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On the cover: Detail of the restored Central Synagogue in New York. Photo: Peter Aaron/ESTO.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE


By Michael J. Crosbie




**F**aith & Form's last issue of each year has in recent years been a potpourri of articles on subjects that implies no unifying theme. One might cover new sacred art and architecture, another might explore the connections between worship and place, or the issue of how what we create transcends daily life to help deliver us to a sacred realm. The year's last issue has been an opportunity for *Faith & Form* to present a plethora of views on a wide range of subjects.

In her article at the back of this magazine, however, Betty Meyer seems to uncover the threads that tie several of the current issue's articles together. Betty writes about the contrast of traditional and contemporary art and architecture. Nowhere is that more evident in this issue than in the Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels compared to the rebirth of a 19th Century masterpiece: New York's Central Synagogue. In these two buildings we see the past and future of religious art and architecture, balanced on opposite coasts. The cathedral, still under construction, inspires us with new interpretations of ritual and asks us to consider the roles of celebrant and congregant. The synagogue reminds us of the power of traditional architecture and art to manifest a heavenly realm on earth (in midtown Manhattan, no less!). Betty's observations about the use of color in sacred art and architecture are confirmed in the restored Central Synagogue.

How do we define the divine? Claire Gallagher provides us with insight through her work with a congregation in Pittsburgh, where she helps them to connect feeling with intellect, faith with form. Gallagher reminds us that the sacred is not just about style. Douglas Hoffman's review of a new book that espouses the innate (in the author's view) superiority of Classical art and architecture for religious buildings points up the fallacy of this

argument. Great religious art and architecture rests on the abilities of designers and the prayerful commitment of congregations, as was revealed at IFRAA's autumn conference in Columbus, Indiana. There is no secret formula, no ready-made answer that fits all. To believe so is to abdicate one's responsibility as an artist and architect, and is a disservice to congregations. And that's something that centenarian architect Harold Fisher, profiled in this issue, has never forgotten. 

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# Notes & Comments

## Send Your News to *Faith & Form*

The editors of *Faith & Form* want to bring its readers the latest news of those involved in the fields of religion, art, and architecture. Send press releases and materials to the attention of Michael J. Crosbie, Editor, *Faith & Form*, c/o Steven Winter Associates, 50 Washington Street, Norwalk, CT 06854; fax: 203-852-0741; email: FaithNForm@aol.com.

## Big Buddhist Shrines

A 108-foot-tall Buddhist commemorative shrine was dedicated in August at the Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center in Red Feather Lakes, Colorado—the culmination of 14 years of planning and construction. The Great Stupa of Dharmakaya is distinguished by large statuary and brightly colored mandalas. Cost of the stupa was \$2.7 million and construction was completed with the help of more than 400 volunteers. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the biggest statue of a sitting Buddha in Southeast Asia was consecrated in September. The statue at the Manchimmaram Temple is 98 feet tall, 155 feet around, and cost \$1 million to build.

## Moscow Synagogue Restored

Moscow Jews celebrated the restoration of a dome and the gilded Star of David that was absent for a century from the capital city's main synagogue. The dome and the graceful six-pointed star adorned the Choral Synagogue for about a year in 1888. Czar Alexander II followed the wishes of the Russian Orthodox Church and ordered them taken down leaving the synagogue with an ordinary roof. The renovation of the star and dome are seen by some as a sign of the reemergence of Jewish culture in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. "It's the rebirth of the Jewish community after 70 years of totalitarianism," says Leonid Nevzlin, president of the Russian Jewish Congress.

The new star will be visible from the former Communist Party headquarters near the Kremlin, now the office of Russian President Vladimir Putin's administration. To celebrate, musicians played Klezmer fiddle music and traditional Jewish melodies and a flock of white doves was released. As a sign of support, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov laid the cornerstone for a new Jewish community center near the synagogue. A robed Russian Orthodox Church priest attended as a sign of tolerance.

## Good News: More Clients!

Half of U.S. religious congregations are growing and most are thriving, especially those that embrace contemporary worship and social outreach. That's the conclusion of a new study, "Faith Communities Today," released by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The study examined 14,301 houses of worship and 41 faith groups in the U.S. Some of the study's findings: 51 percent of congregations, especially those on the West Coast, report growing memberships; social ministries that reach out to the poor are on the rise (with black Protestant groups the most active); half of all congregations have fewer than 100 regular worshippers; to attract larger congregations many churches now encourage informal dress; more religious services are emphasizing storytelling over doctrine, "less God as judge and more Jesus as friend," noted the report.

## The Buddha Must Go?

We have all admired the visual arts program of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City for many years. They have had an ecumenical, intercultural approach to the arts in a Christian space. Exhibitions have included Andres Serrano and Donald Moffett both controversial figures. But the *New York Times* recently reported that the cathedral director has asked the artist Arlene Shechet to revise or remove her Buddhist influenced art work from near the cathedral baptistry. She has refused to do so and two other artists have removed their work from the exhibition.

The cathedral director says that the work of Shechet is larger than was agreed to but the artist denies this. One can only wish that the concept had been agreed upon before the artist began her work. Even if the cathedral thinks only Christian symbols should be adjacent to a baptistry, should this not have been made clear before the work began? News media are suggesting that the decision to remove the work was because the grandson of Bishop Mark S. Sisk was to be baptized. This is regrettable and it is hoped that the future of interfaith exhibitions at the cathedral will not be impaired.

## A Chapel of One's Own

Writer Laura Chester has collected more than two dozen home chapels in her new book, *Holy Personal: Looking for Small Private Places of Worship* (Indiana University Press, \$29.95). With photos by Donna DeMari, the book documents the places people



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*Detail of etched chapel partition*

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build for themselves for spiritual sustenance, and, according to the author, "bears witness to a yearning for religious privacy, a deep desire to create for oneself a holy chamber, a place where creative expression joins hands with devotion."

### El Salvador Quake Claims Scores of Churches

The 7.8 earthquake that struck El Salvador last January claimed not only hundreds of lives, but scores of church buildings throughout the country. Salvador's National Council for Culture and the Arts estimates that about a third of the country's rare and oldest colonial churches were destroyed. It is reported that at least 137 churches were destroyed or damaged by the earthquake.

### Program Helps Churches Save on Construction Projects

ChurchPlaza, Inc., announced a new program developed to help the nation's churches save time and money on building and renovation projects. The Architects and Builders Program helps churches identify and hire qualified professionals that can assist with church design, says Sarasota, Fla.-based ChurchPlaza, a national supplier of products and services to churches. To participate in the program, architects and builders must submit to a screening process to ensure that they have proper experience, credentials, and customer support levels for church construction projects. All applicants must have worked on at least five church-related projects in the past year. The program is free to qualified participants.

"Every year, more than 6,000 congregations undertake construction projects ranging from minor renovations to massive new facilities," says Dr. Thomas McElheney, ChurchPlaza founder and chief executive officer. Often church officials and

volunteers don't have the expertise to officiate construction projects. The new program will connect them with architects and contractors who understand the dynamics of church-related construction projects.

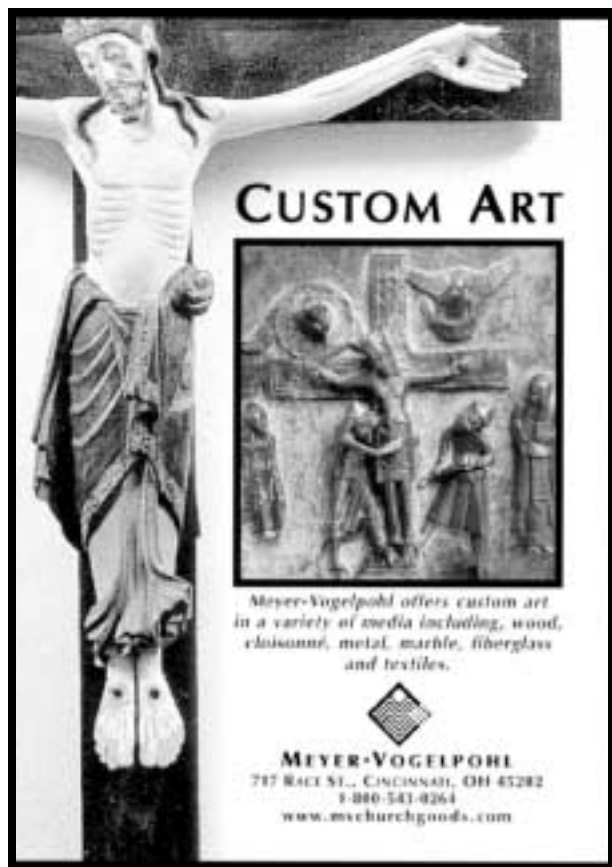
The Architects and Builders Program is the latest facet of ChurchPlaza services to help facilitate church construction projects. Other services include financing; coordinating purchase, delivery, and installation of church seating; sound systems; flooring; lighting; and other product categories.

### Assisi Restoration Opens to Visitors

A restoration underway to piece together 14th century frescoes on the ceiling of St. Francis's Basilica will be open to visitors. The frescoes of the medieval Assisi, Italy, basilica, were damaged during a 1997 earthquake that caused thousands of fragments to fall from the ceiling. The restoration is taking place in a building adjacent to the basilica and will be open to the public for several hours each Saturday. Experts say that at least 20 percent of the ceiling fresco by Giotto and Cimabue, renowned Italian painters, is lost forever.

### Archaeologists Unearth Oldest Christian Church

Archaeologists in Jordan have uncovered what they claim to be the oldest known Christian church. The Martyr Georgeious Church was found on a village northwest of Amman, Jordan. Roman architecture, mosaics, and tomb inscriptions help date the church to about 230 AD, say the archaeologists. The church is said to be in a reasonable state of repair for a building of its age.



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# RESTORING NEW YORK'S CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE

By Hugh Hardy, FAIA



*Central Synagogue shortly after its completion in the 1870s.*

Of all late-19th Century, New York structures, none conveys greater optimism in the future of America than Central Synagogue. Although the congregation numbered only 150 members when founded in 1872, the building was constructed to seat more than 1,000 and now is home to more than 4,000 congregants. Designed by Henry Fernbach (often cited as the first Jewish architect in America), the synagogue is based on the basilica plan and is remarkable for its high-Victorian, Moorish-inspired design. By seizing upon Moorish precedent, Fernbach was able to give New York's Jewish community a structure whose exterior form and detail were—and still are—in sharp contrast to other religious structures of the city. Although not a large building by contemporary standards, the synagogue has always been a significant presence in its neighborhood, originally presiding over a residential area of townhouses. With the widening of Lexington Avenue and the construction of the subway below, it has stood resolute as the neighborhood transformed itself into a commercial and business district with the addition of surrounding high-rise structures.

In 1998, a fire started at roof level, smoldered for two days, and then erupted into flames that consumed the roof and most

of its wooden truss supports. The resulting collapse severely damaged the building, as did the thousands of gallons of water used to put out the fire, which required the removal of nearly all decorative surfaces. Miraculously, the ark, while damaged, remained largely unscathed. Rather than start from new, the congregation decided they would rather rebuild within the historic walls. The charge was to create a detailed restoration that celebrated the synagogue's historic character, while making the building a more functional contemporary space for worship.

Since it is not possible to turn the clock back to 1872, we therefore approached the project as an historic reinterpretation of original finishes, materials, and detail. To bring the synagogue into the 21st Century, we updated building systems; created state-of-the-art audio and video systems; improved the configuration of the sanctuary, foyer, and entrance stair; and oversaw an extensive excavation and renovation of the lower levels so that they could be effectively used for a multipurpose hall and to house mechanical equipment.

The Central Synagogue archives were a primary source of historic research to inform the design. They house the original Fernbach drawings, photographs, and many other useful materials. The Museum of the City of New York, the New-York Historical Society, and other city institutions also provided addi-

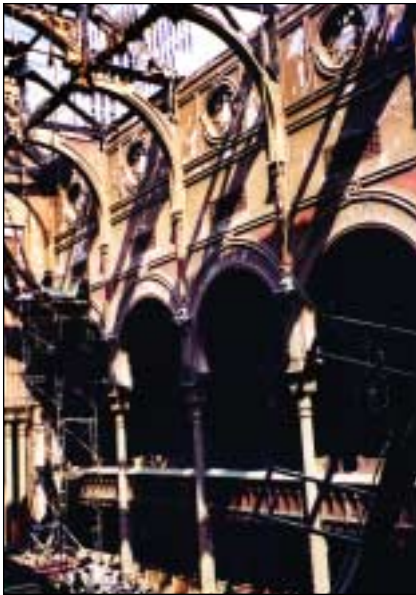


Pete Aaron/ESTO

*Central Synagogue today as it faces Lexington Avenue in New York.*

HUGH HARDY, FAIA is a principal of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates in New York City.





A 1998 fire gutted the synagogue.



Peter Aaron/ESTO

View towards ark from side gallery.

tional information. The original patterned slate roof, for example, was evident in World War II military surveillance photographs of midtown Manhattan. Prior to the fire it was standing-seam metal.

Nearly every surface in the synagogue has been recreated with the goal of seamlessly integrating old and new. This includes ornate plasterwork, woodwork, stencil painting, encaustic tile flooring, and other decoration. Many different crafts and skills were required to recreate this sacred space, with more than 70 specialty firms and nearly 700 workers. A myth exists that there are no longer craftspeople that can perform the complicated and highly skilled work of woodcarving, stencil painting, and other "lost arts." This no longer is commonly the case. As a result of the preservation movement of the last several decades, a new generation of craftspeople is on the rise. There are many artisans in all the trades who can provide the necessary skill.

Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates is greatly indebted to restoration architects DPK&A of Philadelphia. They provided invaluable analysis and documentation of the original plasterwork and stencil patterns, and made computer drawings and specifications that formed a significant part of the project. The new plasterwork includes extensive panel moldings, capitals, brackets, and intricate tracery found in the roof trusses over the bema and organ loft. All ornamental detail was cast in sections and applied in the field. For the approximately 4,000 square feet of encaustic and quarry tile flooring in the sanctuary and entrance foyer—more than 40,000 tiles in a range of colors, patterns, and sizes—surviving tiles were cleaned then reinstalled, with more than 30,000 new tiles fabricated by the original 1872 manufacturer in England.

One of the most significant elements of the restoration is the painting of the geometric, multicolored stencil patterns on the sanctuary and entrance foyer walls and ceilings. Although this work has always been a feature of the sanctuary, its composition before the recent fire was more subdued than the original because of a repainting in the 1950s under the direction of architect Ely Jacques Kahn. Although the original scheme of 1872 could not be accurately determined in all its detail, paint analysis revealed the 1886 scheme, a repainting required by a fire that occurred that year. The present restoration is therefore a return

to the exuberance of 1886, with elaborate floral and latticework patterns comprising 69 colors and more than 200 patterns with three to seven overlays per pattern. Basic geometries and patterns applied in a flat painted finish are highlighted by carefully selected areas of gold leaf and gloss paint, and paint is deliberately applied in a loose, free manner to reinforce the handmade character of this stencil technique. A skim coat of rough sand plaster beneath the painted surfaces gives a modulated effect that adds to the handcrafted quality.

The fire effectively destroyed everything at the clerestory level and above, including some of the last of the synagogue's original stained glass. However, enough historic glass was salvaged to reconstruct two windows, with the remainder replaced with new

glass based on the original design. In the ceiling over the bema, three six-square-foot stained-glass lay lights, which bathe the ark in colored light and were covered over decades earlier, have been fully reconditioned and newly revealed. The new ceiling features six bronze oculus grilles that have been missing for many decades. Their design incorporates the star pattern found elsewhere in the sanctuary.

Placement of 12 new chandeliers reflects the original lighting configuration in the sanctuary. The design is inspired by various motifs in the synagogue. Concealed accent and functional lighting raise lighting levels to today's standards, bringing out the reflective qualities of the wall and ceiling stenciling. Room acoustics are designed to improve a wide range of amplified and unamplified sound, with the provision of two interconnected pipe organs. The organ features 74 ranks and 4,345 pipes, and is one of the largest in New York. In addition, new technologies and systems have been integrated within the sanctuary including new HVAC and sound systems, together with web-casting and broadcast capabilities.

The congregation and clergy, seeking to make the best of a reconstruction, decided to use the opportunity to modernize, improve, and alter the synagogue to meet the changing needs of worship practices. New hardwood pews, which seat up to 1,400



Peter Aaron/ESTO

Detail of restored stencil patterns which animate the synagogue's interior.




*View of the interior from 1939.*

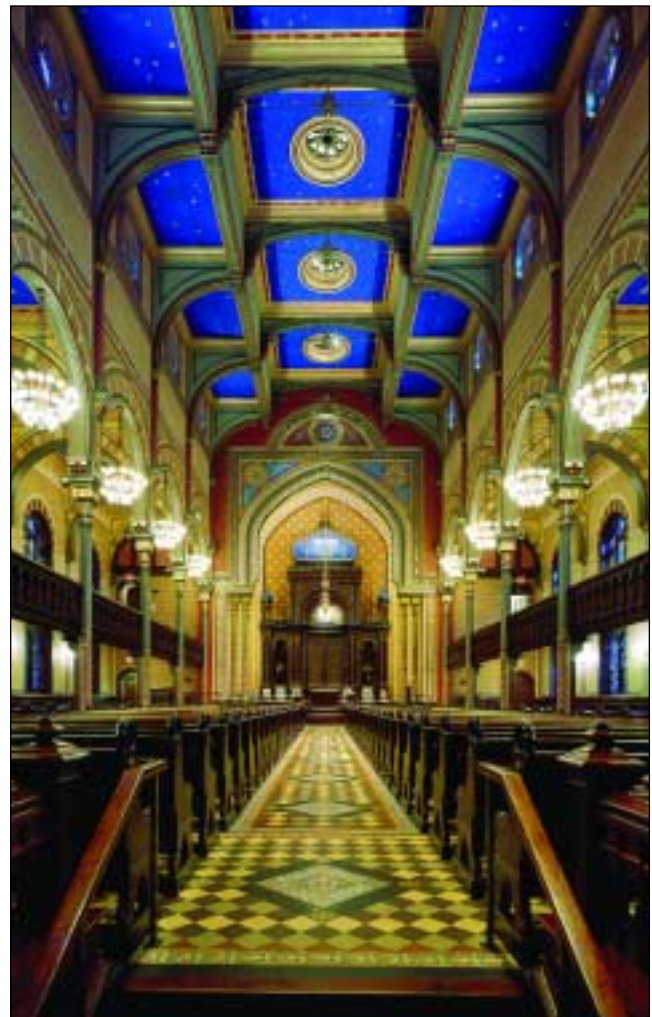
people, are fabricated of walnut and ash with detailed millwork evocative of the original design, yet in a size and seating angle adapted for contemporary standards. The first 13 rows are movable to provide for more flexible and intimate seating configurations, and the pews under the galleries have been angled 45 degrees to create a greater sense of community. The bema also has been reconfigured to ensure better sightlines and provide a greater sense of intimacy. A sliding platform allows for a multitude of pulpit configurations, and enables the reading table to be either elevated on the bema or lowered on the platform and extended into the congregation.

At the main entrance to the synagogue, the lobby has been lowered, the external stairs made less steep, and a second set of internal stairs removed to create an entryway that better facilitates the safe flow of congregants and creates a more formal procession into the sanctuary. Below the restructured floor of the main sanctuary, a large multipurpose space has been created out of what had been a patchwork of smaller rooms and a new cellar level below houses building systems. The synagogue also includes accessibility improvements for the disabled, in compliance with the ADA. There is a new wheelchair accessible ramp on the building's north facade that leads into the lower level, an upgraded, ADA-compliant elevator in an existing shaft that connects the gallery, lower, main, and cellar levels, and new wheelchair lifts for accessing the bema on the sanctuary level, and, on the lower level, for accessing a recessed area that functions as a dance floor or seating area.

Seven heavy timber trusses that each span 35 feet support the new roof. Timber was used rather than steel because it performs well in a fire and will allow the materials used throughout the building structure to modulate in unison with temperature fluctuations and age. On the exterior, ornamental details were recreated that were missing for many decades. This includes the black-and-red slate patterned roof, 30,000 red and dark gray slate shingles that reflect the original design. Fragments of slate found in the clerestory wall informed the design, and the red slate is from the original Vermont quarry. Other details that had been lost over time include crenellations along the roof and the twin, 122-foot minaret towers that flank the main entrance, and German, double-thick, 23-carat gold leaf applied to the finials,

ribs, and decorative bands of the two onion domes. Smaller finials that crown the adjacent stair towers, and were removed around 1920, were reconstructed from historic photographs. They are fabricated in copper, which will weather over time to match the onion domes. The stone facade was extensively damaged by water saturation that recrystallized the stone and caused extensive scaling. This damaged stone was replaced and the remainder cleaned and restored. Ornamental metalwork also has been reconstructed, including four decorative galvanized iron ventilators that were recreated to match the original design. New cast iron railings and new faceted lanterns are installed along the building's north facade as well as lanterns on the Lexington Avenue facade.

The restored synagogue brings back to life an architectural treasure that has played a significant role both in the history of American Judaism and the cultural life of New York City. It is clear upon entering that one has left everyday experience behind and joined in exalted awareness. Passage into this sacred space is now a ritual of discovery and renewal, a way to focus attention on the permanence of community amid the constant change of contemporary society. Even those without religious belief can feel the power and authority of this remarkable space, and for those who come to worship it is a resplendent home. 



*View down central aisle towards bima, with deep blue ceilings and oculi.*

Peter Aaron/ESTO



# SACRED SPACE AT L.A.'S NEW CATHEDRAL

By Nick Roberts



How do we define a sacred space? What do a mosque, a Buddhist temple, and a Christian cathedral have in common? This article will discuss the architectural characteristics of sacred space, and present the new Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles as an example of sacred space in the language of Modern architecture.



Courtesy, Leo A Daly

*Model of the cathedral with its 18-bell campanile.*

For a religious person, sacred spaces are those consecrated to the deity. In Mercia Eliade's words, they are breaks in the homogeneity of space, creating an opposition between sacred space and the formless expanse surrounding it. They are the location of the Axis Mundi, or center of the world, that provides a connection with the realms both above and below. They are consecrated, frequently following conquest or appropriation, by marking with a sign.

For the non-religious person the world is also non-homogeneous. Places become special by their association with rites of passage such as marriage, the birth of children, and the death of family members. Frequently they are places that celebrate national struggle and suffering, such as Gettysburg or the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. The most successful

NICK ROBERTS is an Associate with Leo A Daly in Los Angeles, and the Project Manager for the Cathedral Executive Architect team.

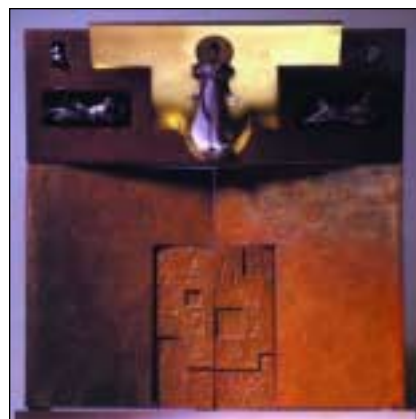
of these spaces are also made special by their qualities of space, light, and sense of procession. They are transcendent--they take us from our everyday world onto another plane of contemplation.

In some respects, we cannot build sacred spaces. As Fr. Richard Vosko says, spaces only become sacred after years of weddings, funerals, and healing, when countless families have worshipped and celebrated rites of passage. They are spaces that embody the memories and history of a people.

The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels is the culmination of the Los Angeles Roman Catholic Archdiocese's 90-year quest for a new cathedral begun by Bishop Conaty in 1904. The quest was interrupted by wars, depression, and the need for new parish churches and schools in the great expansion of the city following World War II.

After the Northridge earthquake devastated the 1871 Cathedral of St. Vibiana, Cardinal Mahony and a small group of donors resolved to create a new cathedral for what had by then become the largest Roman Catholic archdiocese in the U.S. A selection committee, chaired by the Cardinal, and including leaders of the Archdiocese, major donors, and representatives of schools of architecture from across the country, chose Rafael Moneo to design a replacement cathedral on the St. Vibiana's site. The Los Angeles Conservancy's subsequent resistance to the demolition of the earthquake-damaged structure enabled the Archdiocese to look at a number of new sites in the downtown area.

With Executive Architect Leo A Daly and General Contractor Morley Construction, the cathedral is being built on a 5.5-acre site bounded by the Hollywood Freeway and adjacent to the city's administrative, justice, and cultural centers. The



Courtesy, Robert Graham



Courtesy, Robert Graham

*Studies by sculptor Robert Graham for the great bronze doors and the figure of the Virgin.*

building will be a climax to the Grand Avenue cultural corridor, which includes Disney Hall, the Performing Arts Center, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Colburn School of Music.

In addition to the 120,000-square-foot church seating 3,000, the project includes a 55,000-square-foot Cathedral Center with parish offices and meeting rooms, a 23,000-square-foot residence for the Archbishop and priests, a 165-foot-tall



*View of the cathedral under construction, from the southeast, as it faces the plaza.*

campanile designed for 18 bells, and a 2.5-acre plaza for outdoor celebrations.

In every faith, the sacred precinct is clearly demarcated. The journey or pilgrimage from the everyday world of the street to the most sacred space penetrates a number of layers of space, each one marked by a threshold. Frequently, a ritual of cleansing marks the crossing of these thresholds. In the Christian tradition, the ritual procession to the altar repeats the journey that each member of the Church makes, through their symbolic death and rebirth in baptism to salvation and everlasting life.

The cathedral precinct is defined by a porous enclosure, sufficiently transparent

to allow views into and out of the site, but substantial enough to define the point of entry from the street.

Rafael Moneo has created a carefully orchestrated procession, punctuated by a series of thresholds that define the visitor's journey from the street to the innermost sanctuary. A thick wall housing a 36-bell carillon marks the gateway, the first of a series of thresholds. Immediately inside the entry is a plaza with a fountain designed by artist Lita Albuquerque at the level of the street. In the water are inscribed Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well, translated into the 38 languages in which mass is celebrated in Los Angeles. Visitors arriving by car to the

parking garage under the east end of the site join the procession at this same plaza and proceed up a gentle staircase to the great doors. This entry on the east side of the church, in contrast to the traditional entry from the west end, leads the procession along the south ambulatory before turning past the font into the nave. The side chapels, which will be completed over time to honor the patron saints of the many ethnic communities of Los Angeles, are turned to face out into the ambulatory, providing a route for private devotion separate from the space of the nave.

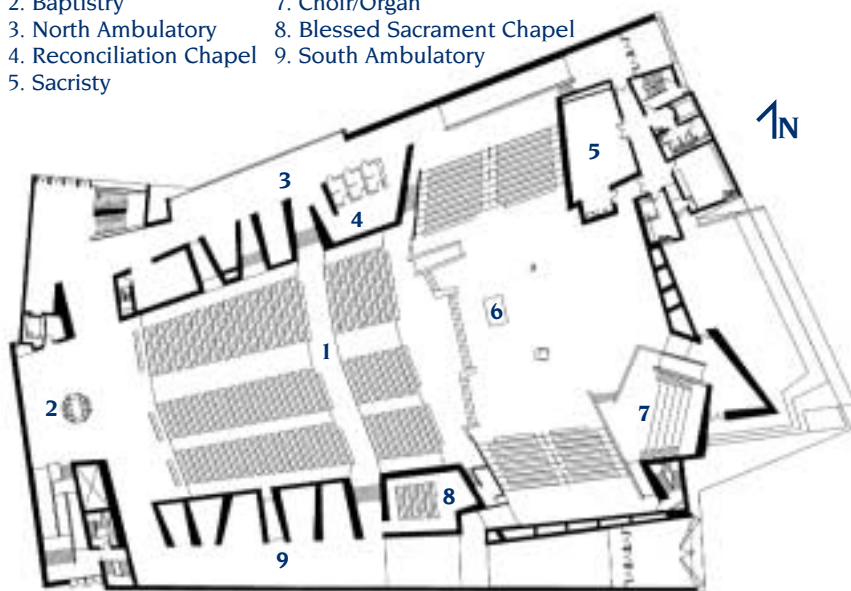
In keeping with the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council, no one attending mass will be farther than 100 feet from the altar. The reconciliation chapels are designed for face-to-face conferences in addition to traditional confession, and a separate chapel for the Reserved Sacrament provides a quiet place for private prayer.

Images in tapestry, mosaic, and fresco portray the familiar figures of the history of the church and tell the great stories of the faith. An Arts and Furnishings Committee composed of artists, architects, and lead donors selected artists from the local community to develop the cathedral artwork. Fr. Richard Vosko and the committee managed the artist selection and the artwork production.

Sculptor Robert Graham designed the great bronze doors. The cast panels represent manifestations of the Virgin Mary from many different countries, and small icons representing religious symbols of other faiths and cultures are mounted at a level where visitors can touch them.

The scale of sacred spaces in relation to the surrounding landscape, and the

1. Nave
2. Baptistry
3. North Ambulatory
4. Reconciliation Chapel
5. Sacristy
6. Altar
7. Choir/Organ
8. Blessed Sacrament Chapel
9. South Ambulatory



*One of the many base isolators upon which the cathedral rests.*





Computer rendering of interior view from altar area with tapestries by artist John Nava.

size of their elements such as door openings and ceiling height in relation to the human body, identify them as special places. The elements of the cathedral are monumental: The chapels are framed by concrete walls four feet thick, the nave itself rises to almost 100 feet above the altar, and the north and south transepts rise 120 feet above the floor.

For Christians, light is the word of God shining in darkness, the generator of nourishment and growth by which all things were made, and a metaphor for divine illumination.

Rafael Moneo has created a slowly rising crescendo of light that accompanies the journey to the sanctuary. From the rel-


ative darkness of the south ambulatory, lit by the reflected light from the chapel clerestories and a slim linear skylight, the end of the vista is marked by a 17th-Century gilded retablo from Spain, brilliantly lit by a window high up on the south wall. As the procession turns into the nave, light floods in from the alabaster and glass curtain walls on either side. The journey culminates in the sanctuary itself, highlighted by the great cross window above the altar, aligned to the rising sun on the feast day of Our Lady of the Angels.

Despite the primacy of the word and the importance of speech intelligibility in post-Vatican II liturgy, a cathedral must still have the reverberant quality of a great

building. Screened from the noise of the freeway by thick walls and double-glazed windows, the sanctuary of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels will resonate with the sound of a new 92-rank pipe organ, designed in a collaboration of Moneo, the Dobson Organ Co. and Manuel Rosales. The tiered choir loft provides space for 72 singers, and the transept seating allows space for massed choirs. The church is wired for broadcast TV and extra conduits and cable trays are designed for future wiring and fiber-optic cables.

Materiality and the experience of touch help to identify a sacred space: At the cathedral, massive walls of lightly sand-blasted colored architectural concrete, a Spanish limestone floor, and a wood paneled ceiling transcend the everyday. The pews and cabinets are made of cherry wood, and the altar is a single six-ton slab of red marble from Turkey.

A sacred building should endure and provide a safe haven after natural disasters. Structural Engineer Nabih Youssef has designed the Cathedral to be seismically base-isolated using a combination of elastomeric bearings and teflon sliders. The concrete exterior is carefully designed for durability, and engineers Ove Arup & Partners have designed the mechanical systems for ease of replacement over the 300-year life of the building.

As the great cross window emerges from a Piranesian maze of scaffolding, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels is already visible as a beacon of faith for the Roman Catholic community of Los Angeles. 



South ambulatory flooded with alabaster light.



Computer rendering of altar area, with large cross framed in alabaster.

# ALTARED STATES

By Claire Gallagher



Being transformed by a space is a powerful experience, especially when it is sacred space. It's an architect's dream to shape an environment that succeeds in allowing its participants to transcend the limitations of their quotidian lives and connect with a higher power. Designing such a space is one thing but, for the public, recognizing the power of such a space--where one's contemplation becomes primary--can involve a lifetime search. What makes a

contemplative space work for its congregation? How does a design professional make that distinction evident to his or her clients? How can the designer help those without fluency in an architectural vocabulary to identify why a space makes one feel the way it does when it alters your state of mind? How can an architect help an individual to read the space and become more cognizant of the pallet used to shape it?

The best place to begin is not to tell the congregation about Chartres Cathedral, Ronchamp, The Church of the Light, or any other undisputed masterpiece of contemplative space. I would argue that one cannot be told; one needs to experience space on a visceral level while being guided by provocative questioning in order to reach a level of understanding necessary to become more proficient in the vocabulary we, as architects, find so easy to speak.

A case in point: Several years ago I was asked to develop a series of events for an "Open House Sunday" at East Liberty Presbyterian Church, the Cathedral of Hope, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a wonderful Ralph Adams Cram church celebrating its 60th anniversary. The primary question for me was, what was the goal for the day? My feeling was that it was a perfect opportunity to improve the public awareness of the many services that the church had to offer to them, while introducing concepts of visual and spatial literacy to the congregation and the public at large. The church serves as an important interface with the community in terms of outreach in a challenged neighborhood in Pittsburgh's East End. That is generally what the public knows about it and this was a chance to change that.

The building is a wonderful example of a mature Cram design, images of which



Lee Simon

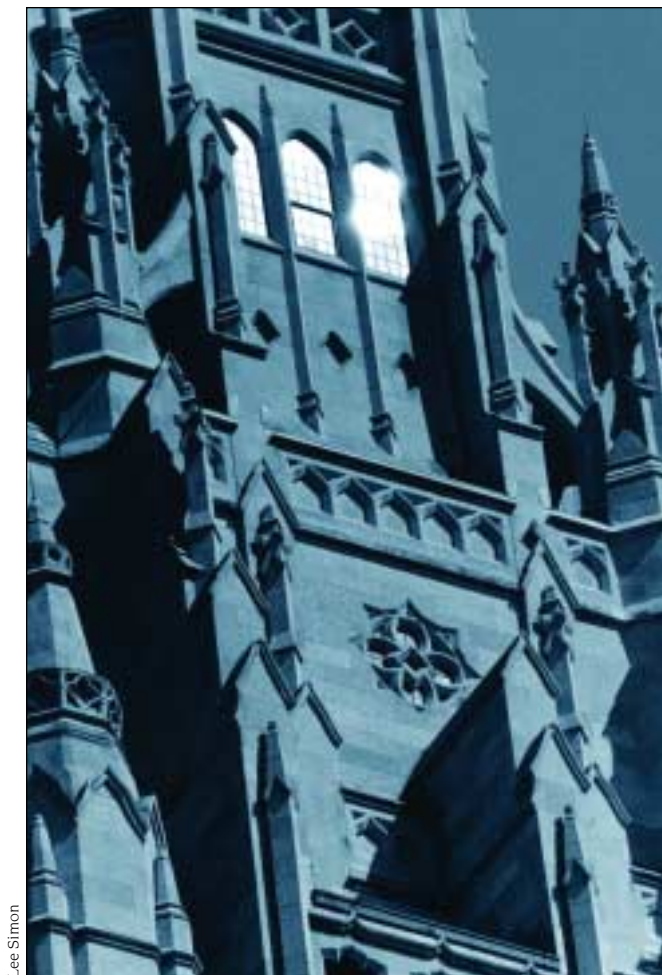
appear in this article. Its abstracted Gothic facade is a landmark in the urban landscape of the neighborhood. The church's massive form is visible from every part of Shadyside and, for some, is a daily destination for shelter and a beacon of hope in their desperate lives. Many details in the interior are unique. For example, aluminum is used extensively in railings, light fixtures, and other decorative elements. There are sumptuous carvings in wood and stone. There is the added surprise of the Mellon crypt and chapel, which always serves as a point of interest for visitors. These elements were easy to address in the context of the planned day for the Open House. Local artisans and restoration experts would



Lee Simon

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Lee Simon

facilitate hands-on workshops where the public could participate in the processes of working the materials from which the beautiful details with which they were most familiar were formed. Metalsmiths, woodcarvers, stained glass experts, and stonecarvers were more than eager to participate. The bigger challenge was to find a way to bring the public to a deeper understanding of the sense of the place and its ability to transform them spiritually. This had to happen with children as young as five, their parents, siblings, and grandparents, and it needed to happen through experience on a unique, individual level. An illustrated slide lecture would not do.

I worked first with the adults and began with an icebreaker. I assembled a group of them and asked them to close their eyes and imagine their favorite spaces in which to read. I suggested that they look all around the space, noticing every detail, using all their senses. I then asked them to open their eyes and to list five characteristics of the space. When they seemed to have finished, I asked how many of them had included pieces of furniture or light fixtures on their lists. Many hands went up; I asked that these articles be removed and be replaced with additional characteristics instead.

When we reviewed the lists, people were surprised to find that they were all unique. What some saw as essential for concentration, others found distracting. Some needed quiet while others needed activity, some needed to see but not be seen while others needed to be surrounded with people. Some needed small, intimate spaces while others found vast exterior spaces without hard edges or enclosure to be places where they could focus and

concentrate. This was a revelation to them. In discussing this new information they began to identify the architect's palette and the vocabulary used in shaping space to facilitate a particular function. The difficulty in communicating and interpreting the client's needs began to become apparent to them. I gave them a list of questions I had generated to further the discussion. This list began with the question: How does this space make you feel? It was a checklist of concepts dealing with scale and proportion, light, acoustics, materials, structure, adjacency, climatic qualities, boundary and enclosure, privacy, etc., which could potentially facilitate awareness of a spatial environment. Armed with this list we visited several spaces in the church with which they were already familiar.

The first was a Romanesque space with a barrel-vaulted ceiling. They were immediately aware that they felt as if they were self-focusing. The shape of the ceiling was bringing their attention back to themselves. The scale of the space was helping this to happen, also. They were able to recognize and articulate this, which was a big step. They began to discuss the acoustics and



Lee Simon






Lee Simon

the effect of the materials on them. One woman mentioned being aware of her footsteps and what that did to her sense of herself in this chapel. They were no longer sleepwalking through the space unaware of the warm wood surfaces and the cool stone floor. They knew why the space made them feel as it did.

Our next stop was the sanctuary of the church, which is Gothic and massive. Here they began to gesticulate enthusiastically and point out things that contributed to making them feel as they did there. They knew immediately why their sense of this space was different than the one we had just visited. They were aware that there were reasons why their eyes moved around and up and why they felt connected to heaven as a result. They noticed the effect of the shape and scale of the space, the structural elements and the magnificent windows. They were able to discuss what the architect's intentions were and what aspects of his palette were used to accomplish them. We had come a long way in a very short time. Something had been demystified.

The group then attended hands-on workshops while I gathered a group of children in the church. We first did some exercises in which I asked them to "be a structure" by using their bodies to experience forces in a building. The children became Gothic arches, columns, posts and lintels, all the while giggling and feeling the compression and tension that the building was experiencing, too. We focused on "what it feels like to be a building," as Forrest Wilson says in his book by the same name. The next step was to try to find a place in the building where it felt the way you had just felt. To my amazement they went right to a

variety of spots and made scrunchy faces while they squatted down showing me how the building felt squashed or stood face to face, hand to hand, and made an arch with a friend to demonstrate how the building felt the forces of what was pushing and pulling on it. They also talked about how small they felt in this space and about the colors that they loved so that poured down on them from the stained glass windows. Another milestone – and these were children who were from five to seven. They were far more observant and aware than one might think. They also had parents, siblings, and grandparents, and I was imagining the lively dinnertime conversations that would take place that evening.

This day was a great success. The participants came away from it with a new understanding of what the architect did to create this magnificent church and how all of the elements contributed to its composition. It was a wonderful day of community for this congregation. It was a demonstration of the capacity of children and adults to understand concepts that might seem at first to be overly sophisticated for them. Not so. This was proof that this strategy works, and works very well. I urge you to try it. No illustrated slide lecture – get your clients and the congregation involved. Give them a chance to come to an understanding of what your potential is to create an environment where they can be transformed, and the variety of tools at your disposal to do so. In so doing, you may even experience a transformation of your own. 



Lee Simon



# REPORT FROM COLUMBUS: ARCHITECTURE IN SUPPORT OF THEOLOGY

By Michael J. Crosbie



Columbus, Indiana is no doubt one of the best places in the country to drop a collection of architects, artists, clergy, and other sacred building buffs for a two-day IFRAA conference on how theology shapes spaces for worship. And this Midwest Mecca of Modernism did not disappoint; the range of religious buildings in this small city is rich and wide, and Modernism's influence on sacred spaces is particularly noted.

For the uninitiated, the wealth of Modern architecture in Columbus is thanks to a program initiated by Cummins Engine Company head J. Irwin Miller that would pay the architect's fees for the design of schools and significant public and private buildings, provided clients chose from a list of architecture's then-current best and brightest. For more than a half-century, this carrot for creativity has resulted in one of the greatest collections of contemporary buildings in America, with works by I.M. Pei, Richard Meier, Cesar Pelli, Harry Weese, Michael Graves, Robert Venturi, among many others. Louis Joyner, an architect in Columbus, provided some perspective on the city and its landmarks and how the focus of this architecture has always been to serve the community's pragmatic needs.

Some of Columbus' most outstanding buildings are houses of worship. Perhaps no two greater churches are found in the city than the First Christian Church and North Christian Church, designed by Eliel and Eero Saarinen, respectively, and separated by 20 years. The elder Saarinen's work sits at the very heart of the city, and is considered one of the first Modern churches in America (although Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park Unity Temple predates it by nearly 40 years). First Christian's site was donated by the Miller family, and J. Irwin, then in his 30s, suggested that an architect with a more contemporary outlook be considered over one with a more traditional approach. Local architect Nolan Bingham, who worships at First Christian, said that the congregation's charge to Eliel was elegant in its simplicity: they wanted a church that would "bring Christ to Earth." The architect responded that form and spirit are joined and related to each other.

At 60, First Christian still possesses a fresh and powerful spirituality. Eliel's use of natural materials, light, asymmetry, and volume resulted in a space that is open to interpretation, a fresh canvas upon which the worshiper paints her own sense of the sacred. The architect told the congregation that history had wrung Gothic architecture dry of further possibilities. Through its absence of traditional design and ornament, Eliel's First



Nave of Eliel Saarinen's First Christian Church is illuminated with natural light.

Christian demonstrates how architecture can speak of the essence of the holy beyond its symbols. Windows adjacent to wall planes allow natural light to rake across lightly textured materials, illuminating a large cross on the sanctuary's back wall. Outside, the church appears as a flat-roofed rectangular box, next to which soars a 166-foot campanile.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a few blocks away from First Christian, demonstrates the continuing influence of Columbus' first Modern building. Designed by Gunnar Birkerts in 1988, St. Peter's similarly places emphasis on natural materials rendered under bounteous natural light. Birkerts managed to create a space that can be both expansive and intimate, depending on where one sits and the number of worshipers. David Force, whose company helped construct St. Peter's, described it as "a

MICHAEL J. CROSBIE is the editor of *Faith & Form* and the author of the book, *Architecture for the Gods*.



*St. Peter's Lutheran Church chandelier dominates the interior.*

church within a church." The geometric layout of the seating helps to define these two, overlapping precincts, big church and little church. Birkerts takes an approach similar to that at First Christian in bringing light into the sanctuary, allowing it to stream across wall surfaces. Since its completion, St. Peter's has become one of the largest Lutheran congregations in the St. Louis Synod, with 3,800 congregants, compared to 200 typically.

One of the most recognizable works of Modern architecture, and a symbol of Columbus' achievement, Eero Saarinen's North Christian Church is a stellar example of the architect's earth-based design, and a sensitive symbiosis of building and landscape. There is a strain in the work of Saarinen the younger that reminds us that we build from the ground up, and his architecture often hunkers into the earth, making a strong connection between the ground and the sky. He achieves this primarily by bringing the roof down to us, allowing it to hover or swoop just above our heads, within our reach. We see this in other Saarinen buildings such as Kresge Auditorium at MIT, Ingalls Rink at Yale,



*North Christian Church's roof hovers low over this earth-bound building.*



*Eero Saarinen's iconic North Christian Church with its sensitive landscaping.*

and the TWA terminal at Kennedy International Airport. At North Christian, Saarinen brings us into the sacred inner sanctum by first inviting us to descend into the earth, below grade level, then to slip under a levitating roof, and finally to come up into the sanctuary as if rising from a tomb. We arrive at the very heart of this sacred space (which is a problem for those late-comers who might like to sneak in) with seating radiating around it. The underside of the concrete roof seems to slide past the supporting walls and float above us.

A fascinating talk by North Christian's minister, Ryan Hazen, recounted the history of the design of the building, which was completed after Eero's death in 1961. Saarinen told the congregation that he would "start as though there never has been a church built." The architect pushed the design of the church well past the expectations of his client. In fact, the role of architect and client seemed reversed, with the building committee giving its ascent to the design, while Saarinen continued to poke and prod and develop it further. He believed that coming to worship should not be easy, that the difficulty of one's spiritual journey should be reflected in the building. Thus, from the parking lot (completely hidden by Dan Kiley's inventive landscaping) one climbs up to the church, then down into it, and then up into the sanctuary. Similarly, one descends into the full-emersion baptismal pool behind the sanctuary. Yet, from a distance, this building is all about breaking its bonds with the earth. It sits within an sensitively landscape field, with its roof-cum-spire floating above, an effect heightened by the roof's deep shadow line.

Just east of North Christian, a new church for the congregation of St. Bartholomew Roman Catholic Church is taking shape. Unlike many of the landmark churches in Columbus, this one is not designed by a high-profile architect. William Browne of Ratio Architects in Indianapolis explained the challenges of designing a new church for two existing congregations: St. Columba's, a 1950s church adjacent to the new facility that just closed its doors; and St. Bartholomew, which is about to vacate a century-old church in downtown Columbus.

The new church follows the form of a chambered nautilus in plan, with a roof that starts low and spirals up around the nave.



The narthex, baptistry, and ancillary spaces are found around the nautilus form. On the exterior, the church uses the same Kasota stone as the existing parish buildings, and dramatically climaxes in a tower crowned with a cross. The building will provide seating for 900 parishioners, and views out to North Christian's landscaped precinct through windows sized and configured according to the Golden Section.

While the new St. Bartholomew's bends to follow a strict geometry, Harry Weese's First Baptist Church, completed in 1965, uses geometrically sculptural shapes to create a sense of place in a suburban residential neighborhood. The triangular slate roofs are the dominant features, suggesting nun's veils, upturned boats, or medieval castles. The two forms—one the church, the other the chapel and multipurpose space – are perpendicular to each other, suggesting two ships with sails raised. Inside, First Baptist has a worship space that revels in the warmth of its wood-paneled ceiling and brick rood screen.


Still basking in the glow of churches by the Saarinens, Weese, and Birkerts—conference attendees were proffered a jarring indictment of these very buildings by The Reverend Monsignor M. Francis Mannion, director of the Liturgical Institute at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois. Mannion's topic was "Tradition and Renewal in Church Architecture," and he noted the controversy in liturgical architecture that centered on theology and art. Mannion discussed Roman Catholic traditions in architecture compared with those in Protestant denominations. His view was that Modern architecture "is not adequate to the service of Christian liturgy," and criticized it as a reflection of the "rationalistic" Modern ethic (one steeped in Marxism and secularism). The way to renewal, Mannion posited, was "a Postmodern embrace of the Classical," which would allow for a "vital reappropriation of liturgical-architectural tradition." Mannion refused to offer any specific examples of Modern churches that he believed to be inadequate, nor could he identify any Postmodern masterpieces of religious architecture. He seemed much more comfortable dealing in generalities. The International Style, not Modernism, was really his target, and his embrace of Postmodern architecture seemed at least a decade too late. Mannion advocated Classicism, which never really disappeared all through the Modern period.



Michael J. Crosbie

First Baptist Church by Harry Weese, completed in 1965.

Perhaps he meant "revivalism" and not "renewal"?

Liturgical consultant and architectural historian Carol Fenning closed the conference with an insightful look at the historical underpinnings of Columbus' First Christian and North Christian churches, how they changed the way many congregations view sacred architecture, and how they continue to exert an influence. Most interesting were the early Modern influences at the turn of the 20th Century, how Modern architects strove for a sense of "holy emptiness," in Paul Tillich's words, and not the "empty sentimentality" of Classical forms. This is an architecture in search of truth and authenticity, the results of which can be seen throughout Columbus. 



Michael J. Crosbie

Detail of pendant light fixtures at First Christian.



# LIFE (ETERNAL) IN ARCHITECTURE

By Thomas Fisher



Most religions have a concept of eternal life, but a few people appear to take that literally, seeming to live forever. Among them is Harold H. Fisher, my grandfather, who at 100 years of age has designed over 500 churches and worked on over 900 religious buildings since founding his own firm in Detroit in 1945. Recipient of the 2001 National Prime Time Award as the oldest person in the United States still working regularly, Fisher also must be one of the longest-practicing architects in history, having started work in the Uniontown, Pennsylvania, firm of J.C. Fulton & Sons in 1916. "Architecture has kept me alive," he says.

Fisher also has kept alive his love of Classicism, leading to his receipt of the Arthur Ross Award for Excellence in



*Westminster Presbyterian Church in Detroit, Michigan, 1954.*



*Centenarian church architect Harold H. Fisher.*

THOMAS FISHER is the Dean of the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota.

Classical Architecture in 2000, and he has remained devoted to religious architecture, recognized in 1992 with IFRAA giving him the Edward S. Frey Award. "If you like architectural design," says Fisher, "you'll get the most out of theaters and churches." His passion for religious architecture goes back to his first job with Fulton, a specialist in churches who had a book of standard designs from which clients around the country could pick. "Fulton would visit the site to meet the client and locate a man to oversee the construction," says Fisher. Fulton would often not visit the job again until the church was completed. Fisher has little good to say about such pattern-book architecture; he believes many of the designs were "junky." But it was in that office, after hours, that Fisher learned the Beaux Arts system of design that has remained integral to his work.

Given the era in which Fisher studied, it comes as no surprise that he lists Bertram Goodhue as a major influence on his

work. One of the leading American architects in the first quarter of the 20th Century, Goodhue was, says Fisher, "the greatest church architect America ever produced. Goodhue was my man!" Unlike his more stuffed-shirt partner, Ralph Adams Cram, Goodhue sought to reconcile Classical and Modern architecture in buildings such as the Epworth Methodist Church in Cleveland. Fisher worked in that city from 1932 to 1945. Goodhue's imaginative combination of the balanced proportions of Classicism with the simplified details of Modernism has found on-going expression in Fisher's work to this day.

In his first major commission after World War II - Westminster Presbyterian Church in Detroit - Fisher mixed the box-like, brick forms of Georgian and Regency architecture with the unadorned surfaces and trim of Modernism. Some of the churches that have come out of his office since then have been overtly traditional, such as the English Gothic St. John Evangelical Church from the late 1940s to






St. Lazarus Serbian Orthodox Church, Detroit, Michigan, 1967.

the Palladian Oakland Christian Church completed in 1998. Most, though, have sought various ways of reconciling tradition with the Modern world, an architectural problem parallel to the theological one of our times.

In his St. Lazarus Serbian Orthodox Church in Detroit from the 1960s, for example, Fisher evoked the domed, arcaded forms of Byzantine architecture with unadorned limestone walls. In Christ Presbyterian Church in Toledo from the same period, he pursued a similar simplification of the English Gothic, combining steep gabled roofs and stone walls with boldly projecting dormers and continuous bands of windows.

In the 1940s and '50s, Fisher's Detroit office grew to be one of the largest architectural offices in the country specializing in religious architecture. "Five firms competed for work around the country," he says, "and the Church Architectural Guild kept us all informed of what was going on." Fisher was one of the first 60 members of that Guild, which after a couple of name changes eventually became IFRAA.


Now, with a staff of more than a half-dozen, Harold H. Fisher & Associates still turns out major new buildings, such as the Modernist Byzantine St. Nativity of the Virgin Mary Macedonian Orthodox Church in Sterling Heights, Michigan, while restoring historic structures such as the grotto behind the 19th Century Assumption Grotto Catholic Church in Detroit. The office has been in business long enough to restore its own work, as it is doing with the entrance to Westminster Presbyterian, the project that propelled the office some 50 years ago.

In the 85 years that Fisher has worked in architecture, he has seen tremendous change. In 1916, for instance, he made blueprints by exposing the paper in the sun, washing them, and hanging them out to dry. He has also witnessed a change in the nature of clients. "We've always had to educate building committees," he says, "but clients have grown less respectful of the architect and have less knowledge of architecture." Yet, for all of the stresses of the work, this is a man in love with his work. At 100, he still gets dressed in suit and tie, goes to the office almost every day, and talks enthusiastically about the next project he's working on, the perspective he's about to render. "Architecture is the life of me," he says. You could call it the eternal life. 

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# Book Reviews

## Ugly as Sin

Review by Douglas Hoffman, AIA

With the title *Ugly as Sin, Why They Changed our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces – and How We Can Change Them Back Again* (Sophia Institute Press, \$24.95) one feels compelled to learn what churches the author Michael Rose finds offensive and how he proposes to correct the problem. The churches he dubs "Ugly as Sin" are post-Vatican II Catholic churches, specifically the "Modern" buildings that emphasize the gathered community through modified seating plans and repositioned liturgical furniture. This is an ambitious undertaking, condemning most of Modern Catholic church architecture and, by implication, the manifestations of Modernism in both religious architecture and liturgy.

One would expect a well-documented premise to take on such a prodigious task. Rather, the author postulates three "natural laws" he deems essential to church architecture, basing his argument entirely on loose analogies to Vitruvius' canons of "commodity, firmness and delight," and highly subjective impressions of historical cathedral architecture. Missing are the carefully researched text references that cement an argument, or for that matter, give it the semblance of credibility.

Certainly there are ample examples of uninspired, imitative works of contemporary church architecture to be critical of, but the author seems not content to distinguish good from bad, rather to castigate all works from the latter half of the 20th Century. To Rose's eye, they do not measure up to the magnificence of Notre Dame of Paris, or St. Peter's Basilica of Rome, nor embody the essentials he espouses as prerequisites of sacred architecture. While we are shown photographic glimpses of these and other recognizably famous cathedrals of prior centuries, we are not offered anything remotely modest enough to make fair comparison to the contemporary parish churches that so draw his ire.

Perhaps more disturbing than the apples to oranges comparison is the insinuation that Protestant architects, aided and abetted by liturgical consultants, have detrimentally influenced the design of contemporary Catholic churches. While fundamental religious conspiracies do not seem as far-fetched today as perhaps even six months ago, it is hard to imagine a cabal of liturgical consultants and Protestant architects, conspiring to eradicate all traces of traditional Catholic liturgical settings. This perception has the shrill sound of one hugely threatened by change of any sort.

A more reasonable explanation might simply recognize an evolving understanding of liturgy for which church architects, clergy and designers struggle to develop an appropriate architectural response. Not content to allow this work-in-progress to become a parish church architecture for our time, Rose demands we recant the "errors" of Modernism, and return to the rudiments he somewhat inaccurately attributes to all churches of past centuries. Call it a "Church Architecture Inquisition" and you have the tenor of this treatise.

DOUGLAS HOFFMAN is managing editor of Faith & Form.

## Churches

Judith Dupré, Harper Collins, \$40.

Review by Michael J. Crosbie

The author of such well-known books as *Skyscrapers* and *Bridges*, Judith Dupré now turns her hand to churches, and she has created a stunningly gorgeous book for anyone who loves sacred spaces. With an Introduction written by Mario Botta, this book includes 58 religious sites from around the world, rendered in beautiful photographs and drawings. The subjects span from the very ancient to the contemporary. Dupré's text is informative and engrossing, written for lay readers and professionals alike. With what she has done with *Churches*, one can hardly wait for Dupré to turn her powers to observation to synagogues, mosques, stupas, pagodas, and more!

MICHAEL J. CROSBIE is the editor of Faith & Form and the author of the book, *Architecture for the Gods*.

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# JUST ONE MORE THING...

By Betty H. Meyer



Not long after September 11th I slipped into an empty church, hoping to find relief from anxiety and an acute awareness of suffering everywhere I turned, but the anticipated solace did not come. After a period of waiting I began to ask myself why I felt no different than when I entered the sanctuary?

I looked around this traditional space with its pulpit and lectern for the spoken word, at the cross, at the stained glass with its sentimental cherubs and angels, and at the brown wood of the pews and furniture. Suddenly I felt engulfed in a dark haze of melancholy. There was no life in this sanctuary. Where is the promise of joy in a resurrection? Where is the hope of a committed discipleship growing together? Where are the intimations of the Holy Spirit? Why do I not feel the awe of transcendence that all religions covet? And if I do not always feel this in the art and architecture of my particular faith, perhaps congregants of other faiths have the same difficulty.

Father Alexander Schememann, an Orthodox priest, wrote in his published journals: "The source of false religion is the inability to rejoice, or rather the refusal of joy, whereas joy is absolutely essential because it is without any doubt the fruit of God's presence. Somehow religious people often look upon joy with suspicion." If this is true, what can be done when we need joy so much?

Architect Tadao Ando suggests that architects can lead congregants toward a "visual literacy." Is it not possible that non-verbal images encourage a deeper spiritual response than the rational one of words? Perhaps we should think more in terms of our whole sensibilities, realiz-

ing that traditional symbols are sometimes dead to the contemporary psyche. I venture that some architects need to learn this too.


The artist/architect deals with line, color, proportion, and balance, trying to integrate into a whole. She succeeds if the client receives the intended meaning of the work, enjoying the work visually but also pondering its meaning. Liturgist Frank Kacmarcik tells us that "non-verbal images are not as dogmatic or absolute as words sometimes tend to be, that they are not about control but surrender. They orchestrate a silence that invokes presence. They are anchors of our convictions, informing our theologies. Seeing is believing.

There is much discussion today concerning traditional versus contemporary form. Some years ago Edward Robinson wrote in his book, *The Language of Mystery*: "I cannot believe divinity does not speak to us continuously--in the present as well as the past and in the future as well as in the present. Divinity and humanity merge in creative imagination and this enables us to see things in a new way." For myself, I do not want to let the past go but I also do not want to disregard emerging changes in theologies or alternative experiences that may or may not be permanent. I ask, is there a place in the traditional for recognition of today's interfaith and intercultural movements?

If we are deciding to return to the traditional because we want to avoid and renounce the present with all its complexities, then we are avoiding the responsibilities that are rightfully ours. We will be letting others make difficult decisions instead of weighing possibilities and making them ourselves. We are the poorer if we do not recognize this.

As I sat in this traditional sanctuary, pondering these questions, I had an overwhelming desire to feel the warmth of color. I long for color and I believe that it translates into a vibrancy of faith. In *Color and Meaning* John Gage writes that color communicates through sensory experience. Perhaps it is one of the ways the architect can reclaim our sensibilities.

Around the time of the First World War the physiological effect of color attracted general public attention. Earlier, a German physicist, Hermann Helmholtz, had coined the term "chromatics." A color-cure ward was established in a hospital for shell shock and nerve cases. The sense of confinement from which some patients suffered was thought to be alleviated by colored ceilings. A second German doctor, Wolfgang Laub, decided that only art can finally heal, and he left medicine to become an artist. According to Gage, "When you look at a piece of art, your senses are stupefied for a moment, you disengage from your daily scramble, and you are given a key to the ineffable."

That is what I was looking for that day after September 11, when I dropped into that traditional sanctuary – a key to the ineffable. That is what I think most people yearn for when they enter a sanctuary. I realize that the key is not always accessible, but is it not worth hoping for? I realize too that it is the life that is lived outside the walls of the sanctuary, traditional or contemporary, that is in the end the measure of our faith. 

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BETTY H. MEYER is Editor Emeritus of Faith & Form.



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