

The cover art is a complex collage. At the top left, a photograph of Stonehenge stands on a green field under a cloudy sky. This is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent circular image of ancient rock art, specifically a spiral design. In the center, a map of the African continent is shown in white, superimposed on a background of more rock art, including another spiral and a zigzag pattern. The bottom right corner shows a close-up of a rock surface with purple lichen.

# FAITH & FORM

THE INTERFAITH JOURNAL ON  
RELIGION, ART AND ARCHITECTURE  
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## Faith and the Feminine





The Votive Chapel - Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe La Crosse, Wisconsin



Top: Our Mother of Good Counsel  
Bottom: Votive Chapel

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#### NEXT ISSUE:

A presentation of the winners of the 2006 Faith & Form/IFRAA International Design Awards Program.

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#### ON THE COVER:

"Stonehenge Ciphers" digital montage, Salisbury Plain and Wiltshire, England. Concise geometric patterns incised into a 5,000-year-old stone orb depict the prehistoric psyche, etching pathways of power and the waves of Wyrd, all rare symbolic writing from the Neolithic megalith builders. Raven, messenger bird of the dead, watches modern visitors to Stonehenge from an ancient nook.

Photo: © Cindy A. Pavlinac, Sacred-Land-Photography.com

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# NOT JUST A ‘GIRL’ THING




EDITOR'S PAGE ★ MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

“Faith and the Feminine” is the theme of this issue’s articles; their authors consider how sacred art and architecture are shaped by and, subsequently, how they reflect the gender of those who make them. Religions, as do other human artifacts, take on the characteristics of their creators. Most religious institutions today are controlled by men; as manifestations of belief systems, our religious buildings and their art reflect ideas of space and forms of adornment that appear to be “male” in gender. For example, to organize a worship space segregating men from women, or to place worshipers according to their gender in proximity to the most holy spot is, arguably, a “guy” thing to do. Sacred space that allows everyone to gather and face each other around a common table, with celebrant and worshipers on the same spatial plane, seems perhaps a “girl” thing to do; it places greater value on human equality and it encourages dialogue between worshipers and celebrant. These practices are not necessarily more “female” than “male.” But they are more likely to be embraced by women, who have been historically under-represented in the command structure of religious institutions, and who now wish to challenge centuries of powerlessness. Actually, both men and women aware of such inequality seek to redress the balance of power.

What about art and architecture? Is it possible that the form, shape, color, and execution of a religious space or a work of art can be more “female” than “male”? This is a complex question requiring that we agree on characteristics as “male” or “female”; as Teresa Berger’s opening article attests, this is not so simple. Architects and artists have infused their religious work with qualities that they dub as “male” or “female,” if only from a poetic or anthropomorphic sense. This issue profiles a few works believed by their creators to possess certain gender qualities. Robin Jensen reflects on the gender significance of the baptismal rite and the font in which it takes place—putting forward the idea of Church as Mother.

Ultimately, every human artifact reflects the people who made it. Religious art and architecture say as much about us as creators as they do about the God we venerate. The work of photographer Cindy Pavlinac appears to capture a truth about ancient religious sites: that they often hold male and female in balance. Pavlinac’s sense of light, texture, and contour reveals sacred places as more feminine to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century eyes. We do not know if these artifacts were fashioned by women or men, but the creators seemed capable of expressing both male and female qualities. This is ultimately the most liberating view of sacred art and architecture: the one that celebrates architects, artists, and celebrants of both genders as creators and participants in our relationship with God.

Beyond this, religions must fight for social justice when it comes to differences between genders, and our sacred places must be settings for achieving that justice. That means, first and foremost, justice inside God’s house: abolishing not only the mistreatment and outright persecution of women in some religions, but also the powerlessness that women face in many religions around the world. 

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# “WISDOM HAS BUILT HER HOUSE” *Reflections on Faith, Form, and the Feminine*

BY TERESA BERGER

When Dan Brown’s furiously successful novel, *The DaVinci Code*, hit the market, the topic “faith and the feminine” entered the cultural mainstream. With this topic, one might argue, comes the recognition that gender shapes sacred space. For *The DaVinci Code*, think only of its concluding pages. The novel’s hero, a Harvard professor of “religious symbology,” ponders the Louvre’s *Pyramide Inversée* and discovers in its distinct architectural form the “sacred union” of male and female. The inverted pyramid is seen as a chalice, a feminine symbol. The small pyramid below is seen as a blade, suggesting the masculine. Buried beneath these two gendered pyramids, the good professor imagines, is the Holy Grail itself, none other than the body of Mary Magdalene. “With a sudden upwelling of reverence, Robert Langdon fell to his knees.” The End.

Even if *The DaVinci Code* gets much wrong, including the nature of the *Pyramide Inversée*, its author does highlight a reality deeply inscribed into sacred space — that this space (as most others) is shaped by gender, that is, by cultural scripts of what a particular sexual identity enables and constrains its bearers to do. In what follows, I provide some historical evidence from within the Christian tradition to illustrate this claim. I then sketch what such a claim may be about and, just as important, what it is not. I conclude with reflections on a biblical text and the sermon I crafted based on this text for an interfaith celebration for the dedication of a Catholic parish church. The biblical text, Proverbs 8:1, 34-9:6, images God as a woman intent on a building project. Based on this image, I suggest that our worship spaces should make room for the subversion of traditional gender stereotypes

and for imaginatively claiming our sanctuaries as more than stages for the performance of what might be construed as appropriately “feminine” or “masculine.”

## LOOKING BACK: HOW GENDER SHAPED SACRED SPACE

Sacred space has a multifaceted history, not least of all because its development is shaped by varying gender systems and their impact on social space.<sup>1</sup> A few examples from the Christian tradition (the only faith tradition I know from within) will suffice to illustrate this claim.<sup>2</sup> The earliest Christian communities grew in a cultural context where spaces were clearly gendered. Initially, Christian communities met in a space associated particularly with women, namely in the home. Recent studies have shown how ancient house-churches enabled women to function as, for example, patrons, leaders, teachers, and missionaries.<sup>3</sup> In the fourth century the church emerged publicly in a sustained way. The public sphere of the time, however, was not one that inherently welcomed the presence of women. A clear indication that Christianity’s going public worked to the disadvantage of women is the fact that women’s bodily presence now began to be constrained in various ways in public worship space. Women were, for example, in growing measure distanced from the sanctuary and the altar. By the time of the *Testamentum Domini* (fifth century), a gendering of sacred space is clearly visible. Women entered the church through a special women’s entrance (guarded by deaconesses?) and worshipped separated from the men. Widows and deaconesses had their own space in the sanctuary during the celebration of the Eucharist; they were, however, barred from this space during the time of their menstruation.

Of special importance for future developments was the spatial separation of women and men, to which the *Testamentum Domini* and other sources witness.

*Immaculate Conception Catholic Church features simple materials and a massive stone altar.*

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Photo: Lorna Collingridge

We know of three different arrangements. First, women's space could be behind that of the men, who directly faced the altar (*Didascalia Apostolorum*). Second, men might stand on the right, women on the left side in the sanctuary (*Testamentum Domini*), a gendered division that marked sacred space for centuries. Third, women might find themselves in a gallery above the main worship space (e.g., in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople).<sup>5</sup> Chrysostom, in one of his early homilies in Antioch toward the end of the fourth century, even mentions a grille or screen between men and women in church. The origin of these various gender-specific arrangements is not immediately obvious. Possibly there is a connection to the ritual separation of women in Judaism, but the references to this practice come from a later period. On the other hand, women in antiquity also had their separate (disadvantaged) space in the theater and the circus, so communities of faith were not alone in shaping their space by gender. The vast majority of Muslim communities to this day in fact require women to pray behind a partition or in a separate room, even in North America.

Moving to the Middle Ages, one thing at least is clear: Women continued to be distanced from the heart of sacred space, namely the sanctuary. In a number of cases, women (purely because of their gender) were not allowed to enter a particular sanctuary.<sup>6</sup> In some religious communities, women could not even see the altar of their convent church during Mass.<sup>7</sup> These are but the sharpest edges of a pervasive trend to distance women from the center of ritual gravity. There were exceptions, typically based on the particular status of the woman in question. The *Pontificale Romanum* (1596), for example, noted that the general rule that women must not enter the sanctuary did not apply in the case of the consecration of abbesses or virgins or the coronation of a queen.

The position of women within the sanctuary is, of course, only one of numerous indications of the interplay between gender and sacred space. There are many more, such as the gendered organization of pilgrimage sites or anchoritic enclosures, of walls or tombs, of commemorative and devotional objects, of pew arrangements or of the positioning of donors in donor images, to name just a few. Moreover, mapping the positions of women and men in Christian worship does by no means provide a complete map of gendered identity and sacred space. What if the "man" in question was a eunuch? We know from the letters of Jerome (+420 C.E.), for example, that eunuchs accompanied Roman aristocratic women of their household into church, presumably to the



*Detail of Immaculate Conception's tabernacle, illuminated with light from above.*

women's side. Or what if the "man" in question was a priest? In the Middle Ages, a man who was a member of the laity would have been severely restricted in his movements in church compared with a man who was a priest. And, in more recent times, what if the "woman" in question were an African American slave? She would not have sat with her white mistress in a 19th-century church in the South. Even today, the meaning of "woman" differs: for example, an undocumented Latina grandmother in my local Catholic parish and a white lesbian professional woman in the same congregation. Both are women, and both are women of faith, but little is said about their lives and the differences that shape them so profoundly by naming both of them "woman." Clearly then, "woman" and "man" are not stable, uniform categories. These categories are always inflected by status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and so on. But if

this is true, what can it possibly mean to invoke "the feminine," especially in relation to sacred space? For answers, we have to move beyond *The Da Vinci Code* and its facile notion of what counts as feminine (embodied, warm, mysterious, sensual, nurturing) and what as masculine (abstract, cold, rational, clear, hierarchical, and ultimately deadly). We will also have to move beyond our own deep-seated cultural codes and convictions.

#### LOOKING CLOSER: GENDER BEYOND THE SEEMINGLY OBVIOUS

To put it succinctly: "gender" pertains to much more than the seemingly obvious cultural scripts of femininity and masculinity. A simple look at real life tells us as much: there is the friend who undergoes a sex change; the child born without clearly identifiable male or female sex organs; the adolescent who discovers that



her sexual attraction is to another woman. All these realities defy the cultural stereotype that there are only two kinds of human beings, male and female, and that on their complementarity hinges the universe. Biological research adds force to the complexities we encounter in our lives. Human beings, such research tells us, exist in more than two basic chromosomal patterns. There are not only the male XY and the female XX patterns; there are also XXX, XXY, XYY, XO, and occasional XXXX forms. In fact, almost six million human beings today live with chromosomal patterns other than the two dominant male and female ones.<sup>8</sup> The category “gender” attends to this multitude of gendered identities and sexualities, precisely in their gendered particularity. Gender, in other words, is not simply about “male” and “female”; rather, gender signifies a complex web of sexual differences whose meanings are everchanging. What does this imply for “faith and the feminine”? It certainly means that the subject is not as clear and simple as *The Da Vinci Code*’s story of the suppression of the “sacred feminine” by an evil male hierarchy would have us believe.

#### LOOKING FORWARD:

##### SANCTUARIES AS SPACES OF (GENDER) SUBVERSIONS

We do, of course, continue to live with powerful cultural codes of what “real” men and “real” women can and ought to do. This reality shapes sacred space to this day—and I am not even thinking of the debate over homosexuality here. Gender marks church life long before we confront questions of same-sex commitments and ordination. Think but of these examples: women make up the majority of worshippers, yet men dominate in positions of leadership. In many congregations, one will never or only rarely see women in the roles of priest, presider, or preacher. Most churches continue to be designed and built by men. The cleaning and the decorating of the church, on the other hand, are typically in the hands of women. So is the faith formation of our children. In short, traditional gender roles continue to matter. At the same time, these traditional gender roles are in flux in contemporary culture as never before, even if our sanctuaries do not necessarily reflect the rapidity of the change. You might today actually see a woman bishop, hear God referred to as “Mother,” and find a man arranging flowers in a church or changing diapers in the restrooms adjacent to the sanctuary (although in most buildings, that man will have to enter the women’s restrooms to find a changing station!).

It was against this backdrop of both rapid change and deep-seated continuity in how gender shapes sacred space that I agreed to preach at the interfaith dedication of the new Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Durham, North Carolina, designed by the late Frank Kaczmarcik.<sup>9</sup> I chose as my text a passage from the Hebrew Bible, Proverbs 8:1, 34-9:6 (which can be found in the sidebar on the facing page).

Proverbs is a peculiar book, not least of all because it uses an image for God that is feminine, the personified figure of Lady Wisdom (the Hebrew *chokma* is a feminine noun). The text tells us that Lady Wisdom,



Photo: Lorna Collingridge

*Statue of the Virgin Mother is in a side chapel near the altar.*

who signifies the Divine Presence, is a builder, a construction worker, who has “built her house” (Lorna Collingridge, a gifted composer of congregational song, set this biblical text to music, enabling the whole congregation to sing, “Wisdom Has Built Her House.” You can hear the composition on *Faith & Form*’s website: [www.faithandform.com](http://www.faithandform.com)). The text is quite specific: Wisdom herself has put the stones in place, and has wielded chisel and hammer. She herself has “hewn her seven pillars.” Such construction work obviously is not the typically feminine labor associated with houses and home-making. This Lady Wisdom, to be clear, is no biblical Martha Stewart. Wisdom is a skilled laborer, no doubt about it, but she seems to skip over the interior decorating part in a hurry. Moreover, Lady Wisdom does not seem to have any interest in the traditionally feminine domestic sphere associated with married bliss and child rearing. This woman is on a different mission, and her building project is about another kind of magic. Wisdom is readying a place for a feast, and a lavish one at that. From the detailed description of her preparation (“she has prepared her meat, she has spiced her wine”), Lady Wisdom plans not simply to feed the world’s hunger but also to feed

<sup>1</sup> For more, see for example the contributions in *Gender and Architecture*, ed. Louise Durning and Richard Wrigley (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000); *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Helen Hills, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Teresa Berger, *Women’s Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 18-20, 33-34, 54-56.

<sup>3</sup> See, most recently, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See Corine Schleif, “Men on the Right—Women on the Left: (A)Symmetrical Spaces and Gendered Places,” in *Women’s Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 207-49.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Robert F. Taft, “Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When—and Why?” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 27-87.



## Wisdom Has Built Her House<sup>12</sup>

Does not Wisdom call, and understanding raise her voice?

"Fortunate is the one who hears me,  
who keeps watch at my gates, day in, day out,  
who waits at the threshold of my doors.

For the one who finds me,  
has found life  
and favor from Adonai, the Holy One.  
But those who stray from me  
do violence to their lives;  
all who hate me love death."

Wisdom has built her house,  
she has hewn her seven pillars,  
she has prepared her meat,  
she has spiced her wine,  
she has laid out her festive table.

She has sent out her servant girls  
to call from the town's highest places:  
"You who are simple-minded, turn to me!"  
To those lacking insight she says:  
"Come, eat my festive meal and drink my spiced wine.  
Forsake foolishness,  
and live!  
Walk in the way of insight."


our thirst for celebration and extravagance. Her invitation is urgent and compelling: "Come, come, turn to me, eat my festive meal, and drink my spiced wine." And then, quite suddenly in the text, Wisdom's building project and the urgency of her invitation become transparent. This is no ordinary invitation to a "housewarming"<sup>10</sup> Wisdom's invitation is much more potent. Lady Wisdom invites her hearers, in choosing her, to choose life itself. In other words, "There is more at stake here than a house built of stones. This is about one's whole existence ... Wisdom invites into the house of life,"<sup>11</sup> into flourishing and abundance. And her invitation is broad indeed: all are called to come to the banquet of life.

So far, so beautiful. There is, however, a stark and deadly claim embedded in this text. Those who do not follow Wisdom's invitation "do violence to their lives; they love death." The reading, in fact, is part of a longer text, the story of a double invitation, both of them from women—one by Lady Wisdom to life, the other by Lady Foolishness to death. Lady Foolishness invites to a different house, and her invitation carries the powerful allure of the forbidden fruit: "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (Proverbs 9:17). The ancient text cuts through the enticing

words: Lady Foolishness's hearers "do not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depth of Sheol" (Proverbs 9:18).

This biblical text is intriguing not only because both life and death are in the hands of two powerful women (so much for the sacred feminine being the opposite of evil masculinity). The text also runs counter to a contemporary trend that claims that our sanctuaries are not really about stones and bricks and mortar, but instead about "the people." They, we, are the real, living stones, so the narrative goes. In fact, my own parish's mission statement hinged on that claim: "Building God's Church is not about bricks and mortar. It is about us. We are living stones of God's Church." This is an important claim. It is also a half-truth, and I am interested in the other half of this truth here. Based on the text from Proverbs, I wonder about the relationship between the stones, the bricks, and the mortar that make up our sanctuaries and Lady Wisdom inviting us to life and flourishing. Those invited by Lady Wisdom might have seen nothing but a new house and a festive meal. But Wisdom's claim goes so much deeper. She entices us to enter within the stones, and through them find the life and flourishing that are divine. Obviously such a vision needs a different way of seeing with and through stones: "a way of insight," as Proverbs calls it, a vision that can decipher in, with, and through the stones the real magic embedded in them. The stones of the new sanctuary at whose interfaith dedication I preached—all 8.6 tons of granite; 37,125 brick floor-pavers; 533 cubic yards of concrete; 17,233 concrete blocks; and 77,400 facing bricks—might just be said to house flourishing and abundance. Lady Wisdom, the Divine Presence, the Holy One reads a feast within them, after all, life itself.

What looks like nothing but a new building project on West Chapel Hill Street in Durham, North Carolina, might then be said to hold the deepest of truths: there is magic in these stones of a newly built sanctuary, the ultimate magic of a God calling us into life. And if we dare to walk into such a building with reverence, it can open up the way of life itself, a way that is God-sustained. There are other such magical places in life, to be sure: a kitchen table, a picket line, a hospital room, a beautiful garden, an oceanfront view, a prison cell, a lover's embrace. These all hold the power to open up magic: a world that does not know how to be disenchanted, words that can still whisper the desire for divine presence, and languages that honor memories of redemption and wholeness. But such magic is indeed also found in the sanctuaries we build and inhabit: divine presence within stone walls, the feast of life for all.

Is such an interpretation of the text from Proverbs a "feminine" one? Might Lady Wisdom be an early embodiment of the "sacred feminine"? In light of what was said above, I think these to be all-too-simplistic questions. The dedication of this sanctuary, and my interpretation of Lady Wisdom's building project in reality were so much more than either feminine or masculine. They were an invitation to move beyond ecclesial gender stereotypes—and to glimpse in this subversion a God who is always beyond gender, yet who welcomes us all in our gendered particularities, whatever they may be, to Her house and its feast of life. 

<sup>6</sup> For more, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Gender, Celibacy, and Proscriptions of Sacred Space: Symbol and Practice," in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, 185-205.

<sup>7</sup> See Caroline A. Bruzelius, "Hearing Is Believing: Clarissan Architecture, ca. 1213-1340," *Gesta* 31:2 (1992): 83-91, and Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 104-5, 109.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Christine E. Gudorf, "The Erosion of Sexual Dimorphism: Challenges to Religion and Religious Ethics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001): 863-91, here 874-75.

<sup>9</sup> The dedication was held on the day after the consecration of the new sanctuary by the bishop.

<sup>10</sup> The term "housewarming" in relation to Proverbs 9 is Ellen F. Davis's (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of*

*Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000], 71).

<sup>11</sup> Silvia Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 24.

<sup>12</sup> The translation is the author's.

# Resurrecting the Lazarus Chapel



BY CINDY EVANS VOORHEES, PHOTOGRAPHS BY CINDY EVANS VOORHEES

The Episcopal Bishop of Los Angeles, The Right Reverend J. Jon Bruno, inherited an unfinished chapel from the previous administration because of cost overruns on the new Diocesan Center build-

ing. The Lazarus Chapel was used occasionally for services but more often as a meeting space because of its office-like appearance. The furnishings, a potpourri of items left over from various parishes, did not coordinate well and made the room look disorganized.

Working long hours and routinely at a hectic pace, the bishop wanted a sacred space

where he and his staff could center themselves and pray at all hours of the day or evening. His commission to me was, "I want to walk into the chapel and feel like I've entered a womb." The room was also to house a columbarium for the diocese.

Initially, I thought the low-hung ceiling would pose a significant design challenge since the existing mechanical system prevented me from raising it. We all know that a high ceiling creates a powerful sense of space. This was not an option yet it turned out to be a blessing. I decided to embrace the low ceiling by reusing the existing T-bar and placing coffered ceiling tiles in the framework to create an even lower cave-like atmosphere. This definitely contributed to the feeling of entering a close, intimate space.

The view from the west window overlooked an attractive but active recreational park for the community that was a distraction for meditation. There was one south-facing stained-glass window depicting Lazarus that would remain. The bishop asked me to consider recycling some old stained-glass windows that were in storage from closed churches. I found windows depicting Martha and Mary that I promptly decided to add on each side of Lazarus. Fourteen Stations of the Cross windows in the inventory would be used to mitigate the effect of the views of the park. The Judson Studios in Los Angeles created grisaille backgrounds in soft transparent tones for the Stations of the Cross and darker tones for the Lazarus, Mary, and Martha windows. The space thus gained more presence conducive to meditation.

The paneled walls were custom fabricated from Honduras mahogany that contrasts slightly yet coordinates with the hardwood floor, giving the room a warm and intimate feeling. The low-voltage tungsten halogen lighting is purposely spread out and a little dark to create the sense of a womb, yet highlights areas of importance such as the altar and the columbarium. The sarcophagus altar was cut down, reconfigured into a table, and placed in the center of the space for more intimate participatory liturgy. The chairs were restrained and recovered in dark tones to enhance the room. The columbarium panes are of Venga granite, which has a rich dark rust tone. A Byzantine votive candle stand with beeswax candles sits in front of a priedieu facing Lazarus for those wishing more intimate prayer.

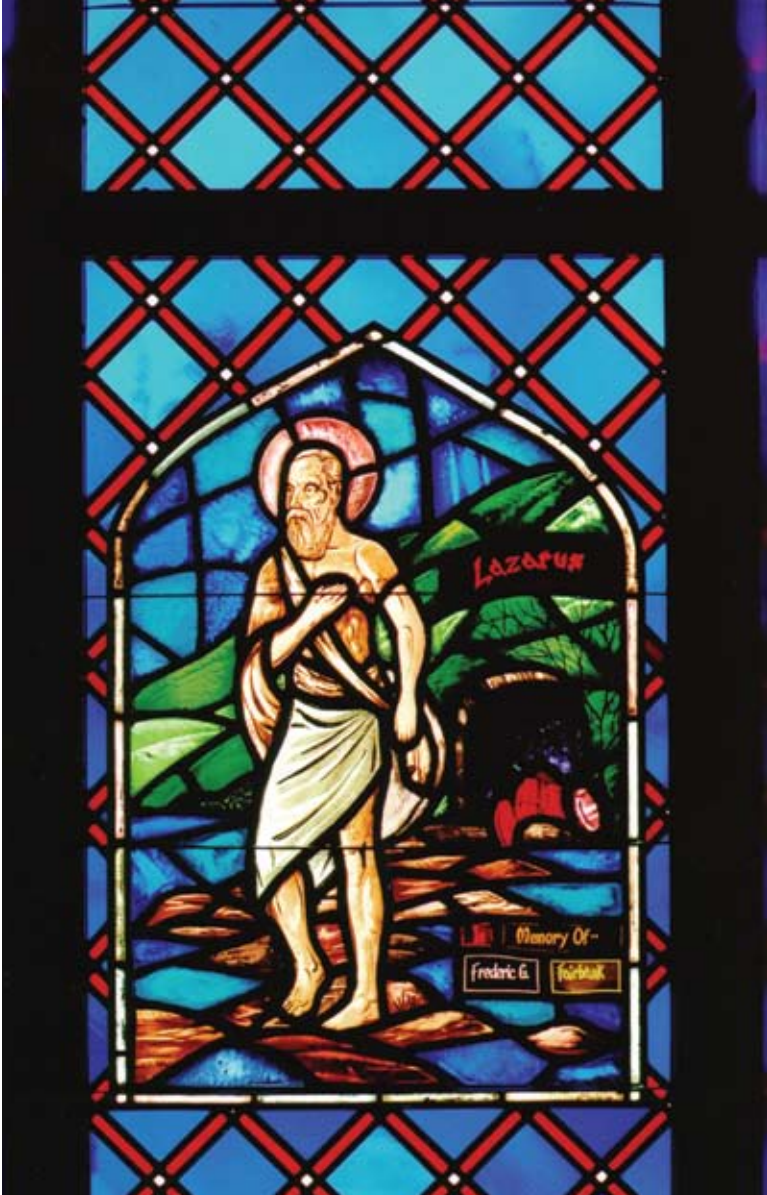


*Chapel interior before renovation was anything but contemplative.*



*Chapel interior after renovation uses dark wood paneling to lend a sense of containment and focus.*






*Detail of Lazarus stained-glass window.*



*Detail of candlestick holder with fish motif.*

The Lazarus Chapel has seen a significant increase in use since its completion. I believe the chapel's new design and its increased use illustrate how physical space affects prayer and worship. Sacred space is the tangible language of theology and prayer, music and preaching, evangelism and outreach. Architecture and design, space planning, finishes, placement of furnishings, and art should all be done with thoughtful and spiritual intention. This particular project was personally rewarding to me because it allowed me to express femininity in design. But the ultimate feeling of success is hearing those who use the chapel say they feel they have entered a womb when they worship or pray. 

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*Windows salvaged from an old church now shield a view to the park.*





*Locmariaker burial chamber, Brittany, France. Neolithic Dolmen was carved 6,000 years ago with dozens of herders' crooks when prehistoric wanderers became shepherds and farmers. The sanctuary's tallest standing stone was 75 feet.*

# Photographing the Sacred Feminine

An Interview with Cindy Pavlinac of Sacred Land Photography

BY MICHAEL J. CROSBIE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CINDY PAVLINAC



Photographer Cindy Pavlinac has captured glimpses of the sacred feminine in her work as she has traveled the world. I sat down with Pavlinac to talk about her photos, her inspiration, and how her images convey an ancient sense of the sacred feminine.

**Michael J. Crosbie:** How did you choose photography as a medium for your art?

**Cindy Pavlinac:** I grew up in Michigan and always thought I'd be a scientist. While an undergrad in astrophysics and engineering

I found myself in the art department photographing physics experiments. When I was told I wasn't allowed any more art classes unless I was an art major, I switched. My greatest struggle was the required figure drawing assignments because I didn't like objectifying the human figure. The professors insisted on realistic drawing, so one day out of frustration, I said "If you want a realistic image I'll just take a photograph." I went around the back streets of Kalamazoo photographing old houses and broken-down cars, and suddenly my art teachers began treating my art seriously. Working in black and white, I learned to see light and shadow, scale and texture. I experimented with time exposures, laying the appearance of physical objects and movement on top of each other to form a new shape, otherwise unknowable. Photography captures material objects, yet there is an inherent self-portrait component to every created image. And the viewer brings her own personal history to the photograph so everyone sees something different. I found that

by telling my story, I could bring the infinite into a moment.

**Crosbie:** The name of your studio is "Sacred Land Photography." How is the land sacred?

**Pavlinac:** My first encounter with sacred land was at Delphi in Greece. I studied archeology in Athens as an undergraduate for six months on a foreign studies program. Our spring trip was to Delphi, and my assignment was to give a report on the Temple of Apollo at the actual site. As we were driving to Delphi, the road narrowed at a place where the mountain slopes to the sea. One of our professors mentioned that this was where Oedipus had met and killed his father, fulfilling the Delphic Oracle prophesy he had just received. It really struck me for the first time that the ancient myths were based in real places. The modern road became suddenly layered with the present and the mythic landscape. Arriving at the ancient temple precinct of Delphi, I immediately trotted up the Sacred Way to get a photo of this magnificent valley. I wasn't high enough, so I climbed a cliff, and





*"Vesica Piscis" chalice well cover, ancient holy well and pilgrimage site, Chalice Hill, Glastonbury Somerset, England.*

as I looked down the wind wisped my hair and I felt that Apollo was speaking to me. The mythic became real. It was a glimpse of source, an essence, and I had never experienced that in my life. It was an awakening, a shift in my attention. Apollo told me to visit sacred sites. I got my picture, climbed down, and visited a different island every weekend.

My school also had a field trip to Egypt – more ancient sacred places – and I found that there were possibilities in accessing ancient civilizations through their sites. Something about the sites remains real and continuous. When I step into an ancient precinct that has a very deliberate alignment, I find that it aligns me. That's my attraction to the sacred. All the old religious sites are very attuned to the sky; for me they represent a point where the inner and outer worlds connect. It awakens a sense of the sacred in me, and I'm attracted to the idea of human consciousness being preserved at a site. It's enhanced and honored beyond its natural state. I named my studio Sacred Land Photography because I make pilgrimages to places that are set apart; finding and honoring and illuminating the sacred, I return with photos to share.

**Crosbie:** Is there a feminine dimension there?

**Pavlinac:** The potential for accessing the sacred

from these sites, like Delphi, is there. To me that is a key to the feminine. Every cathedral is built atop a sacred grove of trees, or a well, or a place where people gathered. The potential of its being a sacred place makes it feminine. We feel nurtured there. That's why people gather there and why we build there.

**Crosbie:** What role do your photographs play?

**Pavlinac:** Part of my role is to visit those places and to translate them into the modern present through my photography. I'm not a tourist. I'm trying to understand the sites in their terms and translate my understanding into art. Native Americans have a term, "rainbow warrior," for someone who bridges these worlds. I want to show people a glimpse into the mystery and power and beauty of a sacred place. The feminine is there, and it's big enough to hold everything.

**Crosbie:** Do people respond to your work in ways that suggest that a strong feminine quality is present in the subjects you photograph, or in the way you have photographed them?

**Pavlinac:** I never think of myself as a woman taking a picture. I am a person alive right now responding to what is in front of me, while trying to touch what has come before. As to how people respond to my work, it stops them.

There is a stillness, and they might not say anything at first. Then they want to know where it was. And if they've been there, they want to know when I was there, because it didn't seem like that when they were there. I usually tell people that I wait around a lot. I travel off season and I go when places are misty or in the rain. I don't like crowds. To be alone in a place is a big head start in helping you to experience it. An image can help bring you into the present, while talking takes you out of it. People are interested in knowing more about the culture and then the conversation turns to more of the feminine, gentler ways of treading the earth, of being there together.

One of the most common questions is what kind of camera I use. How did I get that picture? People are fascinated when I tell them I walk around a site first, and you don't have to have the camera glued to your face. I encourage people to experience the place where they are and to be present. People sometimes open up and tell me their own stories, of something that happened to them there. The photo might give them validation to what they experienced, or they may resonate with it. My multimedia shows, with music and hundreds of images, are

*(text continues on page 18)*





*Carved Stone 8 in Gavrinis Dolmen passage grave, Gulf of Morbihan Larmor-Baden, Morbihan, France. Cairn de Gavrinis Passage Grave, the largest and most decorated tomb in Neolithic Europe with 29 six-foot-high menhirs carved with labyrinthine fingerprints. This sanctuary/tomb/shrine was used by the same family for hundreds of years.*





*The Cove, Avebury Megalithic Center, Avebury, Wiltshire, England. Just three stones remain of an inner circle of this magnificent megalithic site. Stones originally numbered in the thousands, towering over celebrants gathered for trade, festivals, celestial observation, and renewal 5,000 years ago.*



*Acnabreck carved rock surface, Kilmartin, Argyll, Scotland. Section of the largest and best preserved prehistoric cup-and-ring marked rock outcrops, carved circa 4000 B.C.E. Clusters include seven multi-ringed guttered cups.*



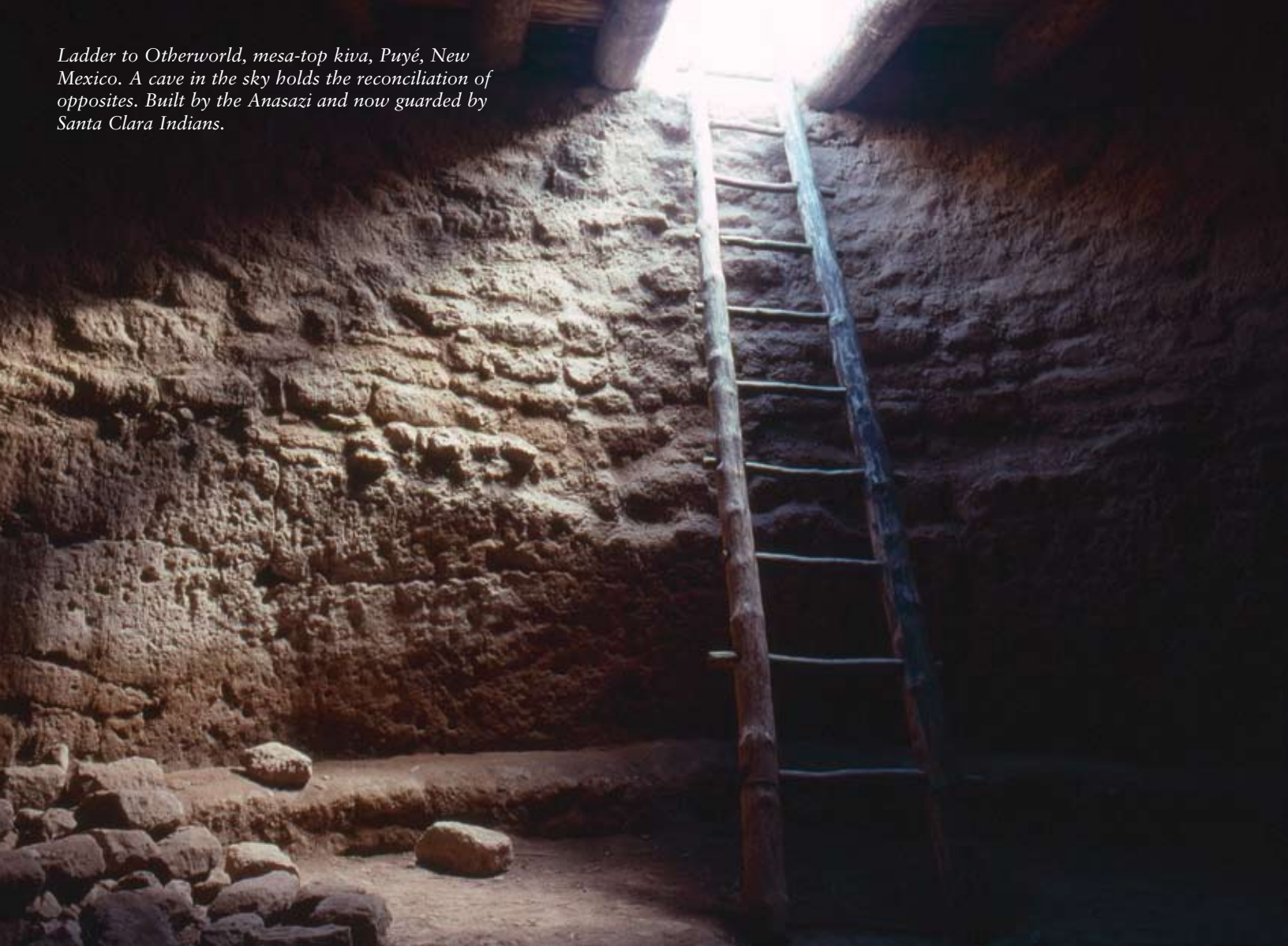


*Ancient sacred spring, Fountains  
Abbey, Fountains Yorkshire, England.*





*Ladder to Otherworld, mesa-top kiva, Puyé, New Mexico. A cave in the sky holds the reconciliation of opposites. Built by the Anasazi and now guarded by Santa Clara Indians.*



*Carles, Castlerigg megalithic stone circle with surrounding landscape and astronomical alignments, Lake District, Keswick, Cumbria, England. One of the largest, and oldest (circa 3100 B.C.E.) standing stone circles. Individual stones were carved along the tops to echo the landscape horizon when viewed from the center of the circle.*







*Celtic cross, ancient village churchyard, Tintagel, Cornwall, England.*

a more comprehensive experience of a sacred place. They are a nurturing experience.

**Crosbie:** Do sacred sites you have photographed have anthropomorphic qualities that seem to suggest a feminine quality?

**Pavlinac:** I am drawn to circles and negative space: domes, wells, and bodies of water; things that are organic, rather than with straight lines. The standing stones look like people, and they have been carved that way. I like places like caves that are enclosed, with subdued lighting. I like to be at sites that are veiled and mysterious. They all suggest a feminine dimension, like petroglyphs that follow the curve of a rock. The feminine aspect is the physical space, the meeting place, the structure; the masculine aspect is the activation of that structure. The shape of a site like Stonehenge is feminine. There is an essence about it. Looking into the mechanism of the

universe you are seeing a phenomenon, something that happens every year, but when you experience it, it completely knocks you loose from time. To really experience such sacred places you need to open yourself up and you need to pull back, to stop and look. We need to strengthen people to do that. You need to surrender yourself to a site instead of conquering it, and that's a feminine aspect to experiencing the places and my photographs.

**Crosbie:** Many of the places you have photographed are very old. Do you think the feminine aspect of these places evolved over time, or were they always this way?

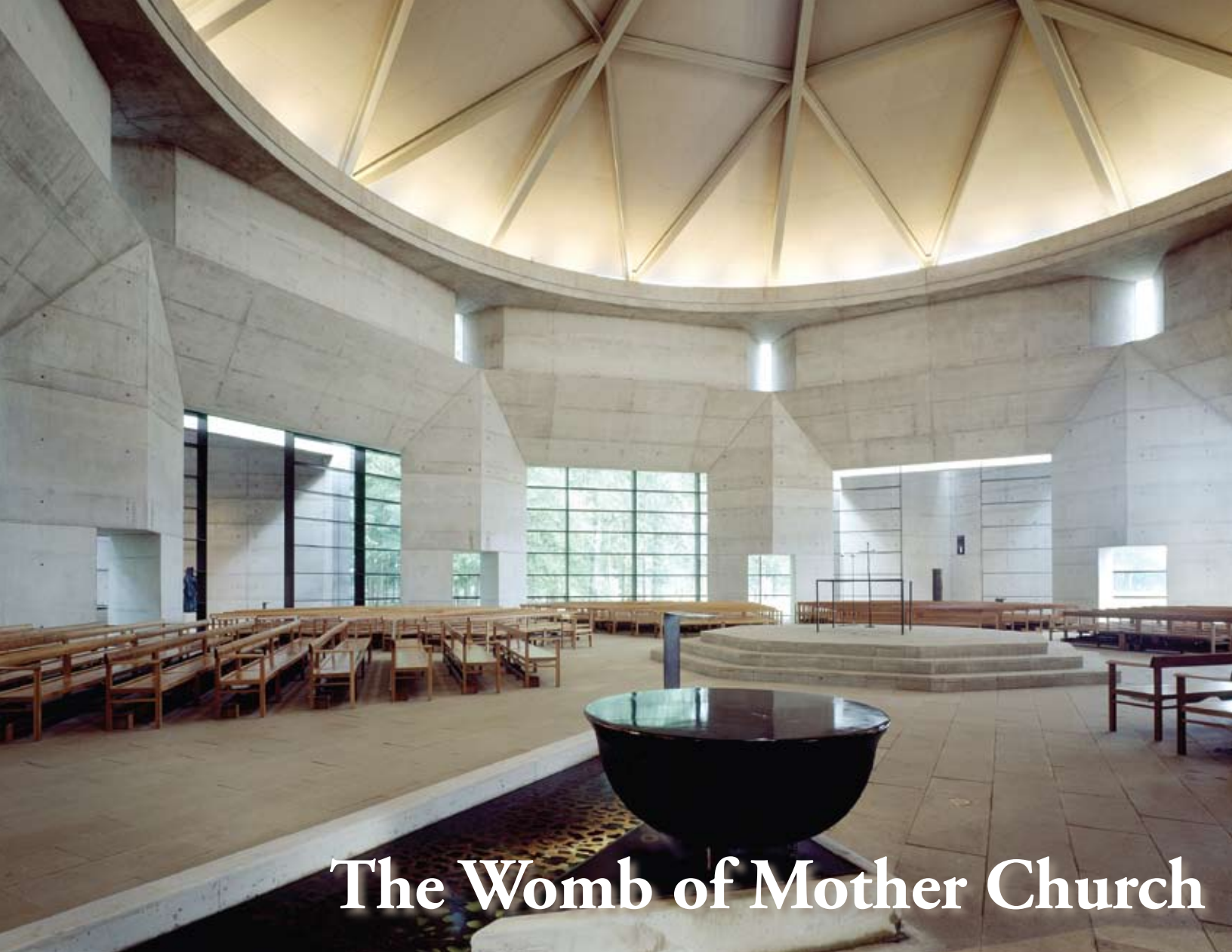
**Pavlinac:** I'm not sure about the feminine evolving – that sounds like a masculine quality. The feminine is more in recognizing what is eternal, the quality that people were attracted to in the first place, and the different responses that people have had to these sites over time.

Chartres started as a well in a grove of trees, then a little church was built, and then larger and larger structures were constructed. But I don't think the feminine aspect changed.

Many of these old sacred sites are ignored now, which says more about our own culture and society. But they are still there. The old sites are held in context and for me that is how you get meaning. There is no context with a relic. But the site is all part of the geographic fabric. The context is an environment, closer to the feminine aspect of the sacred – the nurturing, holding aspect of it. It is an environment – not just the temple, but the environs around it – that prepares you for it, aligned with and integrated into the landscape.

*This article is illustrated with a modest sample of Cindy Pavlinac's work. More of her photographs can be viewed on the Faith & Form website: [www.faithandform.com](http://www.faithandform.com).*





# The Womb of Mother Church

Font at St. Jean Vianney, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, designed by Victor Trahan.

Photo: Tim Hursley



BY ROBIN M. JENSEN

In recent years it has been more and more common for both Catholic and Protestant churches to construct a baptismal pool deep enough to allow for the immersion of a fully grown adult. Situating a font (of whatever size or depth) near the entrance door reminds congregants of their “birth” into the Christian family and they may be invited to dip their fingers into the water as they come in to the church. Both water and font are symbolic of the life-giving properties of the ritual. Just as water is simultaneously cleansing, generative, and renewing, the vessel that holds it is bath, womb, and fountain. For this reason, a font’s form (usually round, octagonal, or cruciform) should explicitly symbolize these properties. Furthermore, in many instances its depth functionally allows full immersion of candidates for baptism, both children and adults. Such an action not only revives an ancient pattern, but

concretely enacts the ritual components of being washed, being born, and being rescued from death.

Next to the font stands the tall, white Easter (paschal) candle. Lighting this candle for the baptism ritual reinforces the teaching that the rite is the way Christians participate in Christ’s death and resurrection, and thus undergo their own regeneration (Romans 6:4). In many liturgical traditions, the celebrant solemnly dips the base of this candle into the font at the evening service known as the Easter Vigil – a gesture that indicates the consecration or the ritual “impregnation” of the water by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. As the light enters the water the gathered congregation prays that the water become a source or spring from which new life will issue.

This dramatic action is ancient, perhaps dating to the fourth or fifth century. Even older than this, however, is the practice of referring to the Church as “mother” and to the baptismal font as her womb. Arguably, the inspiration for this comes from the Gospel of John, in Chapter 3, when the confused Nicodemus sardonically asks Jesus if, by insisting that it is necessary to be born again, he really means to suggest that someone needs to reenter his mother’s womb. Within a few genera-

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Font designed by Fr. Richard Vosko in the newly renovated and restored San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas.

tions, the irony of Nicodemus's question was obscured as the Church found ways to enact ritually a second birth that was categorically different from the first. This second birth (baptism) is by water and the Spirit, rather than by sexual union between an earthly father and mother.<sup>1</sup>

Although different in their nature, both types of birth require two parents. The second mother (the Church) is extraordinarily fecund and nourishing (an *alma mater*). Her womb brings forth innumerable children, her breasts flow with the milk of holy wisdom, and her embrace is a sanctuary of loving protection.<sup>2</sup> Those desiring to be born again are gestated within her body for a period of time (40 days instead of 40 weeks), and when ready they are neonates, delivered from the seminal water. Since they enter and emerge naked, they don new garments before they come to the altar for their first sacred meal of bread and wine along with the food of infants in paradise, a cup of milk mixed with honey.

As the mother of all newborn Christians, the Church was the inverted image of Eve, the "mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20). Eve was blamed as the cause of human sin and death, the result of her disobedience explicitly punished by pain in childbirth – a punishment shared by all future generations of women. On the other hand, the Church (the "mother of the faithful") was the vehicle of human redemption. As such, of course, the Church was also the antitype of Mary the mother of Jesus.

Both Mary and the Church are virgins as well as mothers. Their impregnation is through the Holy Spirit, their parturition is painless, and their birth-giving makes them cooperative agents in the divine work of salvation. Both figures are identified with the bride of the Song of Songs in early Christian exegesis.<sup>3</sup> The Church is the spotless bride, betrothed to Christ, washed and sanctified by water; thus in her own body she is able to wash and sanctify (2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 23-32).

So long as the Church is portrayed as the mother of the faithful, her children are deemed to be brothers and sisters to one another – born from the same womb, dwelling in the same house, and sharing a father (God) and a mother (Church). This familial relationship was particularly emphasized in early North African theology and used as a means to reinforce the importance of unity among siblings. Leaving the family (i.e., going into schism) was the equivalent of losing identity and inheritance, and was tantamount to dishonoring one's parents, a sin worthy of death (Matthew 15:4).<sup>4</sup> At the same time Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine all argued that filial relationship made all Christians spiritual (if not social) equals, potentially undermining earthly differences in class, race, and status (although not necessarily in gender).<sup>5</sup>

In a treatise that addressed the necessity of such family unity, Cyprian of Carthage described this institutional mother in language that was charged with the imagery of a pagan earth-goddess: "She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation; of her womb are we born, on her milk are we fed, of her Spirit our souls draw their life-breath."<sup>6</sup> In his very next paragraph, Cyprian also describes this fertile, nurturing mother as simultaneously spotless, chaste, and modest. She has only one home and one bedroom. Children born to other mothers are illegitimate children and cannot inherit their father's gift of salvation. After all, he insists, in an often-quoted phrase, "you cannot have God for your father if you do not have the Church for your mother."<sup>7</sup>

The motif of Mother Church with the font as her womb was commonly evoked in the preparation of candidates for baptism from the fourth century onwards. In one of the most poetic (and graphic) formulations, Zeno, a fourth-century bishop of Verona, contrasted human fleshly birth with its travail and mess to spiritual birth, which is painless and pure. The spiritually newborn ones emerge from the "milky and generative" font joyful (rather than squalling). Eager nurslings, they gather at the altar rail to receive their first taste of the milk of life.<sup>8</sup>

As noted above, these powerful motifs and symbols were embodied in ancient ritual practices. Many of these are still enacted, such as the consecration of the font at the Easter Vigil. Rarely nude these days, the recipients of baptism still commonly wear spotless white garments to symbolize purity. A new name is given, and the reborn ones are received officially into their new Church family. These images also became "concretized" in ancient architectural space. Thus, from ancient times to today, the symbolism of the maternity of the Church and the birth of her children has been emphasized by the design of built baptismal spaces and the rites enacted in them.

Although baptism was first performed in outdoor settings in natural, flowing water, the rite came indoors, probably about the turn of the second century. Practical considerations of secrecy, modesty, and safety undoubtedly dictated the move, probably first to the pools (*piscinae*) of Roman houses, or even to private baths. Subsequently, as church buildings were constructed fonts were placed in annexed rooms or free-standing buildings expressly designed for the rite.

One of the oldest (still existing) baptismal buildings is adjacent to Rome's Basilica of St. John Lateran. This monument, first constructed

Photo: Chris Cooper

Photo: Robin Jensen





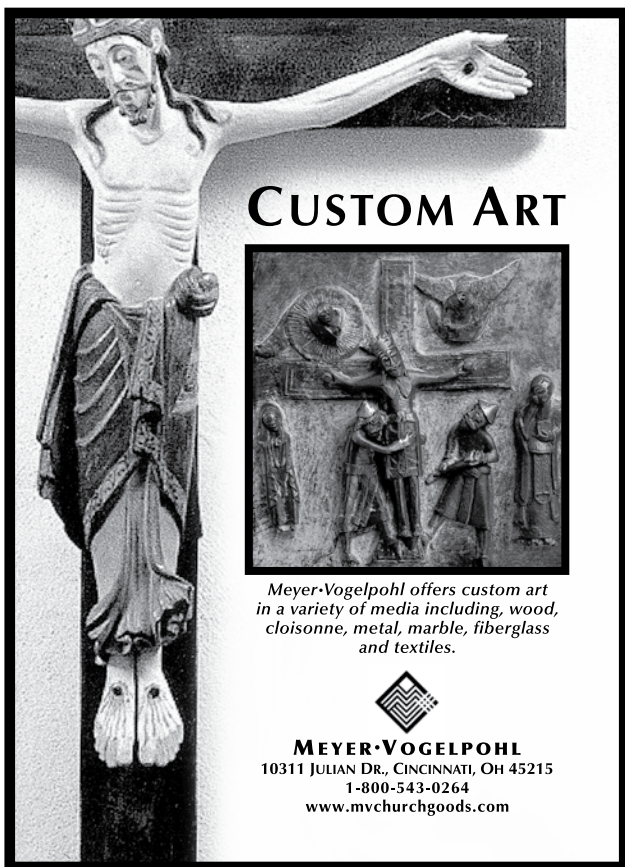
*Detail of the architrave of S. Giovanni in Fonte baptistery at the Basilica of St. John Lateran, Rome.*



*Photo: Robin Jensen*

*Fourth century mosaic tomb cover from Tabarka, Tunisia, bearing the inscription, "Ecclesia Mater."*





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in the early fourth century through an endowment from the Emperor Constantine, was planned as an octagonal building with a central round or octagonal font. Remodeled a century later, it was enhanced by two tiers of eight porphyry columns, a band of clerestory windows, and a cupola set on top of the dome which focused light down on the font, leaving the surrounding ambulatory in relative shadow. The centralization of the space added to the intimacy of the ritual, and the separation of the room gave it privacy and enhanced its mystery. The octagonal shape pointed to the eighth day of creation, the first day of the new creation. The font in the center was the womb that gave birth to the new people of God. About the time of its first renovation, the then archdeacon of Rome (soon to become Bishop Leo I) wrote an eight-stanza poem, inscribed on the lower architrave, that explained the ritual's meaning and effect in terms that included the maternity of the Church (a translation is reproduced in the sidebar on page 23).

Architectural historians have often noted that other ancient free-standing baptisteries like the one built near the Lateran Basilica share physical similarities to ancient baths, mausolea, or martyrs' shrines. All of these building prototypes were appropriate as the rite incorporates bathing, dying, and overcoming death. It is possible (but not certain) that their round or octagonal fonts were intended to suggest the shape of a womb as well as to symbolize the new creation. A few fonts, however, seem more explicitly designed to evoke a woman's birth canal. One of these, still visible today in western Tunisia, has been described by archaeologists as vulva-shaped and its elongated and undulating form appears to justify that description. As candidates descended three steps, they were able, at least symbolically, to reenter their mother's womb, where they were immersed and washed, emerging on the other side.

Baptism is the ritual that encapsulates identity, by reversing the most fundamental of human passages from birth to death. In baptism, one

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*Late fifth or early sixth century baptistery at Sbeitla (ancient Sufetula), Tunisia.*

“dies” and is “born” into new life. Referring to the Church as a mother with a font for a womb is one way to symbolize this belief. The font is thus the source of life and the genesis of the family. The altar is the family table where Christians are nourished and rejoined in love to one another. The lectern or pulpit is the setting for telling the history – the

family story – where the children are formed in their identity and values. In the image of Mother Church, the Christian tradition has, perhaps, its most fruitful counterpart to a pagan mother goddess. Although not without potential problems, the image at best serves a creative, unitive, and communitarian function. By making all Christians the beloved and equal siblings of one set of parents, it both undercuts much of the hierarchical structure of the institutional Church, and offers some balance to the male-gendered language and imagery of the tradition – while still remaining within that tradition. 

Here, born from fruitful seed is a sacred tribe to be consecrated, citizens,  
which the Spirit draws from fertile waters.  
Plunge, sinner; to be purified in the flow.  
Whom it receives old, the water makes new.  
No differences exist among those who are reborn,  
Whom one font, one Spirit, one faith makes one.  
By virginal delivery, Mother Church bears children in the stream,  
Whom she conceives by the breath of God.  
If you wish to be innocent, be purified in this bath,  
Whether you are burdened with your first ancestor's sin or your own.  
This is the fountain of life, which washes the whole world,  
Having its origin in Christ's wound.  
Reborn ones, by this font hope for the kingdom of heaven.  
The blessed life does not admit those born only once.  
Neither the number of your sins, nor their gravity should frighten you,  
The one born in this river will be holy.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Justin Martyr, 1 Apol. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, Haer. 3.24.1. On the milk see Clement of Alexandria, Paed, 1.6.

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, Haer. 3.22.4, 5.19.1.

<sup>4</sup> See Cyprian Ep. 73.

<sup>5</sup> See Optatus of Milevis, Bapt. cont. Don. 4.2, for one example of this idea.

<sup>6</sup> Cyprian, Unit. Ecc. 5. also 19 and 23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>8</sup> Zeno of Verona, Tract. 1.32, 2.28, 33, and 37.

<sup>9</sup> Author's translation. See a longer version of this same article in the forthcoming *Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Pilgrim Press, 2007).





# Chapel of Consolation

## Healing, Maternity, and the Language of Sacred Art

By JOSEPH M. MALHAM

From the Pyramids of Gizeh and Roman sarcophagi to the Taj Mahal, the Renaissance chapels, and the Holocaust memorial at Yad Vashem, human beings have employed art and architecture to express the commingling of agony and hope collectively and individually encountered in the mystery of death.

As people of the 21st century we employ the same means of expression, but in the Christian tradition sacred art more often than not uses representational and figurative language, more than a cursory nod to our core belief in the incarnation, or the visible substantiation, of God. Discussing the healing nature of sacred art as a theory is one thing, but encountering the human face behind the tragedy takes one to a different realm altogether. A realm where, as in music, something beyond words is needed to give form

to the crushing grief felt upon the loss of a loved one.

When the congregation of St. Gregory the Great Church approached Meltem Aktas and me with the idea of creating a mural cycle in an unused chapel off the main sanctuary of the 80-year-old Gothic Revival church on Chicago's north side, we accepted with mixed emotions. Meltem is a nationally known and respected artist with numerous sacred and secular commissions to her name; I am an iconographer who has been artist in residence at the church for six years; yet we had our trepidations. Neither of us had tackled an original mural of such size and complexity, and we were heavy hearted at the catalyst for the project. A gentleman in the parish lost his first child when only a few days old, and the following year lost his wife and the twins she was carrying. It was a horrendous blow to the

entire parish. As a parish family, we stumbled and groped together to find meaning and healing amid such devastation.

Father Bart Winters, pastor of St. Gregory Church, saw that a tribute to the family would have to be commensurate with the magnitude of the loss. He envisioned a Chapel of Consolation, open to people of all faiths or no faith, which would tell the stories of children in both the Old and the New Testaments. The chapel measuring roughly 35 feet in length and 25 feet in width, fortunately presented few problems. Although reached by a narrow stairway (thus rendered nearly inaccessible to the disabled and the elderly) the walls were sound. We had recently painted the ceiling a star-spangled royal blue in imitation of Trecento Italian chapels. We decided to leave the stucco walls as they were which ultimately proved to be a wise decision, as they enhanced the texture of the work and responded dramatically to our lighting design.

From the start of the project, Meltem and I agreed on two guiding ideas. The first was that rather than a memorial to death and tragedy, the chapel would be a celebration of life, light, and love. The second was that for the chapel to succeed as a work of healing art, it would need to be suffused with a sense of maternal love and feminine nurturing. Since by an accident of birth I lack the innate sense of maternal nurturing that Meltem possesses in abundance, it fell to her to infuse the project with the sense of sacred, mystical femininity that bonds mother and child. That sense of mystical femininity may best be viewed, at least in this context, through the lens of classical sacred art. The Madonna, an artistic image that is inevitably associated with the Blessed Mother and the Christ Child, contains within it both the tenderness of ineffable maternal love and the seeds of bitterest pain. While the child clings to the mother in a way that unifies them with one heart and one movement of purpose as it was in the womb, the mother rather than the child invariably engages the viewer, foreshadowing the agonizing necessity of releasing him into the reality of life, a reality that includes not only death but a higher duty and a deeper meaning.



*West wall divided into five faux niches to contain images based on the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary.*

JOSEPH M. MALHAM IS AN AUTHOR AND ICONOGRAPHER RESIDING IN CHICAGO. HE IS CURRENTLY ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AT ST. GREGORY THE GREAT CHURCH AND AUTHOR OF *BY FIRE INTO LIGHT: FOUR CATHOLIC MARTYRS OF THE NAZI CAMPS* (PEETERS, 2002) AND HAS JUST FINISHED A BOOK ON TWO CONTEMPORARY MYSTICS.





Photo: Meltem Aktas

*Depiction of the Annunciation, the second of the west wall's five panels to be completed.*

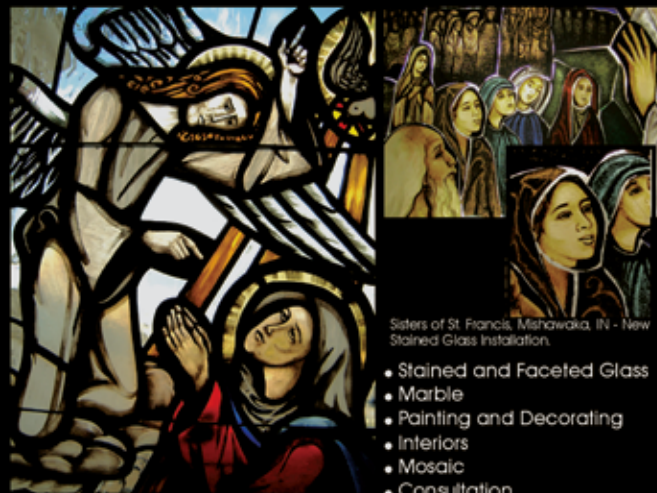
"Wanting to have a baby for many years and not succeeding," Meltem said, "for me, painting the Madonna and Child was a very powerful experience. I felt as though my healing began with the first brush stroke and continued to nourish my soul each time I entered the chapel. It is our hope and prayer that every person who enters this space experiences the same sense of healing."

Beginning with the long west wall (the only wall unobstructed by windows or architectural embellishments) we laid out our designs *a secco* on the dry surface. Working with Father Bart and our associate pastor Father Brian Fischer to insure a correct and cogent theology, we took our inspiration from the infancy narrative of Saint Luke. Dividing the wall into five faux niches approximately 12 feet tall, Meltem and I drew images (*ikons*) based on the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. The binding tie in these particular scriptural meditations (The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Nativity, The Presentation in the Temple, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple) is that they are the few scenes in the Bible where Jesus and the Blessed Mother are both present.

The wall's right angles and flat surface did not lend an overt sense of the feminine. Meltem and I softened the harshness of the wall in the design of not only the *ikons* but in the complementing architectural

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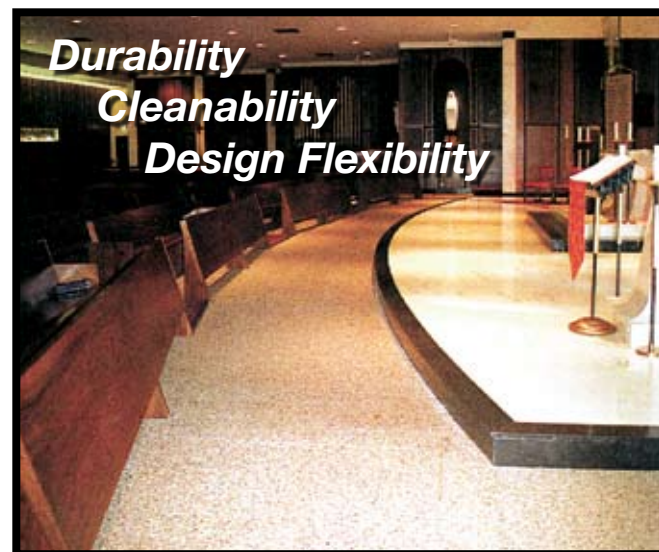
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*Artists Meltem Aktas and Joseph Malham in front of their icon of Madonna and Child.*

motifs. Each scene is contained within a panel enclosed by softly curved arches decorated with swirling acanthus leaves and columns topped with rounded capitals. The central Incarnational image of the Christ Child offered to the viewer by the Virgin is a massive Madonna reminiscent of Giotto and Cimabue but infused with Meltem's distinctively modern sensibility as well. Protectress, yet loving mother with a sense of her son's impending passion and death, Mary engages, succors, and yet shares in the grief and torment we all at some time in our lives will know.

The human language of maternal love and grief is balanced, rendered hopeful, by the enclosure of the *ikon* in a field of 23-karat gold leaf. This is not only an embellishment inspired by the works of Byzantine and Medieval masters but also a symbol of the envelopment of death's darkness in the uncreated light of God's love and mercy.

Having finished the first, central panel of the work in 2004 we were fortunate enough to find a donor for the second panel of the Annunciation. We finished this panel in the spring of this year and with the identity and beauty of the place slowly unfolding it is hoped that the project will find donors and move forward on its own momentum. Meltem and I hope to have the west wall completed within five years and then proceed to the north wall, with its depictions of children from the Old Testament such as Adam and Eve, Samuel, Joseph, and David. The two remaining walls will depict the Flight From Egypt and the Slaughter of the Innocents and close with a rendering of Jesus blessing the children. In tandem with the artistic side of the project is Father Bart's vision of installing an elevator and a private entrance into the chapel, allowing visitors access to the chapel on a daily basis for private prayer and meditation. Our hope is that, as the images are taken from both Testaments, the Chapel of Consolation will draw not only Christians, but Jewish and Muslim people or in fact anyone of any faith who has lost a child to death through sickness or tragedy.


While the project is, appropriately enough, like an unborn baby in that it will arrive on its schedule and not ours, we are confident that we will indeed see it through to completion in our lifetime. Not only are Meltem and I excited as artists to be a part of this amazing and extraordinarily rare creative opportunity, but as members of this parish community we feel it is a vital project with the power to bestow grace, wholeness, and healing far beyond the parochial boundaries of St. Gregory. 

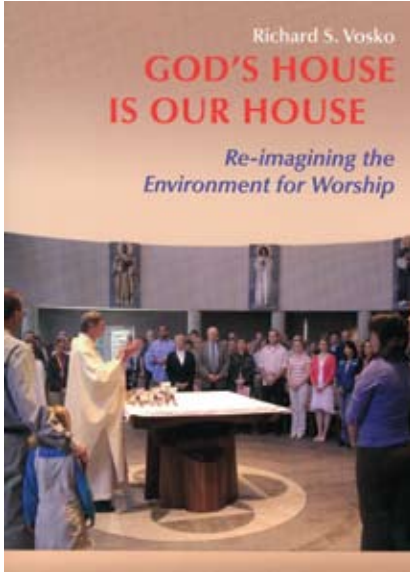
Photo: Meltem Aktas



# NOTES & COMMENTS

## BOOK REVIEW: GOD'S HOUSE IS OUR HOUSE

In his new book, *God's House is Our House: Re-imagining the Environment for Worship* (Liturgical Press, \$19.95), Richard S. Vosko



calls for rethinking church design in a way that invites and celebrates the "full, conscious and active participation" of the faithful as envisioned by Vatican II. Vosko, one of the nation's preeminent liturgical consultants and a Roman Catholic priest, has written a practical yet visionary handbook for those charged with the commission, design, and restoration of worship spaces. It is invaluable for Catholic communities, as it details the ecclesiastical reforms of the past four decades, but has much to teach every design

professional. The book covers spatial arrangements, signage, lighting and landscaping; delineates liturgical considerations specific to gathering, baptism, and the Eucharist; and provides much-needed guidelines on finding and working with visual artists. Significantly, Vosko advocates for pastoral training in the visual arts, a transformative component of worship that has been neglected in the past century.

*God's House is Our House* distills what is essential in eloquent and concise language while providing readers who wish to investigate further with a treasury of theological, ecclesiological, and theoretical references and notes. Vosko's lively scholarship is evident in his meditation on the nature of harmony, which draws on science, the natural world, and other faith ways, using examples as disparate as snowflakes, mandalas, and Fibonacci patterns. The book concludes expansively with a look at issues that are fast gaining momentum: the impact of multiculturalism, the ethical and practical dimensions of environmental stewardship, and the burgeoning of the megachurch. Drawing on 35 years of hands-on experience, Vosko provides useful and inspired advice for congregations, clergy, architects, and artists, and, ultimately, anyone who wants to create places that elevate the human spirit.

—Judith Dupré


Judith Dupré has written numerous books on architecture and is a Faith & Form editorial advisor.

## VOTE FOR THE NEW 7 WONDERS

The "New7Wonders Foundation" is sponsoring a "global vote" to determine the new seven wonders of the world, with the aim of raising funds for documenting, maintaining, restoring, and reconstructing world heritage sites. According to the website ([www.new7wonders.com](http://www.new7wonders.com)) this is the biggest vote to ever take place. Millions of people have already voted for their favorite "wonder." The winners will be announced on July 7, 2007 - 07.07.07 - when the new list will be released. More than half of the 21 sites nominated for voting are sacred places. If you want to learn more (and vote!) visit the website.



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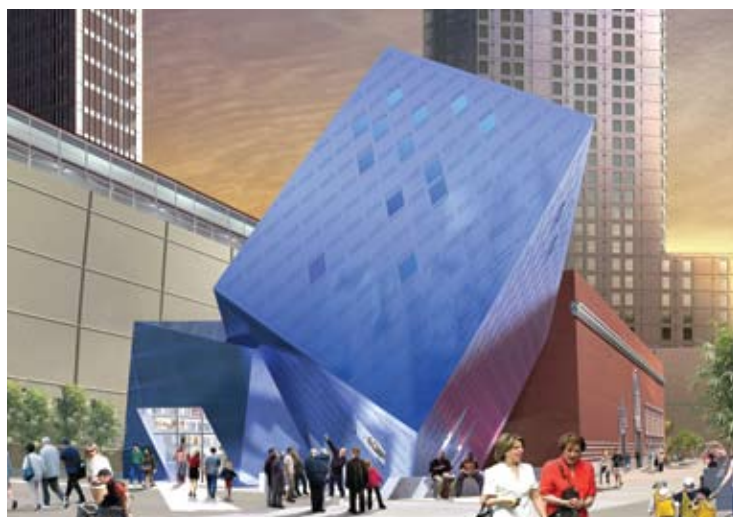


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## CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM BREAKS GROUND



Daniel Libeskind's design for the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco broke ground in July. During the ceremony, Libeskind and San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom unveiled a mock-up of the building's vibrant blue steel panels that are to be used in the adaptive reuse design of the Jessie Street Power Substation. The new design will create new exhibit space within the long-abandoned building and will preserve the monumental brick façade and the character defining features of the substation. Scheduled to open in Spring 2008, the new museum will bring together people, art, and ideas to celebrate the culture of the Jewish experience. The 60,000-square-foot building design symbolically incorporates the Hebrew letters "chet" and "yud," key letters in the word "LChaim," meaning "To Life!"

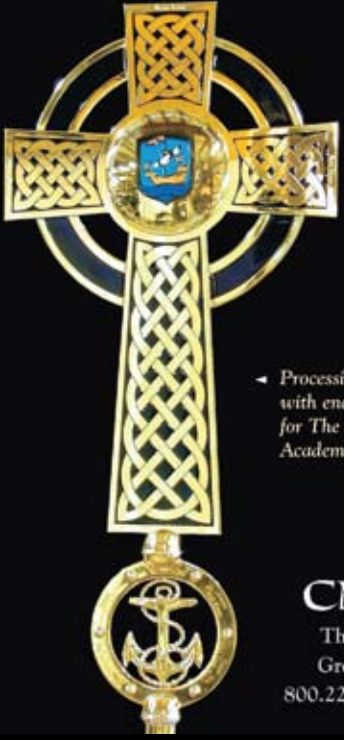
Founded in 1984, the Contemporary Jewish Museum presents scholarly and artistic programs that explore the Jewish spirit and imagination. The museum offers contemporary views and Jewish perspectives on culture, history, art and ideas, with programs reflecting global ideas that tie to the past and remain relevant today.

### Quote of Note

*"Every sacred place is a place where  
eternity shines through time."*

— Joseph Campbell (1904-1987)

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## MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE EXHIBITIONS

Two special exhibitions are now on view at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City: "Ours To Fight For: American Jews in the Second World War" and "A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People." Both exhibits are on view through December 31, 2006.

"Ours To Fight For" explores the roles of Jewish men and women who were part of the American war effort in Europe, the Pacific, and at home. The exhibit honors World War II veterans who tell their stories through video testimony, artifacts, letters, and photographs. An interactive gallery presents the experiences of other ethnic groups who contributed to the Allies. The exhibit "A Blessing to One Another" traces the life of Karol Wojtyla from his childhood in Poland through World War II and beyond. The exhibition examines Pope John Paul II's enduring friendship with Jews, and how these relationships informed his ministry and



papacy, shaping significantly the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. For more information visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage website: [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org).

#### FINNISH CHURCHES IN A MODERN KEY



Modern architecture never missed a beat after the mid-20th century in Finland. At least that is what you might conclude from a small but engaging exhibit currently traveling around the world. "Sacral Space: Modern Finnish Churches" includes a dozen houses of worship built in Finland between the late 1930s and today (the latest one currently under construction in Turku). They are sleek and modern, with clean lines and spare spaces, and filled with ethereal light. One of Alvar Aalto's works is included, the Church of the Three Crosses, with his trademark complex dialogue between plan and section. One of the most beautiful in its estheticism is the Vatiala Chapel (above) in Kangasala, designed by Viljo Revell. This funeral chapel creates a bridge over water, symbolizing the passage from one life to the next.

All of the photos in the exhibit were taken by photographer Jari Jetsonen, whose work carries the show. There is also a catalogue, with project commentary by the architectural historian Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen (who is married to the photographer).

#### DON'T MISS IFRAA'S CONFERENCE IN CALIFORNIA


The Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture's Fall Conference, "Where We Believe, What We Believe: The Architecture of Mind and Spirit," is scheduled to take place October 26 - 28, 2006 in San Diego, California. This conference will consider the impact of neuroscience on religious belief and worship spaces. Over the course of this three-day continuing education symposium, participants will explore some of the latest discoveries about how we perceive our environment and how the architecture community of the 21st century can benefit from such knowledge. Keynote speaker and nationally known neuroscientist Andrew Newberg will set the tone as he highlights his groundbreaking neuron-imaging research into the nature of the religious experience, which he has detailed in such books as *Why God Won't Go Away* and *Why We Believe What We Believe* (to be published in September 2006). Plenary speakers will include church architects Hadrian Predock and Norman L. Koonce. Tour sites will include the architecturally significant Neurosciences Institute and some notable examples of traditional and contemporary sacred architecture in the San Diego area. For more information and to register online, visit: [www.aia.org/ifraa](http://www.aia.org/ifraa).

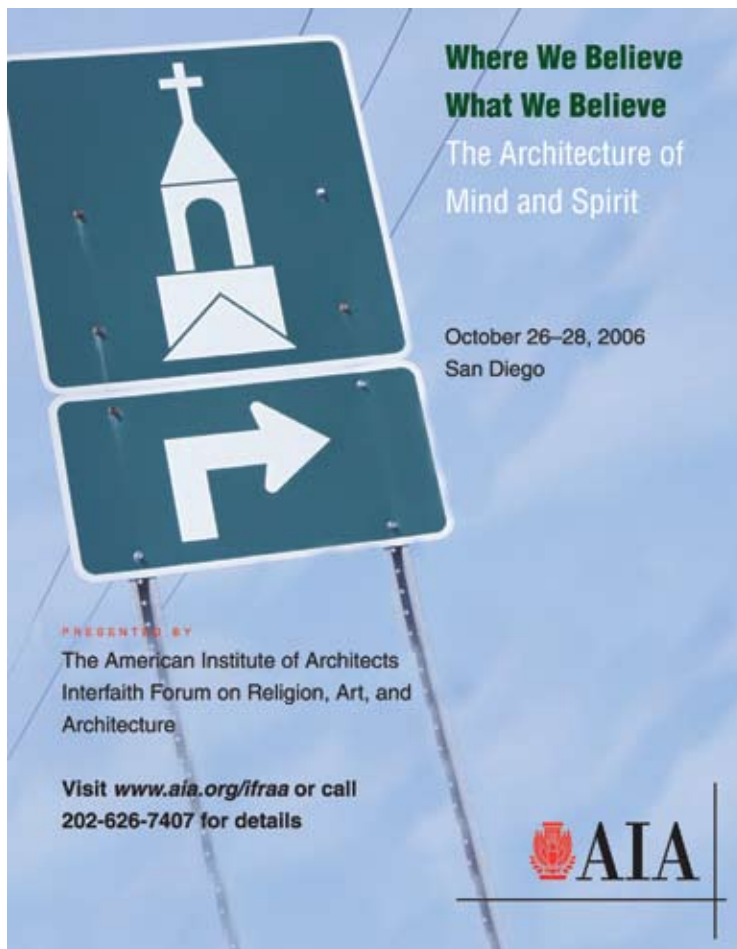
#### TWO NEW HISTORIC LANDMARKS ARE CHURCHES

The U.S. Department of the Interior announced the designation of several buildings as National Historic Landmarks, including two houses of worship. The Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco, described as one of California's earliest pure arts and crafts buildings, represents a unique collaboration of many influential architects and craftspeople. The arts and crafts movement in the late 1800s sought to unite social reform, architecture, art, and the decorative arts. The hallmark of buildings in this style was their open plans and straightforward but beautifully finished and furnished interiors. Established in 1895 and still an active church, the Swedenborgian Church's three buildings and connecting garden make up a religious complex little changed from the time of construction.

The second building designated is the First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, Wisconsin. This internationally recognized premier example of Frank Lloyd Wright's late Usonian architecture is unusual for its nonresidential application of Wright's Usonian principles. Usonian design refers to what Wright termed as an artistic house of low cost for an average citizen of the U.S. Considered a highly personal expression of Wright's own religious faith, the First Unitarian Society Meeting House (built 1949-1952) exemplifies national trends in post-World War II American culture for its suburban location and modernist design.

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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: [mcrosbie@faithandform.com](mailto:mcrosbie@faithandform.com). 




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# TALL TREES FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW

JUST ONE MORE THING... ★ BETTY H. MEYER

Some years ago a parent confided in me that she was not happy with the religious education her children were receiving. "It seems," she said, "that all they do is color. 'Color what?' I ask them and they say, 'Oh, it doesn't matter. Anything we want.' They never speak about a subject or even comments a teacher may make on their work. It appears to be just a baby-sitting class and they aren't learning anything about either art or religion."

I shared this criticism with our religious education committee and of course they were concerned. "What can we do about it that will really help both the teacher and the student and not offend anyone?" After several meetings discussing it, we decided to sponsor an arts festival that would attempt to define art and religious art. Not only would students and teachers be challenged, but no one would be offended. Little did we anticipate how our little acorn would grow into a tall tree.


We wanted our exhibit to be a professional one including painters, sculptors, and a variety of craft artists. We weren't sure just how to find them or how to jury the exhibit. Luckily, we saw in the newspaper that there was an exhibit of professional artists' work on the Boston Common. We mailed invitations to all the artists listed in the brochure and were mystified when we didn't receive a single reply. So we sent a second invitation with an essay by Paul Tillich and Theodore Greene titled "What is Religious Art?" Here is an excerpt:

*Artistically authentic art can be significantly religious in two distinguishable ways, implicitly and explicitly. It is implicitly religious if it expresses, in whatever fashion, the artist's sensitive and honest search for ultimate meaning and significance in terms of his or her own contemporary culture. If religious belief can be defined as man's ultimate concern for Ultimate Reality, all art reflects, however partially and distortedly, this ultimate concern, at least implicitly, even when it makes no use whatever of a recognizable religious subject matter or any traditional symbols. Picasso's "Guernica" is profoundly religious in this implicit sense because it expresses so honestly and powerfully modern man's anguished search for ultimate meaning and his passionate revolt against cruelty and hatred.*

Almost immediately, we received a telephone call from a woman representative of the artists who told us that after reading this enclosure they wanted to participate and would even like to hang the show. They just hadn't thought that their work was religious art. We were fortunate to have good publicity, and the galleries began to call us to offer art work. We insisted that all publicity emphasize that our festival was addressed to all faiths, creeds, and denominations. Many people in the congregation worked for weeks to help with countless chores, and spent hours seeking financial support. It took almost every room in the church to accommodate the 89 entrants. Our little acorn was growing into a tall tree. Branches of the tree included: church members volunteering and training to be tour guides; meetings with public school art teachers and our church school teachers; a sermon on one of the canvases placed near the pulpit; colorings by the children posted in the classrooms for discussion; and several purchases of the art on display, including a sculpture for the entry to our church by a member.

Perhaps the most exciting event was a panel discussion on religious art that included Paul Tillich himself, Frederick Walkey, curator of the Decordova Museum, one of the artists, and the moderator, Reverend

Eugene Meyer. With standing-room only, there were differences of opinion, and after the stimulating panel so many people jumped up to speak they had to wait their turn.

When there was enthusiasm the next year for a second festival (called "Forms of Truth") and the third year ("Forms in Flux"), our committee knew for sure that our little acorn had indeed grown into a tall tree. 

BETTY H. MEYER IS EDITOR EMERITUS OF FAITH & FORM AND CAN BE REACHED BY EMAIL AT [BMEYER@FAITHANDFORM.COM](mailto:BMEYER@FAITHANDFORM.COM)

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