

about this booklet

The title of Father Mc Henry's book is significant, *Architecture and Liturgy* : it both states a problem and suggests lines of a solution. A liturgy that is being renewed for today must express itself in the architecture of our time and both must seek the best pastoral solution together. The liturgist can for his part only indicate the new emphasis and directions that he finds in the documents that have emerged from the Vatican Council.

And this the author does well, with understanding and penetration. He proffers no solutions for all contingencies, but no one who reads what he has written will not have gained in understanding of the role of the church in liturgy today.

The publishers have wisely added the Pastoral Directory of the Irish Hierarchy. This document goes a long way towards answering the concrete problems that pastors, religious superiors and artists have to meet. It deserves careful study by all engaged today in building or reorganising churches.

J.G. McGarry
Chairman, National Committee on Sacred Art.

Architecture and the Liturgy

Francis McHenry O.S.B



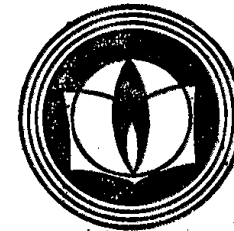
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SIXPENCE

Catholic Truth Society of Ireland Publication

Architecture and the Liturgy

FRANCIS McHENRY, O.S.B.



A Catholic Truth Society of Ireland Publication

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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INTRODUCTION

The distractions of life today make it difficult for us to see or remember the essential purposes of our everyday actions. This is one of the reasons why we forget that our normal work is the way in which we learn to love God and to unite ourselves with His will for us. It is also a principal reason for our tendency to give a great deal of importance to the form of our activities ; to the superficial appearances of our lives, and not enough importance to their content ; to what we are doing and the purpose for which we are doing it.

In the design of churches we can see the same influences at work : too much attention being given to style, to decoration, to atmosphere, and far from sufficient thought and effort being devoted to the real functions of a church. Fr. McHenry reminds us of this reality in terms which should be easily understood by all.

It is necessary that all should understand because it is everybody's responsibility to do what they can to ensure that our churches help us to take part actively in the special work of the People of God which is the liturgy. We need to be informed if we are to be able to advise our architects and to criticise their proposals in a constructive manner. Even more we need to be informed if we are to know how to make the best use of our churches ; how to unite ourselves with Christ in the assembled community so closely that we can carry that unity into all our daily work and pleasures.

What Fr. McHenry has written will, therefore, be of direct benefit to all who read it ; to the architect and to the priest who are most directly involved in the design of churches and to every Christian who is, or should be, equally involved in their full and proper use.

6 September 1967

WILFRID CANTWELL
President of the Royal Institute
of the Architects of Ireland.

Part One

THE BUILDINGS WE KNOW AND THEIR ADAPTATION

LET us begin with a picture of what is rapidly becoming an old-fashioned world. A picture, but not a caricature ! We in Ireland must not forget that most of the rural Catholic churches were built in one of the worst periods of religious architecture, the nineteenth century. Every element spoke—and still speaks—of authentic values. Yet the ensemble, while betokening a fundamentally healthy economy, was indicative of a chronic recession.

The altar was against the top wall of the church and decidedly drew attention to itself as the focal point of the central Christian event, the eucharistic sacrifice. But its remoteness, coupled with the fact that the priest said Mass with his back to the people, dissipated the atmosphere of an assembly of the People of God presided over by Christ present in his ordained representative. Then, too the *mensa domini*, the table of the Lord's Supper, with its correlative aspect as altar of the Lord's sacrifice, had become to such an extent a stand for flowers and candles and statues that the original purposes were obscured to no mean degree.

Add to this the tabernacle firmly fixed on the altar, occasioning further misunderstanding. Yet, once again, an authentic value was ensured. People dropped into church quite in-

stinctively, their gaze was immediately attracted to what must always be the most *personal* focus of the whole church—Christ present in the eucharistic species reserved in the tabernacle.

But it was, as it were, from the tabernacle that he appeared to preside when Mass itself was in progress, whereas he ought to have been seen to do so as present in his priest.

Then there were the communion rails, often huge ungraceful structures, effective barriers between priest and people. Sometimes they consciously repeated the material and pattern of the altar, in this reminding us of the shared meal—an authentic value—yet detracting from the unique character of the single table from which we all communicate.

At varying degrees of proximity to the rails the pulpit would be found; it was not infrequently well down in the main body of the church. Again, there was no mistaking the eminence given to the message proclaimed, but the bread of doctrine was not broken in continuity with the bread of the Lord's Body received in communion.

The elements just mentioned all had to do with the actual celebration of the eucharist. But mingled with them, without clear differentiation, were the objects of personal devotion. These included two of supreme fruitfulness for the flowering of Christian personality—Our Lord portrayed in the guise of utter tenderness, (usually a statue of the Sacred Heart), and Our Lady represented as loving mother of God and men. It was quite customary to place small altars or pedestals supporting such statues in the sanctuary itself, or so very close to it as to form one visual unit with the main altar. There might also be shrines in various parts of the church that by sheer brilliance of decoration competed with the altar for the attention of the worshipper, thus creating an unjustifiable tension between his liturgical and his devotional life.

In all churches there were stations of the cross, a salutary reminder of the price paid for the riches with which God has endowed us. Yet these would so often dominate the interior by their quite disproportionate size, and ultra-realist style, that somehow one was prevented from attaining the full Christian dimension of the resurrection.

There was so much that was right, and yet not quite right, with what I have chosen to call, provisionally, the old-fashioned church. As an instance, take the baptistry. Usually placed

near the entrance, it could fulfil its role of designating the way that leads to life, yet its sacramental voice could never be loud enough to draw our attention effectively because of some conspiracy of silence that condemned it to unobtrusiveness and even shabbiness.

Above it there might be a stairway leading to a choir loft where organ and voice would contribute their measure without, for all that, merging with the congregation in a single act of worship.

Along the side walls of the church there would be confessionals, not inappropriately placed. Yet these structures would be so cumbrous, and their opening and shutting so clamorous, as to impede the forward thrust of worship towards its natural objective, the eucharist celebrated at the altar. In this they might very well be aided by the centrifugal tendencies of faulty lighting, (especially by way of garish stained glass), of obstructive pillars and of misjudged volumes.

Pass now to the style of the church. It might be neo-romanesque, neo-renaissance or neo-gothic or just simply non-descript as to pedigree. Still, it was usually dignified in its way, adorned with sincere, if often inartistic, devotion and endowed with a genuinely religious atmosphere.

Christ is the sacrament of God, and the Church is the sacrament of Christ. Consequently, there is no escaping the world of signs in which we, as Christians, live. The really important thing is that we get our signs right, for there are signs that truly and directly point to Christ and his Father, and there are signs that more properly point to the confusion of man's mind in his thinking about Christ and the Father.

Everything about our churches speaks to us of religion, but it is sometimes with a lisping accent and misleading words. What I have called here the old-fashioned church is still with us: the use of the epithet is to convey that the type is dated by the Vatican Council, and to express the optimistic hope that the liturgical and architectural conceptions behind it may be quickly discarded. It spoke, and still speaks, of true religion and yet of modes of worship that are at variance with true religion. It spoke, and still speaks, to our separated brethren of a Catholicism where sentimentality has run rampant among eucharistic, Marian and ascetic values firmly grounded by the scriptures. The Council has summoned us back to these values

which must now be expressed in a new sign language of spaces, volumes and materials, such that all, ourselves and our separated brethren, may learn the tale of the wonderful things of God.

ADAPTATION

In the meantime, since churches cannot be pulled down wholesale in favour of renewal from the ground up, we are witnessing that flurry of improvisation, the appanage of a period of transition. The besetting sin of such a period is a superficial deference to the principles governing a whole new set of regulations. But our "adapted" churches will speak to us just as loudly as our new churches, perhaps even more loudly since they will be in the majority. And so it is of the utmost importance that the work of adaptation be controlled by painstaking research.

Some of the improvisation which this development has made necessary is remarkably successful; much of it is distinctly unhappy. For the moment we will not pass judgment on it but merely take a close look. As we do so, it should become evident that one cannot change the tradition of centuries without a deep understanding of the goals envisaged. And this applies to adaptation of the old as well as to creation of the new.

Changes vary from parish to parish, but it is possible that the first you have noticed is that Mass is now being said facing the congregation. The main altar did not, of course, allow for this so a small portable one may be in use for Sunday Mass.

The tabernacle may be in its former position up against the reredos that still supports the six enormous candlesticks and the floral decorations. The altar of sacrifice is now on a much lower level than the altar of reservation. In some parts, the presiding chair has been placed on the footpace, directly in front of the tabernacle, so that the celebrant can sit down and listen while a lector reads. The raised elevation makes this presidency quite effective.

Alternatively, the former high altar may have been re-

moved, reredos and all, and a new altar installed furnished with a fairly low Tabernacle. The priest may or may not be saying Mass facing the people. The presiding position is now not likely to be behind the altar: more probably it is to the side, with the chair facing across the sanctuary rather than towards the congregation.

It is just possible that you will find the Blessed Sacrament reserved not on an altar but in what is known as an aumbry, that is to say, a recess in the wall of the sanctuary behind the altar. This custom was known in the Middle Ages and is gaining popularity today. Its construction would, of course, involve a more radical change than is usually attempted in an improvisation. On the other hand, it is even less likely that a free standing sacrament tower will be found in any, other than completely new, churches.

A reading desk or lectern may now have been installed in the sanctuary just before the altar rails either in the centre or to the left-hand side as you look towards the altar. It may be a very flimsy structure, perhaps moved in and out as occasion demands.

The statues may no longer be in the area of the altar, but as no special shrine space was provided by the original architect they may look somewhat incongruous in their present position in front of the sanctuary or against a pillar or wall.

Adaptation may have gone to quite radical lengths in some places, even in regard to the structure of the church itself. Modern methods in building permit pillars to be removed altogether thus allowing for increased vision. Perhaps the very roof of your church has been raised and a new ceiling put in to provide the architectural lines needed for an entirely new orientation of priest and people around the altar. And yet you may find that your church has lost some of its charm in the process.

Further, the intention at least may have been formulated of renewing the structure of the church by eliminating the false architectural features like neo-Gothic vaults and windows, imitation cut stone, or arches that only pretend to support the roof.

What does doctrinal research reveal as the inspiration of these changes? Briefly, two principles: the Church is the new People of God, Christ is present in his People.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Modern man is, at once, particularly conscious of his dignity as a person and of his identification with the human race as in a single family. The Church presents herself as the providential and supernatural fulfilment of all his aspirations in both regards, for, in the Church, unity and personality are found on the unity and personality of the Divine Trinity. In Christ she lives the unity and personality of the Trinity and supremely so when she offers with him the eucharistic sacrifice. At that moment she is most perfectly what St. Peter called "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people whom God means to have for himself." (1. *Pet.*, 2; 9) This is the most intensely personal moment in the life of the Christian and at the same time, the one that unites him most closely to his people.

It was concern for this dual aspect that prompted the Vatican Council to insist, for the benefit of architects and their patrons: "And when churches are to be built, let great care be taken that they be suitable for the celebration of liturgical services and for the active participation of the faithful." *Liturgy Constitution*, n. 124.

Artist and architect must express the attributes of this privileged People apotheosized by the scriptures for its beauty and unfailing newness: "The Church in all her beauty, no stain, no wrinkle, no such disfigurement" (*Eph.* 5; 27.): "Then I saw a new heaven, and a new earth . . . And I, John, saw in my vision that holy City which is the New Jerusalem, being sent down by God from heaven, all clothed in readiness, like a bride who has adorned herself to meet her husband." (*Apoc.*, 21; 1, 2)

The Church is a pilgrim People, a People in exodus from captivity to the Promised Land, a People straining for the full glorification of the sons of God.

And because this glory is already inaugurated in her Head, she is an *eschatological* People, that is to say one for whom the last times have already come and who awaits only the final fulfilment.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

In the meantime, Christ is ever present with his Church on earth as he promised that he would be. But his presence is a many splendoured thing, a gem that flashes at many turns. By the sacraments he is present in all his wonderful works wrought for our salvation, present, that is, in the mode proper to each sacrament. Present by his actions in all the sacraments, he is present by his very substance in the Eucharist, the sacrament of his Body that is constitutive of his Body the Church. From this point radiate all the sacramental presences of Christ: his presence in the ordained priest who represents him as Head of his People, his presence in the faithful who represent him as one with his People, his presence as the two-fold manna of his People in communion of the word and of the eucharistic Body, his presence in every heart that turns lovingly to him.

The presence of Christ is a multiple reality, a world governed by intricate relations. It is the work of altar and tabernacle, of ambo and presiding position, of volume and space and lighting to express these relations that we may attain the total Christ in the way that he has ordained. Like any work in which man plays a predominant part, it may be done well, badly or just indifferently.

HARMONY OF ELEMENTS

When you enter a church what is the first word that the architecture seems, as it were, to utter to you? Surely the word "tabernacle." In a way it is a response to the aspirations of your own heart for you have come to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, to your Friend in all the vicissitudes of life. Yet there is something faulty about the intonation. The tabernacle may still be enthroned high upon the altar

which ought in no sense to be regarded as a stand or throne for it is the very *raison d'être* of everything else in the church, including the tabernacle itself.

The Sacred Reserve is itself a sign, by its very permanence, of that saving action which the Church renews until, at the end of time, her Lord will come; it is the sign of the continuous presence of Christ in his Church until she is fully present with him in glory at his second coming. But this saving sacrificial action is made ours in banquet fashion upon the altar, the *mensa Domini*. The altar, therefore, must be seen to hold every other element in the church in tension. It is the key to the entire sign language as well as being a sign, a word, in its own right.

Failure to harmonize altar and tabernacle has heightened a tendency, now many centuries old, to fall somehow short of the full Christian dimension of the resurrection. Eucharistic piety has concentrated more on the child and the man Christ, of the hidden years at Nazareth, rather than on the paschal Christ who worked our salvation by the mighty deeds of his passion, death, resurrection, glorious ascension into heaven and triumphant sending of the Spirit—precisely those *mirabilia Dei* that the liturgy commemorates immediately after the consecration of the bread and wine. Or again, it has sought to console the suffering Christ, with too little regard for the transformation of his sufferings which he himself approached clear in the conviction that he would one day appear on the clouds of majesty.

The first step towards a eucharistic architecture expressive of the risen Christ with whom the Church keeps company is the separation of altar and tabernacle. But this is only a first step; many others must follow. The altar must dominate the entire *ensemble* as the pivot of that commemoration which the Church makes until her Lord shall come. And round the altar the various other liturgical elements must group in proper relation to it and—what is equally important—to one another.

Here, however, one must hasten to add that there is no single blue print for the perfect liturgical plan. Modern architecture has almost limitless techniques of expression in shapes, spaces, volumes, lighting and material. For this reason the liturgist of today must be much more circumspect

than his brother of yesterday when the question of spatial translation arises. Nevertheless, the liturgist must be able to supply the doctrinal research the architect needs and to warn him off any too facile solutions.

One such facile solution would be to place the tabernacle behind the altar, but completely free of it. True, this will foster devotion to the eucharistic Immanuel but it is more than likely that, in most churches, it will set up a contradiction between tabernacle and presiding position. It is, indeed, Christ who presides at the assembly of the People of God, but Christ represented sacramentally, not in the Sacred Species but in the priest.

Even the manner of supporting the tabernacle has its dangers. To place it on an altar, no matter how small, is to run the risk of detracting from the altar of sacrifice-communion, the *mensa Domini* itself. The same applies to location in an aumbry or niche in the wall of the sanctuary, for here the ledge on which the tabernacle rests wears the aspect of a small altar. Besides, both procedures may reduce the tabernacle to playing a passive role, whereas it is quite a law of liturgical architecture that each and every element should make its voice heard in a distinct, personal, way. These difficulties may be overcome, however, if the architect can treat the tabernacle and its support in a way that dispels the illusion of a second altar.

The Roman instruction issued on the feast of Corpus Christi, 1967, recommends placing the tabernacle in a chapel distinct from the middle or central part of the Church. But it also quotes without comment, the 1964 instruction, which allows for location in any place that is really worthy and is properly equipped. Further, the concern is mainly for those churches where there is frequently a great deal of activity in the nave owing to marriages, funerals and visits on the part of sightseers.

A special chapel of reservation does make it possible to build up an atmosphere suitable for private devotion. But gain may be once more countered by loss. The chapel may even appear so peripheral as to discourage visits to the Blessed Sacrament, a traditional practice of great fruitfulness that must be preserved at all costs.

But there is more. The creation of a "mystical" atmosphere

about the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the sanctuary or in a special chapel, may constitute an experiment with a language of signs which is other than that of Christian sacrament. The latter is never esoteric, occult, but on the contrary always communicative. Above all, it speaks to Christian faith of the primary *action* that constitutes the Church in its very being and that initiates the cascade of Christian signs.

That is why everything in the church building must determine its relation to the Mass—something that applies above all to the tabernacle. Not so much *separation* of altar and tabernacle as proper definition of *relation*!

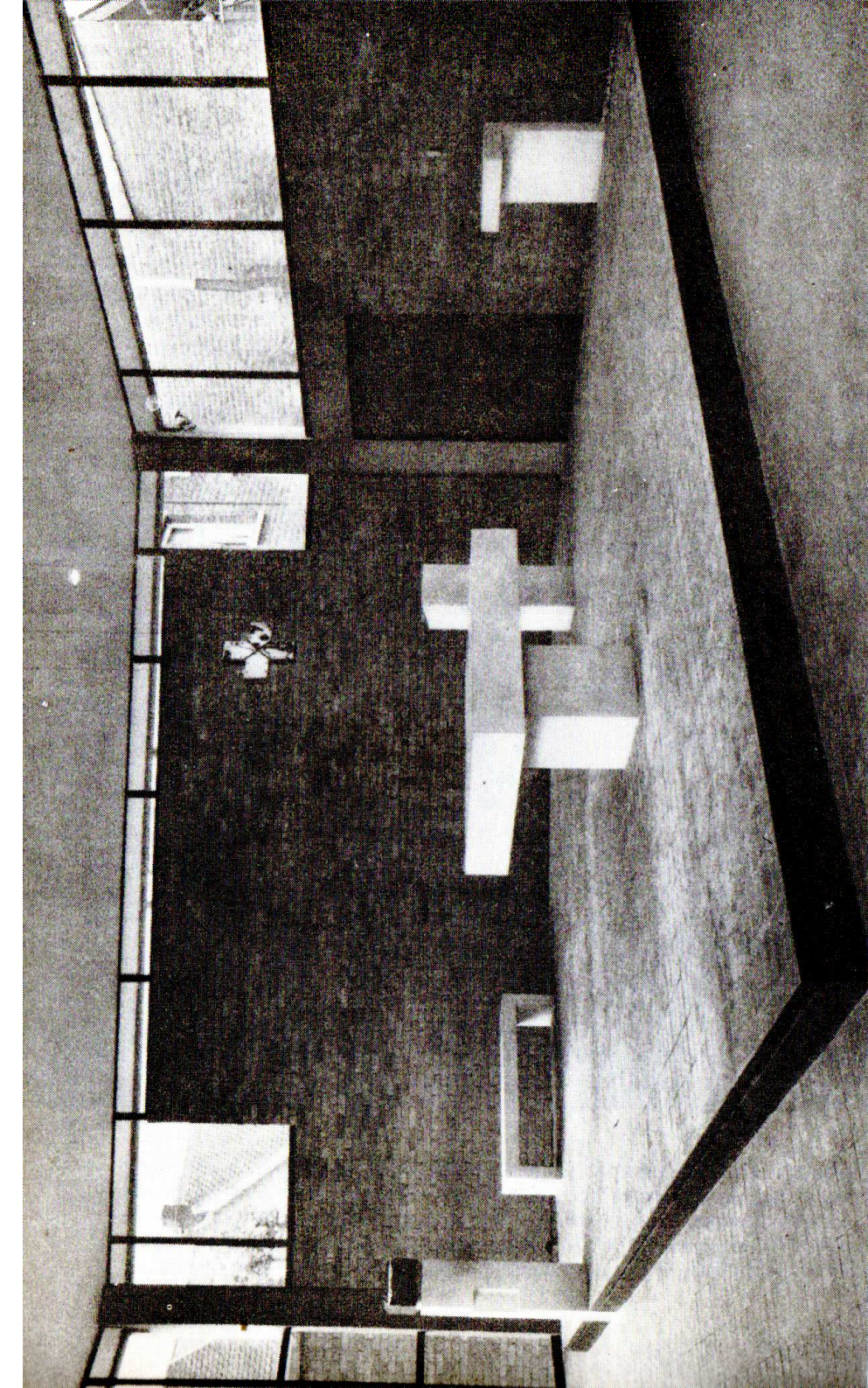
Quite recently a new mode of reservation has come into prominence. Yet it is not absolutely new but rather a revival of a medieval practice in what is, however, a new doctrinal and architectural context. Its use will require some very delicate nuances in planning and it will not be architecturally desirable in every arrangement. I speak of the sacrament-tower. Properly constructed, this could be an extremely striking feature. Tall, upright, it could speak with a strong, very personal voice. It could be a sign of an enduring presence of Christ inviting the disciple to a personal encounter. Its vertical would divert the eye to the smooth, tranquil, horizontal of the altar and, in doing so, help to focus heart and mind on the mystery that unfolds on this very altar every time the eucharist is celebrated.

Perhaps the sacrament-tower would not have the enveloping warmth of the traditional tabernacle but it could well jolt our eucharistic thinking from any too superficial levels to seek the ultimate level, that of the risen Christ, where true comfort is to be found in fully conscious participation in the paschal mystery renewed daily until he come.



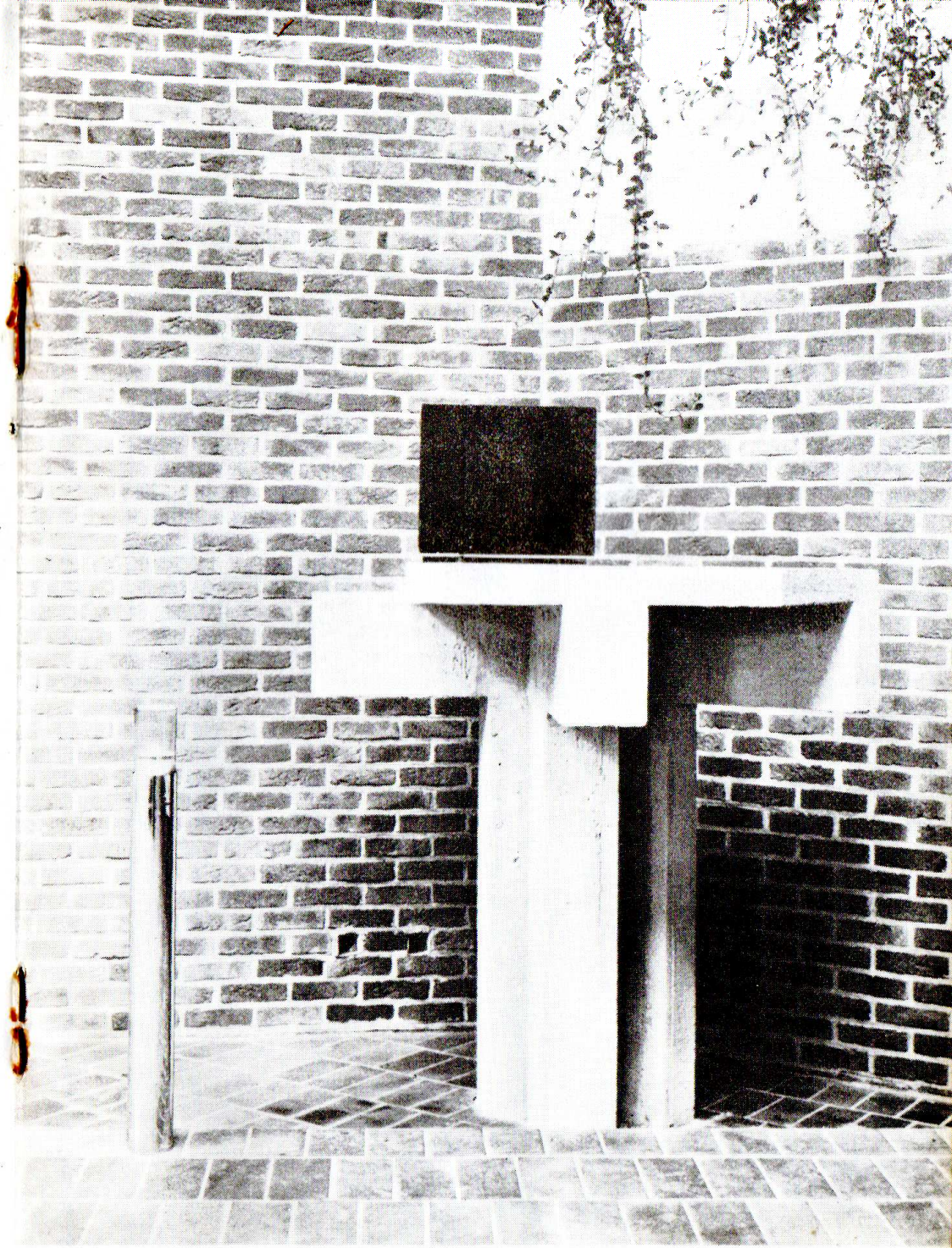
Art d'Eglise

Church of All Saints at Zurich-Neuaffoltern (Architect, Karl Higi). Note that the baptismal font has been located in close relation to the eucharistic focal points, yet in such a way that it does not conflict with them. The emphasis here is on baptism as already implying the eucharist. At the same time, public participation in the baptismal liturgy is facilitated.



Art d'Eglise

Church of St. Joseph at Willebroek, Belgium. (Architect, Marc Dessauvage).



Art d'Eglise

The Blessed Sacrament in the College of Saint-Liévin in Ghent, Belgium. (Architect, Marc Dessauvage).

RENEWAL OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Renewal in the parish church can mean, when all is said and done, only one thing: renewal of the presence of Christ among his people. But this presence is refracted in four main ways, to each of which there corresponds an architectural object, *i. e.* the four focal points of altar, presiding position, ambo and tabernacle.

The altar is the primary focal point, for upon it is centred the entire eucharistic action of the sacrificial banquet. The presiding position is the point of attraction for the assembly of the People of God. The ambo is the focus of the proclaimed word, while the tabernacle is the focus of what we might very well call the word of the heart.

The renewed parish altar will speak of a greater familiarity between the people and sacred things. Being free-standing, on a podium of one or two steps' elevation and well advanced towards the nave, it will be infinitely more accessible than the old-fashioned altar. The congregation will feel that they are grouped around the living centre of their worship. Yet the hierarchical structure of the People of God will be expressed too, for one side will be reserved to the priest through whom principally Christ offers himself to the Father. On occasion the collegial character of this hierarchy will be shown forth when Mass is concelebrated by a number of priests among whom the bishop of the diocese may take his rightful place as leader. This will imply an altar of changed dimensions, yet one that, it is to be hoped, will be not merely a table but clearly also a stone of sacrifice.

How eloquent too will be the presiding position when correctly interpreted by the architect. Christ, seated as befits his authority, will appear to face his people and by the attraction of his personality to make them one with him as he is one with the Father.

Why is it that in passing to the third of our four focal points we are suddenly reminded of the separated brethren? Why if not that they have zealously guarded down the centuries a sense of the presence of Christ in his word, a sense so largely

St. Mary's Church, Tamnaheirin, Co. Derry. (Architect, White and Hegarty). Note the co-relation of font and altar.
V. Rev. B. Kieft, P. P./Deegan Photo



atrophied among Catholics? If this is becoming once again a dynamic feeling among us, the fact is due in no small measure to the biblical scholarship in the churches of the Reformation that exercised such a profound influence on the Second Vatican Council. The author would like to think that the greater part of what he has said, and has still to say, applies to *all* Christian parish churches without distinction, and for that reason he would like to formulate the hope that in those of the separated brethren the architectural treatment of the altar would express the absolute primacy of the eucharist over all services. To this might, perhaps, be added a plea for a fresh look at the many memorials which, for all the worthiness of the personages thus commemorated, do appear to detract very considerably from the primary purposes of sacred space in churches and, especially, in the ancient cathedrals of the land.

Enough has already been said about the role of the tabernacle as focal point. It must now be linked with the other three, and the point made that the various modes of Christ's presence are governed by a delicate set of mutual relations whose purpose is to direct our hearts and minds to the total Christ of the parousia, when he shall come to glorify his People in body and soul even as he is himself glorified by the Father. Between these modes of Christ's presence there can be no real contradiction but there can *appear* to be such when the relations are not properly respected.

An architect's overheard question will illustrate my meaning: "If the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the sanctuary, but not on the main altar, must the usual reverences be paid to it during the course of the eucharistic action?" The very framing of the question would seem to imply that Christ presides at Mass from the tabernacle rather than in the person of his priest. If the former were true then, certainly, the reverences would be required every time one passed in front of the tabernacle. However, it is the second statement that is correct, *viz.*, that Christ the head of his people is represented in the presiding priest, and hence the matter of the reverences should not really arise if right order is observed.

Is there then only one blueprint for the arrangement of altar, presiding position, ambo and tabernacle in our parish churches?

The answer is a very definite *no*! A good architect is a master of nuance in volume, space, lighting, material and elevation; it is quite possible for him to express the same values and the same relations between a number of different objects in more than one way.

This study has been concerned with church renewal in the most obvious architectural area, that of the sanctuary. However, a church is a unit in which everything must speak of the worship of God. It would, therefore, be regrettable if our priests or our architects were to concentrate on one part of it, however important, to the neglect of the rest.

First to engage our attention, the altar rails are no longer a sign of separation between priest and people, no longer a secondary table of communion but rather a reminder that as People of God we have *one* table from which all receive. Consequently, (if retained) they can be pencil-like structures at which the faithful communicate standing or kneeling.

We find too that in the renewed church the choir and the organist are integrated in the praying community leading them in the common worship, not performing in splendid isolation. As a result there is no special organ or choir loft. The architect has diverted his creative energy into other channels such as the provision of ample processional space that suggests the constant pilgrimage or exodus to the Promised Land, upon which the People of God are engaged. The very entrance of the faithful into the church, particularly when it is by way of, or in close proximity to the baptistry (with, ideally, a sunken font to suggest going down and coming up with Christ) is in itself a sacred procession. But most sacred of all will be the procession to and from the altar at communion, with its anticipatory echo in the bringing of the offerings on the part of chosen representatives of the congregation.

Good liturgical architecture might be reduced to simply this: the assignment of its proper space to each element.

Failure to recognise this principle results in the muffling of powerful liturgical voices as when, for example, the funeral service is celebrated in a corner at the back of the church instead of in the communion area where the deceased had received the pledge of resurrection. But the results are even more unfortunate when no special shrine space is allowed and the properly eucharistic sphere is made to do double duty.

The saints, and, above all Our Lady, glorified in body and soul, are witnesses to the risen Christ and the final triumphant outcome of the earthly eucharist. The location of shrines to the side of the main space should, as it were, make it possible for them to witness in an audible and visible way.

Renewal and resurrection are inseparable liturgical terms, for everything about our parish churches must make present the new, the risen Christ. In this, creative art is our greatest ally since it insists on transforming its subject—even the suffering Christ of a crucifix—by the application of abstract values. Do we not often forget that even representative art must undergo a certain abstract treatment if it is to be creative and not merely photographic.

Much could be written about the transformation to be sought by such treatment in stained glass, statues, plaques, vestments (the full, graceful "Gothic" vestments are actually more Roman than those that go by the name), church music (could not traditional Irish melodies be used creatively here, as they were in *Mise Éire*?) and so forth. But in all this, anything ultrarational ought surely to be avoided. Warmth and colour are characteristic of the Irish temperament; they are symbolized by the flowers of countryside and garden that must continue to grace our churches.

Yes, the parish church must speak to us in louder and clearer terms of the great and glorious fact that we are God's People and that He dwells among us. Of it, as of the heavenly Jerusalem that St. John saw in his vision, it must be true to say: "Here is God's tabernacle pitched among men; He will dwell with them and they will be His own people, and He will be among them, their own God."—*Apoc.*, 21: 3.

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The publishers wish to acknowledge with thanks the permission of Mr. Michael Rooney, editor of the *Irish Independent* to reprint Father McHenry's articles and of the Chairman of the Episcopal Liturgical Commission, the Archbishop of Tuam, to reproduce here the Pastoral Directory; also of Fr. Frederick Debuyst, editor of *Art d'Eglise* for permission to reproduce photographs.

Part Two

PASTORAL DIRECTORY ON THE BUILDING AND REORGANISATION OF CHURCHES¹

Episcopal Liturgical Commission of Ireland

General Principles

- 1 The present directives are meant to provide guidance for priests, religious, architects, artists and laity in solving the problems of church design, particularly in the reorganisation of existing churches.
- 2 The reorganisation of existing churches, as well as the planning of new ones, should be carried out in accordance with the principles set out in the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, the *Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the *Ordo Missae et Ritus Servandus in Celebratione Missae*, and the *Ritus Servandus in Concelebratione Missae*.

¹ In preparing this Directory the Episcopal Liturgical Commission has been assisted by the Committee on Sacred Art and Architecture, whose members are: Father J. G. McGarry, Maynooth, Chairman; Wilfrid Cantwell, Dublin, President, Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland; Ray Carroll, Dublin, artist; A. D. Devane, B.Arch., FRIAI, AMTPI, Dublin; Father Austin Flannery, O.P., Dublin; Richard Hurley, Dip.Arch., MRIA, Dublin; Cathal Canon McCarthy, P.P., Dublin; W. H. D. McCormick, Dip. Arch., FRIAI, AMTPI, Derry; Father Gerard Montague, P.P., Belfast; James White, Dublin, Director of the National Gallery of Ireland; Father Brendan Devlin, Maynooth, Secretary.

- 3 The reorganisation of existing churches and the planning of new churches must be seen as part of the liturgical renewal, which "is not limited merely to the changing of liturgical rites and texts" (*Instruction*, no. 5). Similarly, the renewal of church architecture should not be limited to changes in design and construction, but should be part of a larger programme whose aim is "to foster the formation of the faithful" (*Instruction*, no. 5). The "formation of the faithful" will be more effectively achieved if they are made aware from the beginning of the purpose of the renewal and if their "prudent advice" (*Constitution on the Church*, no. 37) is sought and their experience utilised.
- 4 The church is a sacred place where the community of the faithful meet and participate actively in the celebration of the liturgy and wherein Christ works in the community through the sacramental signs. It is also a place of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and for personal prayer and meditation.
- 5 This participation of the faithful can best be achieved in a church which has been properly planned or reorganised. When an existing church is being reorganised, the relationship of all the parts of the church and the technical factors must be taken into account and a master plan prepared, even though social or financial considerations may dictate that the reorganisation be carried out in stages. Thus the seating-plan ought not to be decided upon without taking into account the layout of the sanctuary, and *vice versa*.
- 6 It would be unwise to assume that an arbitrary grouping of seating about a relocated altar would automatically produce a better church.
- 7 In the planning and reorganisation of churches a number of solutions may be possible. It is important that priest and architect should not approach the problem with a preconceived solution in mind. The planning or reorganisation should be inspired, not by considerations of individual convenience, but by the pastoral motive of achieving the most significant expression of liturgical position and movement on the part of the entire eucharistic community.
- 8 The spirit of community requires that the congregation be gathered at the altar as the focal point, and in proper hierarchical relationship with the altar space and with the

- other elements forming the church.
- 9 Active communal participation involves more than seeing and hearing the celebrant: it involves praying with him, answering him and seeing clearly the actions which he performs. This will be best achieved where architectural conditions make the individual aware that he forms a community with the priest and with the other members of the congregation.
 - 10 The faithful cannot participate fully in the liturgy unless the church offers good visibility, acoustics, illumination, heating and ventilation. Neither can participation be fully achieved unless the faithful are sufficiently near the priest.^{1a}
 - 11 The architecture and art of the new or reorganised church should be marked by "noble simplicity" (*Const. Lit.*, no. 34). This requires the proper use of materials and a treatment which is meaningful and temperate. The authentic expression of the Christian virtue of poverty, which does not in any way imply impoverishment, is a valuable witness in the face of the increasing materialism of modern life.
 - 12 The Constitution on the Liturgy, while not imposing any particular style, recommends that the art of our own time be given free scope in the Church, provided it shows "due honour and reverence" (*Const. Lit.*, no. 123). The atmosphere within the church should be welcoming and it should offer the minimum of physical or psychological barriers to participation in the liturgy.
 - 13 It will be found to be an advantage to prepare a written programme for the planning or reorganisation of the church.
 - 14 The architectural character of the church and any existing works of art of genuine merit should be retained, but only in so far as may be consistent with the spirit of the liturgy. The value of such works is not, of course, to be assessed in terms of their costliness or elaborateness.

^{1a} It is a matter of experience that it is difficult to achieve or retain this sense of participation if any of the faithful are more than seventy feet from the altar.

The Sanctuary

- 15 All the elements of the sanctuary (altar, ambo, chair and tabernacle) should be considered together and their significance and function clearly defined.²
- 16 In view of the distribution of the liturgical action between celebrant's chair, ambo and altar, sanctuaries will, in general, need to be larger than hitherto.³ If a communion rail is to be retained it should not be allowed to be a barrier.
- 17 The sanctuary should contain no statues.

The Altar

- 18 The altar represents Christ and is the central point of the church.⁴ It is both altar of sacrifice and table of the Body of the Lord. Since it is a symbol of Christ, it should be constructed of worthy materials and should be pre-eminent in every respect. It is especially desirable that the altar be designed and constructed by an artist.
- 19 The altar should be :
- (a) "so placed in the sacred building that, automatically, it becomes the true focus of attention for the entire congregation of the faithful" (*Instruction*, no. 91).
- (b) free-standing, to permit celebration of Mass facing the people.⁵

² Thus, for example, the location of the tabernacle may depend on the location of the celebrant's chair, and *vice versa*, and the location of the ambo may depend on the location of the chair.

³ In certain churches concelebration will become more frequent, and allowance should be made for this in determining the size of the sanctuary. Furthermore, when the *Instruction* (no. 91) prescribes that "The sanctuary must be large enough to allow for proper performance of the sacred ceremonies", this is to be understood, not in the light of the practice of the recent past, but having regard to the recommendations of the *Ritus Servandus* and the *Instruction* that there should be a plurality of ministers (lector, deacon, commentator, celebrant, servers) even in an ordinary parish Mass.

⁴ "Altare quidem sanctae Ecclesiae ipse est Christus", "for the altar of the holy church is Christ himself" (*Pontificale Romanum*, Rite of Ordination of a Subdeacon). It is marked with the five wounds of Christ and is anointed. "Altare significat Christum" (Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 83, a. 3, ad 5). On Holy Thursday during the stripping of the altar, the following antiphon is recited: "They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots".

⁵ *Instruction*, no. 91: "Praestat ut altare maius extruatur a pariete seiunctum, ut facile circumiri et in eo celebratio versus populum peragi possit".

- (c) placed on a platform, or predella, which surrounds the altar on all sides and is raised a step above the sanctuary floor.⁶
- 20 Since an "epistle side" and "gospel side" are no longer required, the shape and dimensions of the new altar will be considerably modified.⁷ But it should not be so reduced in scale or treatment as to lose its dominance.

Altar Appointments

- 21 The appointments of the altar should be subordinate to the altar itself in design and scale.
- 22 Only such objects as are necessary should be placed upon the altar, and then only when required for the celebration of the liturgy.
- 23 The crucifix should suggest the mystery of Christ, his sufferings and glory. It should be of sufficient prominence to be seen by the people, but not to draw attention away from the altar. It should be hung above the altar or placed upon it. If it is a processional cross, however, it may be placed in front of the altar during Mass, but to one side, so as not to obscure the actions of the priest from the faithful. It is required only during the celebration of Mass.
- 24 Candlesticks should be simple and unobtrusive. They may be placed on the altar or (if the local ordinary so judges) beside it (*Instruction*, no. 94). The use of *souches* or metal tubes to encase candles is not to be recommended.
- 25 The sanctuary lamp should not be given excessive emphasis and should not obscure the view of the altar. It may be standing or hanging.

Side Altars

- 26 Only the main altar should be within the sanctuary area. If side altars are deemed necessary, the need must be prov-

⁶ The platform should be sufficiently wide on all sides to enable the celebrant to walk right round the altar for purposes of incensation (*Ritus Servandus*, no. 29).

⁷ Where the readings are done from an ambo and the rest of the liturgy of the Word from the chair, the celebrant will use only the centre of the altar. Thus, it is likely that the size and shape of altars will revert to earlier practice. Further, the requirements of concelebration should also be taken into account.

ed in each case. Symmetry is no justification. It is contrary to the dignity of an altar to use it as a pedestal for a statue. "Side altars should be few in number. In fact if the building allows this, it is very fitting (*valde congruit*) to put them in chapels somewhat removed from the main part of the church" (*Instruction*, no. 93).

Tabernacle

- 27 The tabernacle is intended for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, for Communion of the sick, for public and private devotion.⁸
- 28 The location of the tabernacle should be determined in the light of the following considerations:
- (a) The location should be worthy of this great sacrament. The *Instruction* prescribes that it should be "dignified and properly ornamented".
 - (b) It should not only meet the needs of the traditional devotion of the Irish people to the Blessed Sacrament but should foster it.
 - (c) It should not impede the full participation of the faithful in the eucharistic sacrifice, nor diminish their understanding of it.
- 29 The tabernacle may be on the main altar, or a side altar (preferably in a side chapel⁹), recessed into the wall of the apse, or on a "eucharistic tower" (pillar) near the altar.¹⁰ None of these positions will suit all circumstances; there

⁸ Instruction of Sacred Congregation of the Discipline of the Sacraments, 1 October 1949 (A.A.S., 1949, pp. 509-510) "*Abs re non erit in mentem revocare primum ac primigenium finem asservandarum in ecclesiis Ss. Specierum extra Missam esse administrationem viatici; secundarios vero fines esse S. Communionem diribendam extra Missam in ecclesiis atque adorationem Domini Nostri Iesu Christi sub iisdem speciebus delitescentis*".

⁹ See Lercaro, *loc. cit.* "On peut conseiller, surtout dans les grandes églises, une chapelle destinée précisément à la réserve et à l'adoration de l'Eucharistie. Elle pourrait servir utilement pour la célébration eucharistique en semaine, quand le nombre des fidèles participants est réduit" (p. 262).

¹⁰ *Instruction*, no. 95 and Cardinal G. Lercaro, Letter to Presidents of Episcopal Conferences (*Notitiae*, no. 9-10, page 263).

The following ways of reserving the Blessed Sacrament cannot be approved: a moveable tabernacle which is lowered into the altar during the celebration of Mass; a fixed tabernacle built into the altar, whether

is no overall solution, because the problem will vary appreciably from one building to another and each individual case must be studied carefully in itself.

- It should be noted that in each individual case in which it is proposed to put the tabernacle in a place other than on the altar the local ordinary must give his approval.¹¹
- 30 If the tabernacle is placed on an altar where Mass is said facing the people it must be "small and suitable".¹² Some authorities feel that this is the least satisfactory solution to the problem.

The Ambo

- 31 There should be an ambo within the sanctuary for the proclamation of the Word of God. It should be a permanent fixture, for it should mark the place of the proclamation of the Word even apart from the celebration.
- 32 The position and form of the ambo should express its relationship to the altar. The practice of placing the ambo on, or alongside the predella or steps is undesirable.

Celebrant's Chair

- 33 The celebrant, taking the place of Christ, presides over the eucharistic celebration from the chair. The chair is not, as hitherto appeared, a place to which the celebrant withdraws in the course of the celebration, but rather a position from which he presides in a positive manner over the liturgical action.

it appears in front of the altar or not; a tabernacle fixed on a small column in front of an altar facing the people but which is lower than the altar; a tabernacle placed on an altar in front of another altar facing the people, even if the two altars in this situation are on different levels; a tabernacle placed in the left side of the sanctuary; a tabernacle which is placed on the high altar in front of which the priest celebrates Mass facing the people but which is not visible over the priest's head when he stands at the foot of the altar. (*Ibid.*)

When the tabernacle is placed in the apse or in a wall, care should be taken that the priest who celebrates Mass at an altar facing the people does not turn his back on it. (*Notitiae*, 5, page 138).

¹¹ *Instruction*, n. 95.

¹² *Instruction*, n. 95.

- 34 The chair should be clearly visible to the faithful and should be so placed that its presidential position is evident. Its position will be determined :
- (a) in the context of the general layout of the sanctuary.
 - (b) having regard to the seating arrangements and their relation to the sanctuary.

Art in Churches

- 35 Since it is principally by means of art that the sacred character of furnishings is expressed (e.g. that, a safe becomes a tabernacle), the making or design of sacred furnishings may be safely entrusted only to artists. So it is too with the making of images of any kind if " lack of artistic merit . . . mediocrity . . . or pretence . . . " (*Const. Lit.*, no. 124) is to be avoided.
- 36 The artist's special gifts and intuitions are to be respected ; he is not merely a craftsman (Pope Paul VI, Address to Artists, 7 May 1964). At the same time, the artist must bear in mind that he is engaged in making a sort of theology in graphic representation and that, therefore, the Church claims the right to pass judgment on the suitability of his work. This is for the ordinary (*Const. Lit.*, nos. 12, 124) to decide, with the advice of the diocesan commission on art, and if necessary other experts (*Const. Lit.*, no. 126).¹⁸
22 June, 1966.

¹⁸ The attention of artists is drawn to Chapter 7 of the *Constitution on the Liturgy*. When the Church claims to pass judgment on works of art, she does so in a spirit of love and respect for art (no. 122). Indeed she asks her bishops to have a special concern for artists (no. 127) showing encouragement and favour for true art, for the truly sacred, seeking for beauty rather than sumptuous display (no. 124) . She reminds the artist of the dignity of his calling, engaged in a kind of imitation of God himself (no. 127). She reminds him of his role in building up God's People, in assisting to form them religiously (no. 127). So much does she cherish the work of the artist that she forbids the disposal of works of value that have been used in her service (no. 126). Furthermore, she has always been the friend of the fine arts and has continuously sought their help with the special object that all things set apart for use in divine worship should be worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world (no. 122).