

FAITH & FORM

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Special Issue:
SPEAKING IN
TONGUES





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Top: Our Mother of Good Counsel
Bottom: Votive Chapel

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Photo: Carol Highsmith, Library of Congress

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SPEAKING IN TONGUES



EDITOR'S PAGE ★ MICHAEL J. CROSBIE

This issue is about the collision of culture and belief. Specifically, it examines how different ethnic traditions express their particular religious beliefs. African, Hispanic, Native American, and Indian cultures find creative expressions that give worldwide religions their own slant. The closest simile is the art of ethnic cuisine—every culture expresses itself through food. In this issue, we see how cultures express themselves through faith.


Cultural expression through faith is freighted with value, which means that there is usually disagreement about what is relevant and what cultural expressions are permissible. Culture shapes ethnic identity, and tastes differ within cultures. If you control the culture, you control the expression of faith to the rest of the world.

Some struggles in religious cultural identity emerged while this issue was in process. Last December in Washington, D.C., the Third Church of Christian Science, completed in 1972, was declared a historic landmark by the city's Historic Preservation Review Board. The congregation was not pleased. The city Board acted when it learned that Church leaders

were planning to raze the building for a new religious structure. Designed by Araldo A. Cossutta when he was a partner at I.M. Pei's firm, the building has been both hailed and criticized for its brutalist-style architecture. In August the church sued the city over the landmark designation, claiming that the Board was infringing on religious freedom by not allowing the church to be altered. Congregants complain that the building is expensive to heat and maintain, and sends the wrong theological message—in other words, it doesn't reflect the culture of Christian Science. The questions here touch on the very nature of religious freedom and the freedom of artistic expression. Should a religious institution be allowed to demolish what some culture critics say is a landmark work of architecture, even if it is a style that has few fans? Should a government agency be allowed to thwart the mission of a religious institution by locking it into an inadequate building?

In Houston, the art and architecture of the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart have been criticized as not reflecting the theology and culture of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church. The sometimes vehement disagreement about art and architecture in contemporary Roman Catholicism is not

new—it has been raging for years. Critics have charged that certain Catholic Church leaders have ignored the spirit and the letter of Vatican II and other pronouncements on Church art and architecture in attempts to return the built environment for Catholic worship to pre-Vatican II models. In this issue, an article in Notes & Comments (page 30) questions the art and architecture of Houston's new co-cathedral. The authors of the article have asked to remain anonymous, fearing retribution if their identities are known. In an unprecedented move *Faith & Form* is honoring the authors' request for anonymity, for the sole purpose of encouraging further debate about the design culture of a major religious institution. This magazine invites and will publish responses to the article in future issues and online.

Design is not benign. It reflects the culture of belief, the values of the culture, and the identity of the faithful. Those who control the art and architecture of religious environments set the patterns of worship and its expression in the distant future. No wonder it raises the voice in passion and pitch—often not in praise! 

MICHAEL J. CROSBIE IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *FAITH & FORM* AND CAN BE REACHED BY EMAIL AT MCROSBIE@FAITHANDFORM.COM

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African Spirit

A Landmark Church Expresses its Ethnic Roots



West elevation of the church, whose narthex opens to the southeast.

Photo: Harrison Northcutt



BY STEPHEN A. KLIMENT, FAIA

AMONG THE IMAGES OF BUILDINGS that adorn the coffee mugs at the Atlanta office of William Stanley, FAIA, NOMA, and Ivenue Love-Stanley, FAIA, NOMA, there's a razor-back form quite unlike any place of worship on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. Completed in 2000 as a freestanding addition to the renowned Ebenezer Baptist Church in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood of Atlanta, this grandly scaled sibling was created to accommodate the rapid growth of the congregation and the rising volume of visitors to Atlanta who include Ebenezer and Sweet Auburn, along with the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial, as key waystations on their tour.

STEPHEN A. KLIMENT, FAIA, IS A FORMER CHIEF EDITOR OF *ARCHITECTURAL RECORD*. IN 2007 HE WROTE A SERIES OF MONTHLY COLUMNS ON DIVERSITY FOR THE ONLINE PUBLICATION *AIARCHITECT*. HE WORKS ON DIVERSE EDITORIAL PROJECTS AND SERVES AS ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK.

What distinguishes Ebenezer from most other churches with mainly African American congregations is that instead of adapting an existing sanctuary to the Baptist liturgy and relying on traditional neoclassical or neo-Gothic styles, as did the original Ebenezer Church on an adjacent site, new Ebenezer, from the very start, embraced African antecedents but never literally copied their motifs, materials, and forms.

The Ebenezer Baptist Church New Horizon Sanctuary was originally proposed for a site next to the existing church, but that plan was discarded for a number of reasons and a new site was chosen across the street, giving the architects greater freedom to explore the notion of afrocentricity in the design. As a symbol of the King family's many links to the church, its central axis aligns across the street with the tomb of Dr. King, recalling his frequent presence in the pulpit in a church where his father had been the pastor.

The new plan consists of a symmetrical central nave with fan-shaped seating. The most remarkable feature inside and out is the row of hut-shaped steel arches or bents that increase in height from both ends up to a mid-nave apex of 80 feet. The shape recalls the profile

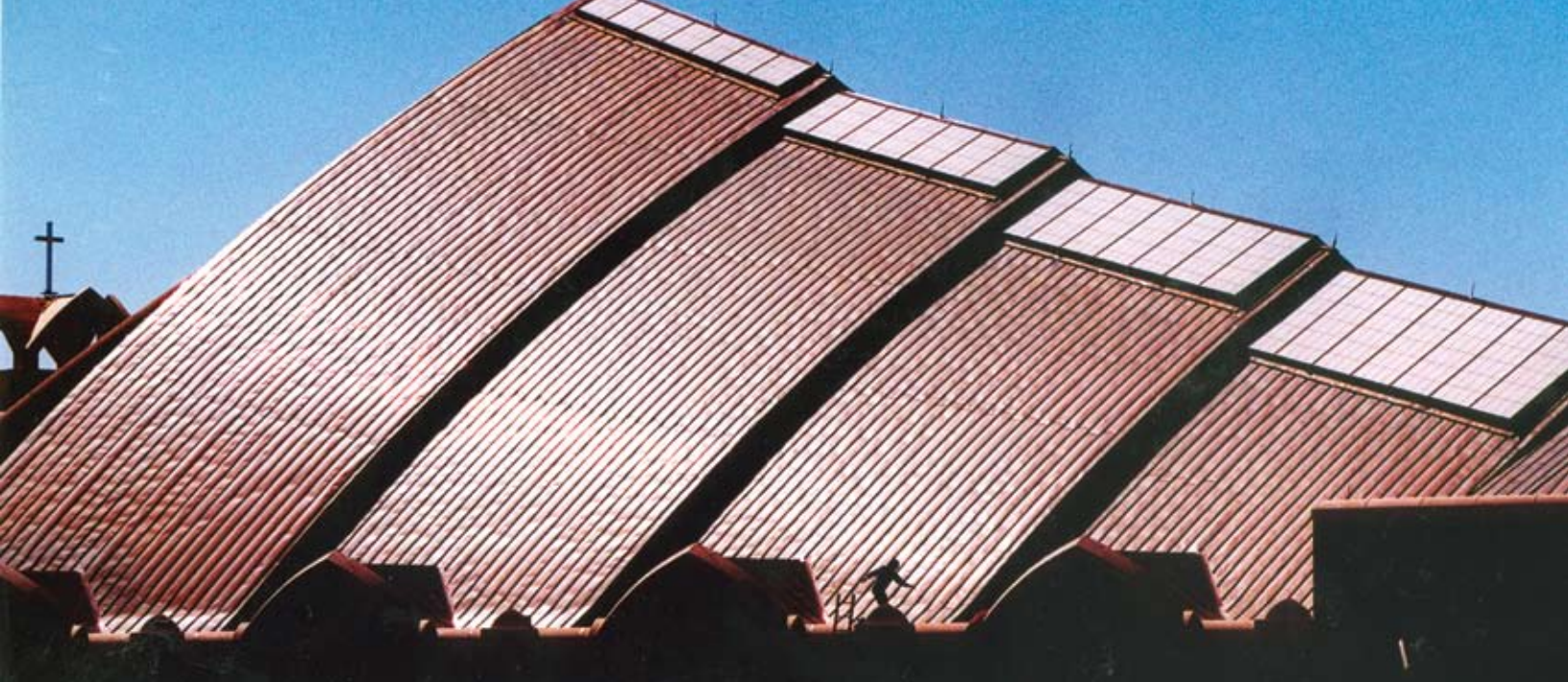
of an African sculpted mound. From the high point the ridge cascades down towards the altar and pulpit, becoming narrower to focus the congregation. The copper standing-seam roof cladding, once it acquires its patina, will suggest the thatch that is a common feature of native African structures. The palette of materials includes tri-colored brick, a gesture of respect to southern black plantation craftsmen who excelled as masons and carpenters.

Dominant features at Ebenezer are the eight "teaching windows" located between the steel bents—four on each wall of the main church, each flanked by small clear "view windows." Teaching windows were a popular African device, characteristic of the Enbele culture in

Site plan with ground floor layout.



Photo: Harrison Northcutt



The church roof has a razor-back profile.

Photo: Harrison Northcutt

Eritrea, where they paint glyphs on the houses as decoration. These windows are not unlike stained glass windows in medieval churches, where they told Bible stories and showed important people (including, it is said, portraits of the windows' donors) to a population that could not read. In Africa, they used educational windows to enhance through pictures Africa's *griot*, or oral tradition of telling stories.

The Ebenezer teaching windows chronicle the movement of Africans across the continent through the diaspora into slavery, passing through the civil rights movement to today. A design competition for the teaching windows was open only to invited artists of African or African American descent. There's a Martin Luther King, Sr., window, and one depicting Dr. King's maternal grandfather, A.D. Williams. They are backlit, and you can see them from inside and out. Or, you will, since the windows are not yet installed for lack of funds. The message will be enhanced using modern technology featuring hooked-up headphones. The "view windows" offer vistas of a prayer garden on one side and the Atlanta skyline on the other.

A round apse behind the altar contains the baptismal pool, the choir loft, organ chamber, and offices. At the opposite end, the three-level narthex is supported by a giant cross. Another high-profile feature is the brick and concrete bell tower, decorated with African glyphs. According to the clergy, the tower owes its form to the Stele of Axum in East Africa: "The Queen of Sheba's monument to King Solomon." The narthex floor is covered with purple and green cut slate, echoing the grasses of the African savannahs.

Inside, the pews are organized in fan-shaped sections, with slate aisles and woven carpets beneath the pews, their ends punctuated with carved glyphs of African origin. The base of each steel bent is finished with one of four African cross motifs: two are Coptic Christian, one is known as the World Cross, and the fourth is an original configuration derived from the old church. The altar furniture comprises custom-made chairs, lecterns, and the communion table. Lighting and HVAC outlets are out of view of the congregation.

MODERNIST ARCHITECT, AFROCENTRIC MOTIFS

It always helps to explore the work and mindsets of leading black architects who have chosen to express African roots in their work. One such firm is Stanley Love-Stanley PC, the architects of Ebenezer Baptist Church. Founding partners William J. Stanley III and Ivenue



Photo: Harrison Northcutt

A large cross is a feature of the narthex window.

Love-Stanley—Ivenue is the first black woman to be licensed as an architect in the State of Georgia—see African culture as an endless source of motifs that lend themselves to expression in black-designed American architecture. Because of its size and physical and historical context, the new building for Ebenezer Baptist Church is a significant symbol of black American culture.

Yet African observers such as the Nigerian architect Olefumi Majekodunmi, along with many African American architects and scholars, disparage the use of such pictorial African motifs by black architects, while they condone them when used by European-descended designers. Perhaps it is because Eurocentric architectural motifs, typically taken from the classical styles and from medieval Gothic sacred and collegiate forms, have become so much a part of America's cultural vocabulary that no one saw anything peculiar in H.H. Richardson's designing a jailhouse as a fortress; McKim, Mead, and White a New York clubhouse like a Roman palazzo; or Ralph Adams Cram a college chapel like a medieval cathedral.

But transporting African motifs to contemporary architecture is a bolder move, and if superimposed arbitrarily over an otherwise logical response to function, climate, and program, they could be taken as a contrived formal gesture.

Many black people in America are descendants of Adinkras. "The Ghanaians are great textile people," says Bill Stanley, "and each one of their woven patterns has a different meaning. We took these weavings and occasionally used them to form patterns in brick in our buildings." Nor did Stanley at Ebenezer stop at the teaching windows. As noted, the entire building is a heady brew of African motifs and forms, beginning with its shape and profile. The schema here, argues Stanley, was "one large community house that has a thatched roof over it, and these forms cascade up and back down. And in some instances there's an opening at the top of this thatching to let the light in."

Many black architects—David Lee in Boston, Michael Willis in San Francisco, Phillip Freelon at Research Triangle Park, North Carolina—tend to eschew such features. Stanley, whose own main body of work is largely devoid of African forms and detail, seeks to explain this by saying: "They're probably modernists. That's what their experiences have been. Cutting to the chase, you've got to have a client who is willing first of all to express his Afrocentricity as a client. He's got to be willing to—I won't say take the chance—but move in that direction, to commit to create a culturally rich and significant building." Not

African decorative themes are found in the design of altar furniture.



Photo: Harrison Northcutt





Interior columns were inspired geometric patterns and colors in African art and architecture.




The bell tower incorporates African decorative motifs.

everybody is willing to go that far. Not every building allows that to happen. “Certain types of buildings, like houses of worship, do. So do some museums.”

The Stanleys are no Afrocentric traditionalists, however. Some 90 percent of their buildings are modernist. But Bill tries to express Afrocentricity whenever it becomes possible and in as many ways as he can. “It’s important that somebody advance Afrocentricity beyond music and painting and jazz and discourse. These are symbols, and they can be manifested in architecture the way they are in Africa, just as easily as in any [other endeavor]. But to try to see how it fits into an architectural scheme without being limiting, and without being pure decoration, takes some doing....”

Stanley sees great beauty in the motifs, but doesn’t walk around in African clothing. He doesn’t even own any. But he claims the African spirit is so ingrained in him as part of his experience that it comes out whenever he expresses himself, even in worship or at play.

When I visited Atlanta the Stanleys invited me to the Sunday morning worship service at Ebenezer. Having visited the church several times before, I now had only to take part in what it was all about—a place of worship. It was awesome: the music, the choir, the audience participation, the inspiring sermon by Pastor Joseph Roberts, the hospitality of the congregation. After such an experience, formal arguments about style, form, and detail become simply the backdrop for the experience. 

VITALS

Project:

Ebenezer Baptist Church New Horizon Sanctuary

Owner:

Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA

Area: 33,091 square feet

Project cost: \$8.3 million

Completion: 2000

Architects:

Stanley, Love-Stanley, PC

Structural Engineer:

Stanley D. Lindsey & Associates

M/E/P Engineer:

Newcomb & Boyd Consulting Engineers

Civil Engineer:

Williams, Russell & Johnson

SPIRITUAL SPARKS

THE HISPANIC AESTHETIC IN RELIGIOUS ART AND ARCHITECTURE



BY JAIME LARA

THE U.S. IS CURRENTLY the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. Many residents of New Mexico and the Southwest are proud to claim that their Spanish-speaking ancestors were landowners there for 200 years before the U.S. ever existed as a political entity; some Floridians and Louisianans could say the same. According to the 2000 census and the projection of experts on population growth and immigration, the Latino percentage of the nation's population will continue to increase. This will have far-reaching consequences for multiculturalism, bilingualism, and catholicity in the wider sense of the word. What will this mean as religious communities become composed of a majority that is Hispanic or Hispanic American? Or how will religious communities attempt to embrace the gifts and cultural flavors of people who have immigrated from one of the 21 countries south of the border?

The reader will please pardon me for attempting to discuss “hispanicity” as if it were some uniform cultural and religious expression; it is not. Latinos in the U.S. are mestizos, sharing to varying degrees a complicated indigenous, European, and African bloodline and cultural history. They or their forbears have migrated from lands as diverse as the Sonoran desert, the Patagonian grasslands, the snow-capped Andes, and the tropical islands of the Caribbean. Moreover, significant numbers of Hispanics in the U.S. now have mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal religious affiliation, not to mention the majority who are Roman Catholics; a minority are Jews or Muslims. Such a variety of faiths forces one to think beyond stereotypes. But in spite of the vast complexity, I believe that certain ingredients went into the collective heritage of Latin Americans and Hispanic Americans in this country, regardless of national or denominational affiliation. Some of these have come into play in the design of recent houses of worship and liturgical spaces.

The spirituality of Latin America is, by and large, a product of late medieval piety and

baroque Counter-Reformation Catholicism. Sixteenth-century “discovery” and evangelization grew out of the travels of medieval explorers in the line of Marco Polo and a late medieval worldview.¹ The initial church buildings in Mexico (the first European construction on the mainland of America) incorporated Romanesque and Gothic elements of stone, massing, and scale, taught to the indigenous builders by the friar-architects. The neophytes of the New World were now greeted by classical portals that introduced them into an atrium reminiscent of ancient indigenous temple complexes while replicating something of the Roman basilicas, and even of the Temple of Solomon.² The atrium was the site of the frequent processions that punctuated the liturgical calendar, a kinesthetic activity that was very popular with native peoples who were accustomed to sacred dance as a liturgical expression.³ In the atrium an outdoor apse sheltered an altar for Mass when the numbers of worshippers could not be accommodated within the single-nave neo-medieval church. The Santa Clara of Assisi Catholic Church in Dallas, Texas (1999), by VAI Architects, has reincorporated some of the same features of a massive forecourt centered on a stone cross carved with the instruments of Christ's Passion. The atrium thus functions as gathering and fellowship space as well as a processional route circumscribed by the enclosure. With the importance that Latin Americans place on family and on social rituals of greeting and leave-taking, the revival of this medieval feature has been a godsend.

A little more history. If the Renaissance had any influence in the earliest churches of the New World it was in the decorated façades of these churches which had been directly copied from black-and-white prints. In the latter part of the 16th century altarpieces and panel paintings were created—again by indigenous artists—in a Renaissance or Mannerist style, but the New World quickly embraced the baroque as an architectural style, as cultural rhetoric, as personal spirituality, and as social theatricality.⁴ “Baroque” has always been more of a mindset than a fashion: a materialized spiritual world engaged less with the intellect than with direct, emotional experience, sensuous, prolix, and ostentatious. A



Photo: Courtesy of VAI Architects

The Santa Clara of Assisi Catholic Church by VAI Architects, has a massive forecourt and arched openings.



The interior of San Javier del Bac Mission in Tucson, Arizona.

horror vacui—a disdain for the void or the unadorned—is evident in the quasi-theatrical settings for the divine rituals seen in thousands of churches that are similar to San Javier del Bac in Arizona.⁵ In a more folkloric way, the California and Texas mission churches of the 18th century, with their riot of colors, bear witness to the unspoken principle that “More is more,” and that God deserves the best, brightest, and most of everything.⁶ Even in the poorest rural parish it is felt that glitter and sparkle are needed to make manifest the glory of God. This sensual piety is as far as possible from otherworldly quietism.

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Photo: Julius Schulman & David Glomb

The Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels designed by Rafael Moneo, completed 2002.

For example, any student of art history knows that Spanish baroque images are never static or stoic; they are in intense movement, windblown by the presence of the spirit, electrically charged by contact with the divine. Hands and arms stretch out to the eternal, mouths open wide in prayer and praise, eyes fill with tears in joy or contrition. Passion and pathos are for the Hispanic soul the true signs of the Holy Spirit. I suggest that Latino Evangelicals and Pentecostals demonstrate the same opulent aesthetic in their verbal and musical expressions, and in the importance they give to the *gloria de Dios* in ecstatic praise. For the Hispanic soul, power is released in passion.

In regard to the worship space, it should be obvious that the subtleties of white-on-white or shades of beige are lost here. Such spaces cry out to be filled and to be given a life and human warmth that otherwise are absent. In this vision, a space for religious fervor that is impassive is no sacred space at all. We may think of the California mission church as one of whitewashed stucco walls, but that is actually more a romantic fiction created by Hollywood. We forget that those structures were often painted with murals on the exterior, and that

the wooden trim and doors would jump out at us with royal blues, forest greens, saffron yellows, and fiery reds. The original interior decoration of the mission churches, which has now been scientifically researched, would impress us with its garish super-graphics.⁷

Admitting these color lines, one has to be somewhat critical of Rafael Moneo's 2002 Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, the largest Hispanic metropolis in the Americas after Mexico City. While the massive structure in an atrium does allude to early Christian basilicas and to the Mexican conversion centers of the 16th century; and while its external concrete shell does mimic the color of natural adobe (the first material used in the California missions), we have to ask if the monochromatic interior dialogues in any way with the surrounding neighborhoods. The cathedral complex sits literally at the seam joining colorful Chinatown, Thai Town, and Olivera Street, the early center of the Mexican-Indian pueblo and the symbolic heart of the Latino community. That permanent monochromatic tapestries were installed to line the cathedral walls means that a golden opportunity for splashes of robust color has, sadly, been

lost. One can use many flattering adjectives to describe the interior space of the Los Angeles Cathedral—the last great Modernist church of the 20th century—but “passionate” is not one of them. The general feeling among Latinos is that the building, except for its lipstick-red altar and torturous crucifix, is self-consciously Anglo and, with its sharp rectilinear lines, aggressively “masculine.”⁸

In contrast, the baroque instinct of the 17th and 18th centuries was eminently feminine. The great pre-Columbian civilizations of the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas may have built in monolithic blocks with a hyper-lineal style of decoration, but Iberian Christianity introduced the rounded arch, the dome with lantern, the *espadaña* bell-wall, the volute, and the voluptuous S curve—all of which are particularly apt for the expression of intense feeling. Add to this the baroque iconography of the Virgin Mary and the gender-bending renditions of the face of Christ, and one can see that the feminine was an all-pervasive principle of the epoch.⁹

In Latino culture religion is handed down by the mother, who is both catechist and home liturgist. More so than in Anglo societies, women have long been recognized as the



The church of La Esperanza de María, Mexican architect Plutarco Barrero's homage to Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp.

leaders of prayer and song during worship, and they are the keepers of the community's memory and traditions.¹⁰ A woman's sense of detail is also evident in the decoration and the ephemeral art of the worship space: delicate fabrics, complex patterns, roses, cherubs, and lace. I suggest that Hispanics, of whatever denomination, still think and imagine in these terms today, even if they don't realize it.

Although 19th-century neoclassical style arrived in the Spanish New World together with the politics of nationalism and indepen-

dence, it never made a significant impact in religious circles. It was an ideology of the elite or Enlightenment clergy, but relatively few houses of worship in Latin America accepted its aesthetic, and none are significant buildings.¹¹ More impressive has been the mid-20th-century contribution of Latin American modernism.

Beginning in the 1950s, architects like Feliz Candela began to experiment with thin skins of reinforced poured concrete and sweeping rooflines. Initially influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, Mexican architects quickly moved to the parabolic arch, the S curve, and a neobaroque aesthetic. They hung curtain walls of glass from undulating concrete shells. The glass walls left little space for side altars, votive shrines and the like, and as time went on ephemeral decorations often took over as the worshippers attempted to inject more color and a sense of *fiesta*. More recently, postmodern architects like Plutarco Barrero have taken Candela's soaring roofs to a new level, as in the church of La Esperanza de María (2000), a Mexican homage to Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp.

The architect Luis Barragan went in another direction by creating massive concrete boxes in

which walls are painted in strong primary colors awash with light. His chapel for cloistered Capuchin nuns in Mexico City (1954-60) is timeless and iconic, with its shimmering gilded panels juxtaposed against walls that pop. Ricardo Legoretta's Metropolitan Cathedral of Managua, Nicaragua, (1993) continues in the line of bold color and simple form influences of the Mudejar or Islamic architecture of Iberia. Its 63 small domes are an allusion to an early open Chapel of the Indians in Cholula, Mexico, which was itself modeled on a mosque.¹² The ceiling of its cave-like Chapel of the Crucifix is pierced with dozens of pinpoint skylights as in a Turkish bath.

A more prismatic Latin American modernism is present in Daniel Bonilla's "open" chapel for Los Nogales School in Bogotá, Colombia (2002). The purity of burnished concrete contrasts with the warmth of tropical hardwoods for pews, altar, ambo, and an enormous lateral door-wall. When this door is swung open, the worship space for 100 swells to accommodate 1,000 or more persons congregated on the grass. From that vantage point the worshippers can see completely through the building and out onto a reflecting pool wherein floats a monumental wooden cross (*à la* Tadao Ando).

Architect Daniel Bonilla's "open" chapel for Los Nogales School in Bogotá, Colombia, of 2002.

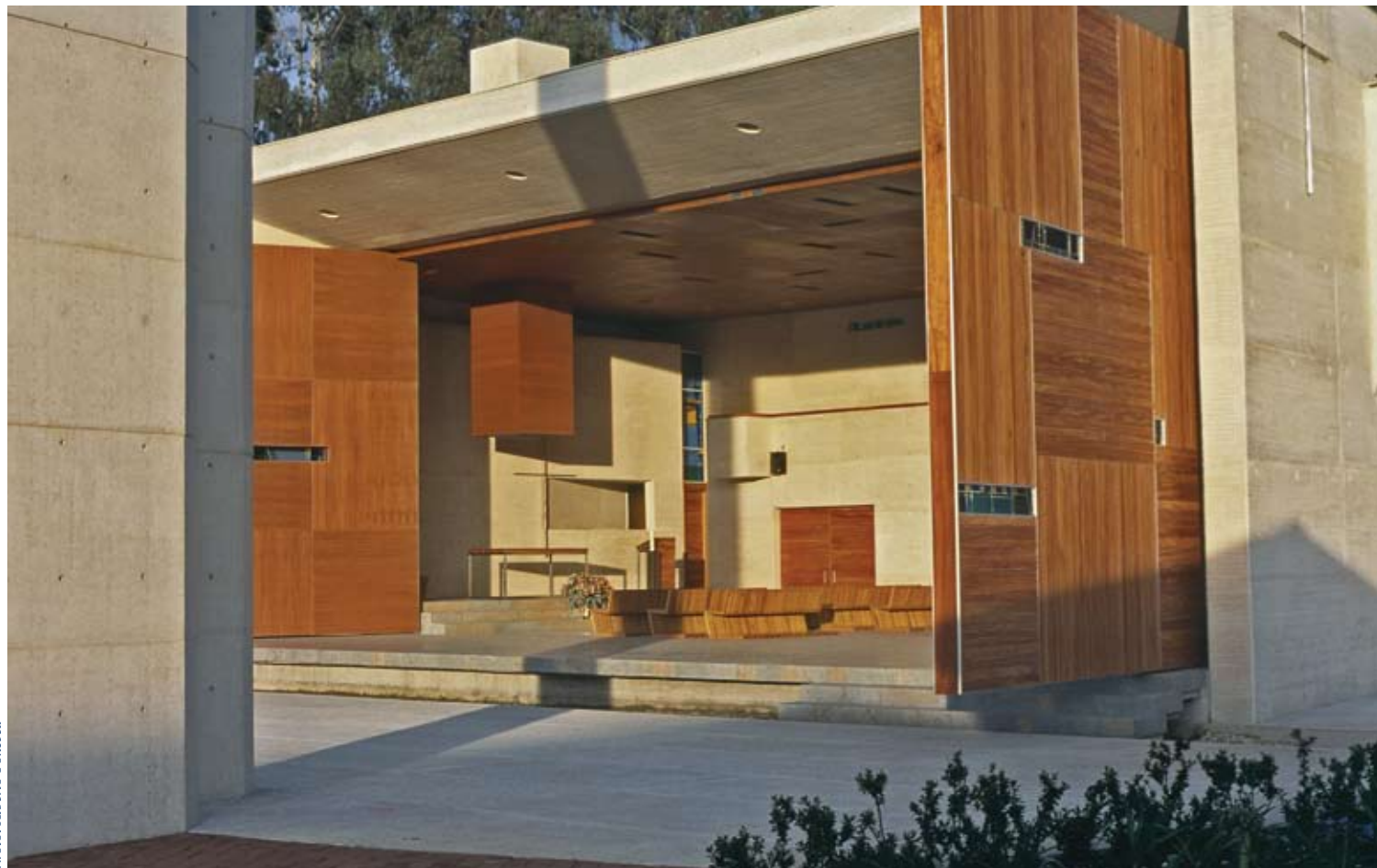


Photo: Alberto Fonseca

Once again, we see a solution that has a historical precedent in the first evangelization of the colonial period but which reinterprets that tradition with all the materials, technology, and aesthetic sensibility of contemporary architecture. Such sacred spaces, while clearly in the modernist vein, show that Latin architects have successfully manipulated the idiom with their own sense of the transcendent.

In the last decade or so, architects and liturgical designers in the U.S. have consciously attempted to incorporate identifiable Hispanic elements for new clients. Mission-style revival churches have been around since the early 20th-century revivals; one need only look at the eclectic examples in San Diego, for example. The use of the *espadaña* wall in Sagrado Corazón Church, Windham, Connecticut, is one recent attempt to give a New England Latino congregation the look of a California mission. The danger here is that, in the hands of a lesser designer, neo-mission architecture can resemble a Taco Bell. Many Catholic and some Protestant congregations have installed an icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe or a carved *santo* in the New Mexican style, the only ecclesiastical art form that is indigenous to the U.S.¹³ But an image in itself is not sufficient to create a Hispanic identity.



Exterior of Sagrado Corazón Church in Windham, Connecticut, designed in 1991.




Courtyard of San Juan Bautista Mission in Miami, Florida, designed by Duany Plater-Zyberk in 1989. Courtesy of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., image used with permission.

Another direction in this historical referencing is the recent renovation of the oldest cathedral in the U.S., San Fernando Cathedral (founded 1731) in San Antonio, Texas. In the final phase of the multimillion-dollar project, the parish commissioned sculptors and painters in Mexico to create three gilded “baroque” altarpieces (*retablos*) that are set deep in the chancel of the original building, behind the centrally located altar table. The *retablos* have no *mensa* (table) and hence do not reduplicate the one altar of the Eucharist, but rather they act as shrines that are dimly lighted during liturgical services but brightly illuminated at other times. Here the traditional and the familiar have been reconstituted for contemporary worship.

A very successful blending of the old and the new is the San Juan Bautista Mission in Miami, Florida. Designed by the firm of Duany Plater-Zyberk in 1989, the modest-sized atrium alludes to the traditional church of Latin America, offering a courtyard as a refuge from the hectic urban environment outside. At the sidewalk level the low front building greets the visitor who is then drawn through a dim *zaguan* vestibule toward the light and the sound of the fountain in the cloistered atrium.¹⁴ A small chapel with a pedimented clay-tiled roof, like the classic basilicas of Rome or the neo-catechu-

menal centers of the colonial New World, is the reward for entering the miniature enclosure.

No megachurches in the U.S. have been built to date by Hispanic congregants. Latino Evangelicals tend to be minorities within larger Anglo congregations (like those of the Assembly of God), who are the ones responsible for the program and design of worship spaces with theatrical stages, praise bands, and sophisticated audio equipment, but little that is traditionally Hispanic as defined here. As Latinos move to the middle-class mainstream and design their own megachurches, it will be interesting to see if their buildings take on the passion and power that is innately Hispanic.

Much of what I have said about a Latino aesthetic could certainly be said of other ethnic groups; Hispanics have no monopoly on passion or religious power. The Crucified One and the Sorrowing Mother are perfectly understandable across cultural lines. But those themes have been imagined and imaged in unique ways by Latin Americans in their sacred words, art, and architecture. The space in which one meets these visual or verbal icons, with their corresponding colors and shapes, is nothing less than a powerhouse, a holy hot spot wherein heaven and earth make contact and where spiritual sparks fly. 

NOTES

1 See, for example, Luis Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992).

2 See Jaime Lara, *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), esp. 111-149. It should be noted that, in Spanish, the most common word for a church building has always been *templo*, temple.

3 See Jaime Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), esp. 171-199.

4 See, for example, Linda Curcio-Nagy, *The Great Festivals of Colonial Mexico City: Performing Power and Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

5 Many baroque architects, both in Europe and in the New World, were also stage-set designers.

6 I suggest that the dictum “Less is more,” popularized but not invented by Mies van der Rohe, has emerged from a Calvinist value judgment (perhaps with Carthusian roots) and means very little to Hispanic worshippers of any denominational affiliation. It obviously did influence architects like Luis Barragan and Daniel Bonilla.

7 See Norman Neuerburg, *The Decoration of the California Missions* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Bellophon Books, 1991).

8 This was the general consensus of Latino pastoral leaders at the 2005 conference of the National Hispanic Institute for Liturgy, which took place at the cathedral.

9 On this topic see Emile Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du XVI siècle: Etude sur l'iconographie après le Concile de Trente* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1951).

10 It is not uncommon for women in Latin American parishes to tell the priest what he is supposed to do during Holy Week; they know the rubrics and customs better than he.

11 It is true that some gilded baroque altarpieces were summarily removed and replaced by neo-classical altars in white or ebony, but there was resistance to the new style.

12 See Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 141-146.

13 See Willard Hougland, *Santos: A Primitive American Art* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1946), 4.

14 The *zaguan* is a familiar feature of Iberian and Latin American vernacular architecture. It originated as a defensible corridor in private houses and palaces.

One of three retablos in San Fernando Cathedral, San Antonio, Texas, installed after a recent renovation.

Photo courtesy of San Fernando Cathedral





'Midafternoon at Her Embroidery' by artist J. Michael Walker, 2000.

Guadalupe

Mother in Many Modes



BY JUDITH DUPRÉ

TAKE THIS," said a Jesuit friend, handing me a red rose some 20 years ago. "And this too," adding a holy card of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

"She will help you with everything. She is your mother." Over the years, Our Lady graciously fielded my many requests, often with quick and witty responses that were accompanied by her trademark roses. Then things turned serious. My newborn son was diagnosed with brain damage. He might never walk, the neurosurgeons said. "Heal him," I begged her, and she did, which is why his middle name is Guadalupe. Though the doctors still cannot explain his miraculous recovery, or how he became the star player of his soccer team, I have no doubts.

Naturally, Guadalupe is at home in my home—on paintings, sculpture, jewelry, and even a potholder that shows her enjoying a breakfast cappuccino and a croissant. But lately I have been seeing her everywhere—on hubcaps, T-shirts, bottles of hot sauce, and bumper stickers that read "In Guad We Trust." South and far north of the border, she reigns supreme in many churches, and in roadside shrines, New Age enclaves, and Tex-Mex restaurants.

Why, I wondered, is her image increasingly apparent in both sacred and secular visual culture?

There is, indeed, something about Mary. Of her myriad cultural identities, none has captured the popular imagination as has that of Our Lady of Guadalupe, variously known as La Virgen, La Morenita, Tonantzin, Star of the New World, and, diminutively, La Lupita. It has been almost 500 years since her image appeared on the *tilma*, or blanket, wrapped around Juan Diego of Cuautlan, the humble



*Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Los Lentos*

JUDITH DUPRÉ IS WORKING ON A NEW BOOK, *MARY: AT HOME WITH THE MOTHER OF GOD*, AND IS A MEMBER OF FAITH & FORM'S EDITORIAL BOARD.

Photo: Alexandria King



Facing Page: 'Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen de Guadalupe,' by Yolanda M. Lopez.

Indian to whom she appeared on December 9, 1531, in Tepeyac, a hill northwest of what is now Mexico City. There, in what was then the far margin of the known world, she appeared, brown-skinned and speaking Nahuatl, the native pre-Columbian language, encoded with the symbols of the Aztecs, and encircled with a black sash that announced her pregnancy. She asked simply for a house in which she could express her love for her children, and bolstered this request by furnishing Juan Diego with proof of her presence—impossible roses in winter and her imprint on his cloak.

Virgilio Elizondo's *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* provides a culturally sensitive translation of the Nican Mopohua, the Nahuatl poem that first recounted the momentous encounter of 1531. Mary's opening words to Juan Diego, "Know and be certain in your heart, my most abandoned son, that I am the Ever-Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the God of Great Truth, Teotl, of the One through Whom We Live, the Creator of Persons, the Owner of What Is Near and Together, of the Lord of Heaven and Earth," are significant because this iteration of names, used preconquest by Nahuatl theologians and subsequently discredited by the Spanish evangelizers, established the authenticity of these venerable names of God¹ beyond any one faith way. She is the Mother of Teotl; the Aztec concept of *teotl*, or the underlying unity of all things, points to why she has crossed physical, political, and cultural borders around the globe.

Her image weaves together contradictions—different, competing, and occasionally combative elements—into wholeness. "Two cultures are reflected in her image, both indigenous and Spanish," Dr. Arturo Chavez, president of the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, told me. Her skin color "speaks to many people who are in a 'no-person's' place, those who are not Indian or Spanish, but mestizo, a mixed-race people." Chavez, who has interviewed dozens of men—former gang members, addicts, and prisoners—who have La Virgen tattooed on their bodies, understands these markings as her image "incarnated" in human flesh. Her tenderness, in this case literal, and ability to melt the hardened heart are redemptive entry points for the disenfranchised.

Guadalupe is also used by gangs as a means of identification, but Chavez notes that the gangs are "often the only place where these boys felt a sense of belonging." The home Mary requested is not a literal home, despite the lavish basilica that was erected in her honor at Tepeyac, but a metaphoric home, a place where one belongs and is cherished.

"She is the most perfect sign of inculturation," according to Alejandro Aguilera Titus of the Secretariat on Cultural Diversity in the Church at the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. By using their language and symbols, she conveyed to the indigenous that "Christian faith is not here to obliterate you, but to give you the message of the true God, a God who embraces you as His own." She "appeals to those who are powerless, and also is an empowering image. Her message, at its deepest level, is one of empowerment."

Additional support for Guadalupe's popularity can be gleaned from the distinctive religious practices of American Latinos, who account for about a third of all Catholics in the U.S. and whose numbers are projected to climb for decades.² More than half of all Hispanics, regardless of religious practice, pray to the Virgin Mary during difficult moments in their lives³; 70 percent have religious objects in their homes. Moreover, three out of four of those who identify with a religious tradition believe that miracles occur today, just as they did in ancient times. This intensity of belief and how it is expressed, combined with a burgeoning demographic, fuel La Virgen's increasing cultural presence.



Photo: Jeanne Figueira Grossetti

'Winter Meditation: The Celestial Feminine' by Jeanne Figueira Grossetti.

Patron of Mamaroneck Diner, Mamaroneck, New York.



Photo: Judith Dupré

And then there is her demure, unassuming beauty. “Guadalupe’s face is one of the most beautiful that I’ve ever painted,” the artist Reverend John Giuliani told me. “The painting has a life of its own.” According to Giuliani, the image on Juan Diego’s mantle that was presented to the skeptical Bishop Juan de Zumárraga as proof, falls into the category of revelation: “It is a visual fact, the miraculous imprint of a revelation. While there is room for stylistic variations, the essential canon of the image is set. The image is. We don’t have any visions of John the Baptist, of Francis of Assisi.”

In a fractious world, La Lupita’s calm image is reassuring. The maternal familiarity she inspires is borne out by the Latino custom of dressing church statuary with actual clothing, the washing, ironing, and repair of which is part of a larger devotion, and one that makes it easy to think of Mary as a family member who, like the rest of us, needs clean clothes. The clothing not only softens her image, but relates as well to how her image manifested itself—on pliable cloth, a cloak to warm and comfort. On December 12, her feast day, statues of Guadalupe are carried in procession amidst joyful singing, another practice that underscores her dynamic presence.

Although La Virgen’s ubiquitous presence defies simple explanation, her ability to mediate disparate, often contradictory forces—within history, religions, and ethnic groups, and within individuals who live in and outside the boundaries of traditional faith practices—makes her beloved. That her iconic image appears in basilicas as well as on bottle caps is proof of the wide faith in her perennial willingness to intercede between all people and God. She imparts hope. As the tattooed men told Chavez, “She’s the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus, and she’s my mother too.”

Photo: Thien H. Gretch



‘Our Lady’ at the garden center.

NOTES

1. Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) pp. 7-8.
2. Pew Hispanic Center report, “Religious Practices and Beliefs.” Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation Of American Religion, April 25, 2007.
3. *Ibid.* Within Catholic Latino groups, this number increases to 79 percent.

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Hubcap on a car in Espanola, New Mexico.



Photo: Mary Hockenbery

Image: Currier & Ives, Library of Congress



'Retablo de la Virgen Indigena' by artist J. Michael Walker, 1995.

'Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe,' c. 1848, by Currier & Ives.



CULTURES OF SACRED SITES

In April, 2008, a conference at the University of Minnesota considered the role of sacred sites in different cultures. In this article, two of the symposium's co-organizers reflect on the lessons that emerged about sacred places from two different perspectives: Native American/First Nations from North America and Hindu/Vaishnava from India. –Editor

BY
RICHARD KROEKER
AND VIRAJITA SINGH



IN WESTERN CULTURES, WE TYPICALLY ASSOCIATE sacred sites with places of worship such as churches and temples. In many non-Western cultures, however, sacred sites exist throughout the natural world or relate to the places in which the earthly activities of deities occurred, according to ancient texts. The number and variety of sacred sites expands almost exponentially as a result, challenging Western notions of where and when worship may happen at the top of a revered hill or at the roadside altar of a deity. The pervasiveness of sacred sites in non-Western cultures may also alter the way in which we see our daily environment: not as something we can exploit as long as we preserve particular places of worship, but rather as something we should cherish and worship as a whole. In a time when we need to redefine our relationship to the natural world and to restore the damaged landscapes surrounding us, non-Western beliefs about sacred sites offer a guide to how we might all inhabit this planet in a more sustainable and equitable way.

SACRED SITES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

As the progeny of immigrant cultures on the North American continent, whether Asian, European, or African, we firmly locate our sacred places in a pre-North American past, both in time and in space. We assume that the places where we now live cannot be understood as sacred in the same sense as the sacred places of our mythologies and

sacred texts. We typically make our strongest spiritual connections to the mythic past in other places, meaning that our adopted geography does not, in itself, have a strong immediate spiritual presence.

The opposite is true for indigenous people. The places where they live – or once lived, before immigrant cultures swept across North America – have that spiritual presence. Elders from the Dakota Nation and the Mi'kmaq First Nation, for example, express eloquently the difficulty they have in communicating this sense of sacred place. They see themselves as the custodians of the natural world where their ancestors and deities reside, an idea sometimes regarded as anachronistic and irrelevant because of its variance from mainstream attitudes toward place.

Albert Marshall, First Nations elder from Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, speaks of

how his people see all things imbued with spirit. Humans are not privileged in this regard; at the level of spirit, we are not superior to other beings. All things, including those we may regard as inanimate, have a spirit that interacts with human spirits. The awareness of the spiritual presence all around us is important to the understanding of who we are and how we relate to our fellow beings. Though there are places of special power, in a real sense, all things are sacred.

Marshall also emphasizes that environmental issues are essentially human rights as well as spiritual issues. In that sense, indigenous cultures have become the proverbial canaries in the coal mine. Because they maintain the continuity of spiritual and material existence in nature, they are the first to feel the pain when the environment comes under threat. Nature may manage very well without the presence of humans, but humans cannot manage without nature, suggesting that immigrant cultures assume nature is spiritually void at their own peril.

The misunderstanding that resulted from Europeans' contact with these indigenous beliefs has its roots in differing notions of the place of humans within nature and in the sense of what is sacred. The first Europeans on the continent typically valued human endeavor above all else. For them, an indigenous society living close to nature had not yet embarked on a process of "civilization," which they understood as asserting a clear human dominance over nature: changing it, "improving upon" it, marking it, and thus owning it. Only humans had access to an awareness of a god that existed outside and above nature, and they often viewed a sacred site as a place of outside intervention by the divine, not as something embedded within nature or emanating from a natural place.

The Mi'kmaq understood all of nature to be part of any covenant between people and the divine. Treaties that native people entered into with the European powers, now centuries old, are just beginning to be understood by the descendants of those who signed them. The treaties called

for a covenant of mutual protection for all beings within a given region. The Mi'kmaq elders maintain that because of humans' close ties with nature, our respect and care for the total environment, not the scale of our exploitation, legitimizes human presence, Marshall calls for a return



Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall is from Eskasoni, Nova Scotia. An activist in issues of cultural and environmental renewal for his people, he helped initiate a program that brings indigenous elder knowledge to the teaching of science at the university level.



The Healing Centre for the Mi'kmaq community of Pictou Landing was constructed by community members using local materials and the principles of longhouse and lodge construction.

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to this awareness not only for the sake of his own people, but also for those who have come to live on the lands that gave birth to that awareness. Part of this awareness involves a return to a view of the earth as our mother. This tradition has no temples; the sacred is embedded in everyday life as well as in special ceremonies and rituals, and the point of life is to return to a nature undisturbed by our passing. However, the Mi'kmaq did make buildings for dwelling and also for healing, as, for example, the sweat lodge. The Healing Centre for the Mi'kmaq community of Pictou Landing was designed by Richard Kroeker in collaboration with Brian Lilley and Peter Henry. It was constructed by community members using local materials and the principles of longhouse and lodge construction. The material and space of the Pictou Landing building are seen as part of the healing process. The building is organized around an outdoor sacred healing circle and a medicine garden.

Elders from both the Dakota and the Mi'kmaq cultures agree that the sacred places with special spiritual significance to them need to remain unmarked. The power of such places is intrinsic; it is not bestowed on them by human effort. Immigrant cultures still hesitate to recognize the places that are sacred to the indigenous people of this continent. The history of this misunderstanding has repeatedly resulted in tragedy, not just for indigenous cultures, but also for the natural world as a whole.

SACRED SITES OF THE VAISHNAVA FAITH


From the native perspective in North America, sacred sites are embedded within nature or emanate from a natural place, but the understanding on the other side of the world, in India, is quite different though ultimately related. For practitioners of the Vaishnava faith (part of the larger Hindu tradition), the notion of the sacred is connected firmly with Lord Krishna and the location of his earthly activities during his childhood and youth about 5,000 years ago in the area of Braj in Northern India. In the West, Krishna is usually known as a character from the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, particularly as the protagonist who spoke the Bhagavad Gita, the revered holy text of the Hindus. Krishna (literally "the all-attractive one") is beloved across India as an enchanting presence, his beauty often described by Vaishnava poets as having dark-bluish skin, large lotus-like eyes, and long raven-black hair adorned with a colorful peacock feather.

The Braj region is divided into 12 forests (the actual forests are mostly gone), all very significant in the context of Krishna's life. The principal forest, on the banks of the River Yamuna, is Vrindavan, now the site of a large town with more than 5,000 temples. Conceptually, the devotees of Krishna consider the Braj region as no different from the spiritual place where Krishna is believed to permanently reside, so that region can be understood to be a portal that merges earthly space-time with that of the spiritual realm. Consequently, devotees strive to follow well-understood rules of appropriate behavior, of do's and don'ts, while in the Holy Dham (divine abode).

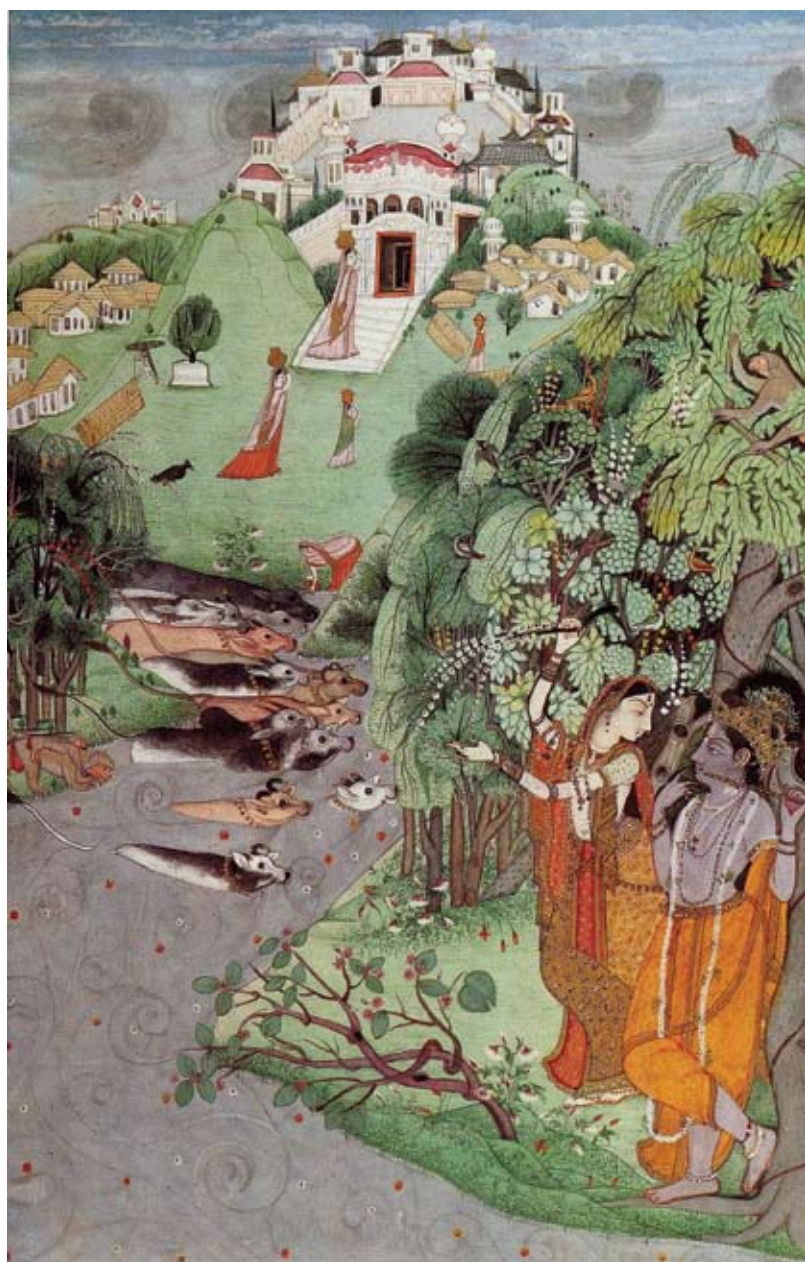
Archetypal examples of sacred sites in the region are: 1) a location of a story/pastime in Krishna's life on earth; 2) locations of worship of Krishna (usually marked with a temple) by significant teachers and personalities from the tradition; and 3) memorial structures (*samadhais*) holding relics of important teachers in the tradition. Pilgrimages and circumambulations (*parikrama*) are very important within the tradition, and travel to specific sacred sites, towns, or even the entire Braj region can last from a few minutes to many months to an entire year.

Unlike the purely oral tradition of indigenous North Americans, the sacred sites of Braj are connected to and reinforced by the sacred texts as well as by the stories and histories told about each place. The stories of Krishna's life in Braj depict a bountiful nature of exquisite beauty

with which the residents have a loving relationship. We can still see that bounty in some of the sacred sites of the region, although today many of them suffer from intense development and environmental degradation and pollution, in direct contrast to the clear ecological perspective of the ancient tradition. The River Yamuna, for example, extremely sacred because of references to it in sacred texts and the devotional practices involving it from time immemorial, is now struggling with the effects of industrial pollution and sewage effluents from large cities upstream.

Both the indigenous North American and Indian situations show how much we have lost sight of the relevance and meaning of sacred sites, particularly from the point of view of what it means to be human and how one must live on Earth. In every culture, Western and non-Western alike, we need to revisit these sites, reconsider their meaning, and make them accessible to larger populations as powerful touchstones as we come to terms with our environmental planetary condition. Sacred sites also offer us sacred insight into how we can make our way toward a more sustainable and environmentally responsible future. 

Hindu deities Krishna and Radha at the river.



Left Behind

A Desert Altar Reveals the Religious Culture of Migrant Workers

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ELIZABETH IRELAND



THE ARIZONA DESERT IS CHAOTIC. In the summer, temperatures soar past 100 degrees; in the winter, migrants are in danger of hypothermia at night. The State Department notes that establishing an exact number of migrants is difficult, but approximately 300 of them pass through the treacherous desert from Mexico to Southwestern Arizona each day.¹ Some, led by experienced guides (known as coyotes), follow decade-old trails. Others trek through new areas, creating their own desert paths. The Samaritans, a group of volunteers who provide migrants with food and water, map public trails in order to track migrant traffic. Ed McCullough, a Samaritan and former geology professor, walks the trails nearly every week. In late 2005 he stumbled upon an altar on a migrant trail near Arivaca, Arizona.²

The Arivaca altar in the Arizona desert provides meaning for migrants as they walk through the desert. As they add objects to the altar, they contribute to a system that effaces three boundaries: one geographic, between the U.S. and Mexico; a second one spiritual, between transcendent and material realms; and a third one cultural, among other migrants from diverse backgrounds. The altar participates in cultural *mestizaje* by including migrants from different cultures, yet it also reinforces the barrier between migrants and non-migrants.

Representing both public and private space, the Arivaca altar stands on federal land, but the great majority of the people who visit the altar are migrants crossing from Mexico to the U.S. Most of these migrants travel through Arivaca on their first day in the desert, as it stands only 10 miles from the border. To reach it from the main highway, one drives off-road about 10 minutes and then walks 30 minutes through an isolated desert canyon. Items such as water bottles and bean cans scattered along the desert floor mark the area as migrant land. Although technically the altar stands on public land, it exists in a private migrant world.

The altar's public location represents the communal migrant experience. Chicana scholar Karen Mary Davalos explains: "Moved into public view, [altars] take on additional meaning ... [and] make explicit a communal claim for the sacred, acknowledge the multiple forms and relationships people have with Christ and his mother, and offer a collective memory and relationship to the divine."³

After migrants reach the U.S., many display gratitude to God in the form of religious drawings known as *ex-votos*. During the trip, migrants presumably look for divine guidance also, but it is more difficult to find visual representations of their piety. Using migrant testimony, I found that as migrants travel through the desert they participate in a system of meaning-making different from the one they embrace when they finish the journey. Outsiders can view their religious story through the objects migrants leave behind: prayer cards, money, images of the Virgin Mary, necklaces with Jesus images, candles, and photographs.

To analyze the objects on the Arivaca altar, I relied heavily upon testimony from migrants themselves. I visited a day labor center where workers congregate from 5 A.M. until 10 A.M. six days a week to

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look for work. About 95 percent of the workers are of Latin American descent, and the majority are Mexican. I spoke with the workers waiting for jobs and asked them about their religious experiences when crossing the border: Did they carry specific items with them as they traveled? If so, did these items represent families, religious history, or current experiences? I interviewed 15 migrants in total. All but one of them had crossed the desert some time in the last 10 years. Some journeyed with guides; a few traveled alone. Each migrant discussed religion differently. Some elaborated on the objects they carried with them; others spoke about religion in their home countries.

The objects and images placed upon the altar included saint icons, money, images of the Virgin, necklaces with Jesus charms, candles, and photographs. These objects do not represent just things; each item holds significance. Kay Turner, who writes of women's folklore, elaborates on the profound meaning of items, particularly figures that embody "the ... persons whom they represent."⁴ Although an outside observer might not understand the objects, historian Ramón Gutiérrez explains, "Each portrait and each adornment on an altar has profound personal and familial meanings."⁵ Objects sit upon altars for distinct purposes, as the migrant testimony confirmed.

Considering the Arivaca altar's location in the middle of undeveloped desert, the migrants' limited resources at the moment determine the objects displayed. In speaking to the migrants in Tucson, I discovered that few carried more than two or three saint cards with them as they traveled. Migrants in the desert cannot go to a store and purchase devotional items; arriving at the Arivaca altar, they can contribute only what they carry.

The makers of the Arivaca altar have included the images of different saints to express various religious sensibilities and creative approaches to altar-making. These saints usually appear in the form of small prayer

cards, or *estampitas*, which migrants carry in their pockets or wallets.⁶ Only three of the 15 migrants with whom I spoke told me about their own personal *estampitas*, yet all migrants recognized the cards as religious expressions. A few *estampitas* display the Virgin Mary or Jesus, but most of them depict saints. These recognizable symbols imply a greater system of meaning-making present as migrants travel through the desert. Migrants bring prayer cards because they engage in relationships with saints, receive prayer cards as gifts, and respect the Catholic ritual of prayer cards.

Establishing another boundary between religious groups, the *estampitas* mark the altar as a Catholic space. Protestant migrants do not bring *estampitas*, but they too recognize that the cards provide order for migrants on the journey. One migrant, Luis, spoke of his saint figures as close friends. He showed me three prayer cards enclosed in plastic. I asked him to describe the saint in the middle, whom he identified as Peter. When pressed for more information, he responded that Peter was the man with the keys. When a look of bewilderment crossed my face, Luis said, "Heaven. He'll let you into Heaven." Luis did not describe the biblical context for St. Peter, but he clearly identified the image and found it meaningful.

Although I later found that Luis's image of St. Peter actually represents St. Jude, Luis still described a personal relationship with his *estampita*. Interestingly, St. Jude is the patron saint of lost causes. The image of a lost cause saint may provide protection for migrants' border trek, but the fact that Luis never identified the journey as a "lost cause" shows the difference between migrants and non-migrants. Whereas non-migrants might see the border crossing as treacherous, Luis expressed profound piety, not acknowledging the horror of the border. He explained the journey modestly in a way only other migrants would understand, noting that he traveled for survival alone.



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Regardless of the icon's significance, Luis expressed his relationship with it, and felt it provided him with religious significance. He described his two other icons as personal acquaintances: the left scene displayed "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and the right was "Lupe," an abbreviated name for La Virgen de Guadalupe. He chose not to elaborate and merely pointed to the roses around her depiction. Though I could not understand Luis's brevity in explaining his devotional items, his familiarity with them shows the close relationship he feels with his saints. These are not just insignificant, unidentifiable cards jammed in a wallet; rather, they symbolize figures Luis understands and to whom he relates.

Luis bought his prayer cards at a small church near his home eight days prior to his journey. With precision, he told me he arrived in the U.S. on October 11, 2006. He explained

that other people also purchase religious items before the journey in order to gain protection. He never specified from whom the protection comes, yet Luis confidently described the prayer card ritual as a common experience migrants share.⁷ His prayer card purchase indicates the respect Luis feels toward Catholic ritual and tradition.

Another migrant, José, shared the story of his prayer cards. José's parents presented him with prayer cards because they knew he would need guidance on his trip. Prayers directed to each saint are printed on the backs of the cards. As José did not purchase these cards himself, I questioned him about his particular relationship with these saints. He told me about the feeling of protection he feels when they are with him. Unlike Luis, however, José could not identify the saints or describe their significance. He had to turn the cards over to tell

me their names: San Antonio and Santa Lucia. Carrying the saints' cards with him, he feels a connection to them, but does not express the same familiarity with the saints' religious history as Luis. José's cards show that he values his parents' gift and respects the Catholic *estampita* tradition.

Various *estampitas* representing saints such as Santiago (James) and San Judas (Judas) lie scattered on the altar, but the majority of prayer cards focus on Santo Toribio Romo, a saint who garnered international attention for his aid to migrants crossing the desert. Tessie Borden, a reporter in Arizona, explains the legend: 20 years ago, a man offered to help a younger Mexican struggling to cross the border. The younger man successfully crossed, but had no money to pay his benefactor who replied, "If things go well for you and you return to your homeland...come look for



me in Santa Ana de Guadalupe.” When the migrant returned to Mexico, he visited Santa Ana de Guadalupe to thank the benefactor for his help. Finally, Borden relates, an old woman showed him a picture of Toribio Romo, whom the young man recognized as his helper. The woman took him to the local church where the amazed young man saw a portrait of his helper—and an ossuary containing his bones. Other similar stories circulate regarding Santo Toribio Romo, and migrants continue to visit his birthplace to receive blessings and give thanks.

In Santa Ana de Guadalupe, the surge of visitors created a market for pictures and prayers of Romo.⁸ Many of the prayer cards from Arivaca may have been purchased by migrants in Romo’s hometown before they set off on the border journey. The prayer card displayed connects Romo to the migrant trail. The back-

side reads, “In case of accident, call a priest” and then includes a “Prayer of an Immigrant.”⁹ The card also bears “Santa Ana de Guadalupe” at the bottom, implying its origin in Romo’s hometown.

Individual and communal relationships with saints imply the altar’s role as simultaneously private and public space. Although the altar stands in a public space, the saints resemble private *santos*, which anthropologist Jorge Durand and sociologist Douglas Massey define as “small images of Christ, the Virgin, the saints, or other holy figures...intended for private devotional use.”¹⁰ The Tucson migrants’ stories reinforce this notion of private devotion, as each migrant connects to saints for an individual reason. Migrants present prayer cards because they feel connected to particular saints, receive the cards as gifts, and respect Catholic ritual. Just as each migrant interacts

differently with the altar, each migrant interacts differently with his/her saint. The saints convey the private nature of icons.

On the left side of the Arivaca altar sits a bottle full of money. Someone cut a hole in the top, and coins nearly fill the square-shaped bottle, which had contained a Mexican electrolyte beverage many migrants drink while crossing the desert.¹¹ Although most of the items in the bottle are coins, a few pieces of paper money stick out.

I presumed the money bottle represented an anomalous aspect of the Arivaca altar; Debbie McCullough explained that money usually rests upon the altar, both in a jar and scattered on the rock. “People leave money on the altars,” McCullough explained. “They’ll leave their last bits [because] the poor are more generous with their solicitations of God.” McCullough understands the money as a sacrifice migrants

make in honor of the divine.¹² The act can be attributed to migrants' faith that devotion will produce material rewards such as economic success or spiritual rewards such as mercy.

The coins in Arivaca establish it as a location where migrants—regardless of their Christian denomination—pray for survival. I imagine that some Protestants who might otherwise disregard altar creation contribute coins in Arivaca to draw more strength for the journey. Items such as photographs and money do not have a religious distinction as Protestant or Catholic. Unlike the primarily Catholic saints, coins do not indicate one's denominational preference. The Arivaca altar breaks down cultural and religious barriers between migrants, therefore, as all migrants who desire to contribute may add to the sacred space.

David, a Protestant migrant in Tucson, described the difference between Catholic and Protestant objects: Protestants brought the Bible for support, whereas Catholic migrants relied upon images of saints and the Virgin.¹³ No Bibles appear on the altar, however, suggesting that most contributors are Catholic. The many representations of the Virgin Mary also suggest the Catholic nature of many migrants; coins and photographs imply that Protestants contribute.

A blue 12-inch-high crucifix, the altar's largest item, stands at the center of the Arivaca altar. It marks the presence of Jesus in Arivaca, as do the 15 to 30 necklaces that include a representation of Christ. Most of the necklaces, rosaries, and crucifixes imply that the migrants are Catholic. Other necklaces include small pictures of Jesus, saints, or holy scenes. Candles play a central role on the Arivaca altar. While only one candle sat on the altar in the fall of 2006, used candles appeared in the trash pile on the ground nearby. Three candles sat on the altar six months later, and the trash pile remained, implying continual use of the space. A large black area of soot loomed above the candles. The presence of candles signifies the migrants' faith in God's presence in Arivaca.¹⁴ Candles also imply the connection between material and spiritual worlds. God does not reside in a purely spiritual realm; God comes alongside the migrants at the altar.

Like candles, the altar's photographs signify migrants' destruction of boundaries between material and spiritual realms. In Tucson, nearly every migrant with whom I spoke mentioned the importance of photographs. Numerous migrants told me exactly how many photos they carried—most brought between two and eight, although a couple brought "a mountain"

of photos. Migrants who did not carry photographs told me how much they missed their families and wished they had brought photos. One migrant detailed for me the moment when he lost his photographs on the journey. He could still describe the scenes in detail.

Marco explained how photographs help him remember and connect with distant family. He brought only one photograph with him, but he obviously looked at it often, as he could name the 10 family members pictured and describe who stood where and next to whom. For this migrant, pictures not only remind him of his family but also help him know his family better. Marco believed that he could connect with his family through photographs, sending them good thoughts and almost communicating with them.¹⁵

As migrants fear their surroundings, they develop stronger faith in the divine presence. Placing a photograph on an altar symbolizes devotion to the people depicted and to God the protector. Although migrants may not ordinarily place photographs in religious spaces, they demonstrate religious devotion more profoundly when walking through the desert. Migrants feel more vulnerable and needy in the desert, thus they use religious objects differently than at home. Men, who normally do

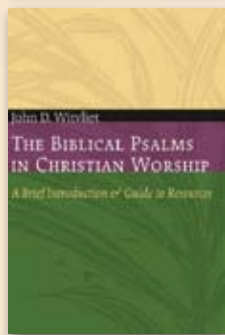
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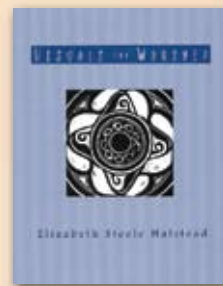
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not participate in non-church altars, may feel a stronger connection with the divine when traveling through the desolate desert. The Arivaca altar aids migrants who search for hope in an uncertain world. Deserted, isolated, and suffering, migrants travel through appalling conditions in search of a better life. The holy presence at Arivaca proves the need and importance of divine guidance. Something must provide order. The presence of the altar and its religious objects help migrants order their lives in a meaningful way as they journey through the desert. 

NOTES

1 U.S. Department of State, "Quick Facts about the U.S.-Mexico Border," Fact Sheet, <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/fs/8974.htm>, 2002.

2 Ed McCullough, phone interview with the author, 25 March 2007.

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4 Kay Turner, "Mexican American Women's Home Altars: The Art of Relationship." Ph.D. dissertation (University of Texas at Austin, 1990): 295.

5 Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "Introduction," in *Home Altars of Mexico*, ed. Ramón A. Gutiérrez (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997): 17-8.

6 José, interview with the author, 15 January 2007, Day Labor Center, Tucson, AZ.

7 Luis, interview with the author, 12 January 2007, Day Labor Center, Tucson, AZ.

8 Tessie Borden, "Migrants' Saints Give Security, Hope: While Stories Multiply, Shrines Keep Growing," <http://www.azcentral.com/specials/special41/articles/1211migrantsaint11.html>, 11 Dec 2002.

9 Translated, the card reads:

Prayer of an Immigrant: I pray that you come before Jesus, Son of God, as today I must leave for faraway lands to work. I pray that you guide my actions, illuminate the path before me, and accompany my loved ones while I'm gone.
(Translation by Elizabeth Ireland.)

10 Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey, *Miracles on the Border: Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1995): 3.

11 Ed McCullough, conversation with the author, 14 January 2007, Arivaca, AZ.

12 Debbi McCullough, phone interview with the author, 31 March 2007.

13 David, interview with the author, 12 January 2007, Day Labor Center, Tucson, AZ.

14 For more information about the tradition of candles upon an altar, see Marie Romero Cash, "Altars de la Gente," in *Living Shrines: Home Altars of New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1998): 39.

15 Marco, interview with the author, 12 January 2007, Day Labor Center, Tucson, AZ.



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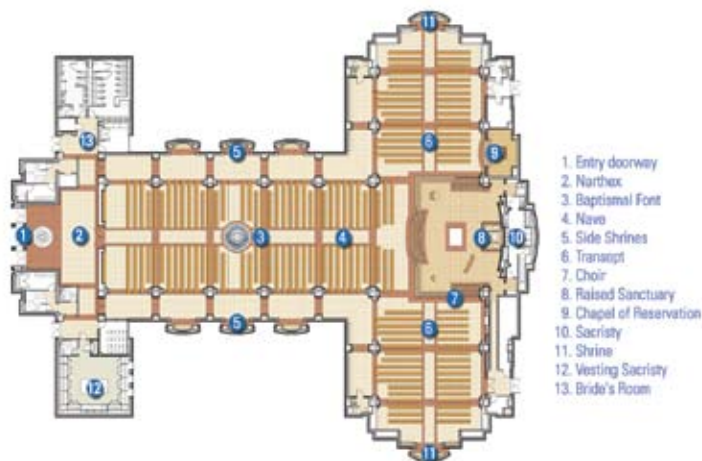
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NOTES & COMMENTS

HOUSTON'S CO-CATHEDRAL: RIGHT FOR OUR TIME?

In 2005, Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza and the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston imagined "a new cathedral for the ages, one of profound spiritual expression and enduring artistic quality," according to the project's description on the website of Ziegler Cooper, the architects who carried out this grand vision. The culmination is the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, dedicated on April 2, 2008, by Archbishop Fiorenza's successor, Daniel Cardinal DiNardo. A cruciform building inspired by the European Romanesque style, it is most definitely one of spiritual expression. Whether it embodies enduring artistic quality, or will endure for the ages, remains to be seen.

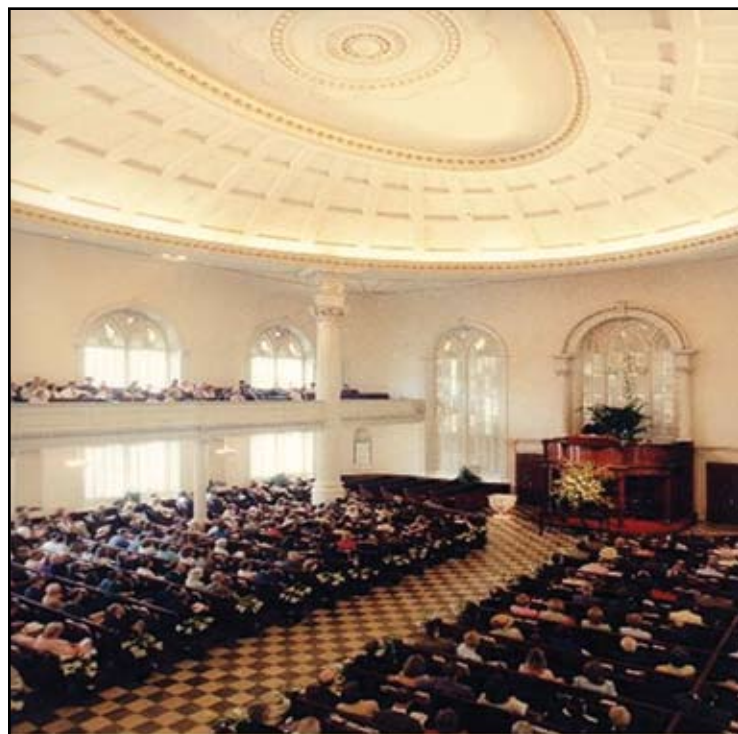
Plan of the new Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Houston, Texas.



The architects reportedly visited scores of European cathedrals, but the Romanesque style may not have been the best starting point for their design process. It is certainly not the definitive or final word for the architectural expression of a 21st-century cathedral. One might have expected the architects to study ecclesial documents such as *Built of Living Stones*, the premier statement on new church construction and renovation by the American bishops. Paragraph 40 of that document states: "Since the Church is not wedded to a single architectural or artistic form, it seeks to engage the genius of every time and place, to craft the finest praise of God from what is available."

Such study might also have prompted more elemental questions: What is a cathedral? What is it supposed to enable to occur within its walls? How has this been expressed in the whole of Christian history, especially in the last 50 years in the U.S.? How might this expression be most dynamically achieved in a new cathedral?

Why is it, in the fourth largest and one of the most ethnically diverse and multicultural cities in the U.S., that a new cathedral would adopt a medieval European design? Was no one an advocate for the larger Catholic population that is Latino, African American, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, and Filipino, with the dominant majority of mixed-European ancestry, mostly non-Italian? Was anyone thinking of the present and future congregations this cathedral would serve in the next 500 years? As it stands now, the co-cathedral reflects some very specific and enduring values and traditions: enormity; hierarchical order; monumental marble furnishings (altar, ambo, font, and statuary); nostalgia for the past; expressions of piety and devotion that may adequately serve neither present-day nor future faithful.



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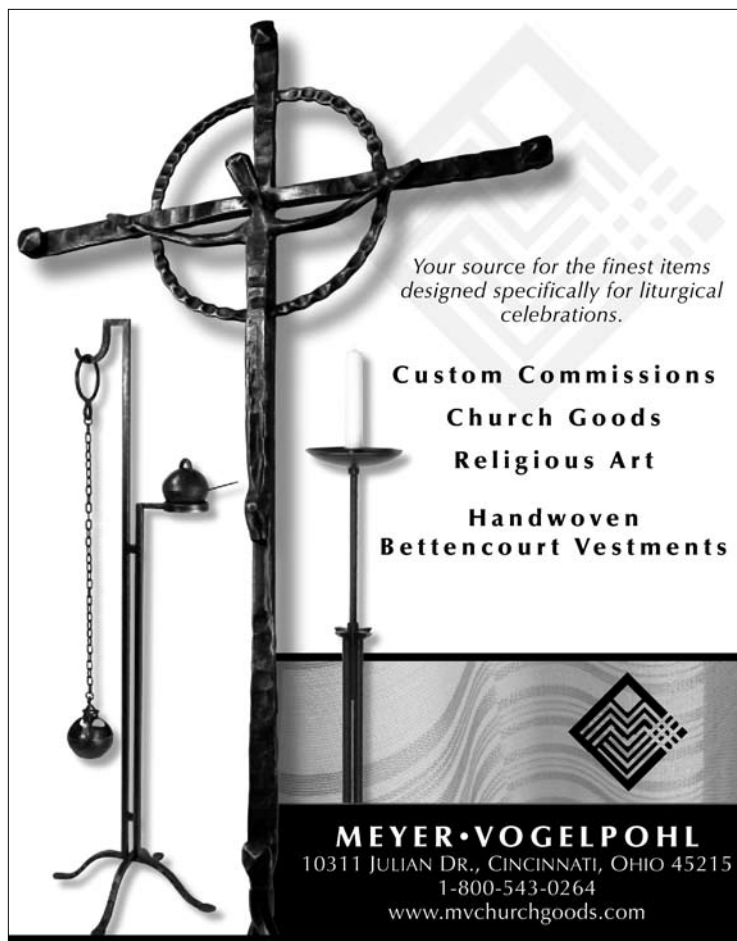
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The co-cathedral's long nave is filled with celebrants during its dedication in April 2008.

For its published price tag of \$49 million the building is a bargain, as cathedrals go. Many of the materials (marble, limestone, wood) and their interplay in the volume of space are finely crafted. But for \$49 million, why couldn't a new "cathedral for the ages" have been constructed? Was it lack of imagination or of broader consultation by the design team, or the overbearing influence of the building's patrons, that produced this design? Whatever the answer, the result is a stolid, heavy structure, time-bound by its preference for historical form, predictable, and not particularly spiritually invigorating. Its exterior offers passersby on the neighboring elevated expressway a flat, bland, 1950s imitation of an originally robust medieval style. The façade itself is lackluster and uninviting, projecting more self-consciousness than warmth, more a sense of bastion and fortress than of house of worship.

The investment in Italian artists, companies, and craftspeople reveals the priority placed on European origins for works fabricated for this inherently American cathedral. Why were American artists and artisans not invited to design and make the stained glass, statuary, altar, ambo, font, and other items? Mellini Art Glass and Mosaics of Florence, Italy, who executed the stained glass, have provided extensive and quite beautiful work in the Vatican and elsewhere. In this cathedral, however, the stained glass images, the 12 Apostle windows, and the numerous angels in the clerestory windows seem stiff, posed, predictable, and not particularly uplifting. The massive Resurrected Christ window over the main entry, while powerful and immense, takes one aback with its far too chiseled corpus, whose emphatic musculature conveys much more a perfected earthly Christ than it does the risen Lord. The Holy Spirit window in the dome over the altar was obviously influenced by Bernini's

Photo: Aker/Zvonkovic Photography





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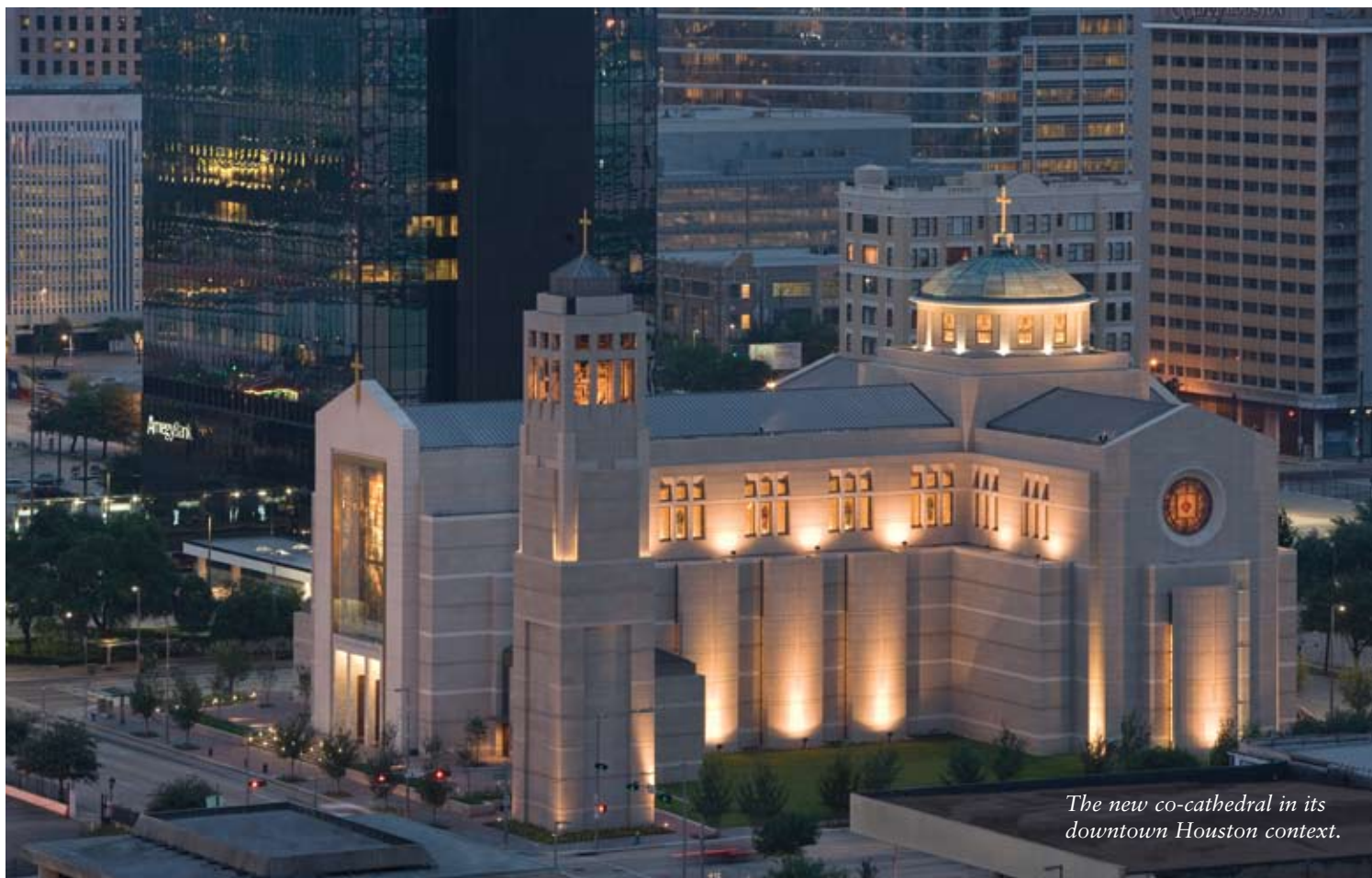
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The new co-cathedral in its downtown Houston context.

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Holy Spirit window in baroque St. Peter's. It is beautiful, intentionally placed, yet again, predictable.

Did no one ask how liturgy would function in this new structure? How the assembly sees, hears, and has a sense of proximity to the liturgy is critical and essential to the design of a building. The configuration of the assembly in this space works against active participation; the distance from the last pews to the altar is off-putting. One gets the impression that the building was designed primarily for pomp and circumstance, grand processions, or occasional archdiocesan events such as ordinations. Why does the new cathedral overwhelmingly emphasize piety over liturgical celebration? There is nothing intimate in the devotional character of the building. Even the statues of the Virgin and the Sacred Heart are more monumental and overpowering than devotional. They and the saints are clearly to be observed from afar, and their enormity diminishes human interaction and engagement with them.

The same can be said of the tabernacle for Eucharistic reservation, located to the left of the sanctuary in a recessed, elevated, marble-clad chapel with no accessibility for the disabled. There is no provision for the devotional postures of the faithful (kneeling or sitting). Even St. Peter's Basilica in Rome maintains Eucharistic reservation in a sizeable side chapel, draped off from the nave for the private prayer and devotion of the faithful before, after, and sometimes even during the celebration of Mass. Why has Houston's cathedral chosen this solution, rather than following Rome's example? Liturgical documents make it overwhelmingly clear that Eucharistic celebration takes precedence over Eucharistic reservation. But in this cathedral, the enthronement of the Eucharist, visible from within the main body of the building, is the preferred emphasis. While the intent may have been further affirmation of the doctrine of real presence, this arrangement will also ensure

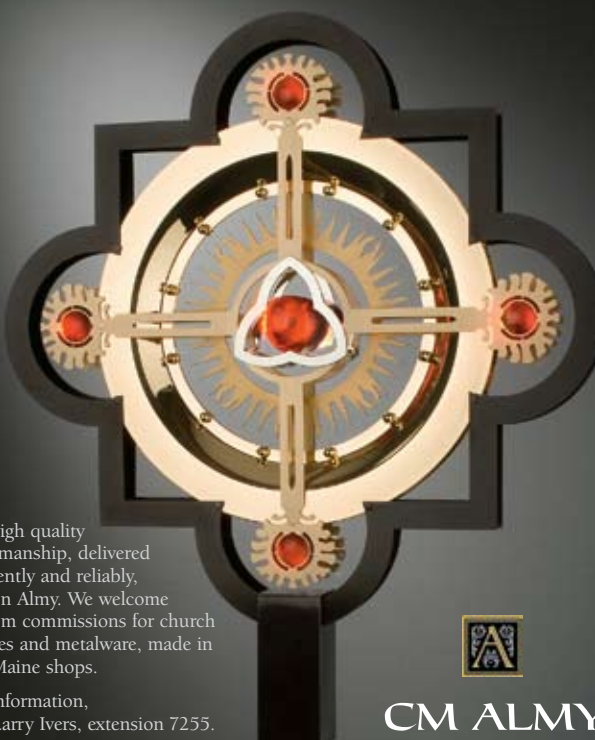
ongoing tension between the primacy of Eucharistic celebration and Eucharistic reservation.

We do affirm that the cathedral's Carrara marble work (altar, ambo, and statuary of the Virgin and the Sacred Heart) is exceptional. Sculptures in their suspended mounting on the wall appear almost weightless — no minor achievement given the fact that each piece weighs six tons and is 12 feet tall. Their location at the end of the transept aisles, however, suggests that they are "out of the way," rather than essential. The execution of the baptismal font is laudable, though it does not allow for immersion of adults or children beyond infancy. Situated in the main aisle, halfway between the main entry and the sanctuary, it is sizeable, allowing for "living water" to flow over the edges of the bowl, and it will serve well for infant baptism by immersion. But people seated in the transept aisles cannot see a baptism during Mass. Acoustically, the building is a dream, ideal for singing, and for the resounding music of a great pipe organ that is yet to be installed.

Building a new cathedral is a milestone in any age for any community of faith. It is a historic and fertile opportunity for the expression of faith, creating a home for liturgical celebration of life's great moments and all that occurs between birth and death and beyond. The cathedrals our ancestors erected reflected not only their devotional faith but also their needs for liturgical expression. Unfortunately, Houston's new cathedral reflects predominantly the piety and liturgical expression of a pre-21st-century tradition. The ages to come will judge whether it has successfully achieved the mandate given to the architects to design a building for the next 500 years. Regardless of who inherits this building long after its patrons have passed on, what is expressed is very specific, identifiable, and historically bound to a way of imagining church, belief, faith, worship, and devotion in an era in which we no longer live.

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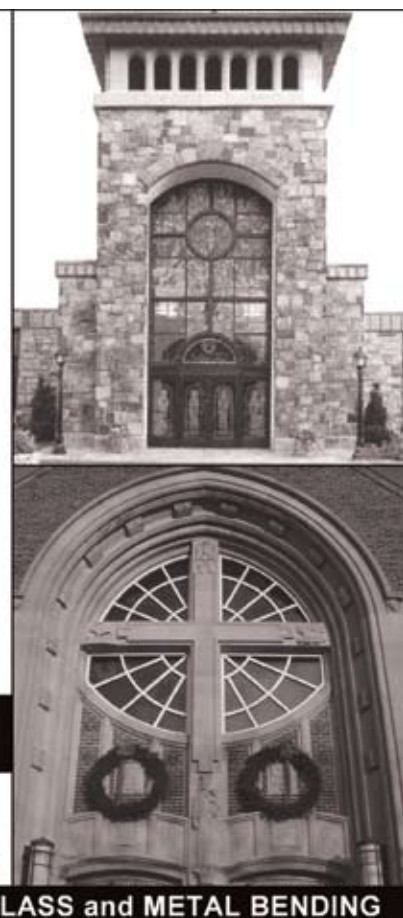
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WHO'S TO BLAME?

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

Recently I was dismayed to read the title of an article in the Spring 2008 issue of *Bostonia* magazine: "Have Architects Gone Mad?" I winced and thought, "No, no – *you* have!" But I did read the article. The writer asked the reader to consider some of the ideas and opinions of John Silber (more than 25 years at the helm of Boston University) who has written a new book, *Architecture of the Absurd: How Genius Disfigured a Practical Art*. Silber, the son of an architect, often surprises designers involved in university projects by reading their drawings and specs and then challenging their plans. He was named an honorary AIA member in 2002.


Silber writes that architects are often ego-driven, and place their own artistic vision above that of their clients and their community. He reminds them that architecture is a practical art, and that architects are not pure artists. Their primary responsibility is to design functional buildings that, for example do not leak, and that this should trump the architect's aesthetic statement. It is important to build structures that are functional, but I found myself thinking again about the architect's role in creating an interesting and unique design based on the practical and aesthetic needs of the client.

Who is to blame if the end result is not what the client expected? Who hired the architect? When a church is being planned, it is usually a building committee whose members represent the congregation. Has the committee met often enough with the architect to understand the design? Has it shared its understanding with the congregation? Is the congregation concerned with outcomes or is it satisfied just to let the "experts" do it? There seems to be enough blame for all, but blame is not the answer, and *Faith & Form* and its readers want to promote a better understanding of the roles of everyone in the process. We would be interested in your suggestions.

I admire Rabbi Hayim Herring of Minneapolis, Executive Director of STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal), who wrote of re-envisioning a new synagogue. Sixteen scholars and communal leaders were consulted to learn what precedents suggested directions for renewal and for visions to re-energize the synagogue as a focal point for Jewish identity and community. If only every congregation (whether building or not) would adopt this re-envisioning and re-energizing process, and if only the upper echelons of all faiths would do the same. We can hardly blame the architects for bad design if we haven't done some soul-searching in an attempt to define ourselves and our mission.

As it happens, we are now experiencing a return to traditional architecture in many areas; I think it is partly because people are confused and fearful about the world. Reverend Laurence A. Gipson, retired from St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston, a new building modeled on St. Elizabeth's Gothic Cathedral in Germany, reports that after 300 conversations with worshippers it was clear that a traditional building with traditional worship enables people to feel closer to God. But there are

other congregations who deny this and are asking for changes. In some cases, the altar and pulpit have been discarded altogether, and sanctuaries are simply large rooms that will accommodate dozens of people for group discussion. One chair may be designated for the celebrant. Modern paintings and sculpture may adorn the space. These people want simple architectural designs that blend into their neighborhoods and are easily recognized as contemporary religious buildings.

Critics complain that recognition of a transcendent God is being denied by such simple surroundings. But those involved say they are using their creative imaginations to combat secularism and to attract young people and agnostics to some form of spiritual practice. Do these two groups, both the traditional and the nontraditional, not have a moral obligation to recognize and respect each other? Their separatism and criticism certainly make it difficult for the architect and the artist. Can a sense of mystery and community not be expressed in many ways? Both groups are yearning for cultural renewal and the promotion of hope for the future. If we continue our conversation and continue to work together, we can't help but find common ground. 

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