The list of artists, architects, and dancers who are canonized saints is not very long. Yet the artists who tried to live saintly lives is. I knew one myself. Catholic artists live to make the world a more beautiful place and to allow Christ to be present in man’s highest creation. That creation is an art which edifies man and glorifies God.

I knew a ballerina who tried to portray joy in all that she did. She knew that it seemed natural to make dance about oneself, about novelty or eroticism. Her goal instead was to sanctify the art form, to reject the worldly and revive the good, the true, and the beautiful. The finest ballets share this with great art and architecture: a profound story is told, the music uplifts, and the performance is a work of excellence.

She was devoted to her craft, spending countless hours practicing and studying the works of great ballerinas. She pushed her body like an athlete to be the best physically and like a musician to be the best technically. Like all classical artists she sought out great teachers both living and dead, and wanted to bring new classical works of choreography to the public.

She was not a prodigy in high school, but pushed herself to improve and each year she gained technique and roles. She disliked mediocrity, especially in herself, and wanted to be perfect as her Heavenly Father is perfect. Her strength, like many Catholic artists, came from daily Mass and its extension, Eucharistic adoration.

Like some of the greatest artists and even saints, she died young, at twenty-three. She is my daughter, Raffaella Maria Adelaide Stroik. This was the prayer she wrote:

God, the Most High, I thank you for this opportunity to use my gifts that you graciously bestowed on me. I praise you and bless you for this expertise. May I use them to help glorify your holy name. May the talent and beauty I possess point to the exquisiteness that you bestow on the world. May all those that see it glorify your loveliness, for all things flow from you. Jesus, the searcher of minds and hearts, I invite you into my heart today. Create a new one within me. Replace my stony heart with one that beats only to love you. I want nothing, if not you. Send forth the Holy Spirit, the Bearer of love, joy, and peace, to rest upon me. Keep me free from harm, pure in heart. Keep me joyful in mistakes, passionate in holy desires. Keep me strong in adversity, confident in fear. Remind me that my soreness and bruises are proof that I loved fiercely. Help me to not let the suffering go to waste, and to offer it up to you as purification for my shortcomings. Saint Vitus and Saint Genesius of Rome, pray for me.

Duncan G. Stroik
Notre Dame, Spring 2019
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Sacred Architecture, a publication of the Institute for Sacred Architecture, is dedicated to a renewal of beauty in contemporary church design. Through scholarly and popular articles on architectural history, principles of design, and contemporary buildings, the Journal seeks to inspire and inform.
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TRUE
GOOD
BEAUTIFUL

Brings us to

God

-Pope Francis

Sacred Architecture
Issue 35  2019

St. Mary of Perpetual Help
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St. Mary of Perpetual Help
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New Lighting for Michelangelo’s Pietà, Rome
A new lighting scheme has been installed for Michelangelo’s Pietà in Saint Peter’s Basilica. Italian lighting company iGuzzini designed four schemes for the side chapel where Michelangelo’s incomparable work is located. All of the new fixtures are warm-tone LEDs. The first scheme emphasizes the sculptural detail, highlighting the plasticity and overall harmony. The second scheme lights the right side of the statue, leaving Jesus and Mary’s faces in shadow. The other two options are a “full light” scheme and the “daily” scheme, which lights the statue entirely from the front.

David Watkin, RIP
Renowned architectural historian David Watkin died on August 30, 2018, at the age of seventy-seven. Emeritus professor at the University of Cambridge and emeritus fellow of Peterhouse, Watkin was also a prolific author, writing over thirty books, including *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement* (1977). In 2013 he received the Henry Hope Reed Award, established by Richard H. Driehaus in association with the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. It is given to an individual working outside the practice of architecture who has supported the cultivation of the traditional city and its architecture and art. An essay adapted from his book *The Roman Forum* was published as “The Churches on the Forum” in *Sacred Architecture* Issue 23.

Van der Rohe becomes Pastoral Center, Des Moines
A building originally designed as a bank by Modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, which has served as the Diocese of Des Moines’s chancery since the 1990s, has been restored. The building received historic status in 1992, and was purchased by a group of private individuals who donated it to the diocese. The renovation of the 55,400-square-foot Catholic Pastoral Center was completed last summer. It replaced the HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and security systems, upgraded audio/visual equipment and LED lighting throughout the building, and replaced select exterior finishes and pavement. Designed by BBS Architects | Engineers of Des Moines, Iowa, the work was performed for $10 million by Neumann Brothers, Inc also of Des Moines. Having rigorously restored the building’s historic features, the diocese expects to get one-quarter of that back from the state.

Sacred Architecture News

**Four new lighting schemes were designed for Michelangelo’s Pietà by Italian lighting company iGuzzini. Left: Before the new schemes were implemented. Right: After**

*Calvary Chapel of Biola University, Los Angeles*
This chapel in Los Angeles was rededicated in early September after a $1.9 million renovation. Working in a variety of media, Danish artists Peter Brandes and Maja Lisa Engelhardt redesigned the interior with a seventeen-foot-tall by thirty-one-foot-wide gilded relief titled “Resurrection” on the wall behind the pulpit, new lighting, and contemporary stained-glass windows depicting scenes from the Old Testament and the Gospels. The chapel was originally designed by John Andre Gougeon and built in 1975.

*A large gilded relief and new stained-glass windows were installed in Calvary Chapel at Biola University in Los Angeles.*
Saint Adalbert Church for Sale, Chicago

The Archdiocese of Chicago put Saint Adalbert Church up for sale in the summer of 2018. The 2.14 acre lot comprising the 1,800-seat church, rectory, convent, school, and off-street parking is listed through commercial real estate broker SVN. Being close to I-90 and a CTA rail station, the property is being marketed as having transit-oriented-design (TOD) potential and thus a candidate for transformation into condominiums. Local preservationists and members of the parish, primarily under the auspices of the Society of Saint Adalbert, seek to keep church open by converting the convent into a bed & breakfast. Saint Adalbert was designed by architect Henry J. Schlacks and built from 1912 to 1914. Schlacks designed numerous churches in Chicago and the Midwest, including the Shrine of Christ the King (formerly Saint Clara/Saint Gelasius) undergoing restoration after a fire in 2015.

Christian Persecution, China

Crosses have been forcibly removed from Catholic churches across China. One in the city of Lingkun was severed in early October from the steeple with a blowtorch and pulled off by a crane by workers sent by the United Front, a popular movement of permitted political groups organized by the Chinese Communist Party. Party officials claimed it was “too visible.” This is but one example of the ongoing persecution of Christians in China, with particular hostility directed at the Catholic Church.

Church of Saint John Cantius, Chicago

This church in Chicago, Illinois, was solemnly consecrated for the first time in October. The Rite of Dedication of the Church and Altar and Mass of Dedication was celebrated by the Most Reverend Joseph N. Perry, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago. The church was designed by Adolphus Druding and built from 1893 to 1898, when it was blessed but not consecrated.

Church Roof Collapse, Roman Forum

In late August, much of the roof collapsed at the Church of San Giuseppe dei Falegnami (Saint Joseph the Carpenter) adjacent to the ancient Roman Forum. No one was injured. The church was begun under the architect Giacomo della Porta and continued by Giovanni Battista Montano and Giovanni Battista Soria, and finally completed in 1663. Among the proposed explanations of the damage was a previous faulty restoration and any combination of deterioration due to insects, moisture, and water damage. Now a popular location for weddings, the church is built over the ruins of the ancient Mamertine Prison, where both Saints Peter and Paul are believed to have been imprisoned before their martyrdom.

Carroll College’s new chapel was a former gym, built in 1917, and later renovated through the generosity of Dr. Earl Heller.

Roof collapse at San Giuseppe dei Falegnami in the Roman Forum.
Chapel of the Holy Shroud Reopens, Turin

The Cappella della Sacra Sindone (Chapel of the Holy Shroud) in Turin was reopened in late September, after a twenty-one-year closure for renovation. A fire blazed through the chapel in April 1997, intensified by wood scaffolding still there after a restoration earlier that year. The fire so badly damaged the marble that replacement stone had to be quarried from Fabrosa, the source of the original distinctive marble, and the bronze had to be replaced as well. The renovation cost over €30 million with €28 million having been funded by the Ministry of Culture and an additional €2.7 million donated by the Compagnia di San Paolo. The chapel was designed by the Modenese architect and Theatine priest Guarino Guarini and built from 1668 to 1694.

The Chapel of the Holy Shroud reopened after an intensive twenty-one year, €30 million renovation following fire damage in 1997.

Saint Ambrose Relics Confirmed, Milan

A forensic analysis in October confirmed the authenticity of the relics of Saint Ambrose (c. 340–397), Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor of the Church. The technicians, led by Dr. Cristina Cattaneo, confirmed evidence of a fractured collarbone that never fully healed. Ambrose referred to the resultant chronic pain in a letter to his sister Marcellina, also a canonized saint. The forensic team also verified that the relics are those of a man aged approximately sixty years at the time of death. The team found that Saints Protasius and Gervasius likely were twins, possessing the same congenital vertebral defect, and at about 5'-10" were tall for their time. (Ambrose was about 5'-6".) Ambrose had their relics translated to Milan while he was bishop there. The three saints’ relics can be seen together in the crypt underneath the high altar of the basilica of Saint Ambrose in Milan.

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New conventual church, France

A new church built for the motherhouse of the Fraternity of Saint Vincent Ferrer in Chémeré-le-Roi, France, was blessed in late September. The chapel was blessed during a Pontifical Solemn Mass on the traditional feast of Saint Michael the Archangel celebrated by the Most Reverend Guido Pozzo, then-Secretary of the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei. Over 1,200 faithful assisted at the Mass, overflowing to the outside where large television screens were set up for viewing.

San Marco Convent Closed, Florence

One of two Dominican convents in Florence founded in the fifteenth century, the Convent of San Marco was closed last September. Designed by the architect Michelozzo, San Marco is renowned for its frescos by Fra Angelico throughout the priory. At the time of its closure, it was home to four elderly friars, who moved to the other fifteenth-century convent, Santa Maria Novella. It has not been determined what will become of the convent. San Marco is state property and the Ministry of Culture may absorb it into the Museo di San Marco.

The Pontifical Solemn Mass for the new conventual Church of the Fraternity of Saint Vincent Ferrer in Chémeré-le-Roi, France, with an overflow crowd seated outside the church
New National Cathedral, Ghana

Ghanaian-British architect David Adjaye is designing a new National Cathedral of Ghana, to be located in fifteen acres of garden in the capital city of Accra. The interdenominational Christian church will measure over 700,000 square-feet and will include a 5,000-seat auditorium, baptistery, music school, art gallery, and Ghana’s first Bible museum. Adjaye designed the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., which opened in September 2016. “I have sought to craft a building that not only understands its landscape but one that will be unique to Accra and the Ghanaian Nation,” the architect said. Ghana’s president called it “a Church of national purpose.”

Architecture Conference, Vatican

An invitation-only conference on liturgy and its relation to sacred art and architecture since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council was held in Rome in mid-November. The conference referred to Vatican II as “the first important opening of the Church to contemporary art.” Roma 1968-2018: Arte Sacra e Spazi di Culto (religious art and places of worship) was sponsored by the Vatican Museums, MAXXI (National Museum of Twenty-First Century Arts), and ANISA (Associazione Nazionale Insegnanti Storia dell’Arte). Speakers included Paolo Portoghesi, a prominent Italian architect, as well as other professors from Sapienza University of Rome and the Polytechnic Universities of Milan and Turin.

Columbus Murals Controversy, Notre Dame

Twelve 130-year-old murals of Christopher Columbus in the Americas by Luigi Gregori in the University of Notre Dame’s Main Building will be covered, the university’s president has declared. Full-scale photographs of the murals will be displayed elsewhere on campus. In a January letter, Reverend John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., conceded that Columbus presented a magnanimous figure to Catholic immigrants under suspicion in the late nineteenth century. “For the native peoples of this ‘new’ land, however, Columbus’s arrival was nothing short of a catastrophe. Whatever else Columbus’s arrival brought, for these peoples it led to exploitation, expropriation of land, repression of vibrant cultures, enslavement, and new diseases causing epidemics that killed millions.”

New Cathedral in Pekhon, Myanmar

The cathedral was blessed in mid-December. The Diocese of Pekhon was erected in 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI. Forty-four priests, six men in religious orders, and forty-five women in religious orders serve about 50,000 Catholics in fifteen parishes. Catholics make up about one in six people in the majority-Buddhist area. Originally served by priests and brothers of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, the last missionary died in 2007. The new cathedral replaces a former cathedral that was irreparably damaged by an earthquake in 2005.
New Abbess and Abbey, Missouri
For the first time in American history, a Benedictine abbess was consecrated according to the traditional Pontificale Romanum. The day after dedicating the Abbatial Church of Our Lady of Ephesus in Gower, Missouri, the late Bishop Robert Morlino, formerly of the Diocese of Madison, consecrated Mother Cecilia Snell, O.S.B., as Abbess of Our Lady of Ephesus. The abbey church was designed by William Heyer Architect of Columbus, Ohio, and built by Straub Construction of Shawnee, Kansas, for $6.5 million. It measures approximately 14,000 square-feet. The choir seats fifty nuns, including the abbess, with nave seating for aspirants and seating for 150 visitors in the transept. Heyer and Shawnee also designed and built the abbey residence, parlors, cloister, and chapter room, which were built from 2009 to 2015.

New Chapel at the University of Saint Francis, Indiana
A new chapel at the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne, Indiana, was blessed in early October. The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, celebrated Mass and blessed the Oratory of Saint Francis of Assisi. The 260-seat chapel was designed by William Heyer Architect of Columbus, Ohio, and built for $4.7 million by Tonn & Blank Construction of Michigan City, Indiana, with the assistance of Design Collaborative Architects, Fort Wayne, Indiana. “This will truly be the dwelling place of the Lord,” the bishop said in his homily, “since here the most holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, will be celebrated and reserved.”

Flood Damage to the Basilica of Saint Mark, Venice
Sixteen hours of three-foot-deep flood water in the city of Venice extensively damaged the marble and mosaic floor of Saint Mark’s Basilica. The flooding in late October was the highest since 1966 when the acqua alta surpassed six feet. The procurator of the basilica, Carlo Alberto Tesserin, said that the cathedral had “aged twenty years in a day.” A preliminary estimate of the cost of remediation was €2.7 million.

Church Renovation, New York
Our Lady of Victory Church in Rochester, New York, was renovated for the celebration of its sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary. The renovation was managed by Granda Liturgical Arts. It included refinishing the high altar and side altars, building a new altar rail, freestanding altar, and baptistery, and refinishing the sanctuary and nave floors. Although the church was blessed after completion in 1868, it was solemnly consecrated by the Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano, Bishop of Rochester, on the Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.

Controversial Light Show, Rome
A light show was projected onto historic Roman churches in October. Barcelona-based digital visualization company Onionlab created the “Solid Light Festival” projected onto the facades of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (where Saint Catherine of Siena is buried), Sant’ Agostino, and the Pantheon. Scenes projected onto Santa Maria Sopra Minerva included pulsating orbs, collapsing walls, and tunnels terminating in an abyss.

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**News**

**Restoration at Basilica of the Nativity, Bethlehem** Restoration work continues at the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, described less than ten years ago by an art historian as “in the direst need of the greatest care.” A major restoration began in 2013, a year after the basilica was given UNESCO world heritage status. The $17 million project is making repairs throughout the church, replacing wood members in the roof structure, restoring exterior windows, and cleaning interior and exterior stone. The most noticeable restoration is that of the wall and floor mosaics. Work on the floor mosaics was completed in time for Christmas 2018. The church was originally built in the fourth century by Saint Helen—mother of Emperor Constantine—over the place where Jesus Christ was born. The present church dates to the reign of Emperor Justinian I, who ruled Byzantium from 527 to 565. Like the other sacred sites in the Holy Land, it is administered jointly by the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic Churches, with each responsible for defined areas under the nineteenth-century Status Quo agreement.

**Fra Angelico Masterpiece Restored** Fra Angelico’s great masterpiece *The Annunciation* has been restored to recover its bright colors and intense light, with much of the work repairing earlier attempts at restoration. The c. 1425 altarpiece at the Museo del Prado in Madrid will be on display in its regained splendor along with works by other early Renaissance artists. The exhibition, *Fra Angelico and the Rise of the Florentine Renaissance*, will be open for the museum’s bicentenary in May 2019. The €150,000 restoration was funded jointly by American Friends of the Prado Museum and Friends of Florence.

**Proposed Center in front of Chartres** The city of Chartres proposes to replace the gentle slope of the parvis (forecourt) in front of its famous cathedral with a modernist “interpretation center” that will rise like a long rectangular lid from the space right in front of the cathedral. The work is projected to cost €23.5 million. The twelfth-century cathedral is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which describes it as “the complete and perfected expression of one of the most characteristic aspects of medieval art.”

**Bishop Robert C. Morlino, RIP** The Most Reverend Robert Charles Morlino, Bishop of the Diocese of Madison, passed away on Saturday, November 24, 2018, at the age of seventy-one. Bishop Morlino studied at the University of Notre Dame for his Master’s in Philosophy, Weston School of Theology for his Masters of Divinity, and the Pontifical University in Rome to earn his doctorate in Moral Theology. He went on to teach Philosophy at Loyola College, Saint Joseph University, Boston College, Saint Mary’s College, and the University of Notre Dame. In 1999 Pope Saint John Paul II appointed him the ninth bishop of Helena, and later the fourth bishop of Madison in 2003. He was a strong supporter of beautiful liturgical art and architecture, playing a large part in the construction of Saint Paul’s Catholic Center at the University of Madison. At the dedication of the chapel in 2017, he said, “beauty is our tool of evangelization. Beauty is a way that every human person can come to know God, because God is beauty itself.” Throughout his life he devoted himself to the mission of promoting diocesan vocations, increasing piety in the diocese, and challenging Catholic institutions to fully express their faith in the public square. A memorial fund has been set up to memorialize his legacy with the primary intention of constructing a chapel and crypt for the future Diocese of Madison cathedral building. The diocese has been without a cathedral since Saint Raphael Cathedral was heavily damaged by fire in 2005 and demolished in 2008.
Hand carved 4' sculpture of Our Lady of Guadalupe
St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic Church in Spring, TX
Polychromed, gold gilded (24. kt), engraved ornaments

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Pictured above: Restored Sanctuary of St. Stanislaus Catholic Church - Milwaukee, Wisconsin
S.O.S: SAVE OUR SPIRE

Duncan G. Stroik

The French people have a lot of experience in rebuilding churches. World War II, World War I, various nineteenth-century governments, the French revolution, the Huguenots and before that, the barbarian hordes, all took a toll on these heavenly palaces. Not to mention fires and damage due to the travails of time. This latest fire, watched by tens of millions on the internet, calls for the rebuilding of the roof, the spire, and part of the ceiling of Notre Dame in Paris. Other elements such as stonework, stained glass and the magnificent organ are likely to be restored.

What is turning out to be the most controversial aspect of the vaunted restoration is the spire. In 1793 the original spire of Notre Dame cathedral was mutilated and taken down by the revolutionary government. For sixty years artists recorded the grand old dame without it.

Then in the 1850s, it was redesigned and rebuilt as part of a major conservation and rebuilding of the cathedral by the influential gadfly Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc.

One hundred sixty years later the French government had erected scaffolding and was commencing to restore the spire when it perished in a horrific conflagration. There was a huge outpouring of sympathy and donations, up to $1 billion, for the cathedral.

Why would people care about a cathedral in our modern secular age? It is clearly because Notre Dame is a beloved monument, a symbol of France and one of the best-known and most visited works of architecture in the world. But even more importantly, though perhaps not consciously felt by all, Notre Dame Cathedral is a sacred place.

Sometimes the goal is to rebuild the building similar to the way it was, and at other times the goal is to rebuild it bigger and better. In the case of the Notre Dame spire (or flèche) that burned, it was a nineteenth-century replacement. Designed by Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, the preeminent Gothic architect of the nineteenth century, the spire was larger and taller than its predecessor.

Viollet’s spire was an octagonal flèche which rose 305 feet from the ground and 146 feet above the roof. According to Viollet, the wood structure weighed 550 tons and the lead covering was 275 tons.

What did Viollet do? He enlarged the spire by adding a second level to the base and stretching the central conical roof. He enlarged the base and modified the interior structure so that it could better withstand the storms that are the enemies of towers. After one such storm, Viollet verified that the spire had only moved twenty centimeters.

Interestingly, the octagonal base of the spire was rotated so that four of its corners aligned with the roof ridges. This allowed Viollet to arrange larger-than-life copper statues of apostles and evangelists above where the roofs meet. These are the sixteen statues sculpted by Victor Geoffroy-Dechaume that had already been removed for restoration when the fire struck. The statues stepped up the roof toward the base of the octagon with its columnar buttresses.

Beyond the buttresses, eight gothic arches with tracery like the windows of the nave supported a first level. A second level with smaller arches supported gables with tracery and gargoyles downspouts. The corner buttresses held pilasters which are like miniatures of the central spire.

This conical spire was beautifully ornamented with hundreds of croq or croquets on its ridges which soared ninety-five feet up in the air. On top there was a large cross with a weather-vane rooster containing relics: a thorn from Christ’s crown of thorns and relics of Saint Denis and Saint Genevieve, patron saints of Paris.

So why not replace Viollet’s spire with something new and improved? If the purpose is to do something that contrasts with the cathedral, a modernist spire will succeed. If the purpose is to be taller or made out of modern materials, many architects would be only too happy to oblige.

But what if the requirement is to do something better than Viollet, something more beautiful than the iconic spire at the crossing of one of the most well-known churches in the world? Using the Gothic language, that would be difficult to achieve. Nothing Gothic on this scale has been done since the completion of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., in 1988, and there are few architects adept at its syntax.

If that were the goal, it would disqualify all of the designs heretofore proposed. Of course it is conceivable that someone could design a new spire more beautiful than Viollet’s, but why should we even consider it?

The only criticism of Viollet’s spire I have heard so far is that it wasn’t original. Its youth, only 160 years old, is not a sin or a reason to replace it as if it were a nonfunctioning plumbing fixture. Unless someone can convince Parisians that Viollet’s spire was not in keeping with the cathedral’s architecture, had some functional structural flaw, or was ugly, then why not rebuild Viollet’s spire in all its Gothic glory?
Built right after the Council of Trent, the Church of the Gesù (1568) stands in the heart of Rome on what seems to be an island flanked by streams of busy streets. The stark imposing façade proudly displays the monogram “IHS,” representing not only the name of Jesus in Greek but in Hebrew, the name the angel defined as “He who saves his people from their sins.”

Inside, with its eclectic array of artistic styles, one is greeted by an exuberance of angels and saints, biblical scenes, and relics, most notably the body of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the arm of Saint Francis Xavier, and the arm of the martyred Saint Andrew Bobola—all underneath a ceiling that portrays the Name of Jesus resplendent in heavenly glory.

From the busy streets of Rome, the Gesù is a retreat into sacred beauty. But most importantly, it presents the visitor with the itinerary of a spiritual pilgrimage leading to union with God through means of the visual, so that he may be filled with the love of Divine Mysteries. It offers a moment of edification that can lead to conversion from sin.

Saint Ignatius’ Influence

One of the greatest influences in the decoration of the Gesù was the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, published in 1548. These meditations were a means toward union with God and his saints using the imagination. Ignatius writes: “When the contemplation or meditation is on something visible, for example when we contemplate Christ our Lord, the representation will consist in seeing in the imagination the material place where the object is that we wish to contemplate.”

This representational meditation is an anamnesis, a remembrance of and participation in a sacred event. The mystery becomes alive, by adding color, architecture, emotion, and landscape. The meditation thus becomes a point of encounter between the soul and Christ and his saints. Sacred imagery becomes the visualization of...
the spiritual pilgrimage to the divine union the Spiritual Exercises pursue. It emphasizes not the anger of God at sinful humanity, but the merciful redemption of mankind through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, by the shedding of his blood.

The Circumcision is the Gesù’s patronal feast, celebrated on the first of January. It is important especially due to the admiration for martyrdom during the era, as it unites the name of Jesus with the blood of Christ as the only means of salvation. In his circumcision, Christ first sheds his blood, prefiguring his eternal sacrifice on the cross. It is one of the first moments proclaiming that man has the hope of participating in the triumph to come, which is eternal life with Christ.

Muziano’s Biblia Pauperum

At the Gesù, from 1587 to 1589, Girolamo Muziano (1532-1592) portrayed the Circumcision of Christ at the church’s high altar. It depicts two important themes: that the Son of God, born of the Virgin, is given the name Jesus; and that this was the first moment that the salvific blood of Christ was shed, in expectation of the crucifixion which he willingly received out of love for man.

The Gesù represents the Jesuit tradition of designing churches as catechetical, devotional, and liturgical edifices in which the true teaching of Divine Revelation was enshrined in its decoration. The decoration acted as a “biblia pauperum,” where the visuals were “books for the poor or unlearned.” The altarpiece was a means of teaching and edification, or moving the senses, to desire invisible divine mysteries much in the style of an evocative sermon. The Holy Name and redemption is further emphasized by two other important chapels in the church: the left transept’s chapel originally dedicated to the crucifixion, the right one to the Resurrection.4

In light of the biblia pauperum, an altarpiece must be a faithful portrayal of the life of Christ. Muziano’s masterpiece is a pictorial commentary and meditation on Luke 2:21: “And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”

Another source of the biblia pauperum can be found in liturgical sources such as the Breviarium Romanum, which usually gives the feast a spiritual or moral interpretation. The readings for the Matins of the Circumcision emphasize that Christ humbled himself as a small child, being born under the law. Like any child, he is circumcised to be dedicated to God, although he is in truth the holy and consecrated one of God. The breviary instructs the worshipper to circumcise his heart from sin, based upon Saint Paul’s teaching in Romans. As Christ underwent circumcision according to the law, he prefigured the forgiveness of sins which would be accomplished by the shedding of his blood and the Resurrection.

Fidelity to sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the liturgy is the foundation for the simple meditations of the Spiritual Exercises. These divine sources provide the first step for the representation prescribed by Ignatius. It is this tradition that Muziano follows while using artistic imagery and a holy imagination.

The visual technique of the Spiritual Exercises emphasizes that the Christian use his imagination to see the events in Christ’s life more spiritually and even mystically. Christ’s presence is in the here and now, and through this divine union, the soul can have a foretaste of transfiguration through grace.

Much like the Spiritual Exercises, Muziano’s art draws men closer to God. It goes beyond the catechetical purpose of merely educating the unlettered. Paintings are truly an educazione, that is, a formation beyond mere intellectual understanding. It is one that develops the interior life of the soul’s union with God.
The Circumcision

The original painting of the Circumcision by Muziano takes place in a loggia or a balcony of the Temple of Jerusalem, with the main figures situated on an orthogonal platform like actors on a stage. Christ is lying on a table/altar, which can be seen as a pictorial commentary on the Gesù’s actual high altar, situated below the painting which shall contain the unbloody sacrifice.

The child Jesus is not surrounded by a large crowd of figures that could distract from his place. The Son of God Incarnate with the humility of a child is the protagonist among a group of individuals supporting his role. The Mother of Jesus, the high priest, attendants, and pious men and women observe the scene.

The loggia or balcony opening up to a paradisical vision of hills and valleys, trees and the heavens, and the setting of the sun, encourages the contemplation of the truth of the beauty of nature from which one can see something of the beauty of God. The landscape by its ideal beauty represents the presence of the numinous, while a liturgical and devotional dimension is given by the vertical perspective of the altarpiece and especially those of its figures.

This altarpiece’s place within the greater plan of the Gesù also adds to its imaginative representation. The beauty of lapis lazuli, the gilding of sacred vessels, the painted ceilings, and the overall plan of the nave, point beyond themselves to the ineffable and divine beauty of God as earth leads to heaven. The beauty of creation becomes a meditative way to attain to a union with God whose beauty goes beyond human conceptions or symbols, which ultimately lack in the ability to describe this transfiguring reality.

Art That Portrays Life Eternal

Worshippers first gaze as they enter the Gesù ad orientem towards the Circumcision, with various mysteries of Christ’s life in the side chapels. As they lift their gaze skyward, a celestial fresco of the Triumph of the Name of Jesus (1679) by Giovanni Battista Gaulli (1639-1709) gradually transforms vibrant color that fades into the light of heavenly glory. Art then starts to portray life eternal.

Its founding principle is the humanity of Christ, which can be portrayed, and thus his earthly history becomes the door through which man can fulfill his desire to see, touch, hear, and taste Jesus’ divinity. Images make present in a meditative way the divine presence in a very incarnational manner. The senses find consolation, a flourishing of sanctified desire, in the portrayal of the sacred, rather than desolation of a deprivation of the beauty of God—a sensual and spiritual desolation where there does not seem to be love or hope by the seemingly palpable absence of God.

In the altarpiece, the high priest is performing the rite of Circumcision, assisted by a Levite holding Jesus. Joseph looks on from the left, leaning on his staff, while the Virgin’s sorrow is evident. As Ignatius of Loyola observes, the beseeching child looks “to his mother, who has compassion for the blood that flows from her son.” Such sorrow reminds us of the prophesied sword that shall pierce her heart, and her witness while standing beneath the cross where Christ’s blood was shed.

The surrounding figures are in awe and grief, especially the prophetess Anna, the old woman standing in contrast to the youthful and sorrowful face of Our Lady. The gesture of the hands is eloquent of the apprehension of Mary and Anna; these gestures also reflect a spiritual elegance and modesty promoted in the artistic style of the era. Nearby are attendants carrying...
ointment and oils for the wound, and water to wash the hands of the priest.  

The figures have a sense of balance and proportion. The bodies resemble classical stylization, showing an ideal beauty understood in the Renaissance era to emphasize what is good, and thus what is true. The painting never separates the three transcendentals of goodness, truth, and beauty.

In the altarpiece, there is no exuberance or variety of emotion or color, decoration, or figures, that would distract the viewer from contemplating the sacred event. The painter’s prudence is evident. His painting unites the beauty of the human figure, the dramatic landscape of varying colors of blue revealing the dimming sunlight, the fine architecture of the High Renaissance, and divine history common to sacred art of the era.

Muziano’s Way of Beauty

Through this via pulchritudinis, this way of beauty, Muziano reveals the dynamic of grace. The human condition is not negated, but divinized, thereby beautifying it, perfecting it, and ridding it of the stain, ugliness, and distortion of sin.

The Circumcision is a depiction not simply of one episode in Jesus’ life—it is a visually expressive moment where the Lord speaks to the soul of the individual looking at the painting. In it, the Lord reveals the mysterious and divine meaning of the historical event as spiritually relevant for the present. The Jesuit Jeronimo Nadal (1507-1580) points out that what is asked is not circumcision in the flesh or by the rule of the law, but of one’s heart. Circumcision of the heart means that the Christian should fiercely battle against temptations and the disordered passions of the flesh, which lead to perdition.

Without this battle, there is no union and interior beauty given by God’s indwelling in the soul. The circumcision of Jesus in the life of the believer is about the shedding of sins in order to rise to the heavens while on earth. A foretaste of Heaven would be the triumph of the name of Jesus glorified in the heavens, who was Incarnate of the Virgin Mary and who was given the name Jesus at the moment of his circumcision.

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Endnotes


10. Ignacio de Loyola, Ejercicios Espirituales (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1990), n. 317.


12. Ignacio de Loyola, Ejercicios Espirituales, n. 266; See, Nadal, Adnotationes et meditationes, 29.


14. Ibid.

15. See Nadal, Adnotationes et meditationes, 29.


Over the past several decades Evangelical Protestant churches have sought to build buildings that differ from traditional church architecture in order to attract unchurched individuals to the church. (I use George Barna’s definition of an unchurched individual as someone who has not attended a Christian church service within the past six months, excluding special services.)

This missions-based theory of church design is known as architectural evangelism. It proposes that traditional church architecture acts as a barrier for the unchurched and thus churches should build buildings rooted in secular typologies, using few or no ecclesiological markers, and constructed with low-cost materials. Familiar with this kind of building, the unchurched will be more apt to attend.

Supported by national conferences, monthly periodicals, and specialized design firms, architectural evangelism has visibly altered the religious built landscape of America. However, there has been little study of whether it does what it intends. In the past ten years, two studies examined how unchurched people responded to church architecture. Both Barna Research Group’s Making Space for Millennials and Lifeway Research Group’s “Sacred Space” concluded that they preferred more prototypical or traditional churches over secular-based churches.

Yet, these studies tested only a handful of images and did not explore the architecture. This paper looks at the results from an in-depth research study exploring the efficacy of architectural evangelism. Specifically, the research aims to explore the nature and relationships between the exterior design of Protestant churches and the judgments and preferences of unchurched people.

Influence of Evangelism

American Protestant church design has developed prototypical formulations through reflections on the relationships between liturgy, worship praxis, and space. It is also deeply influenced by the missionary or evangelistic call to reach individuals with the Gospel.

Historically, Protestant leaders have moved out from their churches, relocated to unchurched areas, and used non-church types of architecture, including warehouses, tents, schools, and theaters. This changed with the advent of the missionary theory known as “Church Growth theory” — the foundational missions theory of architectural evangelism.

Church Growth theory, developed by Donald McGavran and Americanized by his students at Fuller Theological Seminary, sought to utilize sociological tools to gain an understanding of a setting’s social, linguistic, and cultural context. Church leaders could then develop, refine, and utilize evangelistic tactics that were reproducible, effective, and contextual. (See McGavran’s Understanding Church Growth for an introduction to the theory.) Church Growth theorists found that in mass evangelism efforts like Campus Crusade and the Billy Graham crusades, a large number of individuals were converted yet few ultimately integrated into a church.

Church Growth theorists developed and propagated the idea that a more effective evangelism tactic would be to use the local church as the source of the evangelistic call. They shifted the direction of mission efforts from “going out” to reach the unchurched to “attracting” them into the church.

The rise of Church Growth theory was fueled by the adoption of its principles by several prominent Evangelical megachurch pastors. Among the best known are Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral, and Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, both in southern California, and Bill Hybels, former...
pastor of Willow Creek Church outside Chicago. They used sociology to understand the unchurched. An example of such work is journalist Lee Strobel’s book *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary*. They tried to create a church with no barriers to unchurched participation.

This included architectural design. As a heading in a 1996 Willow Creek Leadership Conference brochure read, “Traditional church forms can be barriers to our communicating with unchurched people.” Therefore, the question for church architecture became how to design a building that would remove barriers of communication such that the Gospel could be presented to individuals familiar with contexts such as the modern office building. An example of this work is Martin Robinson’s *A World Apart: Creating a Church for the Unchurched*.

**Architectural Evangelism’s Prescriptions**

Their discussions ultimately produced a missiological design logic for unchurched church architecture. Several design prescriptions formulate the basics of architectural evangelism’s missiological logic.

In short, the logic states that traditional church design is a barrier for unchurched and therefore churches should: be designed with more modern and familiar secular styles; remove ecclesiological markers; and avoid ornate buildings to avoid perceptions of hypocrisy. Unchurched individuals will have a higher level of preference, sense of comfort, and ultimately will be drawn to the church.

To examine the efficacy of architectural evangelism’s design prescriptions, a research study was completed using what is called an image-based sorting task interview. It used four case studies, with 200 participants.

The study used four churches in two locations: southeastern Michigan and southern California. In each location two churches were selected, one that had adopted the tenets of architectural evangelism and one that had not. Each had a worshipping population between 500 and 1500. Each selected self-affiliated with Evangelical Protestantism, the trans-denominational movement which has the highest adoption rate of architectural evangelism.

Two hundred individuals participated in the research: twenty-five from each case church and twenty-five unchurched people living close to each one. The churched individuals were chosen in proportion to each church’s age and sexual demographics. The unchurched participants were recruited so that there were corresponding age and gender demographics with the churched participants.

**Image-Based Sorting Task Interview**

The research utilized an image-based sorting task interview. Each participant was interviewed in a one-on-one in-person format for approximately one hour.

Twenty-five exterior images of churches constituted the set of test images. The images were selected according to the design’s use of four architectural characteristics:

1. Ecclesiological elements (strong, moderate, none)
2. Historic styling (historic, non-historic)
3. Roof design (pitched, flat)
4. Compositional hierarchy (pre-modern, mixed, post-modern)

The images were selected to create a fully-crossed set with each image designated as a combination of the design criteria. (We’ll look at 1, 3, and 4 here.) Participants were asked to respond to a series of prompts which asked them to rank the images according to preference and to sort them according to their:

1. Sense of comfort in approaching or entering the building (comfortable, uncomfortable)
2. Perception of aesthetic quality (beautiful, ugly)
3. Perception of proto-typicality (looks like a church, does not look like a church)
4. Past experiences (looks like a church I’ve had experience with, does not look like a church I’ve had experience with)

The data was analyzed for statistical significance and correlation using standard statistical tests (the Kruskal-Wallis statistical test with corresponding post-hoc measures and Spearman’s Rho correlation analysis.)

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*East Hills Church in Riverside, California, represents the low end of the scale of the case study research (least preferred, least beautiful).*
Preferences for Exterior Church Design

The interview asked individuals to rank the set of images according to their preference. Architectural evangelism expects that unchurched individuals would have a higher preference for modern non-church architecture, for architecture with few to no ecclesiological elements, and with flat roofs and post-modern compositional hierarchies.

However, the results suggest that this may not be the case. On the effect of ecclesiological elements, we found that unchurched respondents strongly prefer church buildings with a strong use of ecclesiological design elements, followed by a moderate use, and least prefer buildings with no use of ecclesiological design elements. Churched respondents also prefer church buildings with a strong use of ecclesiological design elements, and vary on secondary preference for moderate or no use of ecclesiological elements. Churched individuals that attend churches that adhere to architectural evangelism had a higher tolerance for no ecclesiological markers.

On the effect of roof design, we found that both unchurched and churched prefer churches with sloped roofs over buildings with flat roofs. And on the effect of compositional hierarchy, we found that unchurched and churched respondents do not prefer churches designed with a modern compositional hierarchy. Churched individuals agree, with a slight variation. Churched individuals from architectural evangelism find mixed compositional hierarchies to be more comfortable. Unchurched individuals find buildings with a pre-modern or mixed compositional hierarchy to be more comfortable than modern buildings. Churched individuals agree, with a slight variation. Churched individuals from architectural evangelism find mixed compositional hierarchies to be more comfortable.

Overall, the use of traditional ecclesiological design correlates with higher judgments of comfort by the unchurched. Again, this finding is contrary to the design prescriptions of architectural evangelism—suggesting that the efficacy of the prescriptions may be in error.

Importance of Beauty

In addition to comfort and overall preference, the interview asked participants to complete a ranking and sorting exercise based on their perception of aesthetic quality, prototypicality, and past experience. Some of the key observations are:

First, participants found churches designed with a strong use of ecclesiological elements, sloped roofs, and pre-modern use of compositional hierarchy to be the most beautiful.

Second, they judged churches designed with low-cost or austere construction methods to have the least aesthetic quality (i.e., to be ugly).

The participants were also asked to rank the set of images according to the level of comfort they would have attending the church for a church-sponsored service or event. They were asked to rank the images within a 5-point Likert scale from Very Comfortable to Very Uncomfortable.

On the effect of ecclesiological elements on the participants’ perception of their comfort in being in the church for a church event, we found that the unchurched consistently found church buildings with stronger use of ecclesiological elements in their design to be more comfortable. Churched individuals from architectural evangelism churches were more comfortable in mixed compositional hierarchies than pre-modern hierarchies.

On the effect of roof design, we found that everyone felt more comfortable with church buildings with sloped roofs than church buildings with flat roofs. And on the effect of compositional hierarchy, both churched and unchurched judged buildings with a modern compositional hierarchy as less comfortable. Unchurched individuals find buildings with a pre-modern or mixed compositional hierarchy to be more comfortable than modern buildings. Churched individuals agree, with a slight variation. Churched individuals from architectural evangelism find mixed compositional hierarchies to be more comfortable.

Efficacy of Architectural Evangelism

The research suggests that the efficacy of architectural evangelism’s design prescriptions may be limited. Unchurched individuals are not primarily driven by perception of comfort, nor do they prefer churches designed with non-prototypical secular based modern forms. Rather, they, like churched individuals, are primarily motivated and drawn to perceptions of beauty—which are best understood as churches designed with prototypical form, including strong use of ecclesiological elements, sloped roofs, and pre-modern and mixed compositional hierarchies.

Ultimately, this research suggests two ideas contrary to architectural evangelism: First, the Protestant church interested in attracting unchurched individuals should stop asking what the unchurched find comfortable, and begin asking what they find beautiful; and second, aesthetics is not a superfluous expenditure for a church, but at its root, is a part of its mission.

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That which is beautiful is true; that which is true must be beautiful.

-Owen Jones
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It may have been partly the bright light, I admit, after all those crepuscular chapels. As soon as I opened the door, before I saw the altar, or the tabernacle, or the crucifix, when all I could see were pews, I felt at home. “Jesus is here,” I thought with complete certainty.

My family and I had been received into the Church at the Easter Vigil three months before. I was in Oxford for a conference on Newman. A theologian friend, John Saward, also a convert, had given me a tour of the city, particularly the old college chapels. Some memorialized our former Anglican heroes. Saint Mary the Virgin on High Street memorialized our hero Newman when he was an Anglican.

And the reverse as well. It included the spot where the Reformation father Thomas Cranmer had been tried and convicted for tearing England away from the Church.

It had been a lovely day, full of the history and architecture I had loved as an Anglican, and was missing as a new American Catholic. (Our new parish was particularly inane and ugly. You wonder what serious architect could have thought it worth building.) All that history, beauty, all those lovely old chapels and churches. Then John suggested we end the day praying in the chapel of one the Catholic halls.

I don’t remember which chapel we visited, but a room of Anglican beauty it was not. It was fairly spare, with few shrines or candles or statues, and Ikea-style pews. Nothing to make your heart soar. But Jesus was there.

**A Fussy Anglican**

I had been a fussy Anglican. The aesthetic side of religion mattered much to me. I said then that beauty conveyed the eternal. Now I suspect I didn’t believe in the eternal as much as I thought. After we entered the Church, that feeling gradually left me. Ugly buildings and sloppy celebrations and sing-songy music that would have left me grumbling all Sunday afternoon didn’t bother me.

It was what my new brothers and sisters found meaningful, I thought. I had entered their Church and should not demand my own way. More than that: after years of deep commitment in what had been (somewhat unknowingly) a subjective form of Christianity, I was struck, and drawn, and compelled by Catholicism’s objectivity. It came as a liberation from a piety that depended either on what a Catholic would call scruples or a dangerous over-confidence in one’s closeness to God.

Jesus sits there in the tabernacle. He is there, whether or not I believe it, or feel it, or want it. He is there even if the church is ugly, the mass badly celebrated, the music insufferable. I loved the fact that Jesus is, as I liked to say, always just around the corner. My Anglican friends would roll their eyes, and some of my Catholic friends shake their heads, but with Jesus there, I could put up with pretty much anything.

I still feel that way. The Church who so calmly, serenely, objectively declares the truth, who brings Jesus to us body and blood, soul and divinity, transformed my mind and life. Give me the worst suburban mass over the most beautiful Anglican choral Eucharist. That world I don’t pine for.

Now, as the shrinking and aging diocese of Pittsburgh starts closing churches, one of which may be ours, I feel somewhat differently. Three or four years after we entered the Church, we stopped going to the church in whose boundaries we live, the ugly one, for several reasons. One is that the 1961 building is so ugly: a semi-overturned ark, red brick-walled, with inane abstract stained glass windows, and behind the altar a tall bas relief of Jesus giving what seems to be the Queen’s...
wave, the one where she holds her wrist still and moves her hand from side to side. His left hand, too. The choir sits facing the people on risers to the right of the sanctuary.

Recent pastors have done what they could, one putting the tabernacle behind the altar, another putting a statue of Mary behind it to the right. But still, they can’t do much with the building. It doesn’t feel like a sacred space. It feels to me like a space made not to be sacred. Jesus is there, but the building tries to tell you he’s not.

This is a Catholic Church

The parish we go to in the working class town across the river was built by Italian immigrants one-hundred-some years ago. Everything in the church says “This is a Catholic church”: the stained-glass windows picturing the biblical stories, the traditional stations along the nave, the Lady and Saint Joseph shrines on either side of the altar with their candle racks and their big statues, the shrine to the right with the Pietà and the statues of Saint Pio, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and Saint Anthony of Padua, the fresco of the Holy Family above the altar, the carved wood reredos with the realistic crucifix and the traditional gold tabernacle below it.

I still love the objective reality of the Church, and especially the reality that Jesus is here—and here no matter with what kind of church we surround him. Life can be hard. Faith can be hard. What I really need is for a church that says not only “Jesus is here,” but here is the history and here are the stories and here are Our Lady and the saints, this is where a taste of heaven can be found.

I light a candle at Saint Joseph’s shrine for a dying friend every Sunday. I then pray kneeling before that Pietà, meditating on the Mother of God holding her dead son, the dead son of God. I sometimes just sit in the pews and look around at all the things in that church that say “Jesus is here.” I need that.

David Mills, consulting editor of Sacred Architecture, is editor of Hour of Our Death (www.hourofourdeath.org) and is writing a book on Catholic death and dying for Sophia. He is the former editor of Touchstone and executive editor of First Things.
Reciprocity Between Window and Wall in Renaissance Florence

Virginia Raguin

Renaissance art was essentially public art, even as it was commissioned by single individuals and religious and civic organizations. The donor was keen to see the monument in a public place, accessible to all. It was a mark of status, a demonstration of piety, and a call for remembrance and prayers.

Religion, economics, and politics were linked. “Governments underscored their legitimacy with memorable images in which divine and civic virtues were combined,” explains the Renaissance specialist John Paoletti. The wealthy merchants’ status depended on their acumen and their largess in the decoration of the religious orders’ sites.

Prayer was another powerful incentive to pay for religious work. The patrons of the time were deeply convinced that prayers for the dead were essential for their ultimate reception in heaven. The chapels they supported were the sites where priests daily offered masses dedicated for the souls in purgatory. The prayers of the living were believed to be efficacious in obtaining forgiveness for any errors committed by individuals on earth and thus hasten their entry into heaven.

Florence’s Stained Glass

Let us look at the stained glass in Florence. Too often scholars neglect the stained glass of Florentine churches in favor of narrow studies of the frescos and the artists’ personal styles. The guidebooks often skim over the windows to concentrate on the non-transparent decorative elements.

In most cases the windows, frescos, and the altar pieces were commissioned as an ensemble. The city is splendid since so many works of art remain in their original locations and therefore the ensembles remain together.

The patrons were powerful families in Florence. They were keen to acquire the finest product using specified materials to reflect the imagery dear to the family. We have ample evidence through tax records and contracts between artists and patrons that issues such as size, time of completion, and guarantee of the artist’s personal contribution, not simply his workshop, would be part of the enterprise.

These contracts frequently specified materials. They might mandate a high-cost blue pigment derived from crushing lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone, for example, or real gold leaf, not a yellow paint substitute.
Santa Maria Novella

Families jealously guarded their rights to decorate chapels. The Ricci family had long held the right to decorate the walls of the chancel of Santa Maria Novella, but fell into financial straits, forcing them to declare bankruptcy in 1348. The original frescos in the chapel, painted by Andrea and Bernardo Orcagna in the mid-fourteenth century, had by the 1480s become severely water damaged. Still financially vulnerable, the family sold its right to the Sassetti family, wealthy bankers of the Medici.

Francesco Sassetti wanted a series of frescos to honor the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. The Dominicans opposed having images of the “competition” set in a central worship area of the church. Sassetti subsequently shifted his attention to Santa Trinita, which, although not a Franciscan foundation, accepted the subject matter. The Sassetti chapel there, painted by Domenic Ghirlandaio, included a portrait of the donor and six impressive scenes of the life of Francis.

The Riccis then sold their right to Giovanni Tornabuoni, who promised to continue the subject matter of the earlier, damaged frescos. He had risen to prominence as treasurer for Pope Sixtus IV, who reigned from 1471 to 1484. A fresco of him kneeling in prayer appears immediately to lower left of the window wall. His arms, a rampant lion quartered in green and gold, appears in the window he faces.

The chapel is renowned for its extensive and well-preserved fresco cycle and windows created by Ghirlandaio and his workshop between 1485 and 1490. (Ghirlandaio was buried at the church when he died in 1494.) The windows were fabricated by Alessandro Florentino. The chapel is dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin and the major themes are the Life of the Virgin and the Life of Saint John the Baptist, the subject matter of the original frescos.

On the left wall, below the Massacre of the Innocents, we see the Marriage of the Virgin to Saint Joseph. On the window wall above the donor portrait, we see the Annunciation, with the Archangel Gabriel kneeling before Mary. In the window, Saint Dominic holds lilies, Saint John the Baptist holds a cruciform staff, and, at the top, Saint Peter carries a book and keys.

The central section begins with the Miracle of the Snow. The legend tells that the Virgin appeared in a dream to Pope Liberius, asking for a church in her name. The following morning, despite it being August, snow fell, outlining the dimension of the church. Begun in 432, the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore is one of the most venerable in Rome.

Above the Miracle is the Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple. Above that is the Assumption of the Virgin, who lets down her girdle to Saint Thomas, a reference to the tangibility of her physical assumption to heaven. To the right, the row begins with Saint Thomas Aquinas wearing a star-studded robe and holding a sun of divine radiance, symbol of his inspired theology. Above him Saint Lawrence, a deacon in Rome, holds his grill, the symbol of his martyrdom. At the top is Saint Paul, a complement to Saint Peter on the left.

The completion of the chapel in 1490 is recorded in a Latin inscription placed on the arch in the fresco of Zachariah receiving the angel’s message: An [anno] MCCCCLXXXX quo pulcherrima civitas opibus victoris artibus aedificiisque nobil[is] copia salubritate pace perfruebatur (During the year 1490 the most beautiful city for wealth, victories and commerce, famous for its monuments, enjoyed abundance, health and peace).

The chapel to the right of the main altar was commissioned by Filippo Strozzi and decorated by Filippino Lippi between 1487 and 1502. Strozzi had been exiled to Naples and the commission was part of an extensive campaign to rehabilitate his family name. A contact has been preserved between the patron and the artist, one that his heirs continued after Filippo’s death in 1491.

The frescos of the window wall are executed in primarily grisaille, or neutral tones. In one, a pagan muse, music, holds a lyre and instructs a child to play the pan flutes. The illusionistic architecture creates a three-dimensional “trompe l’oeil” foil for the deeper colors in the glass.

Lippi also apparently designed the windows. In the main window, the Madonna and Child appear below a wreath with the Lamb of God. Below, under the Strozzi coat of arms showing a gold shield with a red band carrying three white crescents, we see the apostles John the Evangelist and Philip, name saint of the patron. On the left wall, Saint John the Evangelist resuscitates the Christian woman Druisana who had welcomed him in her home in Ephesus, a legend from early Christian times.

The Spanish Chapel

Each religious order was keen to promote its work in religious and social spheres, and did so in the decoration of their churches and buildings. We can see that in the Spanish Chapel, off the smaller cloister immediately to the left of the basilica. It honors the Dominicans in an extraordinarily complex and original composition. It retains one of the most admired fresco cycles of its time.

On the left side, the thirteenth-century Dominican philosopher Saint Thomas Aquinas sits enthroned, flanked by figures from the Old and New Testaments. Below him are personifications of the sciences and academic disciplines, such as canon law, music, and grammar, and...
below each of them its most notable proponent in history. Euclid sits below Geometry, for example. On the next wall, the altar wall, we see a moving narrative of the crucifixion. On the right wall, directly across from the image of the enthroned Thomas, the Dominicans honored their history as preachers by depicting luminaries of the order, Thomas Aquinas and Saint Peter Martyr, campaigning against heretics through text and speech. The entrance wall honors Saint Peter Martyr.

The Franciscans’ Santa Croce

The Franciscans were no less distinguished. Santa Croce’s numerous chapels were decorated by important families. The Baroncelli Chapel is one of the most celebrated. Located in the southern transept of the church, it commands a distinctive place within the building.

In the center is a large two-light window with three rows of saintly figures. A series of six images presents, from the bottom, John the Evangelist and Bartholomew, Louis of Toulouse and Sylvester, and Peter and John the Baptist. At the very top of the window Saint Francis receives the stigmata from the seraphic vision. Five of the saints in the windows are name saints of members of the Baroncelli clan as they are listed on the tomb: Pietro (Peter), Vanni (a diminutive of Giovanni for John the Baptist and John the Evangelist), Salveto (Sylvester), and Bartolo (Bartholomew). The Baroncelli coat of arms, a white shield with transverse bars of red, crowns the window.

Detailed images of the window show the color palette favored in Florence. In contrast to the insistent red and blue of French medieval glass, the Florentine windows incorporate a significant mixture of green and yellow.

The chapel was probably completed from 1328 to 1334 (the date of 1328 is inscribed on the Baroncelli tomb). The Baroncelli were discerning, ordering an altarpiece from arguably the most important painter of the era, and the fresco cycle from his most distinguished pupil.

The altarpiece, showing the Coronation of the Virgin, is signed by Giotto, responsible for cycles of frescos in the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi and the renowned Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Scholars have debated to what extent the master executed the work and what part his assistants played, as he accomplished his extensive work with the aid of a large workshop. A long tradition dating from the fifteenth century ascribed the frescos to Taddeo Gaddi, who was a close associate of Giotto, and the windows are associated with him as well.

The chapel’s dedication honored the Virgin Mary and both the frescos and the altarpiece elaborate narratives of her life. We perceive a dynamic reciprocity among altarpiece, window, and frescos. The viewer’s eye darts from subject to subject across the walls and within each scene; we read a story.
Altarpiece and Window

Both altarpiece and window command a central place. Light penetrates the space through the intense colors of the window just as the gold gilt of the altarpiece radiates light from its surface. Both altarpiece and window preserve a hieratic order, emphasizing presence. The saints, suspended in glassy brilliance, suggest to the viewer the glories of transfigured light enjoyed in the beatific vision. In contrast, the frescos, spread in bands across enveloping space, communicate an earth-bound narrative.

In the window wall, the narrative at the top on the left shows the Annunciation to the Virgin, the moment when Gabriel tells her that she will be the mother of the Messiah. On the right we find the Visitation, when the expectant Virgin visits her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Below, on the right is the Nativity of Jesus and on the left, the news communicated to the shepherds.

The second scene is a brilliant nighttime composition, showing two startled reclining shepherds illuminated by the glow of the angelic appearance. Gaddi’s image has remained a touchstone in art, with painters coming after him striving to capture a night scene with such clarity and intensity. Just below, the three Magi look up to a glowing star, in which the Christ Child stands, and on the right they kneel down and worship him.

Barely glimpsed, on the left, is a cycle on the early life of the Virgin. It shows Joachim, her father, expelled from the Temple because he has no child, an angel telling him of the promise of a child, his meeting with his wife Anna at the Golden Gate, the birth of the Virgin, her presentation in the Temple, and her marriage with Joseph.

To the right stand monumental figures of David holding the severed head of Goliath and above him Jesse, the founder of the line of David. Jesse was often depicted in conjunction with the Birth of Christ, following Isaiah: “And there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

The Bardi Chapel

Santa Croce’s Bardi Chapel, to the right of the main altar, was decorated by Giotto in about 1310. The Bardis were
bankers established in the thirteenth century. By the fourteenth century, with thirteen international branches—in London, Barcelona, Bruges, Paris, and other places—they were powerful enough to fund the English monarch, Edward III, during his war with France.

On the exterior wall above the chapel opening, the Stigmatization of Saint Francis draws attention to the stories of the saint's life on the interior walls. Indeed, the iconic image acts as a summation of the life of the saint. Framed by a stark mountainous landscape, Francis kneels outside a chapel. A seraph bearing the form of the crucified Christ hovers in the sky above.

Giotto not only designed the frescoes but the stained glass in the narrow lancet above. On the lowest level, we see Saint Louis of Toulouse wearing a blue cloak with fleur-de-lis, a symbol of France, and Pope Gregory IX in a red chasuble. The pope was a supporter of the mendicant orders and had canonized both Saint Francis and Saint Anthony of Padua. On the next level is Gregory's predecessor Pope Innocent III who approved the Franciscan Order. Next to him stands Saint Anthony of Padua, an immensely beloved Franciscan saint, barefoot, tonsured, and in simple, brown robes.

**Santa Maria del Fiore**

Florence’s cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore, often called the Duomo, was equally embellished with stained glass set within frescoed walls and chapels. Begun in 1296, the building was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio, also architect of Santa Croce. Its construction continued intermittently over the next century, the nave being completed by 1380. In 1418, the competition for the design of the great dome, the largest since Roman antiquity, was won by Filippo Brunelleschi.

Its completion in 1436 was a major event. Pope Eugenius IV presided at the consecration and the famous French composer Guillaume du Dufay created an innovative motet *Nuper rosarum flores* (“The rose blossoms recently”) whose patterns were inspired by the structure of the dome. Such a prestigious commission brought leading painters and sculptors for the design of the forty-four windows.

Although sadly difficult to see from the floor, the round windows (oculi) in the drum of the dome show the Life of Christ. Created by some of the greatest Florentine artists of the time, the windows include the Coronation of the Virgin (Donatello), Nativity and Resurrection (Paolo Uccello), Descent from the Cross (Andrea del Castagno), and the Presentation in the Temple and Agony in the Garden (Lorenzo Ghiberti). Similar windows decorate the entrance wall.

In other areas, such as the nave, we find a pattern of paired saints, generally in two to three superimposed rows. Ghiberti was responsible for many, including a series of female saints in the north nave. The long, narrow faces, dense patterns of clustered flowers or leaves in the border, and deep red or green of the drapery strewn with quatrefoil or cinquefoil stars show similarities with Ghiberti’s oculus of Saint Lawrence enthroned.

Florence is highly popular with visitors, but to the stained glass aficionado, careful planning is important. Come off-season and bring binoculars. Try to see the ensemble of windows, frescoes, and altar pieces, which is how the great patrons of these buildings saw things.

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Virginia Raguin is distinguished professor of humanities at the College of the Holy Cross. Among her many books are Stained Glass: From Its Origins to the Present and Stained Glass: Radiant Art.

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A Living and Fruitful Root: Consecration of an Altar at Santa Maria la Antigua

His Holiness Pope Francis

For me it is no small thing that this cathedral now reopens its doors after a lengthy renovation. It has experienced the passage of the years as a faithful witness of the history of this people, and now with the help and work of many it wants once more to show us its beauty. More than a formal restoration, which always attempts to reproduce the original appearance, this restoration has sought to preserve the beauty of the past while making room for all the newness of the present. A Spanish, Indian and Afro-American cathedral thus becomes a Panamanian cathedral, belonging both to past generations and to those of today who made it possible. It no longer belongs only to the past, but it is a thing of beauty for the present.

Today it is once more a place of peace, that encourages us to renew and nurture our hope, to discover how yesterday’s beauty becomes a basis for creating the beauty of tomorrow. That is how the Lord works.

Brothers and sisters, may we not allow ourselves to be robbed of the beauty we have inherited from our ancestors. May it be a living and fruitful root that will help us continue to make beautiful and prophetic the history of salvation in these lands.

His Holiness Pope Francis was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Argentina. Elected in 2013, this was his third World Youth Day as Pope.

Reviewed by Anthony Visco

The use and role of art in the Catholic faith is boundless and intentionally so. As we can trace it from the graffiti of the catacombs to the great cathedrals of Europe, art has always stood as both sign and symbol of our faith. Catholic artists are called to use their gifts and talents to best reveal the truth and beauty of the faith. For the Church of Rome, the role of art and architecture was and has remained a tool of testimony.

In her latest book, How Catholic Art Saved the Faith: The Triumph of Beauty and Truth in Counter-Reformation Art, noted art historian Elizabeth Lev takes us through passages that art historians often neglect. That is, how art assisted the Church and helped restore the faith with the Council of Trent.

The book is divided into three sections, addressing the Protestant challenge to Catholic teaching on the sacraments, intercession, and the human place in salvation. Each chapter examines an issue and then presents and explains art (mostly from Italy) created to address that issue. The last chapter examines Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, which Lev calls “the ultimate Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation.” The book also includes a twenty-page set of short biographies of the major artists Lev discusses.

After the Protestant Reformation in 1517 and its destruction of sacred art, the Church had to defend its art. The Council is rarely discussed by art historians, and if discussed, almost always treated as an oppressive menace to the artists of the time, rarely as a call to action. Lev points out what Trent and the Counter Reformation meant to artists and the renewed responsibility it gave the artist. To frame her insights, she describes the influence of the saints on the artists of the time including Saints Philip Neri, Charles Borromeo, and Ignatius of Loyola.

As Franciscan spirituality was the inspiration of the Renaissance, the study of the body as the divine in our space and time remained a constant reminder of Christ with us. For the Protestant, the portrayal of the body of Christ became problematic.

With Jesuit spirituality, the stimulus for the artists shifted from the presence and place of the sacred to witness and transcendence. If the Renaissance focused on Christ as the Word made flesh, the artists of the Counter-Reformation were now charged with the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Those very points disputed and rejected by the Protestant Reformation now became central.

Though mostly referred to by art historians as “Mannerism,” the art of the Reformation that followed Luther’s revolt is rarely examined as a statement of faith and as the bridge from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation. Starting with artists of the Reformation such as Michelangelo, Del Sarto, Bernini, Caravaggio, Gentileschi, Peter Paul Rubens, and Reni, all working with fever and fervor, Lev carefully shows us how the sacramental faith and the witness to the Most Blessed Sacrament became central in the Counter-Reformation.

With the theme of metamorphosis and the use of tenebrism and deliberate ambiguity of form and void, the paint-ers and sculptors as well as the architects of the Counter-Reformation depicted the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Penance, guiding the Church and her faithful to both personal and communal transformation. As Lev tells us, “The debates of the present called upon these witnesses from the past and the artists were expected to close the gap of the centuries between those lives and the present through the employment of their prowess.”

Importantly, How Catholic Art Saved the Faith both answers those unanswered questions of Catholic art history and tacitly asks where we are now. As she writes, “The challenges and circumstances that the Church faced 500 years ago bear a striking similarity to the ones the faithful face today.”

As we find ourselves coming out of a severely mannered period of church art and design, we must ask: Was Modernism indeed our Mannerism? If so, how do we as Catholic artists and architects respond? Elizabeth Lev sheds new light on both the past and perhaps our future as we approach what may be a Second Counter-Reformation in sacred art and architecture.

Anthony Visco is the director of the Atelier for the Sacred Arts where he designs and produces works for the liturgical environment. He also teaches courses in sacred art both in Philadelphia and Florence, Italy.
BOOK REVIEW

HOUSE CHURCHES AND SACRED SPACE

Sacred Ritual, Profane Space: The Roman House as Early Christian Meeting Place, by Jenn Cianca (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018) 248 pages, $110.00 hardbound, $34.95 paperback

Reviewed by Uwe Michael Lang

This engaging book offers a fresh perspective on how Christians understood and embodied their liturgical worship in the first three centuries. The author questions the conventional narrative that the early Church identified itself exclusively as an eschatological body of believers that rejected ideas of sacred space prevalent both in Second Temple Judaism and in the pagan environment, and saw no need for places dedicated specifically to ritual and worship.

The first generations of Christians did not have buildings set apart for liturgical celebrations, but assembled in domestic settings. Such “house churches” are the focus of this study, and Cianca defines them as unrenovated, private living space used for Christian worship. The author, who teaches classical studies at Bishop’s University in Canada, distinguishes early house churches from the later domus ecclesia, buildings that were renovated and adapted in a more enduring fashion for liturgy and sacraments.

The mixed social structure of early Christian communities was reflected in the different types of housing where they met. These ranged from the domus and country estates of the upper classes to apartments of different sizes, as well as shops used for commercial and residential purposes. These varied forms of urban dwelling provided the setting for the daily life of the familia, the Roman household that could include extended family members, slaves, and visitors.

Cianca elucidates cultic and ritual practices in these domestic spaces, for which there is ample literary and archaeological documentation, including portable altars and shrines. The worship of household deities, such as the Lares and Penates, was an integral part of Roman family life. In the earliest stages, Christian communities would by necessity have met in inhabited spaces where pagan domestic cults had a visible presence. She is aware that much of her argument is hypothetical, and she is careful in making her claims.

According to Cianca, many Christian households, including those that hosted meetings for prayer and worship, would have continued to practise at least elements of Roman domestic cult. This claim is surprising, given that a stream of Christian apologists, such as Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Lactantius, and Arnobius of Sicca, unequivocally reject pagan worship (both public and domestic) and exhort Christians not to take part in it.

Cianca muddles the waters by arguing that in earliest Christianity “attitudes toward the domestic gods were not always consistent.” While some authors considered these deities harmless and others saw in them a real threat, all condemned their worship. Cianca observes that domestic cults could not easily be set aside, because they were so essential to what being Roman meant. However, the same can be said of public sacrifices, from which Christians were bound to abstain.

The material evidence the author cites for the enduring adherence to, or perhaps rather tolerance of, pagan domestic cults in Christian settings is very slight: a bacchic frieze in the assembly room of the building in Dura Europos, commonly identified as a mid-third century domus ecclesia, and material remnants of ancestor cult in the chapel complex of the villa at Lullingstone in Kent from the second half of the fourth century. Both cases, coming from the peripheries of the empire, are later than the period of house-church Christianity under scrutiny in this book.

The paucity and ambiguity of the available data does not support the weight of Cianca’s argument. Many believers made some compromise in times of persecution, and it is quite likely that even in Christian households, vestiges of Roman domestic cult continued. This may also be concluded from the fact that Christian authors continued to rail against it. In general, however, Cianca seems to underestimate the distinct self-identity of early Christians and their consciousness of being separated from the outside world.

At the center of this study is the thesis that, “despite a lack of materially articulated or physically separate space, the house-church Christians were indeed meeting in sacred space.” This sacred space was, by practical necessity, temporal not permanent, and it was constituted through and in ritual performed by the body of believers, especially the Eucharist.

Here Cianca draws on the insights of social anthropology and ritual studies, including the contributions of Arnold Van Gennep, Jonathan Z. Smith and Catherine Bell. The study would benefit from a more in-depth consideration of Victor Turner’s work on liminality and communitas, where he offers a complex description of the sacred that accounts for the important role of ritual.

Cianca’s non-theological perspective offers new insights into a field often obscured by denominational controversies, but also falls short of an adequate analysis of, above all, the meaning of the Eucharist for early Christians. The choice of endnotes makes the scholarly use of the book more difficult. For this reviewer, the significant contribution of this relatively short study lies in its conception of ritually constructed sactality, which “allows for an organic, slower-moving development of early Christian sacred space, rather than reading a sea change into the building of the Lateran in Rome.”

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Rev. Uwe Michael Lang is a priest of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri and teaches at Allen Hall Seminary in London. His book Signs of the Holy One: Liturgy, Ritual and Expression of the Sacred was reviewed in the Fall 2016 issue of Sacred Architecture Journal.
Anne-Marie Sankovitch’s opus stands tall in its purpose to demolish tired narratives based on dichotomies between structure and ornament, and the Gothic vis-à-vis the Italian Renaissance, as she does in her revised dating and alternative discourse on the complex origins of Early Renaissance architecture in Paris in the 1530s, via rigorous formalist description, especially of the support elements—piers and columns, capitals, and consoles—which she developed with laser-beam focus.

No one had done this before, and as a result, Sankovitch was empowered to dismiss the “ossified” oppositional criticism, not merely react against it. Viollet-le-Duc’s diatribe, the loudest of all, is happily muffled. Sankovitch’s method necessitated the retrieval and editing of her detailed photos, which are virtual eyes into her thinking—although one is tested by the inability to “see” the whole, and the constant flipping through pages.

Be warned that the formatting was left unfinished. There is no index or list of illustrations (and the in-text captions are brief); archival documents are excluded from the bibliography; and a first name is not always identified. An appendix of the chronology, at least up to the dedication of the church, in faraway 1637, would have been helpful in rescuing blocks of information from ponderous footnotes. In the end, however, a sympathetic reading is finely rewarded.
Sacred Architecture

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Ecclesiastical Art since 1875

WOOD
MARBLE
BRONZE
MOSSAIC
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Best references in USA:
- Cathedral of Saint Patrick - NYC, NY
- Cathedral of St. Petersburg - St. Petersburg, FL
- Church of the Epiphany - Miami, FL
- Church of Saint Williams - Round Rock, TX
- Church of Saint Catherine of Siena - Wake Forest, NC
The Mystic Cave: A History of the Nativity Church at Bethlehem, by Michele Bacci (Viella, 2017) 321 pages, €70.00 hardcover

Reviewed by Anthony Giambrone, OP

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, one of Christendom’s most eminent and ancient houses of worship, is unique among the loca sancta of the Holy Land. Like the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, also erected by Constantine under the special patronage of Saint Helena, it bears both the ornaments and scars of its exceptionally long history.

Unlike the tangled and truncated structure that now enshrines Christ’s tomb, however, the monument to the birth of the Savior has almost miraculously survived seventeen long centuries of earthquakes, fires, and wars. Thus, despite a series of significant refurbishments and the lamentable decay ensured by the senseless stalemate of the status quo, the church has essentially preserved its original architectural genius intact.

In order to assure that this exceptional patrimony remains preserved— for the deterioration had reached a crisis state—a long-overdue cooperative effort of restoration was initiated in 2009. A team of experts began a thorough survey of the building in 2013.

As an outgrowth of this undertaking, Michele Bacci, historian of art and special consultant in the project, has addressed the remarkable lack of systematic studies of the shrine with The Mystic Cave: A History of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. (Among his other books is The Many Faces of Christ: Portraying the Holy in the East and West, 300 to 1300.)

The nicely clothbound text is richly illustrated in color and enormously well-researched and documented. It is a shame that the bookmaker’s art was not always equal to the contents (pages 43–58 mysteriously reappear after page 306, for example).

The curious title—“Mystic Cave”—is a phrase lifted from Eusebius of Caesarea, who used it to describe the holy grotto designated by tradition as the site of Jesus’ birth: “God’s second home after heaven,” as a medieval author quaintly called it. A mysterious energy somehow infuses the place, absorbing the grace of the Incarnation and making it accessible to pilgrims. The architectural rendering of this cave into a coherent cultic space forms the leitmotif of Bacci’s text, which stresses the rich interplay between the humble grotto and the sumptuous upper church serving as its liturgical crown.

The book follows a simple chronological order, tracing the development of the church in three great acts of mise-en-scène: the sequential staging of the Constantinian shrine, its sixth-century renovation, and the magnificent twelfth-century joint redecoration by the Crusader Latins and Byzantine Greeks. The fourth and final chapter is a sad and extended tale of lost cohesion, passing through Muslim encroachments, ugly Christian factionalism, and the multiplication of devotional distractions.

Certain major features of Constantine’s basilica remain a mystery. Excavations in 1934 rediscovered the original mosaic carpet, a luscious pavement which lies several feet below the present floor. The sanctuary itself was an octagonal space, placed at the eastern end of the long nave and installed on a vertical axis directly over the grotto.

An oculus seems to have been cut into the floor, boring down into the cave so that worshippers might gaze down during services. This layering of the locus sanctus established the essential coordinates of the church, while subordinating the cave to the public eucharistic liturgy above.

After suffering damage, perhaps by riotous Samaritans or perhaps through a fire, a major reconstruction program was undertaken in the mid-sixth century, most likely under the emperor Justinian. Without altering the essential layout, much lovely ornamentation (still visible) was added. The critical innovation, however, was the opening of the grotto to the private devotion of the pilgrims, who could now descend beneath the bema into the holy grotto itself, entering from the southern transept and re-emerging in the north end of the church.

A climax of the story comes in the third chapter with the Crusader period, above all the gorgeous mosaics dating from the 1160s. Bacci expertly exposes the design of the vast mosaics of the church, executed in classical and dynamic Comnenian style.

One element missing in his discussion, however, is the observation of the placement of Passion scenes in the south transept and Resurrection scenes in the north. This reinterprets the pilgrims’ descent into and ascent out of the “mystic cave” as a baptismal-like passage from death to new life, crossed by way of the Lord’s Incarnation.

Bacci is correct that for many pilgrims today the upper church has unfortunately become a non lieu, a mere transitional space leading to the grotto below. Since the time of his writing the renovations have happily continued, however, and having visited the basilica frequently before, I can testify that the wonder of the newly uncovered upper church at Christmas 2018 promises a new era in the history of this august sanctuary.

Rev. Anthony Giambrone, OP, is a Dominican friar of the Province of Saint Joseph, assigned to the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem, where he is a professor of New Testament. Besides his academic publications, he is a regular contributor to Magnificat and Catholic Digest.
The Making of Church Screens


Reviewed by Dianne Phillips

The eleven essays collected in this volume study the partitions separating the nave from the chancel or choir. A common feature of medieval churches, they are now mostly lost, casualties of the Reformation and early modern shifts in taste toward more open, unified interiors. Occasioned by a 2012 conference convened by the Cambridge University Medieval Panel Painting Research Center, which brought together scientists, conservators, historians of religion, and art historians, the papers vary widely in their scope and methods.

Though designed to demarcate and preserve the sacred nature of the space surrounding the altar and control lay access to it, these screens constituted a porous barrier. Extending laterally across the east end of the nave at its junction with the chancel, they typically feature a central opening, often furnished with a gate or door, situated on axis with the main altar and “signed” above by a large crucifix—the “rood” in England. Arguably the single most important representational image in medieval churches, such crucifixes were a particular target of Reforma tion iconoclasts, usually destroyed and replaced by panels bearing scriptural texts.

The essays reveal the varied terminology for these screens across and within countries, a range that reflects their diverse functions and forms. In addition to separating the nave (the church of the laity) from the chancel (restricted to the clergy), the screen structure also provided an elevated platform for preaching, liturgical reading, and the performance of religious drama.

“Screens” are an appropriate characterization of the wooden partitions in English parish churches and Dutch churches. The major item of furniture in such interiors, they generally were comprised of a solid dado topped by open tracery or arcading in the upper section and a rood loft. The monumental stone structures discussed in the papers on German and Italian churches were much more imposing; in Italy they are sometimes referred to as “bridges.”

The first seven essays, four of which are technical in nature, concern English rood screens in parish churches. One provides an overview. In addition to the Crucifixion, iconographic programs often included the Last Judgment in the chancel arch and, on the dado, apostles and local saints or saints favored by the patron. Such programs both reinforced church doctrine about the salvific economy and also promoted social cohesion while enhancing the prestige of the donor.

Other papers examine such features as wood types, moldings and jointing, pigments and paint application in screens. Among the interesting discoveries: costlier materials were used for the creation of the crucifix, and the account books of churchwardens provide a rich source of evidence of material and labor expenses.

The remaining two essays on English screens situate them within their social and cultural contexts. One interprets the Reformers’ effacement of their images and Latin inscriptions, supplanted by scriptural texts in the vernacular, as an effort to impose uniformity on the textual diversity of the late medieval church interior. The other relates the series of English royal saints depicted in the dado of a Norfolk screen to the late medieval appreciation of genealogical diagrams.

The remaining four essays turn to Europe. Focusing on a selection of German and French screens, one rejects the charge that they obstruct vision and reframes them as a key factor in the creation of a dynamic environment. The innovative paper demonstrates how the screens were “animated” by the performance of the liturgy and of religious drama, and by the movement of the worshipper during the mass and when walking about the nave.

A paper on Dutch screens notes their survival (sans imagery) through the Reformation and describes how they were adapted for the Calvinist celebration of the Lord’s Supper, held four times a year and restricted to the “truly converted.” Another essay, by Donal Cooper, summarizes recent scholarship on Italian screens, mostly in urban mendicant churches, and the sociological significance of their restriction of access to the altar in which both gender and social status are implicated. The final essay, on choir screens in Scandinavian parish churches before 1300, suggests that thirteenth-century developments on eucharistic teaching influenced the trend toward lighter, more transparent structures.

Geared to specialists, this collection presents a wealth of fresh material, including color photographs, mostly of English parochial screens and their carpentry details. Readers looking for sustained reflection on the theological and religious function of screens, and on how they could serve both to separate and unify, may be disappointed. Of the themes specified in the subtitle, the volume is more satisfactory in exploring the “making” and “preserving” of medieval church screens and less in plumbing their “meaning.”

Dianne Phillips is an art historian specializing in late medieval Italian art. She lectures on religious imagery to parish groups and college classes.
In 1961 the Anglican Peter Hammond famously addressed in his book *Liturgy and Architecture* the relationship of church design to a reassessment of the Church’s purpose. But until recently, the relationship between modern architecture and liturgy has still been largely overlooked. With its focus on the culture of American Catholicism, this new volume by Catherine Osborne makes a highly valuable and scholarly addition to a rising awareness of the connections between modern church architecture, liturgy, and the sacred arts in the twentieth century.

Broad in scope and researched over many years, this illustrated volume focuses on the contributions of American “Catholic modernists” in the last century. Osborne, who most recently taught in the department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, draws on holdings in libraries and archives from universities and dioceses, as well as interviews with many architects, artists, priests, and church members across the country.

She focuses on such questions as: How did many American Catholics come to believe that modern church design could help shape a discussion of modernization within the Church at large? What criteria did twentieth-century American Catholics—especially those educated in theology and liturgical practice—use to judge sacred art?

At the center of her story is the work of Maurice Lavanoux (1894-1974), the editor of the journal *Liturgical Arts*, who served for forty years as secretary of the Liturgical Arts Society, a New York-based group which promoted the “advancement” of the Catholic arts. Amplifying and translating theological debates from Europe into an American context, he was influential in promoting the application of modernist design principles in Catholic church architecture, and for understanding the cultural manifestation of the Church as a living, changing body rather than a timeless and fixed entity.

As Osborne points out, his efforts helped many American Catholics see the necessity of moving beyond redundant discussions of the Neo-Gothic Revival. He urged instead the view that modern church architecture can be a means of engaging with deeper theological questions about the role of the Church in changing societal movements, values, and technological and material innovations.

In particular, Osborne documents an alignment between the advances in building technology that followed the Second World War and the Catholic Church’s embrace of a more modern theological perspective. Church leaders hoped that a more contemporary approach to church design would also spark a renewal of Catholic congregational life: advances in engineering would have theological implications. Undergirding Osborne’s far-ranging investigation is her argument that this collective sense of progress laid the groundwork for the social importance of modernist church design, which in turn helped to account for the reciprocal advocacy of creative change in sacred art and theology.

This reviewer would have liked a closer description of actual built projects, and an analysis of how the many issues described by the author could be read in terms of a church buildings’ spatial ordering, circulation, structure, and details. Osborne does for instance include intriguing details of new, even experimental forms of Catholic worship space at mid-century, including Mark Mill’s surrealist proposal for a Chapel on the Moon (1967); Cardinal Bea’s proposal for a submarine chapel; or Paolo Soleri’s 1970 study *Arcology: The City in the Image of Man*.

Such visionary projects illustrate what Osborne calls the “Teilhardian moment in American religion and architecture.” She extends her exploration of Catholics’ concern for their physical environments into a discussion of urbanism and theology, as well as Catholic interpretations of Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City* (1965).

The book helpfully expands our understanding of the works of American architects and artists who built and designed for Catholic worship (including Marcel Breuer, Pietro Belluschi, and Barry Byrne), and the arguments that shaped an evolving understanding for the role of religious art and architecture. A valuable and fine-grained account of a broad subject, it will be a useful resource to architects and artists engaged in designing contemporary Catholic worship spaces, as well as those interested in the history of modern church architecture, liturgical arts, and the patterns of change in American Catholic culture.

**Karla Britton is a Professor of Art History at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona. She wrote Auguste Perret, the first monograph in English on the French architect, and edited Constructing the Ineffable: Contemporary Sacred Architecture.***
PROTECTING SACRED SITES IN THE SECULAR AGE

Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age: Anamnesis of Durham Cathedral, by Marie Clausén (Routledge, 2016) 180 pages, $170.00 hardcover, $56.95 paperback

Reviewed by Nathaniel Gotcher

In 2014, I had the opportunity to pass through Durham to finally see in person the cathedral I had particularly admired from afar. That experience confirmed that Durham Cathedral was the apogee of the English Romanesque, but I also felt a certain hollowness, as if something was missing. More than a house for the tombs of Saints Cuthbert and Bede, the cathedral itself was a corpse, a building unensouled.

The fear of this reality inspired Marie Clausén to write Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age: Anamnesis of Durham Cathedral. Picking up her book, I was thrilled by the title. Here is someone, I thought, with a keen interest in saving Durham Cathedral from the emptiness an irreligious society has imposed on it.

In fact, Clausén, an academic book editor and poet, accepts that Christianity is passing away and will soon be gone. Christianity cannot save Durham or other ancient churches. What can, she asks? Is there a way that Durham can rise to new life when Christianity loses its significance?

At the core of the problem is the reality of a mechanistic modernity. The world has become desacralized in an attempt to tame nature and utilize it to seek pleasure and power. She is extremely perceptive in her portrayal of the ills of the modern globalist economy and draws on a variety of sources such as the conservative philosopher Roger Scruton and the psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist to demonstrate the ways our world oppresses the human person. Her most compelling passages describe the urban and architectural expressions of post-industrial neoliberalism, which are the antithesis of buildings such as Durham Cathedral.

Aware that this post-industrial neoliberalism is the face of secularism to most people, she finds a moral imperative in presenting the spiritual nature of the world so that with the collapse of Christianity she expects, the modernists will not win. If we are not careful, she warns, the transition from a Christian world to a secular one will empty our sacred buildings of meaning.

If we are to save our ancient sacred architecture, as Clausén emphatically believes we should, we must understand the nature of a properly secular spirituality. With its status as the most beloved building in Britain, she uses Durham Cathedral as the cornerstone on which to build a case for this post-Christian religion.

For what she proposes is not irreligion but a new religion. As David Foster Wallace says, “Everybody worships, the only choice we get is what to worship.” For Clausén, there may be a spiritual realm or there may not be, but our minds perceive something “numinous” about certain ancient piles of stone and it is our duty to connect with and protect these places, if only for our own sakes.

Although she is clear that nothing she says necessitates an actual deity, hiding behind her rhetoric of transcendent reality, “ghosts” within our sacred buildings, and the timeless nature of historic structures is Being itself, a philosophical god, an Unknown God. If Durham Cathedral is to be the centerpiece of a new religious worship, it will be at most what classical Christian thinkers call “natural religion,” the worship due to God understood through natural reason, not based on divine revelation.

Will this be enough to save Durham Cathedral? When it became clear that the ancient pagan gods were mythological and the stories about them were fabricated, the atheistic rulers attempted to maintain the pagan cults to no avail. If our worship is a lie, we soon grow tired of the duty. Clausén believes this is the fate of Christianity, but will a spirituality predicated on the unknown fare any better? Will not the disillusioned of the secular age reject the imposition of a religion based on vague personal perception?

Perhaps the only hope for Durham Cathedral is not in a vague, secular, natural religion, but in a clear statement of the truth of a divine being that became flesh and fills our sacred spaces and our souls. Clausén herself admits that anything less than traditional Christian worship at Durham Cathedral will appear inauthentic.

Without it, Durham will remain a museum piece, and not the spiritually pregnant edifice she wants. In this secular age of skepticism and existential mystery, Durham Cathedral needs to be a solid place to stand where we know our myths are true.

Can we save Durham Cathedral? Should we even try? These are, ostensibly, the questions at the heart of Sacred Architecture in a Secular Age. Flitting methodically between an apologia for secularism and a lament for a more numinous age, Clausén looks through her architectural subject to the existentialism that haunts modernity. Ultimately, though, the question is not “Can we save Durham Cathedral,” but “Can Durham Cathedral save us?”

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