

2007

The role of sacred art in Catholic identity

Mary A. Callaway
University of Dayton

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THE ROLE OF SACRED ART IN CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Theological Studies in the Department of Religious Studies

by

Mary A. Callaway

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

April, 2007

APPROVED BY:



Moore, Cecilia
Faculty Advisor



Doyle, Dennis
Faculty Reader



Smith, Anthony
Faculty Reader



Yocum Mize, Sandra
Chair, Department of: Religious Studies

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2007

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF SACRED ART IN CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Name: Callaway, Mary A.
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. Cecilia Moore

This thesis establishes a historical and theological view of the role of sacred art and architecture in nurturing Catholic identity. The research and resulting argument will show how the Church has been consistent from the earliest days on the role and purpose of sacred art and architecture in liturgical and prayer settings – sacred art and architecture can, in fact, facilitate a Catholic imagination and identity by illustrating and bringing the Tradition to life. A photographic survey shows how sacred art and architecture are a means to transmit the Tradition, form a collective imagination, and as a result, enable a loving friendship between God and the community as well as among members of a community. Finally, the caveat in all of this is the need for doctrinally sound, continuing, and age appropriate catechesis and the last chapter presents a number of catechetical principles as well as considerations regarding sacred art and identity. In short, sacred art and architecture are valuable and practical tools of theology since they allow the faithful to employ the imagination in getting to “know” God through his creatures, creation, and history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to everyone who has helped with this work. I especially would like to thank Dr. Cecilia Moore who was a patient advisor and one who gave great advice on focus, content, form, and presentation. I also wish to thank my amazing husband, Bruce, who gave me encouragement while also taking care of my every need. Finally, thanks is in order to the adults in the Sunday morning Our Lady Queen of Peace religious education program who always have challenging questions, exciting insights, and keep me on my toes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).¹

Sacred art and architecture are tools of theology and even types of theology since they allow the faithful to develop an imagination and thus, to come to know God through his creatures, creation, and history.² As such, while sacred art and architecture can never take the place of Scripture or Tradition, they are a critical element of Tradition because they assist in an understanding of the truths found therein. Specifically, sacred art and architecture can help bring the Tradition to bear on the mission to further God's kingdom as all are called to by the Scripture. Thus, the theory of this thesis: sacred art, and to a certain extent architecture, serve as vehicles for the transmission of Tradition and as a result nurture Catholic imagination and identity.

¹ Scripture quotes are from The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, 1993.

² To simplify terminology, sacred art is defined herein to include all genres and types of art including frescos, mosaics, stained glass, icons, paintings, murals, and sculpture. Architecture refers to the exterior and interior of a church building and its general style (e.g., Gothic) while architectural adornment includes such things as the type of columns, arches, materials, and artistic but practical architectural elements (e.g., gargoyles and grotesques). Symbols "stand for or point to something beyond themselves" (George L. Coulon, "Symbolism, Early Christian," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 660-662). Symbolism is "the use of signs, both literary and material, to represent spiritual reality" (Coulon, 664-671). Symbolology is simply the study of symbols and symbolism.

This thesis, therefore, demonstrates the value of sacred art and architecture. Certainly the misuse of sacred art, statues, altars, and windows can result in idolatry or at least scandalize by suggesting idolatry. But used properly, sacred art has great value because it has: a) been a catalyst towards forming a unique and energizing Catholic identity; b) been a tool for educating the community; c) acted as a devotional aid in spirituality and prayer; and d) perhaps has helped retain parishioners who otherwise might see no difference in Catholicism versus any other Christian formation or tradition.

Furthermore, sacred art and architectural adornment can help create an environment wherein worshippers arrive early for worship, stay for a time of reflection after the conclusion of a liturgy, and embrace the church as a place for contemplation and prayer. The reason for this is the feeling of vibrancy and welcome created by sacred art and architecture – the church is inviting as it provides a way to relate to God outside of liturgical celebrations. The parish benefits because some linger after the liturgy, in part, because they see themselves as members of both the present and historical community – the communion of saints – with a mission of furthering God's kingdom.

Moreover, sacred art creates continuity in the cultural identity of a parish. Through it, the parish can preserve old traditions and understanding while also celebrating the addition of new traditions or icons as younger generations come to maturity or new cultures join the parish. As a result, many can see themselves as having a stake or a genealogy in the community while they add a distinctive piece of history to the parish story. In fact, sacred art procured generations ago

leaves a rich legacy as it safeguards the culture and ethnicity of many generations. And yet, art serves to link the parish to the larger church while also being a common language useful in welcoming people of different cultures. Lastly, celebrating culture and ethnicity through art creates a rich harmony from generation to generation and thus a strong sense of community.

Consequently, sacred art contributes in three ways towards fostering a sense of Catholic identity and as a result, a parish with a mission: a) sacred art engages the imagination and thus sheds light on the truths of the transcendence and immanence of God; b) sacred art reminds the faithful of the communion of saints and thus the historical reality of God in the midst of creation as well as the parish in the life of the Church; and c) sacred art captures a parish's understanding of itself in terms of culture, ethnicity, and history and this understanding serves to keep the parish together as it embraces new cultures and as each new generation honors, observes, and continues the efforts of ancestors, albeit in an unique way.

In short, sacred art and architecture are vital to the vibrancy of parish life and liturgical celebrations. The faithful, in fact, gain an ability to learn about Tradition and Scripture but perhaps most importantly, gain a way of 'knowing' God through a rich liturgical, contemplative, and prayerful life. Thus, sacred art and architecture help the Church to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

Tradition

Sacred art and architecture are a part of the Tradition and as such act to transmit God's revelation. Theologian Fr. Yves Congar wrote, "if, then, we consider the content of what is offered, tradition comprises equally the holy Scriptures and, besides these, not only doctrines but things: the sacraments, ecclesiastical institutions, the powers of the ministry, customs and liturgical rites, in fact, all the Christian realities themselves."³ If from God's point of view Tradition is the entire content of his revelation, then from the human point of view Tradition is nearly synonymous with the self-identity of the Church. Thus, Tradition explains how people see and understand God, his will, and his creation.

As are any parts of the Tradition, sacred art and architecture are vital to the vibrancy of parish life and liturgical celebrations. Without these components, the Church, in fact, loses not only the ability to educate in terms of Scripture, doctrine and Tradition, but also, and perhaps more importantly, loses in a way of 'seeing' God in its prayer and contemplative life. Theologian Margaret Miles writes, "the worshippers perception of an image is not an aesthetic appreciation. Rather, the image is valued because of its power to move, to focus the sense and the mind, and to offer a mnemonic aid that gathers the worshippers strongest and most fundamental ideas, emotions, and memories in the enriched presentation."⁴ Hence from two important points of view – the individual and the

³ Yves M. J. Congar, O.P., *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A.N. Woodrow, 1st ed. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964), 17-18.

⁴ Margaret R. Miles, *Images as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 8-9.

Church – sacred art and architecture are critical to praising God and to comprehending and retaining the knowledge found in the Tradition.

Method

In the *National Directory of Catechesis*, the Bishops emphasize four characteristics of faith – it should be: known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer.⁵ In a way, these four characteristics are the action verbs of Tradition and allow sacred art and architecture to become vehicles to assist individuals and communities as they incorporate these actions into day to day spiritual and secular lives. More importantly, these actions reflect the necessary attitude of individuals and communities as they embrace the Tradition and then transmit it to succeeding generations.

Furthermore, everyone has an imagination and likewise, over time, a group of people can create a collective imagination. Many theologians and artists assert, therefore, the existence of a Catholic imagination in individuals as well as in communities. The individual and community think about God and their relationship to him through this imagination. When cultivating this relationship, people will naturally operate using all of the senses but do so especially through the visual. And thus the imagination of the relationship spills over into manifestations of the sacred in art.

As a result, Christians have used sacred art and architecture from the time of the early church to help them understand, express, practice, and perpetuate

⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 60.

faith. Moreover, art and architecture are, in fact, critical components of Catholicism in terms of culture and identity in part because Catholicism is often identified with soaring cathedrals, stained glass windows, adorned altars, colorful mosaics, and various other types of art and architecture. Consequently, the argument developed here results in a theory of a role of sacred art as one of defining and protecting sacred Catholic identity as well as a way to transmit the Tradition. The argument will be based on analysis of Church teaching through the ages on sacred art and architecture, the thoughts of selected theologians on the matter, and Church documents of the Second Vatican Council as well as papal and episcopal documents.

First, conciliar teachings reflect and embody Catholic theology. It is necessary, therefore, to extract the appropriate function of sacred art in Catholicism from conciliar decrees as well as to understand the events, discussions, and disagreements leading up to a council. The first part of the thesis provides historical background about and the results of three councils: the Second Council of Nicaea, the Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council. Each is important in terms of sacred art, especially the Second Council of Nicaea called in order to establish doctrine on the appropriate employment of icons. Likewise, the Council of Trent is important as the Church had significantly lost its direction regarding such things as indulgences as well as becoming nearly idolatrous and superstitious in its notions about sacred art and relics. Finally, the Second Vatican Council is important as it established contemporary Church doctrine, theology, and thought on many topics including sacred art.

Second, to continue the discussion in terms of Church doctrine, Chapter III focuses on church documents of the twentieth century. The contemporary and yet appropriate employment of sacred art and architecture is described in many Church documents including encyclicals, papal letters, episcopal letters, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *Book of Blessings*. An understanding of these documents is critical to knowing how to take advantage of sacred art in liturgical services, catechesis, and prayer.

Third, Chapter IV focuses on the thoughts of selected theologians, artists, and architects who have much to suggest about the appropriate treatment of sacred art and implementation of church architecture. It starts with a short analysis of the role of language and imagination in learning and comprehension and then quickly turns to the theological thought of two foundational theologians, Abbot Suger and St. Bernard of Clairvaux. As in the previous chapter where the Second Council of Nicaea and the Council of Trent gave voice to those who disagree with the necessity of sacred art and architectural adornment in Catholicism, the thoughts of St. Bernard are included as he preferred a far less ornate church. Chapter IV continues with a study of two influential thinkers, sociologist Fr. Andrew Greeley and theologian Fr. David Tracy, regarding their views on the role of imagination in theology and Catholic identity. Finally, Chapter IV ends with the opinions of a number of artists and architects on the Second Vatican Council in terms of its decrees on sacred art and architecture.

A photographic survey in Chapter V depicts sacred art and architecture in terms of the Tradition, liturgical celebrations, devotion, Catholic identity, and

parish culture. The point of the survey is to show the rich use of sacred art and architecture as a way of engaging the Catholic imagination. In turn, the imagination helps the individual comprehend Catholic theology, the parish to form an identity based on Catholic theology, and the community to perpetuate the Tradition. The survey includes images of art drawn from Scripture, the Tradition, and local culture especially in terms of God's immanence, 'grace lurking everywhere' (Greeley), the Christocentric nature of Catholicism, forgiveness and reconciliation through the Incarnation, the work of the Holy Spirit, the sacramental nature of Catholicism, Mary as Theotokos, and the communion of saints.

Finally, based on the results of this research, the concluding chapter reflects on ways to appropriately present sacred art and architecture in order to form a Catholic identity, to imaginatively worship and pray, and finally, to correctly transmit the Tradition.

Conclusion – Value of the Research

The value of the research and the argument in this thesis is its establishment of a historical and theological view of the implementation and application of sacred art and architecture. The research and resulting argument will show how the Church has been consistent from the earliest days on the role and purpose of art in liturgical and prayer settings – sacred art and architecture can, in fact, facilitate a Catholic imagination and identity by illustrating and bringing the Tradition to life. The photographic survey attempts to show how sacred art and architecture are a means to transmit the Tradition, form a

collective imagination, and as a result, enable a loving friendship between God and the community as well as among members of a community. Finally, the caveat in all of this is the need for doctrinally sound, continuing, and age appropriate catechesis. The Church must provide catechesis on sacred art in order to avoid scandal and misunderstanding as well as to show how sacred art is a valuable tool in worship and prayer – this important point is covered in the concluding chapter. In short, sacred art is a valuable and practical tool of theology since it allows the faithful to employ their imagination to 'know' God through all of his revelation.

CHAPTER II

CONCILIAR TREATMENT OF THE ROLE OF ART IN CATHOLICISM

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made (Romans 1:20).

In spite of occasional disputes, the Church has consistently upheld sacred art, architecture, and architectural adornment as appropriate and even necessary in the life of the faithful. In fact, more than one council has restated the need for sacred art and architecture in worship and devotion as long as catechesis and balance are evident. The first council called to specifically address icons was the Second Council of Nicaea called in the eighth century as a result of a large scale iconoclasm. But this council did not end the issue as many continued to detest sacred images as idolatrous and even superstitious even though others felt the images somehow brought God and the communion of saints closer to the faithful.

Later, the Council of Trent produced decrees meant to dispel inappropriate and superstitious application of sacred art in worship and devotion even though the purpose of this council was not primarily about the use or misuse of sacred art. In fact, many of the faithful and clergy had developed improper and unacceptable views and habits regarding sacred art as evidenced by, in an indirect way, the scandal of indulgences. In any event, the Council of Trent restated the decrees of the Second Council of Nicaea.

Finally, the Second Vatican Council also considered sacred art and architecture as these applied to 'new' ways of worship and devotion. It essentially repeated and revalidated the decrees from Nicaea and Trent on sacred art while also bringing a new sense of community to liturgical and devotional practices. The Second Vatican Council strengthened teaching on devotional practices as a way of worshipping God as opposed to potentially idolatrous worship of a saint or sacred art itself. In fact, this council called for balance and simplicity while also encouraging the employment of sacred art as an aid to beautiful liturgical and devotional practices.

Conciliar teaching from the Second Council of Nicaea, Council of Trent, and Second Vatican Council is remarkably consistent on the topic – sacred art and architecture are appropriate and even necessary for worship and spirituality. However, proper catechesis, balance, and simplicity are absolutely and always necessary. This chapter analyzes reasons for these councils, related theology, and resulting decrees regarding the topics of sacred art and architecture.

Second Council of Nicaea

The issue of icons as a form of idolatry occurred primarily in the Eastern Church in the period of approximately 717 C.E. up to the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 and even beyond until about 840.⁶ Controversies over icons did occur in the western church and in other times; this period is, however, perhaps

⁶ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, vol. I: *Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001; reprint, 2003), 363.

the worst as it resulted in the destruction of property and is the most visible because of the necessity to call a council to resolve the issues.⁷

The iconoclasts believed many in the church were actually worshipping the icons or the saints depicted therein instead of properly worshipping God through the veneration of the saint or icon. Moreover, many iconoclasts also thought images of Jesus Christ were idolatrous regardless of their purpose and therefore were a violation of the First Commandment. The iconoclastic Emperor Leo III, while clearly Christian, may have been affected by knowledge of Islam or monophysite doctrine and as a result was especially opposed to icons.⁸ “[Leo] knew well the Muslim prohibition of representational art in worship; Muslims consider it a form of idolatry.”⁹ Also, according to historians Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, there was a political tension between Leo and the monks and nuns in monasteries because they did not pay taxes or, “reproduce children to provide soldiers and workers for the empire, yet they engaged in criticism of imperial excesses.”¹⁰ Ironically, Leo may also have been superstitiously attempting to appease God in terms of natural disasters and the loss of land since he “regarded these setbacks as a sign of God’s displeasure at the veneration of images; the purity of Islamic worship which did not allow the depiction of holy images had led to spectacular success.”¹¹ In any event, Leo prohibited icons through decree in 730 after removing the patriarch of Constantinople who

⁷ Ibid., 363.

⁸ Fiona Nicks and Jean Maurice Gouillard, “Iconoclasm,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 281.

⁹ Irvin and Sunquist, 361.

¹⁰ Ibid., 361.

¹¹ Nicks and Gouillard, 281.

opposed him on the matter.¹² Historians have mixed opinions about the historical evidence of martyrdom although those who violently defended icons and the right to icons were probably injured or exiled.¹³

Leo's great grandson, Constantine VI, and his mother, Irene (both favored icons), called the council in 787 in order to resolve the issue. As a result, the council reinstated the use and value of icons in worship and devotion. After Irene's death, however, iconoclasts pressed the issue once again and as a result icons were suppressed with a new wave of persecution from 815 through about 840.¹⁴ "Finally, in 840, the persecution wound down ... opposition to the icons had come primarily, from the emperors and the military, yet for all the violence, the practice of venerating them was as popular among the people as ever."¹⁵

Fiona Nicks and Jean Maurice Gouillard, however, portray the arguments of the iconoclasts and the iconophiles as more extensive than the issue of idolatry alone.¹⁶ First, the iconoclasts pressed the issue of true God versus true man by claiming an image of Jesus resulted in the separation of his humanity from his divinity as well as in an emphasis on his humanity – only the Eucharist was "an appropriate non-anthropomorphic image of Christ."¹⁷ The iconophiles countered with, "to deny that Christ had assumed a circumscribable form would be to deny the Incarnation."¹⁸ Second, regarding the images of the saints, the

¹² Ibid., 280.

¹³ Irvin and Sunquist, 361. Nicks and Gouillard, 280-281. Irvin and Sunquist suggest some iconophiles were killed as they defended icons while Nicks and Gouillard contend there is no evidence of martyrdom during this period.

¹⁴ Irvin and Sunquist, 362.

¹⁵ Ibid., 362.

¹⁶ Nicks and Gouillard, 281.

¹⁷ Ibid., 281.

¹⁸ Ibid., 281.

iconoclasts thought in terms of “adoration of dead matter” while the iconophiles portrayed the adoration as a way to honor the saint instead of adoration of the image or its component parts.¹⁹

St. John Damascene was among the first to establish the acceptability of sacred art in worship and prayer in part because of his views on the critical role of language and the imagination in learning and in knowing God. He was, in fact, the primary theologian responsible for the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea regarding the function of icons and sacred art even though he wrote his treatise and died prior to the council. John based his theology on the fact of Jesus’ incarnation; because Jesus was human the church can rightly show him in his human form. Thus, icons of Jesus were not idolatrous and as John notes, “therefore I venture to draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes through flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead.”²⁰

St. John added an element of common sense to bolster his logic when he writes about ‘seeing with the mind’s eye’ – in other words, one visualizes what one hears or reads. In a way, the individual is ‘making’ an image in order to understand but doing so is not idolatrous in the sense of making a graven image; instead, it is a natural effect of language and also a requirement for knowing or learning. John clarifies the concept saying:

If therefore, Holy Scripture, providing for our need, ever putting before us what is intangible, clothes it in flesh, does it not make an image of what is thus invested with our nature, and brought to the level of our desires,

¹⁹ Ibid., 281.

²⁰ Irvin and Sunquist, 363-364. St. John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, trans. Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), 5.

yet invisible? A certain conception through the senses thus takes place in the brain, which was not there before, and is transmitted to the judicial faculty, and added to the mental store.²¹

Moreover, John admits to the human inability to render an image of the invisible and unknowable God as a physical image even in the mind's eye. He permits, however, one to draw on analogical images to help one meet or worship God – one may see God in the beauty of the rising sun, for example. John says:

Gregory, who is so eloquent about God, says that the mind, which is set upon getting beyond corporeal things, is incapable of doing it. For the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are made visible through images (Romans 1:20). We see images in creation which remind us faintly of God, as when, for instance, we speak of the holy and adorable Trinity, imaged by the sun, or light, or burning rays, or by a running fountain, or a full river, or by the mind, speech, or the spirit within us, or by a rose tree, or a sprouting flower, or a sweet fragrance.²²

St. John, however, insists on veneration of saints and icons while limiting worship [*latreia*] to God alone.²³ He says, "you see the one thing to be aimed at is not to adore a created thing more than the Creator, nor to give the worship of *latreia* except to Him alone."²⁴ And yet John also provides reasonable logic for the veneration of the saints, images or icons thereof, and of such things as relics and holy places. In terms of veneration, he thinks:

I worship the image of Christ as the Incarnate God; that of Our Lady, the Mother of us all, as the Mother of God's Son; that of the saints as the friends of God. They have withstood sin unto blood, and followed Christ in shedding their blood for Him, who shed His blood for them. I put on record the excellencies and the sufferings of those who have walked in His footsteps, that I may sanctify myself, and be fired with the zeal of imitation. St. Basil says, "Honouring the image leads to the prototype."²⁵

²¹ Damascene, 11.

²² Ibid., 11-12.

²³ *Latria* (Greek: *latreia*). "The veneration due to God alone for his supreme excellence and to show people's complete submission to him." John A. Hardon, S.J., "*Latria*," in *Pocket Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Image Books Doubleday), 222.

²⁴ Damascene, 7.

²⁵ Ibid., 24.

The rest of John's treatise contains an extended explanation of his logic, a collection of the thoughts of many church fathers on the subject, and a point by point apology against the iconoclasts. Among others, he quoted and added commentary to such great church fathers as Sts. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom. For example, St. Denis remarks, "instead of attaching the common conception to images, we should look upon what they symbolise, and not despise the divine mark and character which they portray as sensible images of mysterious and heavenly visions" and John adds, "[St. Denis] cautions us not to despise sacred images."²⁶ In short, St. John demanded proper worship of God, allowed icons in such worship, and permitted the veneration of the saints as long as the images thereof revealed God while enabling his honor and praise.

In the introduction to the decree on sacred images, the Second Council of Nicaea drew on the thoughts and theology of St. John by declaring images of Jesus, the Word Incarnate, as appropriate and acceptable, saying "the production of representational art... is in harmony with the history of the spread of the gospel, as provides confirmation that the becoming man of the Word of God was real and not just imaginary."²⁷ This council also established decrees on the proper veneration of the images or icons of the saints and of holy places. Moreover, these council decrees provided a catechesis of sorts by defining adoration and veneration in theological terms as well as by explaining where images can and should be placed. This was necessary to counter the iconoclast

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

²⁷ Second Council of Nicaea, "Second Council of Nicaea - 787," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 135.

accusations of idolatry and to establish once and for all the Christocentric nature of the church. The council stated:

We decree with full precision and care that, like the figure of the honoured and life-giving cross, the revered and holy images whether painted or made of mosaic or of other suitable material, are to be exposed in the holy churches of God, on sacred instruments and vestments, on walls and panels, in houses and public ways; these are the images of our Lord, God, and saviour, Jesus Christ, and of our Lady without blemish, the holy God-bearer, and of the revered angels and of any of the saintly holy men. The more frequently they are seen in representational art, the more are those who see them drawn to remember and long for those who serve as models, and to pay these images the tribute of salutation and respectful veneration. Certainly this is not the full adoration in accordance with our faith, which is properly paid only to the divine nature.²⁸

In effect, the Second Council of Nicaea restated teachings of previous councils regarding the true humanity and true divinity of Jesus Christ as well as the understanding of Mary as Theotokos. It established the basic teaching of the church on the customary purpose of icons, art, and images in worship and prayer as well as the difference between the proper worship of God as opposed to veneration of the saints and angels. This understanding, as presented by the council, was reinforced by the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council. But even with such church teachings, controversy over sacred art and architecture occasionally rocked the church.

Council of Trent

While the primary purpose of the Council of Trent was not to deal with sacred art and architecture, these topics were a logical tangent to the discussion of Protestant accusations concerning indulgences and especially about sacred

²⁸ Ibid., 135-136.

art as a form of idolatry in liturgical and devotional practices. The Protestant accusation claimed Catholics had elevated the saints to an equal station with God and, as a result, Catholics mistakenly and even superstitiously worshipped the saints instead of worshipping God alone.

In fact, there were a number of issues leading to the Reformation and eventually to the Council of Trent. In the context of this thesis, three important issues were the scandal of indulgences, the veneration of relics, and, tangentially, the desire to worship in the vernacular. Each issue impacted the thoughts of Church leaders and Reformers on the role of and, more basically, the permissibility of sacred art and architecture in worship and prayer.²⁹

According to historian Diarmaid MacCulloch, Martin Luther was particularly concerned over the scandal of indulgences and lectured against the system on a number of occasions.³⁰ And while sacred art and indulgences do not go hand in hand, they are related philosophically. Indulgences, as defined in the scandal of the Reformation, were simply payments on behalf of another or oneself to gain the soul's freedom from purgatory; and in a similar vein, some church leaders may have portrayed the purchase or patronage of sacred art and architecture as a way of penitence or way to find favor with God.³¹ Accordingly, sacred art and architecture were scandalous in two related ways. First, sacred art and architecture became a path to power and forgiveness – the wealthy donated art and architecture to garner favor (and power) with the Church.

²⁹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History*, 1st American ed. (New York: Viking, 2004).

³⁰ Ibid., 116-119.

³¹ John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity: Interpreted Through Its Development*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 11-14.

Second, the purchase of art unfortunately precluded or delayed assistance towards alleviating poverty. These factors are not the primary reason for the rejection of sacred art and architecture by the Reformers – superstitious idolatry is primary – but perhaps they contributed to Protestant thought and doctrine.

At the time of the Reformation, many came to think of relics of saints and martyrs as having special, even miraculous, power for those who touched or venerated them and as a result, many were misled into superstitious and heretical practices. Similar to the issue of indulgences, sacred art and architecture were indirectly related to an improper comprehension of the role of relics, shrines, and graves. In this case, many reliquaries and shrines were ornately adorned and often placed in singularly dedicated and beautified chapels. Thus, one could link sacred art and architecture to the worship of saints and martyrs instead of an appropriate level of veneration. In essence, perhaps sacred art and architecture distracted an otherwise faithful but sometimes poorly catechized person in such a way as to cause a misunderstanding of the role these objects: instead of pointing to worship of God and Jesus Christ, they instead resulted in worship of the saint or the objects themselves.

The tangential issue, a desire for worship in the vernacular, had the effect of diminishing the need for sacred art while also allowing for a less ornate and grandiose architecture. Prior to the Reformation, many church leaders appropriated sacred art to educate the average worshipper since few could read and, even if they could, there were few books until around the time of the Reformation. Thus, sacred art and architecture substituted for the written word

on the topics of church teaching, Tradition, and Scripture. But the Reformation concern with the scandalous and idolatrous nature of sacred art conveniently coincided with a greater literacy and the Protestant worship in the vernacular. As a result, many Protestant leaders advocated the purification of churches and the removal of sacred art. It is, however, nearly impossible and certainly unfair to characterize the whole of Protestant Christianity in terms of these three issues as they are related to sacred art and architecture. Even so, each of the principle reformers, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli, had a specific point of view on the suitability and function of sacred art and architecture.

Luther was the most tolerant of sacred art and architecture although he did have concerns regarding their employment. In the Smalcald Articles of 1537, Luther wrote vehemently against relics and the invocation of the saints even though he did not perceive sacred art and architecture as idolatrous saying, "once the most obviously absurd images had been removed in an orderly fashion, there was nothing wrong with sacred art in church."³² Additionally, "Luther produced a lasting formula to convey the usefulness of images: for recognition, for witness, for commemoration, for a sign."³³ But as on other topics, Calvin and Zwingli split with Luther – for them, sacred art was a distraction and worse a source of idolatry.³⁴ Thus, some Protestant churches were completely stripped of art while others were merely reformed to eliminate images found to be inconsistent with Scripture.

³² Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," in *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions*, ed. Denis R. Janz (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 140.

³³ MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History*, 140.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 240-242.

The Council of Trent was, in effect, the answer to the issues of indulgences, relics, and the vernacular as well as a response to those who had called for church reform in the fifteenth century. In one sense, the council was necessary to protect the Church from further disintegration and in another sense, it was the official rejection of all things Protestant: "its aim would be to reject errors against faith, add strength to the official teaching, restore the unity of the church, and reform the standards of the Roman curia and of church discipline."³⁵

During Session 25 of the Council of Trent, the council developed a decree, "on invocation, veneration and relics of the saints, and on sacred images" as well as a decree on purgatory, a primary reason for a system of indulgences and as such, a major contributor to the issues leading to the Reformation.³⁶ To summarize, the council was rightly concerned with the proper teaching on the employment of images in veneration while also being particularly uneasy with scandal and superstition – much like the Protestant reformers.

First, the council confirmed the suitability of sacred art, but, in order to set a standard and to establish church teaching, it also clarified prayer in terms of the saints. Here the council insisted on the teaching authority of the bishops who were admonished to instruct the faithful by placing sacred art in the context of the church as a community and particularly a communion of saints with a Christocentric feature. The council asked the bishops to teach the faithful about engaging the saints in prayer, saying, "the saints, who reign together with Christ,

³⁵ Norman P. Tanner, S.J., "Introduction to the Council of Trent," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 657.

³⁶ Council of Trent, "Council of Trent," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 774.

offer up their own prayers to God for men; that it is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers, aid, (and) help for obtaining benefits from God, through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is our alone Redeemer and Saviour."³⁷

Next, to counteract any potential misunderstanding and resulting scandal, the council wrote to warn against the possibility of imbuing the saints and images thereof with divine attributes. Instead, the faithful were to look upon saints and their images as a way to honor and praise Christ. The council decreed:

That the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and retained particularly in temples, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them, on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them; or that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent; in such wise that by the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ; and we venerate the saints, whose similitude they bear.³⁸

Third, the council authenticated sacred art as a way to instruct the laity in a number of areas, particularly in giving thanks to God, stating:

As also that great profit is derived from all sacred images, not only because the people are thereby admonished of the benefits and gifts bestowed upon them by Christ, but also because the miracles which God has performed by means of the saints, and their salutary examples, are set before the eyes of the faithful; that so they may give God thanks for those things; may order their own lives and manners in imitation of the saints; and may be excited to adore and love God, and to cultivate piety.³⁹

³⁷ Council of Trent, "On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images," in *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent, Celebrated Under the Sovereign Pontiffs, Paul III, Julius III and Pius IV*, ed. James Waterworth (Chicago: The Christian Symbolic Publication Society, 1848), 234.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 234-235.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

Lastly, the council set out to eliminate superstition, to "abolish filthy lucre," and to ensure sacred art was beautiful but not overly suggestive or perverted.⁴⁰ In short, the entire decree was an answer to Reformation demands to eliminate idolatry while also placing God once again at the center of prayer and worship.

The Council of Trent considered sacred art as one of many issues stemming from the Reformation and after due consideration embraced sacred art and architecture as meaningful and acceptable. This was an answer to many but not all Protestants who felt sacred art distracted the worshipper from Christ while also causing superstitious practices and a general misinterpretation of the Gospel. In addition, historian Hubert Jedin deemed the Council of Trent as historically significant in terms of the wider concern for the need of a better Catholicism: "the new Catholic piety and mysticism, the revival of scholastic theology, the emergence of positive theology, and the art and culture of the baroque age depend upon the Council of Trent."⁴¹ In other words, besides correcting some of the abuses evident in the Church, the council was also a catalyst to an enriched and singular Catholic identity clearly distinguishable from a Protestant reality.

For Elmer Lampe and Philip Soergel, the Counter-Reformation, or Catholic Reformation as they prefer to call it, had a great influence on art because Catholic artists painted as if they were apologists. They explain:

In apparent defiance of the views held by Protestant leaders, Catholic artists frequently chose for their themes the most severely attacked Catholic beliefs and devotional subjects; the Real Presence, the Child

⁴⁰ Ibid., 235-236.

⁴¹ Hubert Jedin, "Trent, Council of," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Thomson Gale), 174.

Jesus, St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin, St. Peter, Purgatory and such contemporary figures as St. Charles Borromeo and Theresa of Avila.⁴²

This apologetic feature of the arts is based on Trent's resolve to use "art in service to religion" as well as its emphasis on "a cultural renewal with religious purpose."⁴³ Thus, the Council of Trent resulted in the reinvigoration of Catholic society and identity through the artistic portrayal of unique Catholic beliefs.

Not only is the Council of Trent ruling on sacred images consistent with the theology of St. John Damascene and the Second Council of Nicaea, but also, more importantly, Trent's decrees on sacred art and architecture became the basis for Catholic identity for over 400 years. The impact of Nicaea and Trent has even continued into the twenty-first century as the Second Vatican Council largely restated the decrees of these councils on sacred art and architecture, adapting them only in terms of its own decree on the church as the People of God.

Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council was formed, in part, to analyze the role of the Church in the world and to ensure the resulting self-understanding of this role was consistent with the mission given it by Jesus Christ. Moreover, Vatican II accomplished many of the reforms called for by Martin Luther, some in a sense related to sacred art and architecture. In terms of the role of sacred art and architecture, however, the Second Vatican Council did not significantly change the decision of previous councils – both the conciliar and post-conciliar

⁴² Elmer Lewis Lampe and Philip Soergel, "Counter Reformation," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 313.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 313.

documents are consistent with Nicaea and Trent in terms of these objects.

However, before summarizing Vatican II decrees on sacred art and architecture, it is important to reflect on the general sense of the council regarding a definition of church as found in *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*).

As noted by Avery Cardinal Dulles, many had a view of the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council as consisting of a hierarchy of the ordained with the laity playing a role perhaps best characterized as an audience. He refers to this view as a model titled "the church as institution" and typifies the model as one of rules, disciplinary offices, and a culture wherein the members adhere to the rules and submit to authority.⁴⁴ While Vatican II could not and did not completely eliminate the institutional aspects of the Church, it did emphasize the importance of all of the members of the Church in terms of executing the mission given it by Jesus Christ. According to Dulles, "Vatican II in its Constitution on the Church made ample use of the models of the Body of Christ and the Sacrament, but its dominate model was rather that of the People of God."⁴⁵ In other words, the Church is much more than structures, rules, and hierarchy and, as a result, conciliar and post-conciliar documents pointed towards church layout and adornment to emphasize and facilitate the view of the faithful as the People of God. And more importantly, the council emphasized the people of God as active participants in the prayer, spiritual, and liturgical life of the Church.

Given this model, the council endeavored to balance the concept of the People of God with appropriate architecture and sacred art. And thus, it insisted

⁴⁴ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 2002), Chapter II.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

parish leaders should: a) not destroy existing sacred art or architecture; b) not remove existing sacred art or architecture without due consideration to the role of such things in a parish; c) remove existing sacred art of questionable doctrine or of a cheap or shoddy nature; and d) should emphasize the People of God as central to the Church in renovation and new construction; i.e., a church should facilitate the active participation of the faithful.⁴⁶

In addition, the council urged artists and architects to accept and embrace the reason for their work – to glorify God while also educating. The council noted, “[artists] are concerned with works destined to be used in Catholic worship, for the edification of the faithful and to foster their piety and religious formation.”⁴⁷ Finally, a number of conciliar and post-conciliar documents addressed sacred art and architecture, with some, but not great detail including *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, *Inter Oecumenici*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Communio et Progressio*, and *Cenam Paschalem*.

Sacrosanctum Concilium is the primary constitution concerning the liturgy. It includes a chapter on sacred art and sacred furnishings (Chapter VII). In particular, articles 122-125 establish the role of sacred art and the way it is to be maintained and used. From a theological point of view, the council begins by speaking of art in terms of God, stating:

The fine arts are rightly classed among the noblest activities of man's genius; this is especially true of religious art and of its highest manifestation, sacred art. Of their nature the arts are directed toward expressing in some way the infinite beauty of God in work made by human hands. Their dedication to the increase of God's praise and of

⁴⁶ Vatican Council II, "Sacrosanctum Concilium (4 December 1963)," in *The Vatican Collection*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975; reprint, 2004).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 127.

his glory is more complete, the more exclusively they are devoted to turning men's minds devoutly toward God.⁴⁸

But in order to ensure against overly radical changes in art or architecture, the council insisted on four related dictates found primarily in articles 123 and 124. First, it mandated the preservation of existing art; in other words, parish leadership could move or remove but not destroy sacred art. Next, the constitution cautioned parish leaders to wisely procure new art so as to avoid disrespect or scandal by mandating: "the art of our own times from every race and country shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided it bring to task the reverence and honor due to the sacred buildings and rites."⁴⁹ Related to this and third, parish leaders must remove and furthermore, must not procure offending art or art lacking artistic merit. And finally, those selecting the art should do so based on "noble beauty rather than sumptuous display."⁵⁰

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the council also spoke about sacred art from the point of view of the laity, primarily in Article 125. Here the council concurs with previous councils on the veneration of images but mandates reason concerning the number of images, "for otherwise the Christian people may find them incongruous and they may foster devotion of doubtful orthodoxy."⁵¹ This is a continuation of teaching and decrees from the Second Council of Nicaea and the Council of Trent necessary to counter charges of sacred art as causing idolatrous worship.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Article 122.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Article 123.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Article 124.

⁵¹ Ibid., Article 125.

The council wrote to artists (and presumably to architects) and Bishops in Article 127 regarding the sacred trust given them. First, the council reminded the Bishops of their responsibility and authority to properly teach artists about the Tradition – as teachers, the Bishops ensure the creation of doctrinally-sound art. The council then encouraged artists by exclaiming, “all artists who, prompted by their talents, desire to serve God's glory in holy Church, should ever remember that they are engaged in a kind of sacred imitation of God the Creator.”⁵²

As will be discussed in Chapter IV, a number of artists and architects judge Article 124 as the reason Church authorities moved completely away from sacred art and towards a modern art and architecture inappropriate for Catholic worship and identity. Because the liturgy changed in terms of the laity from passive observation to active participation, some artists and architects contend those in authority or on various commissions called for the elimination or minimization of sacred art due to its potentially distracting nature while insisting architecture must make participation easier. Article 124, however, does not go to such a depth of argument and actually says: “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.”⁵³ As such, read in light of the other articles, sacred art and architecture must simply facilitate the proper and joyful praise and worship of God as well as assist the faithful in spirituality and prayer.

⁵² Ibid., Article 127.

⁵³ Ibid., Article 124.

Eucharisticum Mysterium and *Inter Oecumenici* do not go into great depth with regard to sacred art and architecture.⁵⁴ Most importantly, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* reminds Church authorities of the centrality of Christ and as such, the requirement for the altar to be central in worship. It requires parish leaders to make the altar central to worship; but if art must be changed because of changes to the altar, the art must not be destroyed but should be wisely moved to a place respectful of God, the beauty of the art, and the community.⁵⁵

Gaudium et Spes establishes the proper relationship between the Church and the world. In this document, the council gives a special place of importance to literature and the arts. In particular, the arts and literature are identified with the nature of humanity:

[Art and literature] seek to give expression to man's nature, his problems and his experience in an effort to discover and perfect man himself and the world in which he lives; they try to discover his place in history and in the universe, to throw light on his suffering and his joy, his needs and his potentialities, and to outline a happier destiny in store for him.⁵⁶

Similarly to other council documents, *Gaudium et Spes* reinforces the permissibility of art in liturgical settings. Most importantly, this document links the employment of sacred art with assisting the faithful in knowledge of God.

⁵⁴ Sacred Congregation of Rites, "Inter Oecumenici (26 September 1964)," in *The Vatican Collection*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975; reprint, 2004), Article 4.

⁵⁵ Sacred Congregation of Rites, "Eucharisticum Mysterium (25 May 1967)," in *The Vatican Collection*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975; reprint, 2004), Article 24.

⁵⁶ Vatican Council II, "Gaudium et Spes (7 December 1965)," in *The Vatican Collection*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975; reprint, 2004), Article 62.

Gaudium et Spes claims:

[New forms of art] may also be brought into the sanctuary whenever they raise the mind up to God with suitable forms of expression is adapted and in conformity with liturgical requirements. Thus the knowledge of God will be made better known; the preaching of the Gospel will be rendered more intelligible to man's mind and will appear more relevant to his situation.⁵⁷

Communio et Progressio discusses the Church's responsibility to advise and form those in the media as well as the Church's proper use of the media in spreading the Gospel. In this document, the council dedicates four articles to the "Forms of Artistic Expression." Here again the document speaks to the nature of humanity by charging artists to reveal the human condition in such a way as to challenge humanity to live a more holy and wholesome life and thus, to grow closer to God: "[the work of the artist] can make spiritual reality immediate by expressing it in a way that the senses can comprehend. And as a result of this expression man comes to know himself better. This is not only a cultural benefit but a moral and religious one as well."⁵⁸ *Communio et Progressio*, therefore, is consistent with other council documents in terms of an overall view of what the Church expects of artists and architects – through their work, artists and architects must properly reveal God to humanity and humanity to itself.

Of all the documents, *Cenam Paschalem* provides the most detail on layout and decoration of a church, particularly in Chapters V and VI. It refers to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* by noting the importance of art in worship, both old and modern art, and establishes teaching on art and artists. *Cenam Paschalem*

⁵⁷ Ibid., Article 62.

⁵⁸ Pontifical Council for the Instruments of Social Communication, "Communio et Progressio (29 January 1971)," in *The Vatican Collection*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975; reprint, 2004), Article 55.

declares: "artists are trained and works of art are selected by the Church so that faith and piety may be fostered by good and appropriate art."⁵⁹ Other key concepts in *Cenam Paschalem* include:

- a. Arrangement. "Though these spatial arrangements should express the structure of the community and the different functions within it, they should also bring everyone together in a way which shows that the Church is one."⁶⁰
- b. Solemnity. "The building and its decor should foster devotion and reflect the sacredness of the ceremonies for which it is the setting."⁶¹
- c. Active Participation. "Much care should be devoted to the places for the people, so that by seeing and understanding the sacred ceremonies they may take their full active part in them."⁶²
- d. Veneration. In Article 278, the council permits veneration of images as long as the images are limited in number, the images are properly placed in relation to Christocentric worship, and no saint has more than one image.⁶³
- e. Modesty and dignity. The council seems to take a balanced approach in terms of modest and dignified decoration noting, "church decor should aim at noble simplicity rather than at ostentatious magnificence."⁶⁴

In short, the Second Vatican Council was a watershed in the life of the Church. It repeated many teachings of the past but more importantly, brought new energy to the centrality of Christ and the role of a sacramental life in the

⁵⁹ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, "Cenam Paschalem (26 March 1970)," in *The Vatican Collection*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975; reprint, 2004), Article 254.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Article 257.

⁶¹ Ibid., Article 257.

⁶² Ibid., Article 273.

⁶³ Ibid., Article 278.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Article 279.

practice of the faithful. And last, the council gave new dignity and respect to sacred art and architecture in worship, spirituality, and prayer by encouraging the reverent and modest use of images and architecture to direct humanity to God.

Conclusion

The role of sacred art has been controversial since the earliest days of Christianity primarily due to its potentially idolatrous nature or its capacity to lead one to idolatry. On the contrary, St. John Damascene established a theology of icons by asserting the validity of sacred art. His theology asserts: a) God became man in the person of Jesus Christ; b) a human is a bodily being whose likeness can be captured in art; and thus c) it is permissible to create a likeness of Jesus Christ. Likewise, one can produce an image of a saint, a symbol or scene to portray a matter of faith, or a symbol of holiness, God, or a theological principle – though the primary quality of the image, symbol, or icon must always point back to God.

Three important councils, the Second Council of Nicaea, the Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council, considered this theology in terms of the place, value, and appropriateness of sacred art and architecture in the life of the church and faithful. They each taught the same basic lessons: a) worship belongs to God alone; b) Catholicism is Christocentric; c) it is acceptable and proper to make images of God because such images assist in worship and devotion; and d) it is also acceptable to make images of the saints as long as these images point towards the one, true God and as such, are merely venerated. Since the Second Vatican Council repeated these lessons and

teachings, they are true and good today. Most importantly, these lessons are binding on the Church and call for balance and simplicity while also acknowledging the beauty and the usefulness of sacred art and architecture in the life of the faithful.

The next chapter provides an analysis of several papal, liturgical, and episcopal documents and is necessary to ensure not only the understanding of Church teaching but also to describe the practical implementation of the teaching. This then sets the stage for an examination in Chapter IV of the role of the imagination in faith and the role of sacred art and architecture as catalysts for an active imagination.

CHAPTER III

CURRENT CHURCH TEACHING

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-5).

This chapter focuses on current church teaching on sacred art and architecture as taught and formulated in papal encyclicals and letters, liturgical documents, and episcopal documents and letters. It is critically important to understand these documents because they take conciliar decrees to a deeper level of thought, explanation, and action. Besides, this deeper level is absolutely necessary for a faithful implementation of council decrees.

Furthermore, this chapter and the next set the stage for Chapter V wherein the application of these documents in terms of sacred art and architecture is portrayed in a photographic survey. The survey shows how various parishes have appropriately incorporated sacred art and architecture into a church community but as importantly how each perceives itself in the Tradition and the communion of saints in terms of history, mission, and culture. It also demonstrates Catholic identity and imagination at work in the day to day worship and devotional life of various parishes. And finally, the survey demonstrates the practical employment of sacred art and architecture in the accurate and authentic transmission of Tradition.

In any event, with a proper understanding and analysis of current church teaching, sacred art and architecture can, indeed, become the basis for the joyful application of these elements to liturgical celebrations, spiritual disciplines, and devotional practices. Each can also be creatively adapted for catechesis, the protection of a Catholic identity and imagination, and a true transmission of the Tradition to each new generation of the Catholic faithful.

Encyclicals and Papal Letters

In the twentieth century, Popes Pius XII and John Paul II addressed artists and architects regarding their roles and responsibilities in creating good and sacred art and architecture. These papal documents primarily replicated the declarations of various councils but with a tone of pastoral care and explanation.

Pope Pius XII wrote two salient encyclicals on sacred art and architecture, *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947) and *Musicae Sacrae* (25 December 1955). The former speaks to sacred liturgy and served as a reminder on Church teaching about protocol and ritual within the liturgy. The latter, though written primarily about music, also provides catechesis for artists and architects.

To a certain extent, *Mediator Dei* uses *Mystici Corporis Christi* as its foundation for Church teaching on the role of the laity in the liturgy.⁶⁵ Translator Gerald Ellard says in his introduction, "active lay participation in the liturgy is a foremost and indispensable font of the true Christian spirit. That principle may be said to have launched what is now known as the liturgical movement."⁶⁶ While *Mediator Dei* condemned a number of errors also condemned in *Mystici Corporis*

⁶⁵ Gerald Ellard, "Introduction," in *Mediator Dei* (New York: The America Press, 1948).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Christi, its primary purpose was "to inculcate all that is good in the liturgical movement, and to cut off what is unsound, whether in the realm of opinions, or in practices, that are lopsided as a result of neglect or rashness."⁶⁷

In fact, in *Mediator Dei*, Pius re-confirmed sacred art and architecture as being consistent with and supporting of the Catholic faith. But as in all things, he called for moderation.⁶⁸ In addition, Pius consented to contemporary sacred art and architecture as long as it was not excessive or extreme saying, "provided that [artists] preserve a correct balance between styles tending neither to extreme realism nor to excessive 'symbolism,' and that the needs of the Christian community are taken into consideration rather than the particular taste or talent of the individual artist."⁶⁹ In a sense, Pius also reiterated the decrees of the Council of Trent in the requirement for art to serve religion. Finally, as would be appropriate for an encyclical on sacred liturgy, Pius associated architecture with worship – a church or chapel must be built to facilitate the proper worship of God. In other words, if architects and artists are to serve the faith they must create buildings and art in light of the faith as practiced. He said, "let them be capable and willing to draw their inspiration from religion to express what is suitable and more in keeping with the requirements of worship."⁷⁰

In a similar vein, Pius wrote *Musicae Sacrae*, on the creation and use of music for liturgy and prayer and as a way to remind musicians of their duty to bring forth the glory of God through the beauty of music – similarly to artists and

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁸ Pope Pius XII, "Mediator Dei (20 November 1947)," in *The Papal Encyclicals: 1939-1958*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, NC: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981), Articles 189-191.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Article 195.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Article 190.

architects, musicians must compose in consonance with Church teaching and theology. In this way, Pius confirms the relationship between music or art and the practice of faith while also pastorally forming the musician or artist.

First, in terms of art, Pius establishes a reason for art, one consistent with the thoughts and teachings of various councils and theologians through the ages. Pius declares, "actually religious art is even more closely bound to God and the promotion of his praise and glory, because its only purpose is to give the faithful the greatest aid in turning their minds piously to God through the works it directs to their senses of sight and hearing."⁷¹ In the spirit of St. John Damascene then, Pius declared the use of sacred art as a way to encourage the faithful in prayer, spirituality, and worship.

Second, in terms of the formation of the artist, Pius proclaims a requirement for the artist to be Catholic and one who practices his or her faith through worship and prayer. In Pius's opinion, artists who do not practice the faith or who are in need of reconciliation with God should not create religious art because the art will not reflect God's glory or be a useful tool for others in terms of prayer and worship. Those artists who are faithful and prayerful, on the other hand, have artistic skills appropriate to the creation of religious art.

⁷¹ Pope Pius XII, "Musicae Sacrae (25 December 1955)," in *The Papal Encyclicals: 1939-1958*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh, NC: McGrath Publishing Company, 1981), Article 27.

Pius remarks:

[The artist] lacks, as it were, that inward eye with which he might see what God's majesty and His worship demand. Nor can he hope that his works, devoid of religion as they are, will ever really breathe the piety and faith that befit God's temple and his holiness, even though they may show him to be an expert artist who is endowed with visible talent.⁷²

But the artist who is firm in his faith and leads a life worthy of a Christian, who is motivated by the love of God and reverently uses the powers the Creator has given him, expresses and manifests the truths he holds and the piety he possesses so skillfully beautifully and pleasantly in colors and lines or sounds and harmonies that this sacred labor of art is an act of worship and religion for him. It also effectively arouses and inspires people to profess the faith and cultivate piety.⁷³

More recently, Pope John Paul II wrote an important letter to artists (and by implication, to architects) and later addressed them during the Jubilee in February 2000. The former traces the history of religious art, asks whether art needs the Church or Church the art, reminds artists of a duty to adhere to faith and doctrine, and prompts Church leaders to assist artists in faith formation and spirituality.⁷⁴ The later can be characterized as a celebration of artistic talent with a message – artists must realize they are inspired by God in creative efforts and for this reason they must act in a holy and humble manner.⁷⁵

Near the beginning of his letter, John Paul notes the utility of symbolic art in early Christianity and in so doing corroborates a theory of art as a way to form an identity. He explains, "art of Christian inspiration began therefore in a minor key, strictly tied to the need for believers to contrive Scripture-based signs to

⁷² Ibid., Article 27.

⁷³ Ibid., Article 28.

⁷⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists* (Vatican City: The Vatican, 1999).

⁷⁵ Pope John Paul II, "Address of John Paul II For the Jubilee Celebration For Artists," (Vatican City: The Vatican, 2000).

express both the mysteries of faith and a 'symbolic code' by which they could distinguish and identify themselves, especially in the difficult times of persecution."⁷⁶ Here John Paul defines art more along the lines of culture and as a way to convey information rather than as inspiration.

But a far more important message in the letter is the bond between the artist and God. On this subject, John Paul points out the similarity between God and artists – they both create beauty – but he also reminds artists about God's reason for giving them great skills and imagination – to share the beauty of God's creation through art. John Paul even calls artistic endeavor a type of vocation, one given to the artist by God.⁷⁷ In short, John Paul asks artists to portray the beauty of God's creation in such a way as to inspire others towards a fruitful and spiritual relationship with God. He speaks pastorally, saying:

In order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art. Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colors, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen. It does so without emptying the message itself of its transcendent value and its aura of mystery.⁷⁸

In his Jubilee address to artists, John Paul invites artists to re-establish a close relationship with the Church by exclaiming, "it is time to return to that fruitful alliance between the Church and artists which deeply marked the path of Christianity in these two millennia."⁷⁹ But this closer relationship, he insists, is contingent upon an artist's conversion of heart, the acceptance of artistic skills as a 'gift from above' imparted through God's grace, and upon the artist's holiness.

⁷⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*, Article 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 12.

⁷⁹ Pope John Paul II, "Address of John Paul II For the Jubilee Celebration For Artists," Article 2.

Most emphatically, John Paul tells artists to abandon the ego – art is not for the sake of art or the artist but for God alone. He asserts, “if the artist can perceive a ray of the supreme beauty among the many manifestations of the beautiful, then art becomes a way to God and spurs the artist to combine his creative talent with his commitment to a life of ever greater conformity to the divine law.”⁸⁰ In fact, being open to God can help the artist “to overcome mediocrity and to start a new life, generously open to the love of God and our brethren.”⁸¹

Obviously, both Pius and John Paul are concerned with the suitability of art and architecture as a means to glorify God and to bring the faithful to a better relationship with him. And, as such, they are consistent with previous councils and theologians. Moreover, they both think of art and architecture as a way to form a Catholic identity – artists are human manifestations of God as ‘craftsman’ though God is, of course, the perfect craftsman. John Paul emphasizes this characteristic of artists saying: “the opening page of the Bible presents God as a kind of exemplar of everyone who produces a work: the human craftsman mirrors the image of God as Creator. The craftsman, by contrast, uses something that already exists, to which he gives form and meaning.”⁸² In a sense then, the artist and architect can suggest a unique identity for a community by crafting an understanding of an immanent God who continues to work in and through his creation.

This possibility of forming a unique identity and relationship with God by means of art and architecture is at work in Catholicism, in other religions, and in

⁸⁰ Ibid., Article 4.

⁸¹ Ibid., Article 4.

⁸² Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*, Article 1.

some philosophies. In fact, Catholic identity is based on God's self-revelation in all of its manifestations, a revelation often depicted in art. But John Paul enjoins artists and architects to have a life of faith saying, "this presumes your ability, dear Christian artists, to live profoundly the reality of your Christian faith, so that it will give birth to culture and offer the world new 'epiphanies' of the divine beauty reflected in creation."⁸³

Liturgical Documents

The United States version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Book of Blessings* establishes requirements, standards, and boundaries for sacred art and architecture. By reflecting on these documents, it is easy to show the acceptability of sacred art and architectural adornment in worship and spirituality. In turn, the acceptability of art as a part of the liturgy and therefore the culture establishes art as a characteristic of Catholic identity.

Consideration of sacred art and architecture can be found in thirteen articles of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These articles define the function of sacred art and architectural adornment, the acceptability of sacred art in worship and spirituality, and the selection and care of art.

First, and perhaps foremost, sacred art reflects the realities found in Scripture. But the sacred art of early Christian symbolism was also a precursor to the written Scripture and a reflection of early Christian Tradition and identity. From the start, therefore, sacred art had the role of documenting belief and doctrine while also laying the foundation for a unique identity distinct from the

⁸³ Pope John Paul II, "Address of John Paul II For the Jubilee Celebration For Artists," Article 2.

predominantly pagan and Jewish culture. The *Catechism* states, "Christian iconography expresses in images the same Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words. Image and word illuminate each other."⁸⁴

Second, sacred art represents God's continuing creation and brings to the attention of the viewer an image, albeit imperfect, of God, his work, and his great desire for humanity. As the *Catechism* points out, "to the extent that it is inspired by truth and love of beings, art bears a certain likeness to God's activity in what he has created."⁸⁵ In a sense then, sacred art is an imperfect human way of seeing through God's eyes.

A third primary purpose for art is simply its ability to bring people to God since seeing and hearing often reinforces a particular teaching or doctrine. The *Catechism* claims, "art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill, to give form to the truth of reality in a language accessible to sight or hearing."⁸⁶ Sacred art helps create this memory of the liturgy to make it useful in everyday life. According to the *Catechism*:

Similarly, the contemplation of sacred icons, united with meditation on the Word of God and the singing of liturgical hymns, enters into the harmony of the signs of celebration so that the mystery celebrated is imprinted in the heart's memory and is then expressed in the new life of the faithful.⁸⁷

In essence, sacred art, like Scripture and the sacraments, assists one in a life of faith by revealing God and by pointing beyond the image back to God, its source.

The 'heart's memory' then brings the Scripture, with God's help, to bear on an

⁸⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), Paragraph 1160.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Paragraph 2501.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Paragraph 2501.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Paragraph 1162.

individual's work in the world. In a like manner, the community's memory is also formed through sacred art and architecture and the 'heart's memory' becomes the community's identity.

But sacred art is only acceptable when it is not idolatrous. God alone deserves worship while images of others are only entitled to veneration. Here the *Catechism* insists, "the Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, 'the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype,' and 'whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it' (St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 18, 45; Council of Nicea II)."⁸⁸

Finally, the *Catechism* charges the Bishops to ensure the proper selection, display, and care of sacred art as well as its associated catechesis. It explains:

For this reason bishops, personally or through delegates, should see to the promotion of sacred art, old and new, in all its forms and, with the same religious care, remove from the liturgy and from places of worship everything which is not in conformity with the truth of faith and the authentic beauty of sacred art.⁸⁹

The *Book of Blessings* is another important source of theology and catechesis about sacred art and architecture. It consists of a number of standard blessings for various purposes and liturgies and in particular, this book provides blessings for architecture and portrayals of Jesus Christ, Mary, and the saints. Needless to say, the blessings are consistent with Church doctrine and the *Catechism*. The most important teaching in the *Book of Blessings* is the distinction between veneration and worship defined especially in light of the one and only aim of worship, God.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Paragraph 2132.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Paragraph 2503.

What's more, the *Book of Blessings* encourages the minister to properly catechize the faithful before (preferably) or during the blessing in order to preclude the possibility of superstition or idolatry and to ensure the faithful understand the difference between veneration and worship. For blessings related to the portrayal of saints, it says:

When the Church blesses a picture or statue and presents it for public veneration by the faithful, it does so for the following reasons: that when we look at the representation of those who have followed Christ faithfully, we will be motivated to seek the city that is to come; that we will learn the way that will enable us most surely to attain complete union with Christ; that, as we struggle along with our earthly cares, we will be mindful of the saints, those friends and coheirs of Christ who are also our own brothers and sisters and our special benefactors; that we will remember how they love us, are near us, intercede ceaselessly for us, and are joined to us in a marvelous communion.⁹⁰

In a sense, the *Book of Blessings* provides a practical catechesis on sacred art and architecture as it simultaneously works to impart a common Catholic heritage and identity through standard rituals. As a result, those who participate in a blessing should come away with a comprehension of sacred art and architecture as ways of worshipping God through veneration of the symbols, saints, and scenes captured in the art or architecture.

The *Catechism* and the *Book of Blessings* describe a proper place and role for sacred art and architecture and so these must then have functionality in the Catholic faith and thus, in Catholic identity. In other words, if church documents and teaching had discouraged sacred art or had downplayed the role of architecture in worship, then it would mean sacred art and architecture had little or no function or place in Catholicism. Instead, the Bishops do accord a role

⁹⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Book of Blessings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), Paragraph 1293.

for sacred art and architecture in the faith and as such, these objects influence while also being influenced by Catholic identity and culture.

Episcopal Letters

The United States Bishops have written two episcopal letters on sacred art and architecture. The first is *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* written in 1978 but never ratified by the Bishops. The web site of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops says:

Environment and Art in Catholic Worship is a 1978 statement of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. The purpose of the document is to provide principles for those involved in preparing liturgical space. The committee statement received the approval of the Administrative Committee in keeping with Conference policy. Because the document was not proposed as a statement of the whole conference of Bishops, the full body of bishops was never asked to consider it. *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* does not have the force of law in and of itself.⁹¹

In fact, the authors explain in the introduction why *Environment* was a guide rather than a mandate and in this explanation use the one and only direct quote from a conciliar or post-conciliar document:

The reason for offering principles to guide rather than blueprints to follow was stated clearly by the Council fathers: "The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her very own; it has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in the course of the centuries, she has brought into being a treasury of art which must be very carefully preserved. The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns the sacred buildings and holy rites with due reverence and

⁹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: Committee on the Liturgy, accessed March 6, 2007); available from <http://www.nccbuscc.org/liturgy/qa/environment/environment.shtml>; Internet.

honor; thereby it is enabled to contribute its own voice to that wonderful chorus of praise."⁹²

Even so, church and parish leaders used *Environment* as a building and renovation standard for over twenty years. As a result, many experts attribute a great decline in the use of art in churches and chapels as well as the industrialized look of many Catholic churches to *Environment*. One such critic, architect Michael Rose, says:

These non-churches [for example, the cathedral of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles] – and thousands like them built since 1960 – are buildings that don't speak of God, don't turn man's mind, heart, and soul to things eternal. They're merely 'skins for liturgical action,' lifeless, banal, and uninspiring, often ugly.⁹³

In a church, the purpose of beauty is to make the truths represented attractive to the senses. And if these beautifully represented truths are Christological, they'll aid our pilgrim in prayer, meditation, contemplation, and in the ultimate form of Christian worship: participating in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.⁹⁴

Some experts also think *Environment* misrepresented the conciliar and post-conciliar documents. If so, this may have caused some church leaders to mistakenly give away or destroy much Catholic art and architecture. Rose believes, "the Second Vatican Council didn't mandate or even suggest reforming Catholic church architecture. In fact, the council ratified the treasury of sacred art and architecture by calling for its proper preservation and

⁹² Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1978), Paragraph 8 (quoting *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Article 123).

⁹³ Michael S. Rose, *Ugly As Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches From Sacred Places To Meeting Spaces And How We Can Change Them Back Again* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001), 171.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

maintenance."⁹⁵ Likewise, theologian Fr. R. Kevin Seasoltz complains:

In the decades after the Second Vatican Council many Roman Catholic churches underwent what might be called a 'purification,' resulting in a return to a somber, rather severe style of architecture with emphasis on the community but little stress on the visual arts. In this neo-Cistercianism a sense of the communion of saints that had characterized East and West since the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries was lost. The emphasis on community is surely admirable, since it is the whole assembly that celebrates the liturgy and not just the ordained ministers. But assemblies these days tend to be quite dull. The sense of community that is experienced is often shallow so that people are not drawn beyond themselves.⁹⁶

In fact, *Environment* does insist on what might be called a minimalist approach. As a result, there appears to be a weak emphasis in *Environment* on sacred art, architecture, and symbolism in terms of liturgy and a complete lack of consideration in terms of devotion or prayer. Indeed, paragraph 79, the first direct reference to iconography and statuary, speaks of art in terms of simplicity, not distracting, and minimal in number and affect – and rightly so as too much of the same symbol causes the symbol to lose its meaning.⁹⁷ The authors go beyond this principle, though, when they encourage parish leaders to reject, "certain embellishments which have in the course of history become hindrances" and they go on to suggest: "this effort has resulted in more austere interiors, with fewer obstacles on the walls and corners."⁹⁸ Finally, they discourage existing, 'old' art and instead, encourage the purchase of 'contemporary art' in order to

⁹⁵ Ibid., 204.

⁹⁶ R. Kevin Seasoltz, O.S.B., "Transcendence and Immanence in Sacred Art and Architecture," *Worship* 75, no. 5 (September 2001): 429.

⁹⁷ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, Paragraphs 86 and 99.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Paragraph 99.

make ritual "our own."⁹⁹ In other words, out with old and in with new – an attitude in direct conflict with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Article 123, quoted above.

Additionally, some of the terminology of *Environment* might be misleading because, per conciliar or post-conciliar documents, the authors focused on the communal aspect of 'church' in an architectural sense as well as in the theological sense. As a result, the reality of symbol and sign as previously found in sacred art and architecture was replaced in *Environment* with a stricter interpretation of architecture as merely a suitable setting for worship. Thus, churches built or renovated after Vatican II were often devoid of symbol and sign. Architect Denis McNamara criticizes this understanding in *Environment* claiming:

Despite the prevailing usage of the terms, a church building is not merely an 'environment,' nor is it a 'worship space.' These are anti-architectural terms. It appears to be much more fitting to think of a church as a building, and more importantly, as architecture. Sacred architecture provides the signs and symbols that let the worshiper know that the space inside is reserved, unlike other space.¹⁰⁰

Another failing of *Environment* is found in paragraphs 64 and 65. Here the authors continue a discussion of 'worship space' by suggesting the use of the space for other than worship or prayer. Indeed, they claim the space is appropriate for non-liturgical events convened by the parish and outside community alike saying, "when multi-functional use of the space is indicated by the needs either of the faith community or of the surrounding city, town or rural area which the faith community serves, a certain flexibility or movability should

⁹⁹ Ibid., Paragraph 33.

¹⁰⁰ Denis McNamara, "Liturgical Architecture as Sacramental Experience," *Chicago Studies* 41, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2002): 278.

be considered even for the essential furnishings."¹⁰¹ As a consequence of this multi-functional view of a church, the interior of some churches lost a sense of sanctity and a sense of awe – these churches were no longer a singularly sacred place of reverence and communion with God.

A final issue is found in paragraph 101 where there appears to be no room for sharing of the interior in terms of sacred art and with regard to other cultures.

The authors seem to think a church will consist of only one culture and insist:

Although the art and decoration of the liturgical space will be that of the local culture, identifying symbols of particular cultures, groups or nations are not appropriate as permanent parts of the liturgical environment. While such symbols might be used for a particular occasion or holiday, they should not regularly constitute a part of the environment of common prayer.¹⁰²

Although probably not intended as a rejection of all those who are different, this paragraph does come across with such a flavor. This is really unacceptable in any age but especially in the twenty-first century. Church communities must embrace all regardless of ability, sex, age, ethnicity, or culture. Rejecting another's art is the same as rejecting the other completely.

Unlike its successor, *Environment* is very short and to the point and it truly is an understatement of the council. As noted earlier, there is but one direct quote from conciliar or post-conciliar documents. Throughout the rest of *Environment*, the authors merely refer to council documents including Chapters 6 and 7 of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, Chapter 6 of the *Instruction of the Congregation of Rites for the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Inter Oecumenici)*, and

¹⁰¹ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, Paragraph 65.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Paragraph 101.

Chapters 5 and 6 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Cenam Paschalem)*. Thus, those who did use *Environment* as a guide but who also failed to truly learn from and understand conciliar or post-conciliar documents probably made inappropriate renovation and design decisions. Worse, *Environment* is, in fact, devoid of a Scriptural or theological grounding – there is no theological discussion and but one quote from Scripture in paragraph 3:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1).

In its defense, another terminology issue has caused some experts to unfairly criticize *Environment* because of a purported error in its interpretation and use of the phrase 'noble simplicity' as opposed to 'noble beauty.' This criticism is unfair because various conciliar and post-conciliar documents lay claim to both the phrase 'noble simplicity' and 'noble beauty' in terms of sacred art and architecture. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Article 124 states, "ordinaries are to take care that in encouraging and favoring truly sacred art, they should seek for noble beauty rather than sumptuous display."¹⁰³ On the other hand, *Cenam Paschalem* says, "church décor should aim at noble simplicity rather than at ostentatious magnificence."¹⁰⁴ Perhaps this is the source of some confusion. Noble beauty seems to modify sacred art while noble simplicity modifies church décor. Either way, the existence of both terms allows one to interpret the meaning as most advantageous to his or her argument.

¹⁰³ Vatican Council II, "Sacrosanctum Concilium (4 December 1963)," Article 124.

¹⁰⁴ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, "Cenam Paschalem (26 March 1970)," Article 279.

In terms of positive points, *Environment* does, like the council, emphasize the idea of community along with full individual participation in liturgical services (as opposed to simply observing). It strives to bring a sense of the sacred to the church by stressing quality and appropriateness in Articles 19 through 25. It also rightly restricts or clarifies the role of sacred art saying: "the art form must never seem to interrupt, replace, or bring the course of liturgy to a halt."¹⁰⁵

In short, *Environment* does have its good points on the role, placement, and quality of sacred art. However, because of its lack of an indepth theology and grounding in Scripture, its weak interpretation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and its call for a minimalist approach to sacred art and architecture, it is easy to comprehend how it could be misunderstood and misapplied. This is particularly true if those wishing to implement *Environment* did not also take the time to read and understand the related Second Vatican Council teaching on sacred art and architecture. But its biggest failing is its implied rejection of those of differing age, sex, ability, culture or ethnicity. This significant failing was reason enough to replace *Environment* with a more holistic and loving approach to sacred art and architecture.

The Bishops did, indeed, replace *Environment* with a document rich in the Tradition, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*. The Bishops began in the introduction with:

Parish members are called upon to study the Church's teaching and liturgical theology and to reflect upon their personal pieties, their individual tastes, and the parish history. By bringing together these

¹⁰⁵ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, Paragraph 25.

personal and ecclesial elements in faith and in charity, parishioners help to build a new structure and to renew their parish community.¹⁰⁶

Notably, this letter has a strong sense of theology, a robust connection to the appropriate articles of the Second Vatican Council, has overcome a minimalist approach to sacred art and architecture, and clearly recognizes the equality and importance of all people. In fact, the letter states, "what can sustain Christian communities in this challenge of hospitality is the realization that a pluralism of symbolic, artistic, and architectural expression enriches the community."¹⁰⁷

The Bishops clearly acknowledge the role of sacred art and architecture in Catholic identity in the very first two paragraphs of *Built of Living Stones*. And like Vatican II, they emphasize a call to build connected communities, the Church's mission to further God's kingdom and proclaim the Good News, a necessity to honor the past as well as to incorporate the new, and the importance of honoring culture, new and old. The letter consists of an introduction and four chapters but only the first three are pertinent: a) Chapter One – theological foundation; b) Chapter Two – liturgical principles; c) Chapter Three – suggestions on art; and d) Chapter Four – practical elements in building and renovation.¹⁰⁸

The Bishops declare Chapter One as foundational to the entire document. This chapter conveys the truth of the church as more than just a building or worship space. Instead, the church is God's community – all of creation is a 'living church' – stretching across all people and all time.¹⁰⁹ In these articles, the

¹⁰⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship* (2000), Paragraph 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Paragraph 43.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Paragraph 11.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Paragraphs 12-15.

Bishops focus on community and sacred liturgy, saying: "together the members worship with the whole company of heaven" and "the sacred liturgy is a window to eternity and a glimpse of what God calls us to be."¹¹⁰

Indeed, people need physical structures to help them understand and create community as well as to focus upon the mission of Jesus Christ. But the church building is more than just a physical structure – it is symbolic of God's community and serves great needs such as "a gathering place for the assembly, a resting place, a place of encounter with God, as well as a point of departure on the Church's unfinished journey toward the reign of God."¹¹¹

Furthermore, as the Bishops explain, the very act of designing, building, or creating sacred art and architecture is a way of worshipping and such acts, "inspire and reflect the prayer of the community as well as the inner life of grace."¹¹² From this, one can define community as being built up through art and architecture – the community gains a sense of connectedness, a sense of purpose, and a way to praise through these objects.

In fact, the Bishops proclaim symbol and signs as ways to see God's revelation and particularly the culmination of the revelation in Jesus Christ. As such, the signs and symbols become critically important tools. The Bishops clarify this saying:

Effective liturgical signs have a teaching function and encourage full, conscious, and active participation, express and strengthen faith, and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Paragraph 15.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Paragraph 17.

¹¹² Ibid., Paragraph 18 as footnoted (footnote 18 conferring to Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Artists* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*).

lead people to God. Poorly utilized or minimal signs do not enliven the community's faith and can even diminish active participation.¹¹³

Chapter One also identifies the "liturgical principles for building or renovating churches" in consonance with Vatican II.¹¹⁴ These principles include adherence to church laws and liturgical rites, the need to beautify with dignity especially with regard to reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, building with participation and ministerial roles in mind, and respect for cultures, old and new. The Bishops declare, "*the church building should be beautiful*" and "liturgical art and architecture reflect and announce the presence of the God who calls the community to worship and invite believers to raise their minds and hearts to the One who is the source of all beauty and truth."¹¹⁵

Finally, Chapter One calls for cultural and historical respect for sacred art and architecture as these objects enable worship and praise throughout the ages and in many forms. The Bishops explain:

The Church's great treasury of art and architecture helps it to transcend the limitations of any one culture, region, or period of time. Great religious art fosters the life of prayer of contemporary assemblies who, while rooted in prior artistic traditions, hear God's unceasing call to proclaim the reign of Christ in the languages of a particular time and place.¹¹⁶

Chapter Two is concerned with liturgical principles and emphasizes the sacraments, worship in general, and the placement and symbolism of various parts of a church to ensure a proper understanding in terms of ecclesiology and

¹¹³ Ibid., Paragraph 26 as footnoted (footnote 34 conferring to the Bishops' *Music in Catholic Worship*).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Paragraphs 27-45.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Paragraph 44.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Paragraph 45 as footnoted (footnote 61 conferring to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*).

Christology.¹¹⁷ The first part of the chapter focuses on the Eucharist as the primary liturgical rite. Here, for example, the paragraph describes the design, shape, and placement of the altar, ambo, and presider's chair. Chapter Two also expresses considerations about the design and placement of elements directly related to a congregation including the gathering area (narthex) and celebration area (nave and chancel) especially in terms of effective and efficient participation. Likewise, the Bishops suggest a need for a logical placement of ministries such as the choir in order to facilitate a proper and joyful celebration of God. Finally, these same matters are reconsidered in terms of various liturgies including the other sacraments, funerals, the Liturgy of the Hours, and special rites of the liturgical year such as Advent, Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion on popular devotions and sacred images. Here the Bishops call for a community's procurement of art at the outset of a new church design or renovation because together, sacred art and architecture create "a source of devotion and prayer for a parish community."¹¹⁸ In short, building designs and art must be procured by those who are always mindful of God as well as knowledgeable concerning how people will employ the space as they pray and worship.

Chapter Three specifically addresses art and artists. The Bishops restate Vatican II decrees by claiming, "artworks are worthy of the place of worship and when they enhance the liturgical, devotional, and contemplative prayer they are

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Paragraphs 46-139.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Paragraph 135.

inspired to serve.”¹¹⁹ They declare the criteria for the selection of art to be quality and appropriateness.¹²⁰ “*Quality* is perceived only by contemplation ... [and] is evident in the honesty and genuineness of the materials that are used, the nobility of the form embodied in them, the love and care that goes into the creation of a work of art.”¹²¹ The Bishops also say, “*appropriateness* is demonstrated by the work's ability to bear the weight of mystery, awe, reverence, and wonder that the liturgical action expresses and by the way it serves and does not interrupt the ritual actions.”¹²² Finally, the Bishops distinguish between devotional and liturgical art in Article 155. Liturgical art is related to the sacramental life of the Church while devotional art is used for prayer and spirituality, particularly in contemplation. The Bishops declared the need for both types as long as the art is appropriate and of sufficient quality.

Also in this chapter, the Bishops expect the artist to create art consistent with and in support of Church doctrine and liturgy saying artists “should be knowledgeable about the traditional iconography and symbolism of Christian art.”¹²³ But the Bishops do more than simply counsel artists. They, like Pope John Paul II, celebrate the artist while acknowledging their efforts as being both joyful and demanding because “they are engaged in a kind of sacred imitation of God the Creator.”¹²⁴ Lastly, the Bishops describe the relationship between the Church and artists as one where each needs the other – the Church needs

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Paragraph 143.

¹²⁰ Ibid., paragraph 146.

¹²¹ Ibid., Paragraph 146.

¹²² Ibid., Paragraph 148.

¹²³ Ibid., Paragraph 152.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Paragraph 153.

artists to bring the message to the world while artists need the Church, as all do, to foster prayerful relationships with God, God's creatures, and God's creation.¹²⁵

The Bishops end *Built of Living Stones* with a rather lofty conclusion by defining art and architecture as mediators between the believing community and God as well as between the community and outsiders. Furthermore, they elevate sacred art and architecture from mere efforts, creative endeavors, or concrete structures and instead identify them as tools of revelation and as monuments to the communion of saints and salvation history. In short, the Bishops insist on sacred art and architecture as crucial elements of Catholic identity and history.¹²⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed papal documents, liturgical documents, and episcopal letters in their treatment of sacred art and architecture. The insight gained from these documents adds to the underlying theology and church teaching defined in Chapter II. In fact, Chapter II and III together are the foundation necessary for the practical approach to and implementation of sacred art and architecture as a way to engage the imagination in worship and prayer as described in the next three chapters.

Two popes, Pius XII and John Paul II, both called for sacred art and architecture as a way to show the goodness, beauty, and truth of God. Each admitted the need for moderation and the need for art to serve the church. However, each also saw sacred art and architecture as tools for the praise, honor, and worship of God. Importantly, both admonished artists (and by

¹²⁵ Ibid., Paragraph 154.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Paragraph 258.

inference, architects) to know and practice their faith and to have a deep spiritual relationship with God – for without the grace resulting from worship and prayer, the artist will not create authentic sacred art or architecture and will not, therefore, bring forth God's beauty, goodness, and truth.

An analysis of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Book of Blessings* resulted in knowledge about basic church teaching and theology concerning sacred art and architecture. This knowledge, if properly taught, ensures the proper use of sacred art and architecture in community worship and private prayer. Moreover, the *Book of Blessings* is, in effect, an example of a practical implementation of the *Catechism* as it gives a catechetical treatment to sacred art and architecture as a part of a blessing.

The chapter concluded with a consideration of two episcopal letters, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* and *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship*. The latter replaced *Environment* and is a truer reflection of the Second Vatican Council conciliar and post-conciliar documents particularly since it has a robust theological and Scriptural basis as well as a more direct treatment of conciliar and post-conciliar documents. Finally, *Built of Living Stones* is also more respectful of a need for sacred art and architecture as opposed to a minimalist approach in *Environment*. In any event, a primary consideration and teaching of the Bishops in *Built of Living Stones* is the need for balance and catechesis in all matters related to the role and use of sacred art and architecture.

As noted earlier, the leaders and ministers of the church must inform the faithful in terms of the four characteristics of faith: known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer. Sacred art (and architecture) can facilitate one's spiritual improvement in terms of these characteristics because the total worship and prayer experience through all of the senses is most critical – one hears the word, sees the consecration, embraces his or her neighbor, and tastes the body and blood of Christ. But all of this, including the consecration, is incomplete unless the Incarnation, Jesus' message in teaching, parable, and miracle, his suffering and death, and finally, his resurrection and sending of the Spirit all in service to the Father, are also depicted in some form, whether in word or art. Moreover, art can denote points of doctrine, Scripture, various symbols from Tradition or Scripture, e.g., wheat – Jesus as the bread of life, the lives of the saints, and social justice issues. These representations help new and even life-long Catholics to better know and appreciate the faith. In other words, sacred art and architecture add to one's knowledge of the faith.

Furthermore, in the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* the Bishops call for ceaseless prayer as a critical part of a spiritual life though such prayer does not replace communal liturgical practice – it complements it. In this context, sacred art is a tool for worship, prayer, and contemplation especially as a way to focus or perhaps to suggest a particular thought in the course of day to day prayer and secular life. According to the Bishops:

Popular devotional practices play a crucial role in helping to foster this ceaseless prayer. The faithful have always used a variety of practices as a means of permeating everyday life with prayer to God. Properly

used, popular devotional practices do not replace the liturgical life of the Church; rather, they extend it into daily life.¹²⁷

Clearly then, sacred art and architecture are important in the life of the church and the life of the faithful. The next chapter focuses primarily on the theology of sacred art and architecture. It starts with a consideration of language and analogy in terms of 'knowing.' This analysis is important to understanding how sacred art and architecture stimulate the imagination to know, honor, and praise God. It next describes the thoughts of Abbot Suger and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who disagreed on the role of sacred art and architecture in a life of faith. At last, the chapter takes up the thoughts of sociologists, theologians, artists, and architects formulated since Vatican II. All in all, the imagination is critical to Catholic identity and sacred art and architecture can, in turn, contribute to a healthy imagination.

¹²⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 300.

CHAPTER IV

THOUGHTS ABOUT SACRED ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16).

Ultimately, theologians, artists, and architects of the past and present have given credence to the value of sacred art and architecture as ways to know, understand, honor, and respect God. As such, before turning to specific theological principles about sacred art and architecture, one must first understand theological thought on the role of imagination, language, and the ability to know in terms of a relationship to God.

Learning, Knowing, and the Imagination

Needless to say, God is a mystery to all – St. Thomas Aquinas says one “cannot know God in himself” nor can one develop a complete and perfect compilation of knowledge about God using the arts or sciences.¹²⁸ Actually, Thomas defines ‘to know’ as being a result of the ability to reason beyond mere examination saying, “knowing is an activity of reason, which abstracts from things and then makes connections between them, needing to know each part and

¹²⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1989), 29 (I, q. 12, a. 11).

property and power of things if it is to know them perfectly."¹²⁹ Knowing, therefore, consists of a synergistic system of understanding and judgment.¹³⁰

But according to Thomas, humans can know only some things about God as reasoned from the affects of God's creative acts and most importantly, from his self-revelation.¹³¹ Thomas says:

So although in this life revelation cannot show us what God is in himself, but joins us to him as unknown, nevertheless it helps us know him better, showing us more and greater works of his, and teachings things like his being three persons, which natural reason could never have known.¹³²

In fact, Thomas famously developed five ways to establish the existence of God though these ways do not, as philosopher Fr. Brian Davies clarifies, explain what or who God is.¹³³

As such, one way to know God is to make reasoned understandings about his self-revelation. In this regard, humans can do so by learning the things contained in the Tradition. And for Thomas, learning starts with the senses – one must be able to hear or see in order to learn new concepts and as a result, gain knowledge.¹³⁴ Likewise, he established language as vital to the human ability to learn because language allows one who knows a truth to convey it to another. Thomas asserts, "what we learn from other people we don't derive immediately from the ideas in their heads, but indirectly by way of the words in which they express those ideas."¹³⁵ Still, for Thomas no language can perfectly capture the

¹²⁹ Ibid., 206 (I-II, q. 27, a. 2)

¹³⁰ Ibid., 329 (II-II q. 1, a. 5) and 335 (II-II, q. 4, a. 1).

¹³¹ Ibid., 29 (I, q. 12, a. 11-12).

¹³² Ibid., 29, (I, q. 12, a. 13).

¹³³ Brian Davies, *Aquinas* (London: Continuum Books, 2003), 47.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 167.

¹³⁵ Aquinas, 492 (III, q. 12, a. 3)

nature of God and thus one must exercise the imagination to acquire analogical ways of thinking about and describing God. Davies makes this clear saying, "though Aquinas accepts that we can speak positively and truly of God ... he also thinks that the words we thereby use fail to measure up to the reality they are trying to latch on to."¹³⁶ And yet, Thomas understands God as one who gives humans the grace necessary to know him, even if imperfectly, saying, "by God's grace we can know him better than by natural reason alone."¹³⁷

In spite of this, humans cannot easily deal with the divine and instead they tend to compare the divine to human experiences, images, or symbols. Thomas considered this comparative process logical because he thought each part of creation has some resemblance to God, although imperfect. He claims, "all creatures resemble and represent God, for all creaturely perfections pre-exist in God in one all-embracing perfection."¹³⁸ To gain a modicum of knowledge about God requires the adoption of symbols and images. In light of this, Thomas says, "the mind needs leading to unity with God by way of the world we sense, and in the service of God this means using bodily things as symbols and signs, to arouse our mind to the spiritual acts that unite it to God."¹³⁹

One can make four conclusions from St. Thomas's thoughts. First, God cannot be known in and of himself – he remains a mystery even if humans can know some things about him through observation of creation, reason, and his self-revelation. Second, humans learn through language, symbol, sign, and

¹³⁶ Davies, *Aquinas*, 76.

¹³⁷ Aquinas, 29 (I, q. 12, a. 11).

¹³⁸ Ibid., 31 (I, q. 13, a. 2).

¹³⁹ Ibid., 401 (II-II, q. 81, a. 7).

therefore, through analogy (although the ability to reason is also crucial to learning through an analogical process): As such, and third, because God can only be known indirectly, humans attempt to overcome his unknow-ability by using analogies of God in comparison to previous experiences and propositional knowledge of God. Fourth, all 'ways' of analogy are valid as is the imagination in coming to "unity with God;" thus, the written or oral word, art, and architecture are all valid tools in coming to know God as well as in transmitting the Tradition.

This chapter continues with an analysis of a twelfth century disagreement between St. Bernard of Clairvaux and his contemporary, Abbot Suger, over the acceptability of sacred art and appropriate degree of architectural adornment in church architecture. While most would prefer a middle way between Suger and Bernard, most would agree with Suger on the role of sacred art and architecture in the expression of faith and devotion by individuals and communities. Most, however, would also be of the same mind with Bernard on the need for balance in all things – in other words, too much of a good thing can distract and even lead people away from a righteous relationship with God. Finally, theologians, artists, and architects since the Second Vatican Council have clearly established a place for sacred art and architecture in the contemporary church (assuming moderation and catechesis) while many even point to the loss of art and architecture as leading to an impoverished church. Miles even says, "religion without artistic images is qualitatively impoverished."¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Miles, *Images as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, 151.

Abbot Suger and St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Abbot Suger (d. 1151) and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) had the same overwhelming desire: to praise and honor God through prayer and worship. Each, however, had a very different idea on the function of sacred art and architecture in worship, spirituality, and prayer. In fact, they held nearly opposite views on the subject. Suger valued sacred art and architecture because he thought they enhanced the liturgy and helped the worshipper in prayer.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, Bernard professed a much more limited role for sacred art and architecture as he was convinced these objects distracted the worshipper from his or her true focus, Jesus Christ.

Abbot Suger joined the monastery of St. Denis at a young age. As a young monk and after a thorough education in the faith, arts, and sciences, Suger's abbot appointed him to lead, in succession, several monasteries subordinate to the abbey. He pulled these monasteries from the brink of economic ruin and rehabilitated them into self-sustaining and even wealthy ventures. Because of his success, he was named abbot of St. Denis upon the death of Abbot Adam in 1122. As abbot, Suger continued his plan of reform by embarking on an extensive program to make the abbey profitable. But his most lasting endeavor was to transform the abbey church into a monumental work of art for the praise and glorification of God.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Conrad Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 33.

¹⁴² Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Suger of St. Denis," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons).

Suger wrote extensively about this work to maintain, enlarge, enhance, and consecrate the abbey of St. Denis in *De Administratione* and *De Consecratione*.¹⁴³ In his writings, he placed the role of sacred art and architecture squarely in the realm of spirituality, praise, worship, and prayer. He saw no reason to reject the beautification of worship space or veneration of images and relics because he saw beautiful objects as reflections of humanity's love for and thanks to God.¹⁴⁴ Suger says, "we turned our hand to the memorable construction of buildings, so that by this thanks might be given to Almighty God by us as well as by our successors."¹⁴⁵

Besides thanks and praise, Suger wanted to provide tools for meditation and contemplation for both the monks and the laity. To this end, he felt the abbey and its adornment were perfect for those who would come to worship or to its monastic life. As a result, he enlarged St. Denis to absorb large crowds, to eliminate the distractions large crowds create, and to allow visitors to view and venerate the relics.¹⁴⁶

In *De Administratione*, Suger described the way he applied sacred art and architecture to his own prayer life. He wrote:

When – out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God – the loveliness of the many-colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*, 31-33.

¹⁴⁵ Abbot Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, trans. Erwin Panofsky, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), Article XXIV.

¹⁴⁶ Erwin Panofsky, "Introduction to Abbot Suger *On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*," (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 13-14.

¹⁴⁷ Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, Article XXXIII.

Per medieval art historian Conrad Rudolph's analysis, this quote is based on Psalm 25 (26):8 – "O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides." This psalm is crucial to Suger's logic because it allows him to craft an argument using Scripture. In fact Rudolph thinks, "[the psalm] is central to perhaps the most important passage of all of his writings – his theory of the justification of art as a spiritual aid."¹⁴⁸ Suger extends his Scripture-based argument to explain how meditation on material objects works for him – he briefly rises above life on earth to a place favorable to a spiritual union with God.¹⁴⁹

Suger also thought of art as a way to praise and Rudolph remarks, "his writings are filled with commonplace references to art for the honor of God and the saints."¹⁵⁰ In fact, Rudolph views Suger's theology and arguments on art and architecture as being very close to the theology of St. John Damascene notably in the sense of the praise accorded to God through the veneration of an image of a saint wherein Suger explains, "the honor shown to God and the saints through the ornamentation of the holy place or through the provision of images passes on to whoever is honored with the ornamentation and images – with all honor ultimately passing on to God."¹⁵¹ Therefore, besides the role of sacred art and architecture as devotional tools, Suger also considered them as ways to praise, honor, and most importantly, point to God.

¹⁴⁸ Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*, 33.

¹⁴⁹ Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*.

¹⁵⁰ Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*, 31.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

In his writings, it is clear Suger understood the objections of Bernard and answered them, particularly those objections wherein Bernard seemed to think of spirituality without art as superior to one embodied in art.¹⁵² Suger parries with:

The detractors also object that a saintly mind, a pure heart, a faithful intention ought to suffice for this sacred function; and we, too, explicitly and especially affirm that it is these that principally matter. [But] we profess that we must do homage also through the outward ornaments of sacred vessels, and to nothing in the world in an equal degree as to the service of the Holy Sacrifice, with all inner purity and with all outward splendor.¹⁵³

In short, Suger believed he created honor and praise for God by emphasizing the beauty of nature and the beautiful results of human ability. Thus, nature, art, and architecture were, for Suger, ways to help monks and laity overcome difficulty in prayer especially since no one can continuously or perfectly pray or worship. Finally and as importantly, sacred art and architecture act as reminders of and pointers to God.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux grew up in a noble family and was educated in a church school. He entered into a monastic life, following the Cistercian rule, when he was a young adult. Historian Piero Zerbi says, "he so distinguished himself in following the rule of the Cistercians, the strictest rule of the time, that after only three years he was chosen as abbot for a new foundation."¹⁵⁴ At this foundation established at Clairvaux, Bernard spent considerable effort in reinvigorating a strict observance of St. Benedict's Rule. And he was not only

¹⁵² Ibid., 31.

¹⁵³ Suger, *On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, Article XXXIII.

¹⁵⁴ Piero Zerbi, "Bernard of Clairvaux, St.," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 307-308.

concerned with his own abbacy in terms of the rule but he also railed against those who had, in his mind, become lax with regard to the observance.¹⁵⁵

Because of his concern about rule observance, Bernard wrote *Apologia ad Willelmum Abbatem Sancti Theodorici* to condemn errors in the practices of monks at many abbeys. These errors included relatively minor (but nevertheless unacceptable) violations of the rule in terms of good order and discipline – such things as excessive food, drink, and dress.¹⁵⁶ Bernard was, however, much more concerned with what he felt were significant departures from a humble and simple monastic life chiefly in the area of sacred art and architecture and especially when considered in terms of the business of art – greed, scandal, and the poor.¹⁵⁷ Rudolph clarifies this point saying:

[Art] was not simply something which was made to decorate or to instruct – or even to overawe and dominate. It was something which could by its force of attraction not only form the basis for the economy of a particular way of life, it could also come to change that way of life in ways counter to the original intent.¹⁵⁸

Also according to Rudolph, Bernard based his views on the need for separation of the monastic life from the secular world. Whereas Suger envisioned the abbey church of St. Denis for both monks and the laity, Bernard desired a more solitary environment for monks – isolated and free of distractions.¹⁵⁹ Also, Bernard does not criticize church teaching in terms of the laity on the veneration of art or the ability of art to educate, but instead he rejects

¹⁵⁵ Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 51.

art and architectural adornment as something necessary for a monk's spirituality.¹⁶⁰ As Rudolph points out, these and other arguments are found in paragraphs 28 and 29 of the *Apologia*. In short, Bernard argues: a) against art as a distraction; b) for the separation of monastic from secular life; c) against the potential for scandal of the starving poor; and d) against vanity.¹⁶¹

Most importantly, as Rudolph points out, Bernard does not seem to be as troubled with the piety and devotions of the laity as he is more disquieted by the potential blurring of the lines between a monastic life (one more perfect) and the secular life. He sees the need for sacred art for the laity who are not as perfectly formed as monks and so not as capable in terms of prayer and contemplation.¹⁶² According to Bernard:

We know that since [the bishops] are responsible for both the wise and foolish, they stimulate the devotion of a carnal people with material ornaments because they cannot do so with spiritual ones. But we who have withdrawn from the people, we who have left behind all that is precious and beautiful in this world for the sake of Christ, we who regard as dung all things shining in beauty, soothing in sound, agreeable in fragrance, sweet in taste, pleasant in touch – in short, all material pleasures – in order that we may win Christ, whose devotion, I ask, do we strive to excite in all this?¹⁶³

Bernard's concern against art and adornment was twofold: first, because of the astonishing beauty as well as the overwhelming quantity of art and adornment in some abbeys, monks were distracted from the business of prayer

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁶¹ Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, "Apology to William of St. Thierry," in *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), Articles 28 and 29.

¹⁶² Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*, 50-51.

¹⁶³ Bernard of Clairvaux, "Apology to William of St. Thierry," Article 28.

and contemplation. And, secondly, sacred art and architectural adornment could result in idolatry and other scandal.¹⁶⁴

Bernard also points out the potential for scandal as found in the program of donations and acquisition at St. Denis especially considering the existence of a real need to feed and clothe the poor.¹⁶⁵ The poor could not concentrate on prayer because of hunger and homelessness and so sacred art was lost on them.¹⁶⁶ But the money necessary to procure sacred art certainly could help them overcome their distress and over time lead to a better spirituality.¹⁶⁷

Finally, Bernard is distressed at vanity, a sin in and of itself but one also related to neglect of the poor and destitute. This issue compelled him to lament, "O vanity of vanities, but no more vain than insane! The Church is radiant in its walls and destitute in its poor. It dresses its stones in gold and it abandons its children naked. It serves the eyes of the rich at the expense of the poor."¹⁶⁸

Ultimately, Bernard's opinion of the role of art in worship and prayer was shaped by his strict observance of the Cistercian rule – prayer, contemplation, and worship were to focus on God and not sacred art or architectural adornment. As such, any focus other than one strictly set on God was wrong and was even an impediment to a holy and righteous relationship with God.¹⁶⁹

To summarize, Abbot Suger and St. Bernard had different opinions on the appropriate place of sacred art and architectural adornment in prayer and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Article 28.

¹⁶⁵ Rudolph, *The Things of Greater Importance: Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art*, 86.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 86. Bernard of Clairvaux, "Apology to William of St. Thierry," Article 28.

¹⁶⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, "Apology to William of St. Thierry," Article 28.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Article 28.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Articles 28-29.

worship. Suger considered any and all things of beauty as tools to display the awesome power of God while also honoring God's gifts of nature and human creativity. He saw art as a spiritual aid and as a way of praising God through the veneration of images and relics. St. Bernard on the other hand, saw art as a potential hindrance to a proper relationship between the individual and God. Instead of concentrating on God through prayer, the individual contemplates the art and the artist. Bernard was also opposed to the accumulation of riches and the extravagant show of art and architecture. For Bernard, a vow of poverty was a basic and non-negotiable trait of the monastic rule; he also felt abbey wealth could be better used to assist the poor. Finally, both thought themselves to have the right attitude towards prayer and the function of sacred art and architecture in prayer and worship. Neither, however, backed away from their position and as a result, neither position came to dominate monasticism.

Post Vatican II

From the beginning of Christianity, sacred art has adorned small grottoes, catacombs, great Catholic cathedrals, and humble chapels – in fact, nearly all worship spaces and holy places. The way the faithful employ art in worship and prayer, however, has changed somewhat in modern times. Historically, the primary purpose was to glorify God but at the same time the art was also meant to convey Scripture, beliefs, doctrines, and practices to a largely illiterate church. After the printing press was invented and many learned to read, art took on the role of honor and praise. Yet, the faithful also drew on sacred art as a focal point

for prayer and spirituality, especially given the priestly focus of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass.

As a result of the Second Vatican Council, the Church redefined itself as the People of God and changed its focus from a priestly-centered liturgy to one of community praise and worship. As such, many in the hierarchy relegated sacred art to a position of simple adornment and even discouraged the inclusion of sacred art and architectural adornment in many places. Since then, a number of theologians, artists, and architects have lamented this outcome of Vatican II and have called for a reinvigoration of sacred art and architecture in Catholic private and community life.

Sociologist Fr. Andrew Greeley is one who has called for a new energy in the sacred arts and as a result he has written extensively on Catholicism in terms of its culture, ritual, devotions, and practices and especially with regard to a Catholic imagination. His view of Catholicism is one wherein an individual's ability to contemplate and relate to the divine is first found in the imagination. In fact, for Greeley, the imagination is the primary 'place' or process wherein the individual encounters God. As a result, imagination becomes critical to Greeley's definition of religion.¹⁷⁰

Most think religion is: "a personal or institutionalized system grounded in belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe."¹⁷¹ And while Greeley does not disagree with this definition, he clarifies it by staking religion in the imagination. He claims religion,

¹⁷⁰ Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 175.

¹⁷¹ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1976), s.v. "religion."

"is imaginative before it is propositional. It begins in (1) experiences which renew hope, is encoded in (2) images or symbols which become templates for action, is shared with others through (3) stories which are told in (4) communities and celebrated in (5) rituals."¹⁷² It would seem Greeley is placing religion centrally and wholly in the heart of both the individual and community through symbols, stories, rituals and sacraments.

Moreover, Greeley's definition agrees with Aquinas who claims, "religion consists in performing services and rites in honor of a superior nature called divine."¹⁷³ As such, individuals and communities ruminate intellectually and imaginatively to find the proper way to apply symbols, stories, and rituals in religion. In fact Greeley thinks, "the experience and the story come first, both in the religious tradition and in our own lives. We cannot speak about Theos unless we first encounter Her/Him in experiences that impinge on our imagination."¹⁷⁴ In other words, to achieve Thomas's "unity with God," humans bring the imagination into play as they ponder known propositional facts of religion, God's creation, and 'probable facts' about God found through his self-revelation; the results of this reflection is, in turn, captured in and passed on to others through communal stories and rituals.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Andrew M. Greeley, "Theology and Sociology: On Validating David Tracy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 643.

¹⁷³ Aquinas, 400 (II, II q 81, a 1).

¹⁷⁴ Andrew M. Greeley, *God in Popular Culture* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1988), 90.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

But interestingly and importantly, Greeley understands this process of imagination as occurring not only in and through organized worship but also in and through secular life. He clarifies the process as:

The self-communication of God (experiences of hope, renewal, sacraments of grace, the dance of the Spirit, whatever name one wants to use) occurs not only (and not primarily) in interludes of worship but also (and especially) in the grace-full persons, events, and objects of daily, secular life.¹⁷⁶

He also views the secular as a way to appreciate a religious Tradition while obversely, an experience of God acts to facilitate a more holy and wholesome secular life.¹⁷⁷ In short, imagination is vital to an individual and community grasp of a largely unknowable God through the practice of 'religion.' Religion in turn mediates the synergistic relationship of a holy life (i.e., a life of a religious nature) with the secular world.

Finally, if imagination is as important as Greeley theorizes, then in order to protect the imagination from extinction, it must be regularly engaged at both the individual and community levels. Otherwise, important understanding from and artifacts of the imagination are at risk of loss. For Catholics, much of the imagination is captured and regularly reenacted through the sacraments and devotional rites.¹⁷⁸ But Catholicism goes beyond sacrament and ritual. In fact, Greeley proposes a theory wherein, "grace lurks everywhere" for Catholics and, therefore, Catholics look for it everywhere. Greeley goes on to say, "[Catholicism] is the most sacramental of [world religions], the one most likely to see the transcendent lurking in the objects, events, and people of creation. It is

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁷⁸ Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 137.

the least likely to be afraid of contaminating God by using creation as a metaphor with which to describe Him."¹⁷⁹ If this is true, then one can imagine God in the obvious and the obscure, in ritual, in day to day life, and in God's acts of immanence through the sacraments, sacred art, and architecture.

Theologian Fr. David Tracy also embraces a model similar to "grace lurking everywhere" and views the Catholic imagination as a critical component of his theology of analogy. In fact, for Tracy, "the analogical or Catholic imagination emphasizes the presence of God in the world and the world and its creatures and relationships and social structures. The analogical imagination stresses the metaphorical dimension of creation as a sacrament of God."¹⁸⁰ Tracy's designated role for the analogical imagination is broader, however, than one wherein the individual uses the imagination to understand through comparison; instead, it is one of meeting and conversing with God and others in the community. Yet, Tracy sees the comparative role of the imagination as a first step in learning to practice the imagination in a wiser manner.

In fact, for Tracy and similarly to Aquinas, as individuals consider or learn about various truths, religious and otherwise, they are shaped in some way even if they reject or disagree with the truth. This is also true as people come to know others through personal interaction. Moreover, to affect an understanding, humans compare analogically new with existing knowledge or experience. Tracy simplifies this as, "we understand one other through analogies to our own experience and we understand ourselves through our real internal relations to

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁸⁰ Greeley, "Theology and Sociology: On Validating David Tracy:" 644.

and analogous understandings of the other."¹⁸¹ But Tracy does not stop at the theory of imagination as a way to learn or to relate to others.

As intimated above, Tracy thinks of the imagination as an attribute of conversation. This is notable because, in a sense, the imagination replaces the ego for Tracy. In other words, participants in a conversation abandon their egos and instead allow the imagination to force them to focus on the subject matter at hand; the ego cannot, therefore, obstruct an open, honest, and complete conversation. Tracy claims:

As we have seen, conversation occurs only where the conversation partners allow the subject matter to take over. Conversation occurs only when we free ourselves for the common subject matter and free ourselves from the prisons of our vaunted individualism (expressed in either the timidity of self-consciousness or the indecent desires for self-aggrandizement).¹⁸²

Tracy has developed this theory to smooth the theological conversation among theologians of a particular tradition as well as between theologians of differing traditions or, as he says, to leverage the potential learning and knowledge exposed by religious pluralism.¹⁸³ But since Tracy thinks an individual can come to know another more fully by expanding the exercise of the imagination and because he believes God is immanent in all of creation, perhaps his theory also applies in another way. As was already shown, many before Tracy have established the imagination as vitally important in the theory of learning to the point of it being absolutely necessary if one is to learn. But Tracy's theory changes somewhat the focus from learning to conversing.

¹⁸¹ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 452.

¹⁸² Ibid., 452.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Perhaps by using a Catholic imagination an individual can converse more fully and openly with others and with God; consequently, he or she can come to a better appreciation of these relationships and finally, to treat the other(s) in a just and righteous manner.

It is, of course, difficult to have a conversation with an invisible, mysterious, all powerful and yet all loving and forgiving entity. And thus, the imagination and objects to stimulate the imagination are important as foundational elements to the conversation. Sacred art and architecture can help focus the conversation particularly since God is immanent even in art and architecture. In fact, perhaps this inspiration is richer and the resulting impetus to action stronger when the imagination is challenged by sacred art and architectural adornment.

In this context, Miles theorizes about the imagination in similar ways to those of Greeley and Tracy. She thinks of religion as a tool of analogy saying, "religion has also repeatedly been described as a way of seeing."¹⁸⁴ Hence, religion is contingent on the ability to translate the divine into something seeable and therefore, knowable. In fact, as derived earlier from Thomas, humans can know some things about God by reasoning about propositional facts, evidence found in creation, and God's self-revelation. But to put these things together takes more than scientific reasoning – it takes imaginative reasoning as 'seen' through religion. In other words and obviously, no science can make God knowable, but by using the imagination one can extend the known to a reasonable faith in and relationship with God.

¹⁸⁴ Miles, *Images as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, 2.

This suggestion of mediation is, as well, a hypothesis of moral theologian Fr. Christopher Steck who has suggested a way of reflecting on the lives of the saints to "train our moral senses."¹⁸⁵ Steck's primary purpose in *Saintly Voyeurism* is not to speak of sacred art per se but instead to propose ways for individuals to form their conscience and morality. He, of course, encourages the typical expressions of faith through activities such as prayer and participation in the various liturgies when one is learning to live a moral life consistent with the Gospel.¹⁸⁶ But he also calls for a thorough examination of the lives of others who are known to have lived a moral and holy life (although perhaps not without struggle). According to Steck:

The saints are the irruption of a lived moral artwork previously unseen and unfathomed but, once seen and understood, recognized as a form of discipleship that is right for this period. These moral art forms give us deep sensitivity to the ways in which values and goods can be furthered within the particularities of one's own cultural and historical situation.¹⁸⁷

Again, Steck is not concerned with sacred art but he borrows from the artistic world to make his point – his thoughts are an allusion to the imagination as a way of comparing a good and holy person to one's own life. It seems fair, therefore, to complement his suggestion with action – by contemplating an image of a saint, one may more easily focus on a saint's comprehension and embodiment of the Gospel and in turn, may come to terms with their own 'moral sense.'

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Steck, S.J., "Saintly Voyeurism: A Methodological Necessity for the Christian Ethicist?" in *New Wine, New Wineskins: A Next Generation Reflects on Key Issues in Catholic Moral Theology*, ed. William C. Mattison, III (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 37.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 38.

David Morgan also lends support to this conclusion. His theory can be summarized into what he calls the "sacred gaze." The sacred gaze is "a term that designates the particular configuration of ideas, attitudes and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting."¹⁸⁸ In other words, the act of seeing informs the culture and lifestyle while the latter also informs the act of seeing. Moreover, Morgan puts a strong emphasis on the employment of sacred images as being critical to the act of seeing in the context of religious ritual.¹⁸⁹ In fact, like Greeley, Steck, and Miles, Morgan thinks of sacred art as a tool necessary to enliven the religious imagination – the sacred gaze allows the viewer to improve knowledge of the faith and develop a deeper relationship with God.¹⁹⁰

In this sense, mediation is a primary function for sacred art. Architect Steven Schloeder adds a number of other tasks by claiming the ability of sacred art and architectural adornment a) to bring one to holiness, b) to encourage the faith, c) to be used as a catechetical tool, and d) to assist as a guard against the profane.¹⁹¹ As such, Schloeder is consistent with Abbot Suger, especially with regard to this last task. Schloeder adds:

On a more practical note, since during the course of the mass one's mind and eye may wander, it seems better to give the eye a sacred image on which to rest and contemplate – even if not directly pertinent to the Mass, it is still a part of *communio sanctorum* – than to leave one wandering in an image-free wasteland where the mind could turn more easily to profane subjects.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁹¹ Steven J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council Through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 40.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 40.

However, Schloeder also warns about the appropriate application of sacred art in a similar way to St. Bernard advising, "the art must be in complete conformity with doctrine so that the people are correctly instructed."¹⁹³ He goes on to say, "while the sacred images are a necessary part of the environment of Catholic worship, their number should be moderated, lest the idea of the image lose its potency by sheer repetition."¹⁹⁴

Some architects have created a theology of architecture and in fact, Rose proposes three natural laws for church buildings: verticality, permanence, and iconography. He claims all of the elements of the structure as well as the art within should cause one to imagine an ability to transcend or to reach towards heaven.¹⁹⁵ He says, "the soaring heights of its [the church] spaces speak to us of reaching toward heaven, of transcendence – bringing the heavenly Jerusalem down to us through the medium of the church building."¹⁹⁶ In short, church buildings are not simply spaces for the community to gather. They are instead holy spaces specifically set aside to allow individuals and the community to meet God at liturgy and in private prayer.

Finally, sacred art and architecture are instrumental to the definition and continuation of a Catholic culture and identity. According to sociologist Meneleo Litonjua, a culture is known by its "language, symbols, values and norms" as well as "a people's distinctive expressions of and accomplishments in art, literature,

¹⁹³ Ibid., 40.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 151.

¹⁹⁵ Rose, *Ugly As Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches From Sacred Places To Meeting Spaces And How We Can Change Them Back Again*.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

music and architecture."¹⁹⁷ These things set a group or community apart and make it distinct, identifiable. As a result, members of the culture know how to belong and how to act within the culture as well as how to recognize other members of the culture. But the culture is far more important than being a simple way of identification – it is also a way to imagine and a way to know present-day as well as historical reality. Litonjua thinks, "through language specifically and culture generally, therefore, humans create and recreate their worlds, construct and reconstruct their reality."¹⁹⁸ Finally, because sacred art and architecture are a part of Catholic culture and a type of language, they must also be tools capable of engaging the imagination to create a Catholic reality.

Conclusion

Imagination fuels the faith and art. Art and architecture engage and excite the imagination. Indeed, the world would be bland, boring, and oppressive without a stimulus of some sort to invigorate the senses and challenge the intellect. This chapter has provided the views of several theologians, artists, and architects on the topics of the imagination, sacred art, architecture, and architectural adornment resulting in a number of conclusions important to an understanding and continuity of Catholic culture.

The chapter began with the views of St. Thomas Aquinas on learning, language, and the imagination. For Thomas and other theologians, humans learn through the ability to compare and furthermore, the comparative nature of

¹⁹⁷ M.D. Litonjua, "Catholic Identity and Mission: Culture, Community and Conversations," *Chicago Studies* 41, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2002): 284.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

learning hinges on the power of the imagination. In short, humans learn by observing and listening and then comparing the things they see or hear to previous learning or validated experiences. The engagement of the imagination and as such, the ability to be analogical, therefore, is enhanced through language (Greeley's storytelling or the written word as in Scripture) and symbol (sacred art and architecture). But God is mysterious and therefore, humans have no way to know him directly – and thus as Thomas was convinced, humans have an imaginative capacity to put to work what they do know about God through his creation, creatures, and Incarnation as a way to develop a deeper understanding of him as well as a righteous relationship with him.

Abbot Suger and his contemporary, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, differed on their views of sacred art and ornate architecture. An analysis of their views is important as it points to a need for balance. Abbot Suger greatly desired to honor and praise God and thought of art and architecture as a way to do so. Suger also held an opinion of art as a way to help one contemplate or to focus on devotional prayer. In fact, theologian Fr. Stephen Happel explains Suger's theology of light:

Just as the biblical text could be interpreted analogically, i.e. mystically, with a meaning that led to union with God, so contemplating brilliant color could draw us into the light of God. For Suger, the painted, colored windows provided an even better medium to draw the prayerful monk to God.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Happel, S.J., "Lights and Mirrors: Stained Glass as Metaphor for the Catholic Soul (Afterword)," in *Stained Glass in Catholic Philadelphia*, ed. Jean M. Farnsworth, Carmen R. Croce, and Joseph F. Chorprenning, O.S.F.S. (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2002), 311.

St. Bernard, however, rejected sacred art and overly ornate architecture; his view was nearly the opposite of Suger – art and ornamentation could distract one from a relationship with God and quite possibly might become a form of idolatry. From these two, the obvious result calls for balance and catechesis on the appropriate application of sacred art and architectural adornment in worship and prayer.

Post Vatican II theologians, artists, and architects emphasize the exercise of the imagination to learn about God and one's relationship to God through analogy. But appropriately, their application of the imagination, sacred art, and architecture is contingent upon community and the culture thereof. While the imagination is somewhat a characteristic of an individual, Greeley, Tracy and the others all base their theory on a collective community or cultural imagination wherein the passing of this imagination to others becomes a form of identity and belonging. Greeley's writing, in fact, strongly suggests the existence of the Catholic imagination as a primary reason for the survival of the church, its continuance in history, and its likely survival in the age to come. He notes, however, a possibility of a diluted Catholicism more focused on proposition than God. Likewise, Tracy sees the imagination as a fundamental feature of conversation and so, like Greeley, he is likely to see a danger in a theological conversation devoid of imagination – such a conversation may preclude the ability for those involved to appreciate and fairly criticize the views of others while also having the ability to accept criticism.

Artists and architects extend the theological theories of Greeley and Tracy to similar theories about the benefits of sacred art and architecture for

Catholicism. Presuming balance and catechesis, all offer sacred art and architecture as techniques to: a) form community; b) offer praise and worship to God; c) pray; d) form the conscience or moral identity; and e) teach. Many consider sacred art and architecture as mediators between God and humanity as well as between the day to day secular and religious experience. As such, sacred art and architecture engage the imagination and allow one to transcend the profane by seeking the holy in images and structures.

The next chapter is a photographic evaluation built on six groupings of sacred art: a) Scripture, doctrine, and Tradition; b) the saints as moral exemplars; c) the praise and honor due God; d) topics in the Tradition but outside of Scripture; e) imaginative prayer; and f) Catholic identity. Symbols, scenes, and meanings in the photographs are examined in an attempt to show how the imagination can employ sacred art to 'know' God and to understand elements of the Tradition. The concluding chapter then uses the results of the photographic examination and the analysis in this chapter to facilitate the creation of a set of elementary principles and teaching points about sacred art and architectural adornment in a catechetical program and in protecting Catholic identity.

A Modern Cacophony of Images Deadens the Imagination

For Miles and a number of artists, the modern view of symbols and art is significantly different than in the past. In the modern age people are bombarded with virtually an immeasurable amount of imagery, a constant change of imagery, bursts of color and sound, and a blurring of overlapping and often conflicting imagery. This chaotic deluge seems to deaden the senses – there is no time to think, to create, or to reflect but only time to register the image and the information it conveys.²⁰¹ Individuals have, in a sense, largely lost an ability to imagine through the visual, rarely engage the imagination, and react as robots to marketing messages and symbolic content. As a result, art becomes a consumable good with little or no value – it excites for a short period and then is ignored or discarded when the excitement fades. As a consequence, people reject sacred art and architecture because these objects require the viewer to think and reflect instead of simply to react. Thus, Miles's theory forces a reconsideration of the role of sacred art in faith and catechesis.

According to Greeley, "a full comprehension of the Catholic tradition requires respect not only for its proposition dimension but also for its imaginative dimension, especially since religion seems to originate in and draw its raw power from the imagination."²⁰² And, while he feels propositional religion is absolutely necessary, he thinks Vatican II has created a 'beige' Catholicism because it was

²⁰¹ Miles, *Images as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, 128.

²⁰² Greeley, *God in Popular Culture*, 57.

a 'left-brained' council.²⁰³ Finally, a Vatican II focus on facts and figures has joined forces with the chaotic deluge of imagery described above to drain Catholics of their ability to imaginatively relate to God and to one another.

As Greeley has speculated, a profound Catholic faith, call to conversion, and going forth in service cannot just be fostered through propositional facts and figures. He believes faith also needs reflection and storytelling – and these require the imagination. Fortunately, even considering the effects of any misunderstandings of the Second Vatican Council in terms of sacred art and architecture, Catholic church architecture and sacred art have been retained whether in appropriate quality and quantity or at least in some minimal form. The only hindrance is a lack of catechesis regarding the imagination and the utility of sacred art and architecture in engaging imaginative thought about God and how one comes to know and love him through his creatures and creation.

But how does sacred art and architecture act to encourage the imagination and therefore the faith? As noted previously, Sts. John Damascene and Thomas Aquinas understood the human ability to know or learn as contingent on language and comparison (analogy). In their own way, sacred art and architecture use both language and analogy to kindle the imagination and, in fact, help one to know God.

²⁰³ Andrew M. Greeley, "A Cloak of Many Colors: The End of Beige Catholicism," *Commonweal*, November 9, 2001: 57.

Architecture Nurtures Community and Identity

Architecture allows a community to live the faith by providing an outward sign of identity to those within and outside the parish while also providing the structure necessary for individuals in a parish to come together in a common mission. Additionally and obviously, architecture provides a physical structure for the community and as such enables worship, prayer, and the celebration of the sacraments. But architecture can be much more than a mere physical structure. It can be a 'way' of prayer and worship. This leap of the imagination, however, requires catechesis. As such, the practical teaching method on the topic of architecture is simply to take the students on a tour wherein the catechist describes each place and element of a church in the context of Catholicism and especially in the context of the People of God with Jesus Christ at its head. The catechist should cover practical purpose but more importantly should describe the spiritual aspects of each place and element similarly to the following analysis.

The exterior of a church building and the surrounding grounds have the possibility of being inspiring, inviting, and on occasion, intimidating but must always give an impression of being accepting, forgiving, and embracing of all regardless of ability, culture, ethnicity, age, or sex. In effect, it must nurture the individual through community. Moreover, architecture should also serve as a physical symbol of identity as a People of God and as a Catholic community.

Even so, the catechist should qualify the church as more than just a place.

Instead, a church can move an individual or community to act. As Rose indicates:

One basic tenet that architects have accepted for millennia is that the built environment has the capacity to affect the human person deeply ... the atmosphere created by the church building affects not only how we worship, but also what we believe. Ultimately, what we believe affects how we live our lives.²⁰⁴

The first area one encounters upon entering the church is usually the vestibule or narthex. This area has the practical purpose of preparation in terms of removing coats and hats as well as being a place where the faithful can form processions. Normally, the narthex will have a holy water font and sometimes statues of patron or favorite saints. Churches built since Vatican II, especially those based on the principles found in *Environment and Art In Catholic Worship*, may have larger gathering areas wherein the holy water fonts are very large and one in the same with the baptistery. The dual purpose placement and size of the font/baptistery make it easier for the congregation to witness a baptism of full immersion.²⁰⁵ It also places baptism in the context of the other sacraments. Baptism is, in fact, the gateway to all other sacraments and so the baptistery makes sense in the narthex of the church.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Rose, *Ugly As Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches From Sacred Places To Meeting Spaces And How We Can Change Them Back Again*, 12.

²⁰⁵ Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, Paragraph 77.

²⁰⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Paragraph 867.

As in the case of the exterior, the narthex plays an important spiritual role. In fact, for medieval historian Richard Kieckhefer, "entering a church is a metaphor for centering one's attention and one's life on some particular purpose."²⁰⁷ The first act of this purpose is to bless oneself with holy water – an act reminiscent of baptism but also a cleansing act and finally, a centering act "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."²⁰⁸ A second important role of the narthex is the symbolism it suggests as one of transition. As the faithful move through the narthex, they are leaving the profane and entering into the holy. As such, they strive to make a mental transition as well – away from secular concerns and towards their greatest desire, God.²⁰⁹ In other words, while many see the narthex as simply a gathering place, it has the potential to be a calming place of centering and preparation to meet God. Finally, the transition is complete when one enters the central space of a church – the nave and its primary focus, the chancel (sanctuary). The chancel and the nave are where most sacred art and architectural adornment will exist.

Schloeder describes the design of a church as formed around a language, particularly: "a language of meal and of sacrifice."²¹⁰ Thus, the chancel and its altar are the center piece of the church. The layout and all furniture, sacred art, and architectural adornment must point to the altar and in turn, to the real focus of faith, Jesus Christ. Here again the altar must be inviting and accepting while

²⁰⁷ Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63.

²⁰⁸ Greeley, "A Cloak of Many Colors: The End of Beige Catholicism:" 12.

²⁰⁹ Rose, *Ugly As Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches From Sacred Places To Meeting Spaces And How We Can Change Them Back Again*, 230.

²¹⁰ Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council Through Liturgy and Architecture*, 9-10.

also standing as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Consequently, the symbolism in the chancel must engage the imagination about the mysteries encountered but must not be so obscure or so overwhelming as to detract from the Liturgies of the Word and Eucharist.

According to McNamara, "architecture that hopes to carry the weight of the sacred must therefore use not only the vague, generic symbolism popular in recent years, but also dramatically specific sign and symbol sought by the faithful of our time."²¹¹ In other words, because the architectural language of meal and sacrifice is not always immediately evident, architecture must be dramatic and obvious enough to grab attention, capture the imagination, and suggest individual and communal vocation. Through the imagination, the architecture thus becomes a framework for the celebration of faith as well as an environment wherein individuals bond as a community. Accordingly, architecture acts to remind the faithful of their responsibility for the communal mission while also identifying these faithful and their mission to the outside community.

Through catechesis, the faithful can come to better appreciate the beautiful utility of church architecture as a way of being led to prayer and worship. Catechesis is, therefore, crucial and must focus on the concept of a church building as much more than just a meeting or worship space – it, in fact, is a holy place wherein one meets God. And as a result of the catechesis, perhaps the faithful will come to worship and prayer more reverently and better prepared for an encounter with God and the community.

²¹¹ McNamara, "Liturgical Architecture as Sacramental Experience:" 269.

Sacred Art Enables Catechesis, Identity, and Spirituality

Similarly to architecture, sacred art has a role in a lived and celebrated faith, but it also has important additional roles in mediating the experience of God and in helping the faithful express the faith through prayer. Of course, things other than art (e.g., nature) can mediate in this regard, but mediation is most apparent when God and tenets of the faith are symbolized in such things as side altars, devotional shrines, statues, mosaics, and stained glass windows. As noted before, these objects mediate by engaging the imagination. Greeley says:

Imagination is the source of religion because we are experiencing, ordering, and reflective beings ... and only after we articulate our stories to ourselves and one another are we prepared to go on to the final task of reflecting on the meaning of the stories and the experiences that are encoded in our stories.²¹²

In short, individuals and communities can imaginatively use sacred art as they reflect on relationships with God and others; ideally this reflection results in action to improve such relationships and to bring the kingdom to fruition.

In fact, the community can draw on sacred art and architectural adornment as catechetical tools and to denote Catholic identity. To show this, a few examples of sacred art are evaluated to demonstrate principles or to explain the various theories and facts derived in previous chapters. Each case in point will reveal one or more of the following catechetical categories: a) Scripture, doctrine, and Tradition; b) the saints as moral exemplars; c) the praise and honor due God; d) topics in the Tradition but outside of Scripture; e) imaginative prayer; and f) Catholic identity.

²¹² Greeley, *God in Popular Culture*, 89-90.

The window shown here in its entirety is from Holy Family Church founded in 1905 in Dayton, Ohio.²¹³ Hereafter,

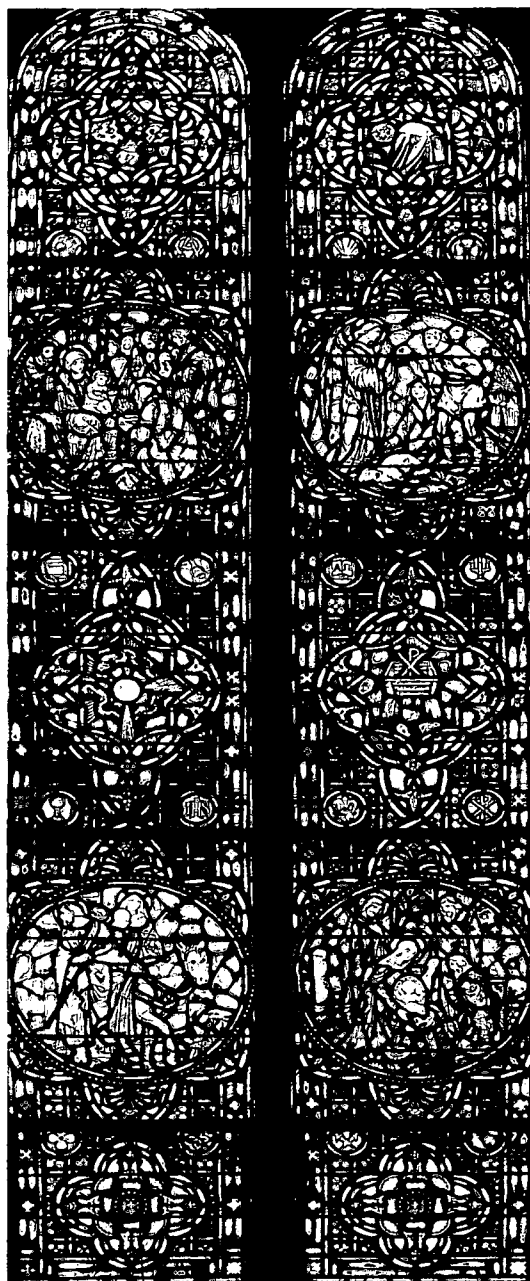


Figure 1: Holy Family Church Dayton, Ohio
Infancy Narrative

fragments of this window are used to facilitate a more detailed view and thus, explanation. This window reveals the catechetical categories of a) Scripture, doctrine, and Tradition; b) the praise and honor due God; and c) imaginative prayer. According to historian and theologian Maureen Tilley, besides the clearly recognizable depictions of the Scripture, the sacred art at Holy Family also includes many symbols. The following narrative uses her work as a starting point and as a primary source of explanation for the sometimes obscure symbolism or Scripture depictions.²¹⁴ Shown clockwise in this window are four parts of the Nativity, the visit of the magi, the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, the shepherds at Jesus' birth, and the flight to Egypt. All

²¹³ John H. Lamott, S.T.D., *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1921* (New York: Frederick Pustet Company, Inc., 1921), 161.

²¹⁴ Maureen Tilley, James Butler, and Anita Wagner, *A Tour of Holy Family Church* (Dayton, OH: Holy Family Church, 2002).

are familiar to Catholics as they are central to the infancy narratives and Christmas.

Catholic viewers will recognize and understand most of the magi scene



Figure 2: Holy Family Church - Magi Fragment

symbols and representations shown in the fragment to the left. In his Gospel, Matthew implies two key facts: a) in Jesus' time, magi were thought to be "a caste of wise men," often astrologers; and b) people of this

time believed a new star appeared upon the birth of a ruler.²¹⁵ These two facts are denoted by a star in the right top quadrant of the fragment. The scene therefore is consistent with the Scripture wherein Matthew explains the method of the magi in following the star to Jesus. In this regard, a catechist can use the art

²¹⁵ Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Prentice Hall, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 635. Matthew 2:2 as footnoted in the New American Bible: "it was a common ancient belief that a new star appeared at the time of a ruler's birth."

to tell the story while also showing how one can employ sacred art in imaginative prayer. Finally, because it is so familiar, the scene can be included in the education of catechists about sacred art by explaining how artists depict Scripture and how a catechist can more easily teach on points of Scripture by using art as a visual aid.

The magi are symbolized in the window as kings as denoted by the crown on the ground by the kneeling figure; removal of the crown implies homage and the fact of Jesus' preeminence. Additionally, the magi are offering the gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold to the Baby Jesus traditionally thought to symbolize Jesus' divinity (frankincense), his suffering and death (myrrh), and his kingship (gold).²¹⁶ These facts are important in terms of the praise and honor due God; the catechist can give examples of other ways to pay homage while also calling attention to the requirement for all, regardless of station in life, to praise, honor, and thank God.

Notice also the presence of Mary and Joseph particularly in their sainthood as depicted by halos. Of note, the magi too have halos – perhaps the artist wished to imply the goodness of the magi and their act of worship or the need for similar attributes – courage, humility, reverence, perseverance, and generosity – in the viewer. Finally, above Mary is what appears to be a symbol of God as denoted by the gold; blue streamers from the gold fall on Mary and Jesus to indicate the bestowal of God's spirit and approval.

For a twenty-first century viewer, the magi fragment has some cultural and ethnic discontinuities. First, according to Scripture scholar Fr. Benedict Viviano,

²¹⁶ Ibid., 636.

“eventually [the magi] were named Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior in the western church, and Caspar became a black.”²¹⁷ However, in this depiction all three are white. Viviano goes on to say, “they were understood as representatives of the Gentile world in all its racial diversity who come to Christ.”²¹⁸ In both cases, the depiction of the ethnicity of Caspar and racial diversity, catechesis about the scene as captured in this window is necessary. First, the traditions of the magi are discussed often in the modern age; thus, many will know of Caspar's traditional ethnicity. However, his depiction as white causes concern as it could indicate the Church's or the parish's rejection of all non-white (and perhaps even non-western European) ethnicities. There will be those who argue about Scripture's silence on the matter but this tradition is important – it establishes equality and thus, catechists should point out and explain the discrepancy. Moreover, and second, Viviano's theory of an early tradition depicting the magi as Gentiles is not often heard in catechesis today but it can be a useful point when discussing Catholicism as an open faith and inviting to all. Consequently regarding this fragment, the most significant point of catechesis must be the fact of Jesus Christ and his Church as embracing of all regardless of ability, age, sex, culture, or ethnicity. This fact must be presented in straightforward and compassionate language to all regardless of and especially in light of ability, age, sex, culture, or ethnicity.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 635.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 635.

The artistic language of kingship in the fragment when applied to the magi



Figure 3: Holy Family Church - Shepherd Fragment

can also be problematic. The crown and gold imply wealth and privilege and as such, the poor may not see themselves in the scene. Moreover, the other participants in the Nativity, the shepherds from Luke's Gospel

seen in the fragment in Figure 3, come open handed to the event. They pay homage but are not denoted with halos as are the magi. Also in the magi fragment, Jesus is looking at the king while in the shepherd fragment he is looking at the viewer; this perhaps is a quirk of the artist but it might lead one to think of the magi as more important than those who are mere shepherds. Or it could mean all are invited to worship regardless of station especially considering this fragment is nearer eye level in the window. The teaching points found in the shepherd fragment are similar to the magi in terms of diversity. One might also

extract a concept of the dignity of work and the equal importance of all regardless of career path or station in life.

The next two fragments are also important to Matthew in terms of his

Jewish audience.

As Scripture

scholar David Barr

points out about

this Gospel, “there

are the many

echoes of the

Moses-exodus

stories.”²¹⁹ Figure 4

shows the flight of

the Holy Family to

Egypt – an act

necessary to save

Jesus while also



Figure 4: Holy Family Church - Flight to Egypt Fragment

reminiscent of the important Genesis story of Joseph, his father Jacob, and Joseph’s brothers who escaped famine – and sure death – in their own land by traveling to Egypt. A potential teaching point from this scene is demonstrated by both the Old and New Testament Joseph – the need to trust in God and to do God’s will.

²¹⁹ David L. Barr, *New Testament Story: An Introduction*, 3d ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 2002), 308.

The fragment in Figure 5 may not be immediately recognizable and



Figure 5: Holy Family Church - Holy Innocents Fragment

requires
knowledge of
Matthew's Gospel
as well as the
imagination.
According to Tilley
it represents
Herod's slaughter
of the Holy
Innocents.²²⁰ Of
course, all
Catholics are
familiar with the
story but unless

one knows the scene shown in this fragment is based on the Gospel of Matthew, it is difficult to extract the meaning behind the representation regardless of the viewer's ethnicity or culture. The symbolism is important because the angel is pointing to God – possibly the artist meant to suggest the dead children were one with God or as is commonly said, were in heaven. An obvious symbol is the lamb, a prefiguring of Jesus as the Lamb of God who is slaughtered for the salvation of all humanity. Inexplicably, the artist has made the father of the slain as the dominant character in the fragment whereas Matthew emphasizes the

²²⁰ Tilley, Butler, and Wagner, *A Tour of Holy Family Church*, 25.

lament of Rachel in his Gospel. Catechetical topics include the mystery of suffering and tragedy, a discussion of Matthew's Gospel and his re-telling of the Jewish story but with a good ending (Jesus Christ), the symbolism of the lamb, and the importance of consolation and compassion during times of grief.

Symbols are also significantly important in Catholicism. Shown in Figure 6 is a fragment from the Nativity panel at Holy Family rich in symbols but requiring

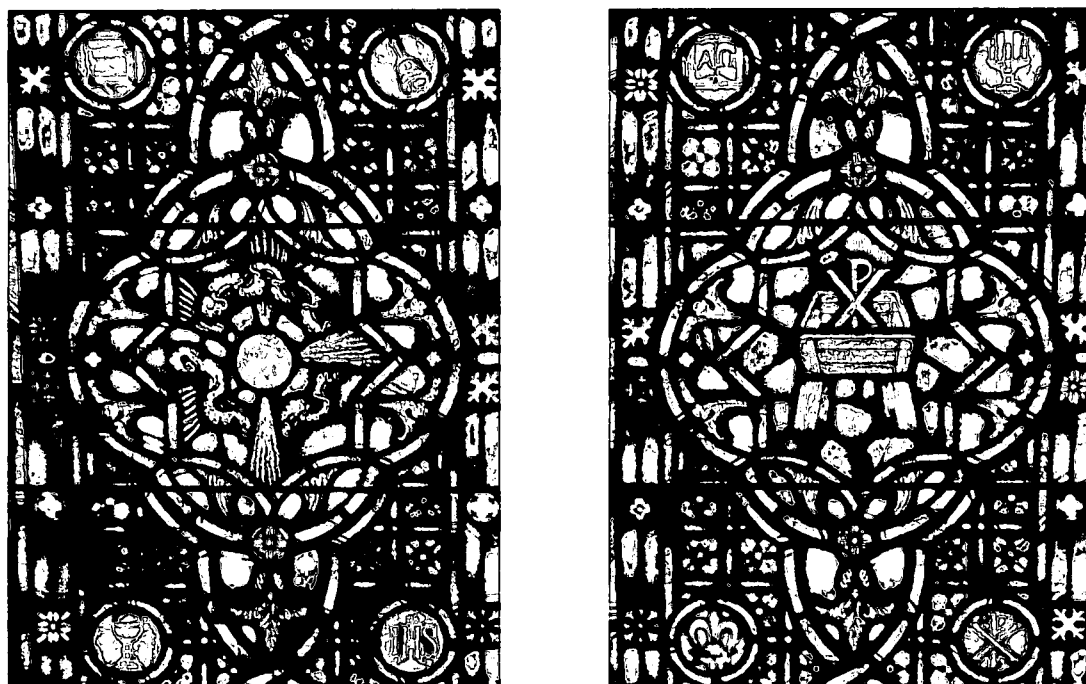


Figure 6: Holy Family Church - Symbols Fragment

both thought in contemplation and action in catechesis. Tilley describes the focus of the left panel as a symbol for the host, imbued with the light of God and radiating in all directions, reaching out to all who trust. The right panel "is the crib of the infant Jesus with the Greek letters X (Chi) and R (Rho). They are the first two letters of Christ."²²¹ The eight small symbols in the two panels are various symbols referring to Christ, God, or some aspect of faith. In the left panel are

²²¹ Ibid., 26 and 25.

four "images from the Mass: an altar missal, a bell, a ciborium, and the monogram of Jesus."²²² The symbols on the right refer to God or Christ: "a book with the Alpha and Omega, a three branched candelabrum [representing the Trinity], a fleur-de-lis [also the Trinity], and the Chi-Rho."²²³

The next example shown in its entirety in Figure 7 is the Assumption of Mary from St. Mary's Church founded in 1859 in Dayton, Ohio. The church and



Figure 7: St. Mary's Church Dayton, Ohio - The Assumption

sacred art were erected in 1906.²²⁴ Overall the scene focuses on the Apostles' discovery of Mary's empty grave and Assumption. The panel on the left depicts

²²² Ibid., 26.

²²³ Ibid., 25. (Explanation of the fleur-de-lis as representing the Trinity is from: Friedrich Rest, *Our Christian Symbols* (Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1954), 17.)

²²⁴ Lamott, *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1921*, 160. Maureen Tilley, Anita Wagner, and Ruth Hohl, *Tour of St. Mary Church Iconography* (Dayton, OH: St. Mary Parish, 1999).

St. Mary as a child with St. Anne her Mother; to the right is St. Rose of Lima.²²⁵

This window is a good example of: a) topics in the Tradition but outside of Scripture; b) the saints as moral exemplars; and c) imaginative prayer.

While the Assumption of Mary is a Catholic dogma, there are no direct Scripture passages to validate this part of the Tradition. The dogma was formed based, in part, on the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and the general idea of Mary's complete willingness to do God's will as well as her holiness.

Interestingly, Tilley provides an important insight to the history of the window, "while the feast [of Mary's death] was broadly celebrated, it was not until 1950 that Pope Pius XII declared that at the end of her life Mary was taken to heaven body and soul. This mounting of this window precedes the proclamation of Pius XII by many years and testifies to a long and popular devotion to Mary's Assumption."²²⁶ There are a number of important features in the scene appropriate for catechesis. The primary catechetical point is, of course, the dogma of the Assumption; combining this scene with one of the Annunciation also allows the catechist to dwell on free will, trust in God, and doing God's will.

²²⁵ Tilley, Wagner, and Hohl, *Tour of St. Mary Church Iconography*, 19.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

In the fragment in Figure 8, the Apostles' are looking variously at an empty



Figure 8: St. Mary's Church - Assumption Fragment

grave or at Mary

as she is

assumed into

heaven.²²⁷ The

scene is

reminiscent of

while also

contrasting with

Jesus'

resurrection and

the empty tomb.

As at the

resurrection,

there is a white

garment left on

the edge of

Mary's tomb.

White, of course,

indicates Mary's

sinless purity and

along with the

lilies indicates her virginity. Here, eleven of the Apostles are present presumably

²²⁷ Ibid., 19.

representing the original eleven (i.e., not including Judas's successor, Matthias). This is as opposed to the resurrection wherein only women were the primary witnesses even though Peter (Gospels of Luke and John) and the disciple whom Jesus loved (Gospel of John) came later. An important catechetical detail in this regard is the divinity and humanity of Jesus as opposed to the humanity of Mary.

The most important symbol in the depiction is seen faintly at the top. At a quick glance, it looks only like a golden light but on further examination it is the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove. It is important here for the catechist to emphasize the fact of Jesus rising on his own as opposed to Mary being assumed by God. Again, this catechesis is necessary to reinforce Jesus as True God and True Man but without sin and Mary as human but also without sin.

There are three other symbols within the scene useful for catechesis. First, faintly evident under Mary's foot (about 1/3 from the bottom) is a ribbon of water. A catechist can call attention to the water and make several constructive connections regarding water as necessary for life and about the human need for cleansing and sanctification. Next, Mary's hands are outstretched towards the viewer and she is often thought of as one who can and will intercede with God on one's behalf. As such, the catechist can use this as a teaching point about prayer especially in the distinction of praying to God and praying for the intercession of the saints. Mary's outstretched hands also indicate her compassion for all regardless of ability, age, sex, culture, or ethnicity. Finally, there is a ring of stars around Mary's head denoting her as the Queen of Heaven. Again, Mary is human even with this distinction and the catechist

should make this point clear; however, the catechist can also direct attention to Mary as the ultimate example of doing God's will as well as her holiness, prayer life, and faith.

The panel portraying St. Anne in Figure 9 is an obvious match with the



Figure 9: St. Mary's Church
Sts. Anne and Mary Fragment

primary panel of the Assumption and fits in the catechetical category of saints as moral exemplars. According to Tilley, Anne is often shown teaching Mary.²²⁸ Besides the symbolism of teaching, a primary catechetical detail is Anne as she points to heaven. A catechist can use this aspect of the fragment to remind parents of their responsibility to catechize their children while also helping them to form the conscience. Likewise, the catechist should teach children to honor, respect, and learn from their parents.

²²⁸ Ibid., 20.

The fragment of St. Rose of Lima, “a Peruvian mystic and the first canonized saint born in the Americas,” fits into both the saints as moral exemplars and the imaginative prayer catechetical categories.²²⁹ Tilley gives a thumbnail sketch of the saint, “while Rose is depicted in what appears to be nun’s clothing, she was not a nun. She was a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic, i.e., a Dominican tertiary. She was a lay woman who lived in her parents home, but participated in the prayers and spirituality of the Dominicans. She was famous for her penitential and ascetic practices, hence the crown of thorns on her head.”²³⁰ This information is useful for a catechist who can address vocation, the sacrament of reconciliation, prayer, and spiritual disciplines.



Figure 10: St. Mary's Church
St. Rose of Lima Fragment

²²⁹ Ibid., 20.

²³⁰ Ibid., 20.

The next illustration is the mural behind the altar at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Dayton, Ohio. It represents, in the big picture, the Church of Jesus

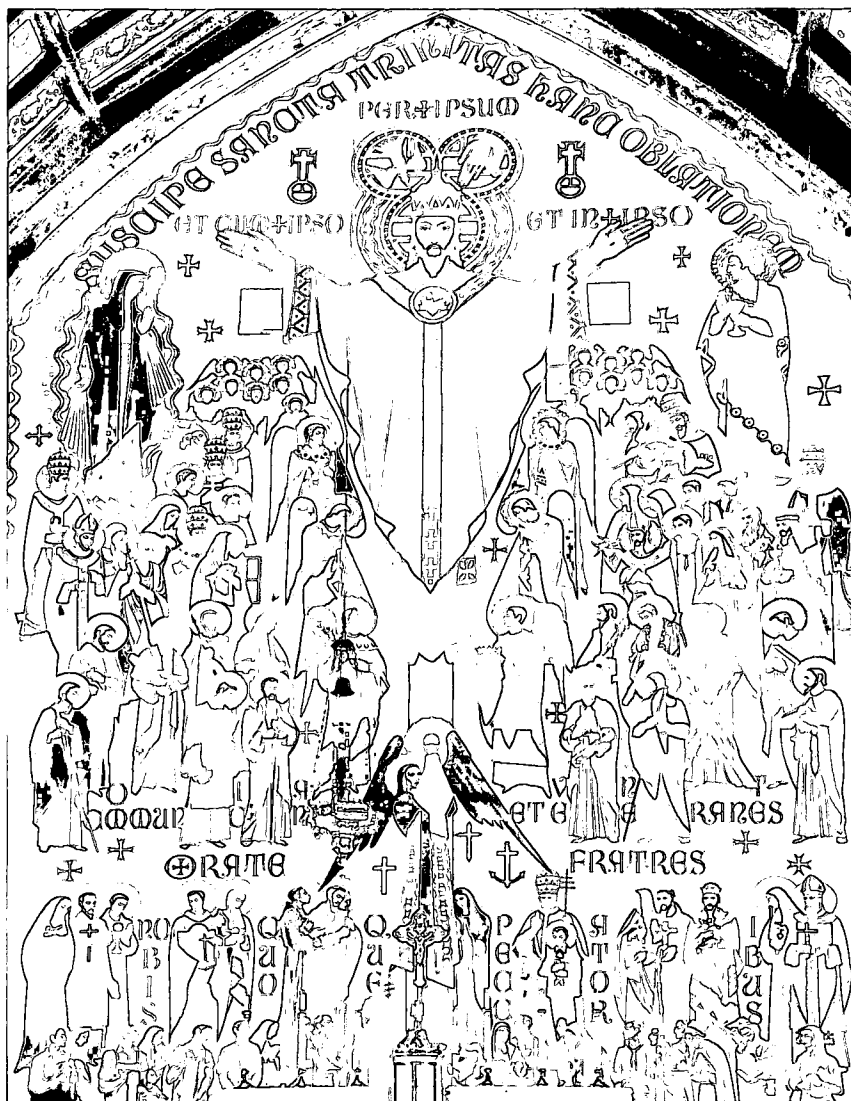


Figure 11: St. Anthony of Padua Church Dayton, Ohio
Mural Behind Altar

Christ and is remarkable in its rich symbolism and beauty. Seen in its entirety in Figure 11, Jesus is obviously the focus of the mural – all symbols, angels, martyrs, saints, and people point to him. All are also paying homage to him as seen by their posture or the symbols the artist has given to them. In fact, this mural is an excellent example of sacred art appropriate for catechesis in all six

categories: a) Scripture, doctrine, and Tradition; b) the saints as moral exemplars; c) the praise and honor due God; d) topics in the Tradition but outside of Scripture; e) imaginative prayer; and f) Catholic identity. The catechist can draw on many different elements of the mural to describe points of Scripture, doctrine, and Tradition. For example, Jesus is depicted as a priest by the chasuble – a clear reference to his role as the new high priest and to his ultimate sacrifice.

Moreover, as seen in the fragment in Figure 12, Melchisedech stands on the far right.

Several key catechetical expressions are, therefore, possible including discussions on the role of priests, vocation, discussion of the Old



Figure 12: St. Anthony's Church - Melchisedech Fragment

Testament view

of priesthood, the various New Testament discussions of the priesthood in the

Gospels and epistles, and finally, a discussion of the baptismal calls as priest, prophet, and king. Another catechetical possibility is a discussion of the Trinity

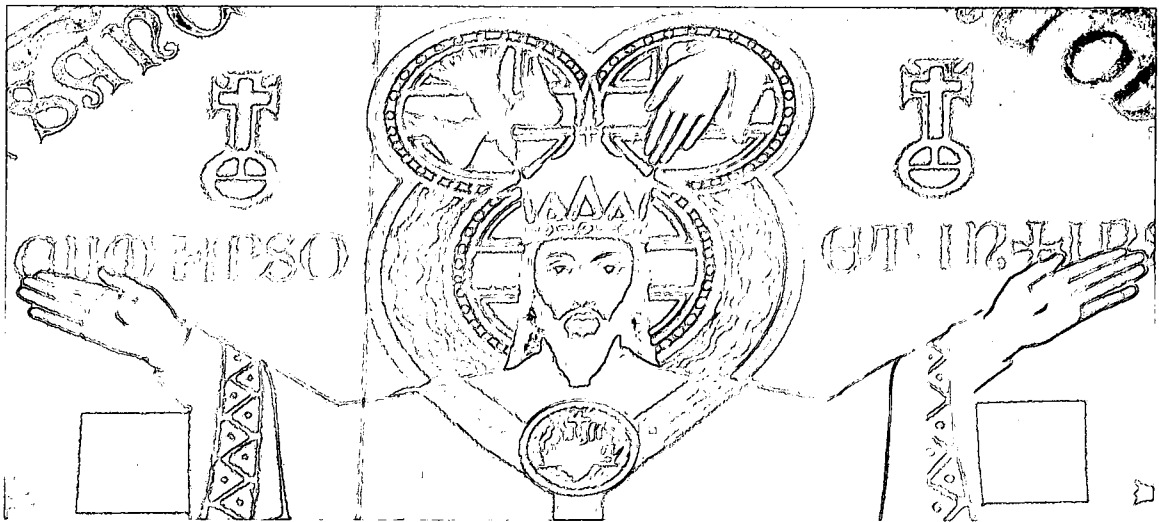


Figure 13: St. Anthony's Church - Trinity Fragment

as seen in the fragment in Figure 13 – Jesus is obviously shown and above him are symbols of the Holy Spirit (dove) and the Father (hand).

Clearly, the artist had a rich sense of saints and martyrs and portrayed many including Stephen, Perpetua and Felicity, Francis of Assisi, Therese of



Lisieux, and, of course, St. Anthony of Padua (fragment in Figure 14). Here again the catechist can use Scripture, biographies, and stories of these saints and martyrs to convey important moral precepts such as caring for others, the importance of prayer, and the need to trust God in all things.

Figure 14: St. Anthony' Church
St. Anthony Fragment

The mural is rich with symbolism especially of symbols relating to the praise and honor of God. For example, at the top of the pyramid of saints and to either side of Jesus is a choir of angels singing praise.

Likewise, many of the saints nearest the bottom are holding a crucifix or chalice and host referring back to Jesus as seen in the fragment in Figure 15. Also, St. Agnes and Abraham on the right and near Melchisedech (Figure 12 above)



Figure 15: St. Anthony's Church - Saints Fragment

are both holding

lambs as a symbol of Jesus in the case of Agnes and of trust in God in the case of Abraham. A final example is the angels to the right and left of Jesus at his feet who are holding a palm branch and crown referring to Jesus' kingship.

The artist also featured imaginative prayer in the mural as seen in the laity from every walk of life at the very bottom of the mural all of whom appear to be in homage, praying, or reading the Scripture. The catechist can direct attention to this part of the mural captured in Figure 16 while also focusing on a symbol or saint during a directed prayer session.



Figure 16: St. Anthony's Church - Laity Fragment

In fact, perhaps the most imaginative and important part of the mural outside of Jesus is the portrayal of the laity. This depiction is specific to this parish and shows many different vocations and professions including mother, father, priest, musician, carpenter, doctor, religious, policeman, daughter, son, laborer, scholar, nurse, white-color professional, theologian, and military members.²³¹ They appear to represent the professions of members of the parish at the time of the murals creation in the 1950s:

Around the altar in the lower group are the members of the Church Militant here on earth, ourselves. People in all walks of life, men and women of all occupations from the various professions, to those who earn their living by manual labor. The different states of life are represented, religious and laity.²³²

²³¹ Francis J. Kuenle, *St. Anthony Church: Dayton, Ohio* (Dayton, OH: St. Anthony Church), 8.

²³² *Ibid.*, 4.

This is a significant point appropriate for catechesis as it reveals the dignity of work and the equal importance of all in the eyes of God and the Church regardless of age, sex, station in life, or profession.

On the whole, the mural represents the entire communion of saints – the community – with Jesus Christ at its head. This idea of community is important as the catechist can describe the important role each person plays in the community as well as the impact of and continuing presence of those who have gone before. In fact, relationships are often formed through imaginative dialogue and thus, this example of sacred art prompts the imagination and suggests the importance of community in the lives of all the faithful.

The final example is also from St. Mary's in Dayton, Ohio and is demonstrative of an etiological reading to explain a point of the Tradition. This



Figure 17: St. Mary's Church - St. Joseph Fragment

scene depicts the death of St. Joseph and features a number of important symbols. First and most obvious are the lilies as symbols of purity or chastity. Next, beyond the scene as one 'looks' out of the window, there appears to be a beautiful garden. Perhaps the garden is a symbol of Paradise while the tree represents the tree of life. Tilley

explains the other more obscure symbols and parts of the scene:

The angel above St. Joseph represents his soul on its way to heaven. Notice Jesus next to the extinguished candles, emblematic of the end of a long life. On the table is a container representative of the medicine of Joseph's last illness, indicating a natural death. On the floor is a scroll

with a prayer to St. Joseph. Barely decipherable at the center are the letters O, P, N, standing for Ora pro nobis, pray for us. The lamp on the floor represents his wisdom which, unlike the smoking candles is not extinguished in death.²³³

Finally, in the big picture, the scene in Figure 17 can explain the absence of Joseph from Jesus' adult life, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. But an observant viewer and catechist can see other themes. First, this might be a good example to use to explain death, grieving, and consolation to older children especially since Jesus is depicted as being present for his foster father's death – a clear promise to the viewer of Jesus' constant presence in the lives of all during good times and bad. Likewise, this scene expresses the need for family solidarity at all times but most importantly during crisis – children and adults alike can learn of the need to care for others even as others care for them. Additionally, Jesus is blessing his foster father much as he did for many in his ministry – Jesus acts compassionately and kindly in a time of great grief even though he himself is grieving. Finally, while this is at first glance a sad scene, a catechist can offer it as one of triumph and joy – Joseph was a righteous man and a man with great trust and love of God; but most importantly, he was a loving husband and father willing to risk all for his family.

Conclusion

As discovered in the various categories, sacred art and architectural adornment serve as tools for Catholics in terms of worship and private prayer and spirituality. But they are more than mere tools – sacred art and architecture form a physical embodiment of Catholicism and a way to identify a Catholic

²³³ Tilley, Wagner, and Hohl, *Tour of St. Mary Church Iconography*, 17.

community. As Happel says, "artistic style and religious devotion link together the public life of the Christian community; in fact, architecture is a 'built theology.' Its shape, form, material, and decoration affect the way the community worships and believes; its design preaches to the assembly about its identity and goals."²³⁴

In fact, the faithful can sense the entire deposit of the Tradition through sacred art and architecture. They can see and imagine points of Scripture, the acts and words of the Apostles, doctrine, and dogma. The faithful can also find God's revelation through sacred art and architecture particularly in terms of his self-revelation, nature, history, and the communion of saints. In fact, through such sacred art as found in St. Anthony's Church, the faithful can truly see their place and role in history and the communion of saints.

Finally, as an effect of the God given grace through the sacraments, through communal worship, and as a result of imagining God's love through sacred art and architecture, the faithful have been reenergized. Through sacred art they have imagined themselves in the entire communion of saints, joining as one to worship, praise, and honor God. They have also been reminded of their commission to live a life in Christ as informed by the Gospel, have been nourished with the Eucharist, and as they leave, are once again 'baptized.' They re-envision themselves as priest, prophet, and king as they re-enter the secular world and as a result, they are both a part of the holy and living communion of saints and are like a city on a hill bringing the Good News in word and deed.

²³⁴ Happel, "Lights and Mirrors: Stained Glass as Metaphor for the Catholic Soul (Afterword)," 312-313.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him (Colossians 1:15-16).

This thesis has provided theories about the appropriate place and role of sacred art and architecture in Catholic life based on an analysis of history, doctrine, theology, and photographic evidence. Moreover, sacred art and architecture as used by the Church through the ages are a part of the Tradition as well as vehicles for the transmission of Tradition. As a result, sacred art and architecture are not merely ways to decorate but are instead valuable tools necessary to nurture and inform Catholic imagination and identity.

Catholicism Today

According to James Davidson and Andrea Williams, the Catholic Church began in the United States as a church of immigrants and one focused, to a certain extent, on itself. But in the twentieth century, Catholics became part of the U.S. cultural and economic mainstream thus creating the beginning of a shift in mindset about the Church. The Second Vatican Council accelerated this shift and caused the people of the church to think of themselves and the Church quite

differently.²³⁵ In fact, many researchers have studied the effects of Vatican II on Catholics in terms of faith and attitude about the Church and most have identified the existence of three age related classifications based on birth year: a) pre-Vatican II (1910 - 1940); Vatican II (1941 - 1960); and post-Vatican II (1961 and later).²³⁶ Each group has a profoundly different view of faith, Catholicism, and the Church. The pre-Vatican II group has the most institutional outlook; the Vatican II cohort shows tendencies to more individualism but also has a partially institutional outlook; and finally, the post-Vatican II group has the most individualistic outlook and attitude.²³⁷

Researchers asked, "as a Catholic, how important is each of the following to you" regarding six elements of being Catholic and found noteworthy differences from generation to generation in terms of those who felt the element was "very important." The differences are remarkable primarily because of the wide disparity between pre and post Vatican II generations but also because the middle group did not always tend towards the mean of the older and younger groups as might be expected. Research results are recreated in Table 1 to show age based differences in Catholic thought and attitude.²³⁸

²³⁵ James D. Davidson and Andrea S. Williams, "Megatrends in 20th-century American Catholicism," *Social Compass* 44, no. 4 (December 1997).

²³⁶ William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, Katherine Meyer, Andrew Greeley, Eugene Kennedy, and Peter Steinfels are a few of many researchers who have studied Catholics and have found significant differences between age groups in the perception and practice of Catholicism. William V. D'Antonio and others, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001).

²³⁷ Andrea S. Williams and James D. Davidson, "Catholic Conceptions of Faith: A Generational Analysis," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 3 (1996): 273-274.

²³⁸ D'Antonio and others, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment*, Table 3.8, 47.

Element	Pre-Vatican II (%)	Vatican II (%)	Post-Vatican II (%)
Sacraments	90	84	73
Spirituality	78	82	71
Mary as Theotokos	83	72	62
Social Justice	77	70	69
Community	71	70	56
Vatican Authority	64	45	30

Table 1. "Very Important" Elements of Catholicism

Similarly, Davidson and Williams observed seven megatrends in the U.S. Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II; these are generally summarized as a shift from a communal point of view and culture to one of individualism.²³⁹ Three trends are noteworthy in terms of the role of sacred art and architecture in day to day Catholic life. First, "an older emphasis on specifically Catholic identity has given way to a greater emphasis on general Christian identity." Second, "specifically Catholic language also has given way to generic Christian language." Third, "there has been a gradual decline in overall levels of commitment to the Church."²⁴⁰ In short, Catholicism has become generalized or as Greeley suggests, has become, "a Catholicism stripped of much of its beauty, its rainforest of metaphors, denuded in an effort to be just like everyone else."²⁴¹

While D'Antonio, Davidson, Williams, and other researchers did not specifically consider sacred art or architecture in their research or methodology, one possible additional trend resulting from a generalization of Catholicism is the

²³⁹ Davidson and Williams, "Megatrends in 20th-century American Catholicism:" 507-510.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 510. In this thesis, use of the word "Christian" by itself as in "Megatrends in 20th-Century American Catholicism" (Davidson and Williams) is somewhat problematic although essential to an irenic discussion and necessary if one is to understand the results of their research. In fact, Catholics are Christians. Therefore, not to be polemic, but perhaps in context of this thesis it is more accurate to think of "Christian" as "Protestant Christianity." Even so, the more nonspecific use of "Christian" will be, in most cases, maintained throughout this thesis.

²⁴¹ Greeley, "A Cloak of Many Colors: The End of Beige Catholicism," 10.

minimization and de-emphasis of sacred art and architecture. As a result, a vicious circle is created: Catholic identity is generalized resulting in less art and plainer architecture, and this in turn results in a loss of Catholic identity. In fact, the Catholic trend towards a more general Christian identity and to generic Christian language might be traced, in part, to removal of Catholic sacred art and the 'modernizing' of church architecture. As McNamara has theorized, "while the Modernist churches of the past decades may have sufficed for a populace that carried liturgical symbolism deeply in their hearts and minds, many Catholics today no longer share the common bond of a rich Catholic culture."²⁴² In other words, pre-Vatican II and some Vatican II Catholics remember the symbols and artistic language of the past while most born in the post-Vatican II generation have no such memory and therefore, no such identity or need to commit.

If, in fact, Catholic language is trending towards a generalized Christian dialect as Davidson and Williams predict, then sacred art and architecture as a language will most likely also trend towards a more general Christian genre. Moreover, if Catholic language, art, and architecture become generally Christian, then many or even most of the outward signs of Catholicism may be obscured and may become meaningless as a tool of distinction; in other words, Catholic churches and other Christian churches will look, feel, sound, and smell the same. It becomes very difficult, as a result, to find differences between Catholicism and other Christianities. This can lead one to question the importance of such a distinction and finally, to no longer think of oneself as Catholic. The ultimate

²⁴² McNamara, "Liturgical Architecture as Sacramental Experience:" 269.

consequence then becomes a failure of commitment to Catholicism and the Catholic Church.

It is easy to see, as did the researchers, in the likelihood of a change in catechetical emphasis for each of the age groups as a result of Vatican II. Based on his research, Davidson theorized the change could lead one to individualism where one: a) embraces a Christian identity before a Catholic identity; b) makes his or her own moral decisions based on the situation; and c) focuses on a one on one relationship with God at the expense of community.²⁴³

In fact, a new sense of Catholic identity occurred as church and parish leaders implemented Vatican II directives on worship and liturgy. As a result, a few church and parish leaders decided to remove some or all sacred art while also 'modernizing' architecture. Therefore, besides hearing a new emphasis on Christian identity, the Vatican II generation also witnessed a de-emphasis of sacred art and architecture as Catholic leaders turned churches into plain and non-descript buildings. Consequently, this generation was both forced and permitted to re-form an identity much less Catholic and more closely aligned to a generic identity, language, and outlook. As a result, the Vatican II generation then passed on a watered down identity, language, and outlook in their catechesis to the post-Vatican II group.

Even with such a generalized outlook, the majority of each generation still identify themselves as Catholic, though there is a decline from generation to

²⁴³ James D. Davidson, *Catholicism in Motion: The Church in American Society* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2005), 172-174.

generation (90%, 80%, 78%).²⁴⁴ But identity is only a minor part of a bigger problem – commitment is of paramount concern. And in terms of commitment, the variations are great: 76% of pre-Vatican II Catholics would never leave the church as opposed to 60% of the Vatican II and 47% of the post-Vatican II generations.²⁴⁵ Davidson claims:

These results have important implications for Catholic parents and Church leaders. For one thing, they point to the importance of building strong identification with the Church. Christian identity is necessary and good, but specifically Catholic identity also is important if future generations are to value the teachings of the Catholic Church. The data on commitment also indicate the value of explaining the benefits one can derive from being part of the Church. Rather than being shy about it, parents and parish leaders should boldly communicate the many ways people gain from being involved in the Church. The more they stress Catholic identity and the advantages of being Catholic, the more successful they will be in passing Catholic faith and morals on to future generations.²⁴⁶

As importantly, Davidson and Williams found in other research a prevalence of religious illiteracy among Catholics of all ages: “religious illiteracy appears to be rather widespread. If half of Catholics do not feel they can explain their faith to others, we are inclined to agree with the bishops that religious illiteracy really is a problem in today’s church.”²⁴⁷

In the end, proper catechesis is crucial to religious illiteracy as well as to Catholic identity and commitment. Obviously, sacred art and architecture are not the one solution to Catholic religious illiteracy, identity, or commitment, but church leaders can and should take advantage of them as practical tools. In fact,

²⁴⁴ Ibid., Table 8.1, 136.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., Table 8.1, 136.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 139-140.

²⁴⁷ James D. Davidson, “Challenging Assumptions About Young Catholics,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 30, 2005.

while Greeley does not advocate a return to an absolute pre-Vatican II set of attitudes, church architecture or adornment, rituals, and rules, he does argue for beauty as a requirement in education saying, "patently we should not abandon catechism nor the teaching of sound doctrine. We should, however, insist that religious education emphasize the beauty in the church and its sacraments and the beauty of sound doctrine."²⁴⁸

Perhaps Catholics need to re-energize identity and commitment through wider adoption of sacred art and architecture as props for catechesis. Surely, the misuse of sacred art, statues, altars, and windows can result in idolatry or scandalize by suggesting idolatry. But as the research implies tangentially, these objects have great value because in the past they have: a) been a catalyst towards forming a unique and energizing Catholic identity; b) been a tool for educating the community; c) acted as devotional aids in spirituality and prayer; and d) perhaps have helped retain Catholics who otherwise might see no difference in Catholicism versus any other Christian formation. And in the future, sacred art and architecture can be called on once again to the same affect.

Based on the analysis in the previous chapters, this chapter concludes the thesis with a reflection on ways to appropriately employ sacred art and architecture in an imaginative way in order to correctly transmit the Tradition. In addition, the conclusion describes how a community can also apply these objects as tools to form community identity, create engaging liturgical actions, and inspire the faithful to prayer and devotion. In any event, pastoral and catechetical

²⁴⁸ Andrew M. Greeley, "The Apologetics of Beauty," *America*, September 16, 2000: 14.

leaders must provide a thorough catechesis about the role and application of sacred art and architecture.

Tradition

Theologian Fr. Richard McBrien provides a definition of Tradition based on the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Lumen Gentium)*. He writes, "the Church, in its teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that it is itself, all that it believes."²⁴⁹ He also clearly distinguishes between Tradition and tradition by explaining, "Tradition is the living and lived faith of the Church; traditions are customary ways of doing or expressing matters related to faith."²⁵⁰ Likewise, theologian Max Thurian gives three similar meanings to Tradition or tradition as: a) Apostolic Tradition – the entire evangelical message of the Apostles; b) Tradition living in the church through dogma, sacraments, and holiness as well as the process to transmit this knowledge to future generations; and c) ecclesiastical traditions in forms of expression based on time, location, and culture.²⁵¹ In this context, sacred art and architecture fit into these categories as ways to facilitate the handing on of knowledge of the evangelical message of the Apostles, dogma, doctrine, sacraments, church holiness, and ecclesiastical traditions.

The previous chapter showed examples of sacred art and architecture in buildings and places used for worship, prayer, and devotion. By virtue of the

²⁴⁹ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, new ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 63 (Quoting the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* Article 8 of the Second Vatican Council).

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁵¹ Max Thurian, "Renewal and the Scripture-Tradition Problem in the Light of Vatican II and Montreal 1963," in *Theology of Renewal: Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church; Centenary of Canada, 1867-1967*, ed. L.K. Shook (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1968), 71.

subject matter portrayed by these objects, one can extract knowledge about Catholic dogma, sacraments, and holiness. In other words, sacred art and architecture can educate. Most often, these tools are strict interpretations of Scripture, doctrine, or dogma, but at times they can also convey etiological representations of traditions. For example, the stained glass window portraying the death of St. Joseph (Figure 17) explains why he was not present during Jesus' ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. In fact, many art historians and theologians describe sacred art as a primary tool for catechesis prior to the printing press and the ability to read.²⁵² But even in modern times, sacred art and architecture have a place in transmitting the Tradition not so much in teaching about the 'facts and figures' of the faith but more so in the imaginative engagement of reason in such activities as the formation of a moral life and the ability to accept the mysterious elements of faith. Philosopher Thomas Merton even perceived sacred art as crucial to faith, claiming, "art is not just another and less perfect, because silent, form of preaching ... it seeks to make the mystery of Christ in His Church not understandable but 'visible' and 'imaginable'."²⁵³

The ecclesiastical traditions – time, location, culture – point primarily to the role of sacred art and architecture in Catholic identity. However, like Merton, McNamara also describes a mystical element in terms of the People of God and the communion of saints. He asserts, "if the heavenly host and images of saints mystically present in worship are removed, an entire dimension of the liturgy in

²⁵² One example is Michael A. Johnston, "Renaissance Sacred Art and Exegetical Theology," *Anglican Theological Review* 75, no. 4 (Fall 1993).

²⁵³ Thomas Merton, "Chronicle: The Council and Sacred Art I," *Continuum* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1964): 138.

which the faithful participate vanishes with them. As a sacramental theologian friend once reminded me, 'that which is not perceived is not encountered'.²⁵⁴ In other words, without some form of imaginative but sacred representation of the entire church (militant, suffering, triumphant), the communal concept of the people of God becomes limited to the periodic coming together of the church militant. In short, there is no continuity with the past and moreover, without a past there is but a weakened and limited future. In short, sacred art and architecture assist in the transmission of Tradition, but these objects also defend against a dilution of the Tradition by embodying the historical truths and future possibilities of the Church.

Principles of Catechesis

In order to protect the Tradition, therefore, the Church must clearly engage the imagination through catechesis about sacred art and architecture. This is a little easier to accomplish when new art or architecture is blessed or consecrated because these blessings become a 'teaching moment.' But this is rare and as such, pastoral and catechetical leaders must periodically teach about the role of existing art to young and old alike. In this regard, parish leadership must consider six instructional approaches to sacred art and architecture. Assumed in these principles is the complete and proper catechesis of catechetical leaders.

First, the catechetical leader must re-orient the student in terms of art and the imagination by demonstrating how the modern, secular manipulation of symbols is not the same as the way symbolism is treated in the church or in the

²⁵⁴ McNamara, "Liturgical Architecture as Sacramental Experience:" 280.

transmission of Tradition.²⁵⁵ In fact, outside of the modern church, Miles believes visual clues, symbols, and icons often are laden with information or are meant to titillate whereas "the historical viewer ... expected images to present a world in which reality and values were organized in an absolute, harmonized, and permanent configuration."²⁵⁶ As a result, the lack of visual clues in a modern church for those from a world normally overwhelmed by such clues could cause a modern viewer to think of the church as so devoid of information as to be totally incomprehensible. And, if the church is incomprehensible, then it can and perhaps must be rejected – or at least avoided. For this reason, the catechetical leader must begin by comparing secular symbolism and its function to sacred art and architecture as a way to explain the purpose of each – informational for the former and representational for the latter.

Second, the catechetical leader must re-present sacred art in terms of a theological and Catholic imagination and as a result can then demonstrate how it can 'change' each time one engages the imagination. This is important because besides the overwhelming amount of symbolism in the secular world, the symbolism is also ever changing and is instantaneously morphed and refreshed. Therefore, static sacred art and architecture seen over and over again could gradually recede or become transparent since no new clues or 'information' are forthcoming.²⁵⁷ From this perspective, it is not unlike driving to work the same way every day and not remembering the drive once one arrives. The

²⁵⁵ Miles, *Images as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, 128.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁵⁷ This analysis is a result of the work of Morgan, Miles, Schloeder, and Rose.

catechetical leader can overcome this difficulty by using Greeley's suggestion to imaginatively but doctrinally tell stories based on the scenes portrayed in or symbolized by these sacred objects. The catechist can then encourage the students to create stories from their own understanding and imagination.

Third, parish leadership must also attend to the catechesis of members of parish commissions about the function of sacred art and architecture in parish identity, worship, and devotion. In particular, pastoral and catechetical leaders can assist the music, worship, and a variety of devotional commissions through a thorough presentation on the employment of sacred art in the work of these commissions. This can lead to a larger audience as these commissions then apply new knowledge about sacred art to community liturgies and devotions.

Fourth, homilists can also take advantage of sacred art by occasionally pointing out representations of the Tradition found throughout the church building. This form of catechesis will reach the vast majority of parish members and has two advantages: a) the art may provide a rendering of the message or Scripture; and b) by preaching a message while pointing out its depiction in art or architecture, the homilist can arouse the congregation's desire to take a new way of imaginative worship into their private prayer lives and secular world. Ethicist Mark Wynn goes further by advocating the use of all of the senses, "for if I immerse myself in the affective world of a particular faith tradition, by familiarizing myself with its images, stories and music, my own affective response to the world of everyday experience is likely to be shaped in some degree accordingly."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Mark Wynn, "Representing the Gods: The Role of Art and Feeling," *Religious Studies* 36 (2000): 329.

Fifth, catechetical leaders must describe how community members can nurture the imagination through sacred art and as a result come to better know the faith while improving their prayer lives and spirituality. In the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, the Bishops define a proper application of sacred art by teaching:

We do this in a holy environment in which architecture, sculpture, paintings, icons, and stained glass lend an ambience that speaks of the mystery of God and divine transcendence on the one hand, and the unity of God with the worshipping community on the other. Since the Son of God honored us by becoming incarnate – the true visible image of the invisible God – we use these signs and symbols to help us experience God's invisible presence.²⁵⁹

In other words, catechetical leaders must instruct the faithful on the efficacy of imaginative visualization in prayer by suggesting how one can employ sacred art to place oneself in God's presence.

As a final point, the catechetical leader can use sacred art and architecture to engage the imagination on important points regarding the communion of saints, an important discussion necessary for Catholic identity. The communion of saints is, of course, a continuous and continuing reunion of the present community with the past, a celebration of all who have gone before, and a way to interpret the future. Sacred art and architecture often portray elements of the communion of saints and as such, catechists, commission leaders, and ministers can easily employ sacred art and architecture in community discussions on purpose, vision, and planning.

²⁵⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 171.

In short, sacred art is not enough by itself. Instead, its purpose in practice hinges on catechesis regarding its functionality as well as an appreciation of the scene or symbolism depicted. The former is perhaps the more important of the two – sacred art can and does illustrate ‘facts and figures’ but it can and often does convey a deeper meaning in terms of what is most important in one’s life, one’s identity as a Catholic, and the community’s self-understanding in the context of a Catholic ‘communion of saints’ identity.

Catholic Identity

Catholicism is primarily a communal faith nurtured and balanced by a healthy, private, individual prayer life. The identity is not simply defined, however, but is instead the total deposit of faith, or the Tradition. In other words, Catholic identity is Tradition and at the same time, the Tradition is the culture. Catholicism can distinguish itself from philosophies, ways of life, and other religions by its Tradition/traditions. In terms of identity, sacred art and architecture have three functions.

First, according to the Bishops, “our parish churches are places where the faithful gather for public worship and personal prayer. These holy places are images of the heavenly kingdom to which we journey.”²⁶⁰ By its nature, therefore, architecture serves as a unifying force even when the community consists of very diverse cultures. In terms of the sacred art within, Kieckhefer says, “communities become communities by what they see together, by shared perception of objects and events that engage the senses as well as the mind and

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 178.

are really charged with symbolic value."²⁶¹ Even so, unique cultures tend to emphasize different aspects of the Tradition and as a result, may derive distinctive thoughts and ideas from sacred art.²⁶² And, while art is not entirely language free, it can serve as a starting point for common understanding and community building especially when the symbolism is based in the Tradition. Consequently, because sacred art is 'owned' by all regardless of culture, it can function as a unifying community builder as long as existing communities and newly arrived cultures come together to give the art a new shared meaning.

Second, sacred art also contributes to the communal celebration of the faith by depicting such things as forgiveness, miracles, and the triumph of life over death as proven by the Resurrection and Ascension. Sacred art is in a sense a catalyst and as McNamara says, "symbolism in the church building can foster the active participation of the faithful in the earthly and cosmic liturgy, as do beautiful music and eloquent texts."²⁶³

Lastly, sacred art serves as a link to the past and as a portent for the future. As a link to the past, sacred art and architecture capture and convey the hope and joy of the original community responsible for the acquisition of such art and architecture. In a way, the art and architecture are also a genealogy as well as a diary of the culture at the time of the acquisition. And yet, because they continuously express the truth found in the Tradition, sacred art and architecture are not stagnant relics of the past. In fact, self-understanding is founded on social location and thus, the beauty of sacred art and architecture – the parish

²⁶¹ Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkley*, 99.

²⁶² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 130.

²⁶³ McNamara, "Liturgical Architecture as Sacramental Experience:" 269.

can always reinterpret symbols and messages contained therein as appropriate to their own times and situation.²⁶⁴

But the Catholic identity of a community is not simply the sacred art or architecture of a particular church. Rather, it is the entire deposit of faith – the Tradition – as a community understands it in the context of its present and historical social location. Certainly, sacred art and architecture can enhance or inform a particular identity but these objects must not be thought of as the whole of the identity.

Conclusion

Sacred art and architecture are both a part of the Tradition/tradition as well as tools of the Tradition. They engage the imagination, mediate between the profane, secular world and the holy, make a mysterious God more knowable, and create a sanctified place of community. In other words, “images, not doctrinal propositions, lead people to prayer.”²⁶⁵

Based on Greeley’s theology of grace – “grace lurks everywhere” – it seems reasonable to define the entire deposit of faith – the Tradition – as both a source of grace and as grace-full. Likewise, one can find grace in sacred art and architecture. Because these objects portray scenes or messages from Scripture, doctrine or dogma, other aspects of the Tradition, creedal truths, or traditional symbolism of the divine, they are the Tradition albeit in a more imaginative visual form than one of an oral or written language. In any event, they are also a source of grace.

²⁶⁴ Louis Dupre, *Symbols of the Sacred* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

²⁶⁵ Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 104.

Moreover, sacred art and architecture force one to engage the imagination and as such, these objects are a type of language wherein one can, after Tracy, converse with the communion of saints while also developing a relationship with God. Additionally, these objects can cause a communal conversation resulting in an understanding of the community's identity or formation of a new identity. Of course, these objects can assist the faithful in day to day prayer and spirituality as well as in communal worship. In the end, finally, the faithful draw on sacred art and architecture as a framework wherein they can come to embrace and appreciate the faith.

Many experts lent their voices in support of sacred art and architecture as necessary components of individual and communal faith. Many also suggested the need to locate sacred art and architecture in a proper context – one wherein these objects: a) point beyond themselves to God; b) are portrayed theologically as well as imaginatively; and c) are appropriately presented catechetically. In short, individuals and communities must be careful to ensure balance by not overdoing art or architecture and must also be vigilant in catechesis.²⁶⁶ Even so, as has been shown throughout, sacred art is a valuable and practical tool of theology and Catholicism since it allows the faithful to employ their imagination to 'know' God through all of his revelation.

²⁶⁶ Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council Through Liturgy and Architecture*, 151.

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