favorite part of Mass. If he still says that at fourteen, the author writes, he won't be going at all when he’s twenty-four. “When he is twenty-four and asked why he goes to Mass, I want him not to respond “donuts,” but ‘divinization.’” The book offers ten “how to” chapters, from “How to enter the church building” to “How to respond to the dismissal.” The “devotional” in the title comes out in the way the “how to” chapters are focused. That on the dismissal, for example, describes the Mass as a spiritual boot camp and the dismissal as a “call to arms.” Christopher Carstens edits the Adoremus Bulletin, teaches at Mundelein Seminary’s Liturgical Institute, and directs the Diocese of La Crosse’s Office for Sacred Worship.

Ritual and Art Across the Danish Reformation: Changing Interiors of Village Churches, 1450-1600, by Martin Wangsgaard Jurgensen (Brepols, 2018) 586 pages, $163.00 hardcover

Denmark enjoys over 1,000 rural parish churches preserved from the Middle Ages. Ritual and Art Across the Danish Reformation traces the Reformation changes through a study focused not only on the use of the interiors but on how people understood and experienced the liturgy celebrated in them. The author argues that in the Middle Ages “the sacralization of architecture and images through liturgy had established visual conventions which did not lose their appeal despite the fact that Lutheran theologians initially did their best to make them do so.” It is part of the publisher’s Ritus and Artis series and is illustrated with 168 black-and-white images and drawings. The author teaches theology at the University of Copenhagen.


A small, compact, well-illustrated, extensively footnoted book, Come and See gives the pilgrim a biblical, theological, and physical introduction to fifteen major sites in Galilee, the Dead Sea area, and Jerusalem. The chapter on Nazareth, for example, begins with the biblical background, including a reflection on who exactly Joseph was and what he did, and an archaeological description. It then offers five “issues raised” by what we know, such as how Christians should read the Old Testament prophecies. The chapter concludes with “points for reflection” and some notes for seminarians. An experienced guide to the Holy Land, the author is a priest of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis and doctoral student at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

San Lorenzo in Verona, by Angelo Pasquello (Cierre Edizioni, 2018) 258 pages, €29.00 paperback

An exacting study of the ancient church of Saint Laurence in Verona, using unpublished documents, from its building in the twelfth century and changes in the centuries after that, to a nineteenth-century attempt at restoring the original church, to its post-war repair of the damages it sustained from allied bombing. The book, written in Italian, contains dozens of black-and-white images of the church, floor plans and other descriptive drawings, and sixteen axonometric images of a model of the church.

Mochi’s Edge and Bernini’s Baroque, by Estelle Lingo (Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017) 328 pages, $125 hardcover

Now mostly unknown, having been eclipsed by his younger contemporary Bernini, the Florentine sculptor Francesco Mochi (1580-1654) created one work that millions have seen: the visually dramatic sculpture of Saint Veronica in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The Tuscan sculptor developed “a new sculptural language that sought to preserve Renaissance artistic values—above all commitments to the representation of the body, the insistent materiality of sculpture, and the agency of the artist—while adapting these values to the exigencies of the new era,” argues art historian Estelle Lingo. That combination produced “an extreme tension in his art that resulted in some of the century’s most breathtaking sculptures.” Mochi’s Edge includes 250 high-quality color and black-and-white photos of Mochi’s works taken for this book. The author is the Donald E. Petersen Professor in the Arts at the University of Washington and has held the Mellon professorship at the National Gallery of Art.


A chronological, illustrated guide to “England’s purpose built parish churches” from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present. To the descriptive chapters are added short features on the fittings, features, and monuments of the period. The book is heavily illustrated with photographs of the churches and line drawings of features (floor plans, types of roofs, the varieties of decorated style windows, etc.). It covers only Anglican churches, though Catholic readers will note that some of those were once Catholic churches. Part of the Pevsner Architectural Guide series, Churches is edited by joint series editor Simon Bradley. It is especially good for architectural amateurs, the Times Literary Supplement reviewer calling it “an excellent starting point” that will help readers see the difference “between a stopped and a sunk chamfer.”

Correction: Gottfried Heinersdorff lived and worked in Berlin, Germany, not Munich as was stated on p. 37 of Sacred Architecture Issue 33.