

REDEFINING THE SACRED IN THE URBAN REALM: TOWARDS A SACRAMENTAL ARCHITECTURE
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"For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an alter with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23)

"Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but is also their means of communication. It is the same with us and God. Every separation is a link" (Simone Weil)

"The name of the city from that time will be: THE LORD IS THERE" (Ezekiel 48:35)

The effects of globalization and secularization in the cityscape today call the Church to an architecture which responds to its new role as "one more" immigrant within the secular urban context and finds meaning by representing otherness and providing sacramental havens to an over secularized society. This reflects a peripheral and not centrist role within the greater urban context and subsequently may be revealed through architectural materializations that aspire, not to the iconography of form but to an iconography of relevance.

The Christian religion has gone through various historical and ontological transformations itself, but in terms of an architectural conversation we will agree for now that the Biblical Canon and Tradition define the relevance with which the Sacraments and the Creeds sustain Christian self definition, and find them central to an understanding of this religion and its self identity, as it manifests itself in and through its architecture.

The history of the place of worship within the Western City has been a history of the inversion of meaning and significance. This is directly related to the power center realignments and subsequent reformations of urban fabric, as they represent manifestations of the shifts in the emotional loci of Western nations and cultures throughout history (Jung, 14). Where the center of Athens and Constantinople was the temple, New York and Hong Kong are centered on commerce (Fig. 01). The Western City has realigned its existential and psychic center as the reinvention of the deity of the age allows the City to turn itself toward the service of the current cultural god (West, 64).

Subsequently, there have been collective shifts in the Western City's understanding of the purposeful architecture of the Church. The God of the Creeds has become supplanted with the god of the machine and traditional Christian architecture has been assigned a role of less if not, at worse, irrelevance in the context of the "machine/city" of modernism (West, 458).

The Church can note that architectural history in the West has witnessed secular architecture becoming wrapped in traditional church aesthetics (Fig. 02). The ascent of modern institutions to perceived higher echelons of cultural importance

have subsequently created the conundrum of the Church's sacred spaces becoming less iconographic in urban contexts, backdrops to the life of the city, no longer central or as relevant in meaning. At worse, it is the absorption of the sacred aesthetic by the profane (Fig. 03). What should be the architectural response to this as far as the Church is concerned? Should it adopt secular form and styles, movements or themes in an attempt to gain relevance in the secular cityscape? (Fig. 04).

RELEVANCE

"For the message of the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing" 1 Cor. 1:18

The habit of the Christian cult in Western cities has created the assumption that Church architecture is typically "part of" any Western City but the Sacramental purposes of this architecture annihilates this idea, in favor of an understanding that the Church, in fact and form, is always sojourning through a strange land. The appreciation of the secular World of the manifestations of sacred Church architecture as lofty and iconographic may be true, but this does not diminish the fact that architecture that comes from Sacramental purposes is for the Church and not the World. (As much as the thinking, systematizing and artistic patronage of the Church have been seminal to the development of Western culture, Western culture is not the Church). Church architecture is for the Church.

The power of the Christian Gospel lies in that it always proclaims an "unknown God" in every Age (Acts 17:23), and thus it is free to speak the language of this God, which is the language of all mankind (Aquinas, Q. 176). Architectural manifestations can "speak in many tongues" without losing sacramental significance, but this should be a purposeful, worshipful act, and not a reaction or absorption of the current mode of thought or a rehashing of an older significant architectural theme. What the secular witnesses of the birth of the Church heard were the saints giving worship to God, yet they were outside observers of the sacred glossolalicevent (Meeks, 149; Acts 2: 7-11).

This seminal event in Church history serves as a metaphor demonstrating that the essence of the Christian worship speaks to all mankind. Architecture can serve as that medium representing a manifest xenoglossialic metaphor which the world can "listen to" and subsequently "hear" the worship of God. The secular witnesses were outside observers to the dynamic of the conversation between the Church and God, which was attractive to some and dissonant to others. (Act 2:13) The importance regarding the metaphor is that the "xenoglossialic" (as architectural) manifestations should be Sacramentally focused. Within such an approach we can discover and develop an architecture, which is transformed from an object of (dead) meaning to an object of relevance, for the Church and the World.

In contrast, Church architecture which seeks to compete with the iconography around it fails its primary purpose, incorrectly thinking it can measure and demonstrate God's glory to the world using a secular yardstick. When the Church uses such an approach it inherently conforms to secular methods and thus denies the innate sacredness of its existence. At these times, such a branch of the Church may be inwardly misaligned in that it has a dogma which is less about the Creeds and more about the Age. Meaningful Sacred architecture follows theological and liturgi-

cal vigor. In order to synthesize an appropriate Christian architecture within the urban realm today there is a need to have a rigorous understanding of how former Christian approaches developed a synthesized architecture that was both relevant and timeless.

CREED AND CULTURE

"Credo ut intellegam" Anselm of Canterbury

Sacramentally focused Church architecture, one can argue, was best described through the development of the Gothic church form and its subsequent manifestations, especially in relation to the City. Unlike the Hebrew temple of the Old Testament, Early Christianity had no specific requirement for an objective place for the worship of God, since the temple of God had become the very bodies of men (Meeks, 75). (I Cor. 6:19) Yet Gothic architecture most clearly synthesized the requirements of a later, more fully developed, theology, characterized by the requirements of temporality, as understood through theological fertilizations which developed from the Creeds and the Traditions (Panofsky, 44-45). Christianity became a religion in which linear time and sacred space became central elements in the construction of its body of understanding, as referenced in its theology, its worship liturgy and eschatological history (Fig. 05).

Scholasticism fertilized the Christian Creed to the degree in which a liturgy of space and form could be developed, which engaged the building technology of the age with the requirements of sacramental space (Panofsky, 2). The key to this evolution was the need to describe the transcendent. Subsequently architecture was developed to materially represent the transcendent and marry physical space to the requirements of a sacred architectural program, to house a liturgy that acknowledged past, present and future simultaneously (representing a temporal triad). Gothicism best synthesized an architecture that responded to the requirements of Christian theology, integrating the ritual requirements of Creed and Sacraments within space, place and time, to bring order from Chaos (Panofsky, 87).

From our vantage point in history we see an architecture that helped define a culture, yet we should note that at the time it was foreign and new. What we seek today is an approach which helps foment such developments, as in Gothicism, where the needs of the Christian community found such a powerful architectural home. (I am certainly not espousing the aesthetic, but the rigor of the approach) (Fig. 06).

In an environment where the Creeds and Sacraments are believed, it is not sufficient to "just wrap" a church architecture program in a current popular building aesthetic. I will dare say that in the context where the Creeds and Sacraments are "actually" believed, this is tantamount to theological heresy. But how to reinvigorate the approach?

PERIPHERY AS CENTRALITY

"So she led them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall" Joshua 2:15

In the Christian context, a relevant architecture within the secular city can only be created if the Church takes seriously the significance of its own revela-

tion. Meaningful Sacred architecture follows theological and liturgical vigor. The manifestation of sacramental purposes, the reinvigoration of the ways the Body of Christ is manifested, both ritually and charismatically, all lend to a need for the architecture of sacra mentality to be interpreted within the profanity it must inhabit, and its subsequent catalytic expressions. The Western City traditionally has been defined by the image of the Church physically and culturally at the center. What would a Sacred architecture of periphery be like? in light of a Sacramental paradigms? (Fig. 07).

This idea of a realignment of church architecture to the periphery of the City (in terms of its secular meaning) still surprises many who individually consider its peripheral placement, as dictated by the present day secular nature of cities, to be a denouement of sorts. Some become anxious to see Church structures, often times physically centered in the urban fabric, relegated as past historical edifices or civic archeology, touristic pass-through or aesthetic backdrops for photo ops and romantic eateries. The Church to some, once central and key in the City, has been relegated to urban wallpaper (Fig. 08).

But if we regard the Church's primary purposes, it is this positioning which primes it to become the safe haven for the disenfranchised, the foreigner (in spirit and in actuality) and ultimately the ark of the eschatological resolve of present Chaos. (Meeks, 160) It is this positioning which allows it to renew its sacramental purposes and its relevance within a new philosophical urban context.

Secularity is a new Dark Age of the Spirit. Secularity's biggest neurosis is the tenuousness of its self-assurance against Chaos. These seismic shifts in the modes of signification have borne the anxiety of Modernity (Jung, 15). The Church stands metaphysically between the false self-assurance of Secularity and its refusal to acknowledge Chaos. Since the Church sits on the edge, "against the wall" as it were, of Secularity's self-definition, it is closest to Chaos and serves to house the glossilalic manifestations of Chaotic representations. To the Secular realm this represents a leaning shed for the indefinable. To the Church it is hosting ambassadors from God. How to represent this architecturally?

THE CITY AND GOD

"Therefore know yourselves, for you are the city and the city is the Kingdom"
(Jung, 35)

Sacramental architecture, which in its essence does not seek to define the secular City through engagement but through contrast, can reflect the realities of globalization today, with honest relevance. The contrast is not in that the Church turns its back to the City but that the Church recognizes that it worships an "unknown" God for the secular culture at large and in every epoch. The alignment is not that the Church witnesses toward the World but that the World witnesses the Church, in its Worship and activity (Acts 2:6).

The Church may move from center to "embassy", realizing its foreignness in societies that move toward secularity, thus reinforcing its mission and meaning through the unavoidable dissonance of function and perhaps form. This can take on the form of architectural manifestations that would engage the urban fabric through

dichotomies or relevant integrations. It is not sufficient for these to be stylistic or plastic representations of formal programs. The "de-construction" of architecture of late or the mechanizations of the architecture of the Modern era or the "Greening" of sustainable buildings presently are not in themselves sufficient to become rehashed and robe the Body of Christ and its mission.

If the language of archetypes and meanings, signs and symbols, in the world changes, the Church, never dependent on those meanings, does not lose its understanding of its relationship to the Passion and the Rapture, but does, by the assurance of its own Creed itself understanding, engage the urban context. Therefore each Christian community should approach its architecture with a regard for its importance as a corporate body in time and space, and the Body of God no less. In the City this especially represents a dual relationship with God and Man. Each should consider what does this mean (Panofsky, 28)? How can we begin?

There is a need to seriously revive the underlying meanings of the tenants each branch of Christianity sees itself representing. The goal is to approach Christian architecture with a clear understanding of its theological meanings and not take those for granted, but engage them in the present; the Covenantal Present of the Church, not the present of secular views.

FUTURE/PRESENT CONSIDERATIONS

"The future of (architecture) ... rests on the development of a refined and revisionist architectural historiography" (West, 462)

Theological developments throughout the life of the Church distilled several key ideas that can be used as a basis to approach an urban Church architecture today. Let us consider the view of time, and elaborate an approach, which can lead to a working parti. I see "temporality" as central to the development of a rigorous appropriate Church architecture (Dooyeweerd Vol. I, 31). A triumvirate understanding of time as past, present and future supports the covenantal nature of the Sacraments, for covenants are experienced temporally as the Present sits betwixt Remembrance and Promise. Time and action are indivisible within the Covenantal structure (Dooyeweerd Vol. 1, 27). For example in the Eucharist we simultaneously remember the obedience of Christ (past) as we celebrate the presence of Christ (present) and as we proclaim the Coming of Christ (future). This structuring of sacramental temporality is seen encompassing the life of the Church as the components of linear time are experienced through the manifestations of the sacraments in the life of the Church proper (beginning with the lives of individual members, whether in sacred vocations or not), as they engage with the Past as memory (in scripture and tradition), the Present as activity (through the sacraments and service) and the Future through evangelical proclamation (manifested in evangelical and eschatological tensions). Summed up in St. Paul's great ethics of Christianity (I Cor. 13:13), Faith supports memory (past), Hope supports evangelical/eschatological proclamation (future) and Love supports sacramental activity (present).

Now, how can such a paradigm lead towards an architectural manifestation? Can such an evolution, of how temporal triads reflect theological frameworks, be able to support a tri-perspectivist approach toward an urban architectural parti and programme, as reflected in the three intertwined and prevalent urban themes of gov-

ernment (faith?), commerce (hope?) and family (love?), all temporally engaged? Architecture can be the language that essentially bridges these. The urban fabric includes the final necessary piece, which is Context, allowing for the framework in which to develop a relevant architecture.

Whatever these development become, they should begin in the conceptual framework of a program which is inward looking, as it supports the Sacramental priorities of the congregational Body, and outward looking, as it evangelizes and serves the secular realm in its proximity and beyond, the realm of the City and the World.

"Sacred doctrine makes use of human reason, not to prove faith but to make clear (manifestare) whatever else is set forth in this doctrine" Thomas Aquinas

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FIGURES

- Fig. 01a. Constantinople.
 Fig. 01b. Hong-Kong.
 Fig. 02. The Limelight Night Club, New York.
 Fig. 03. The Limelight Night Club, interior.
 Fig. 04a. Church in American Mid West or office building?
 Fig. 04b. Church in Mexico or mall interior?
 Fig. 05a. Rheims Cathedral, France.
 Fig. 05b. Durham Cathedral, England.
 Fig. 06a. St. Patrick Cathedral, New York.
 Fig. 06b. Washington National Cathedral, Washington D.C.
 Fig. 07a. Trinity Church from Wall Street, New York.
 Fig. 07b. Citicorp Center w/St Peter's Church.
 Fig. 07c. Citicorp w/St. Peter's Church.
 Fig. 08. Spanish Steps, w/Trinita dei Monti church behind, Rome.



Fig. 01a



Fig. 01b



Fig. 02

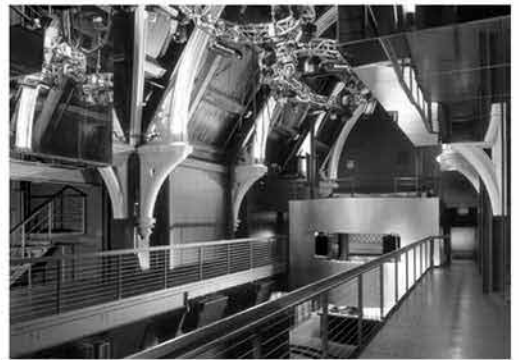


Fig. 03



Fig. 04a



Fig. 04b



Fig. 05a



Fig. 05b



Fig. 06a



Fig. 06b



Fig. 07a



Fig. 07b



Fig. 07c



Fig. 08