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“This book is timely. Vosko’s powerful call for unity and his desire to build common ground are inspiring for anyone in these turbulent, polarizing times; but they are particularly poignant for those of us who seek to support and harness the potential power of spiritual communities to bridge our divides through architecture.”

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Design Principal
HGA

“Richard Vosko has for many years been a clear voice for encouraging congregations of different faith communities to come together through the sensitive design of worship facilities. This new book takes on the very important work of finding ways that architecture and design can lessen tribal dissonance and find ways to discover the holy spirit in each one of us.”

—Michael J. Crosbie, FAIA, Editor-in-Chief, *Faith & Form:
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“This book is a must-read for individuals and groups involved in the ministry of church building and renovation. Moreover, Vosko’s reflections help the reader fathom the deeper developments in the meaning of liturgical symbol in our contemporary age.”

—Mark E. Wedig, OP
Professor of Liturgical Studies
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“Vosko’s extensive experience designing, constructing, and furnishing places for worship is guided by his abiding and ardent belief that those places should help to shape justice-seeking, compassionate, and God-centered Christian communities. His vision is evident on every page of this accessible, theologically grounded, and inspirational book.”

—Robin Jensen
Patrick O’Brien Professor of Theology
University of Notre Dame

“Vosko has opened a critical conversation between the meanings of liturgical ritual, liturgical space as ecclesial text, and the demands of social action. For him, worship doesn’t just point to a social agenda, it includes every aspect of social action.”

—Father J. Philip Horrigan, DMin, liturgical design
consultant, Chicago

Art and Architecture for Congregational Worship

The Search for a Common Ground

Richard S. Vosko



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To
Howard J. Hubbard
*Bishop Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Diocese
of Albany, New York*

A street priest, who became a bishop,
who exemplifies the inseparable link
between worshiping God and working for justice and peace

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part one

Foundations



1. Introduction

I am writing this book to encourage a change in the way most Christians think about the interior design of churches and the art that is in them.¹ Although my perspective is Roman Catholic, I am confident that this material will be helpful to other Christian denominations. Ecumenical and theological scholar James Puglisi reminds us of academics and practitioners who are loyal in the quest for liturgical renewal in their own churches. He wrote of “the riches which other ecclesial traditions carry within their traditions and which caused the Second Vatican Council to affirm that elements of sanctification do indeed exist outside the confines of the Catholic Church, because the Spirit of God will blow where it will”²

Here are my three main objectives: 1) to help the reader perceive the environment for worship in fresh practical ways so it can demonstrate the inclusive and hospitable nature of the Gospel message; 2) to foster appreciation for the fact that houses of worship can serve as tangible expressions of unity and peace in societies broken apart by polarization; and 3) to establish the

1. In this book I am using the word “church” to include all houses of worship—cathedrals, chapels, and shrine churches—actively used by a congregation.

2. James F. Puglisi, ed., *Liturgical Renewal as a Way to Christian Unity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), ix.

understanding that acts of worship and social justice are inextricable: we cannot do one without doing the other.

The last of these objectives, although not directly connected to religious art and architecture, is greatly influenced by them. Indeed, the thread that ties this whole work together is the conviction that worship and justice are inseparable. The call to worship God and the summons to work for justice are one and the same invitation to the entire Body of Christ. It is my thesis that the establishment of egalitarian equivalence within the architectural setting for worship will manifest not only a more united church, but also a people of God more capable of answering that call.

The term “common ground” in the subtitle has a double meaning. First, a common ground is a place where people of differing viewpoints can move toward mutual *agreement*. This book brings together the various opinions about the characteristics of a functional and beautiful place of worship. Second, a common ground is a real borderless place inside church buildings—one that is shared by both laity and clergy during worship. This book outlines the relationships among God, creation, congregations, architecture, art, and worship and shows how they all fit together. The interiors of our houses of worship can create a strong sense of unity between the clergy and laity while together they praise and thank God in concert with Christ the High Priest. Also, because the liturgy is a celebration of the paschal mystery I agree with those who believe that it cannot be contained within four walls. Christ’s death and resurrection are ongoing in the world. Therefore, liturgy requires social action. Without social action, worship is like the proverbial bell without a gong.

Although buildings are important features in our countrysides and cityscapes, I am not so concerned about the external curb appeal or architectural style of a church building (Neo-Classical, Neo-Gothic, Mission, Georgian, or Post-Modern). I am more interested in what takes place *inside* and how the architectural setting and works of art affect the ritual performances of the congregation as well as their mission in the larger community.

At one of his audiences Pope Francis spoke about the preparation of the gifts at the Eucharist. He said, “May the spirituality of self-giving that this moment of Mass teaches us illuminate our days, our relationships with others, the things we do, the suffering we encounter, helping us to build up the earthly city in the light of the Gospel.”³

Two fundamental assumptions concerning liturgical ministry and spirituality underlie this work. The first is the desirability of a shared approach to liturgical ministry, based on charisms and the gifts of the Spirit. The universal call to holiness is an open invitation to all people to acknowledge God’s gifts and then to respond in various ministerial ways. The second is this: Engagement in the sacramental life of the church, especially at the Eucharist, is a divine gift that requires a response, that is, fruitful, active, conscious participation in the Christian life. On a deeper level this is an invitation to all baptized persons to comprehend that the paschal mystery they are ritually memorializing is not something extraneous to their beings. It is a living spirituality that informs our way of being in the world. Although most denominations presume their members are in communion with one another, there are striking architectural factors inside places of worship that weaken the claim that the church is “a sacrament of unity” (SC 26).⁴

The physical and psychological borderlines that exist in traditional and even in modern church buildings undeniably give the impression that religious institutions are organized according to a class system. The architectural distinction between the nave (the

3. Pope Francis, *General Audience on the Liturgy of the Eucharist* (February 28, 2018), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180228_udienza-generale.html.

4. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC [The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy]), in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

assembly area) and sanctuary, presbyterium, or chancel⁵ indicates a framework in ecclesial polity that distinguishes the clergy from the laity. I am aware that the Catholic General Instruction of the Roman Missal calls for the presbyterium (sanctuary) to be set off from the rest of the assembly area (GIRM 295).⁶ Presumably this direction is intended to counter the emergence of more “collaborative ecclesiologies.”⁷ Nevertheless, my proposition for egalitarian worship settings is a response to challenges the church faces at this time in history. Valuable and loyal bonds between clergy and laity have been fractured for one reason or another over a long period of history leading up to the present. The relationships continue to be ruptured because of more recent and extremely disturbing concerns that have to do with the way we treat one another as human beings. Without abrogating the hierarchical nature of any denomination, what can be done? Might the elimination of all architectural and artistic barriers during worship help to restore right relationships within the Body of Christ? My answer to that question is a resounding Yes.

There are innumerable studies that point out how the built environment shapes human behavior. My intent is to illustrate how church architecture and art specifically can provide a common ground in an age when religions and societies are wounded by cultural and personal clashes that are mean-spirited and hurtful. Social psychological findings and other sources regarding beauty and nature offer compelling evidence for the claim that the envi-

5. In this book I am using the words “sanctuary,” “chancel,” and “presbyterium” interchangeably to refer to that area in the churches of most Christian denominations where the clergy preside over the ritual actions occurring there.

6. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

7. See Nathan Mitchell, “Liturgy and Ecclesiology,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 2, *Fundamental Liturgy*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 113–17.

ronment for worship shapes the identity of the members of the congregation and influences how they treat one another, how they worship, and how they tend to strangers in the larger community. The work of designing an environment for worship is much more than a matter of observing rubrical guidelines or following fashionable trends. To explore this material I will examine diversity in architectural and artistic styles as expressions of culture, taste, memory, and imagination.

Part One of this book consists of “foundation” topics that are essential to consider before even thinking about church design. This section will focus on polarizations, reformations, the common good, God, the cosmos, and dualistic language. In Part Two I will examine the development of philosophical and theological theories and how they influence an understanding of the ritual performances of sacraments, especially as they relate to the memorialization of the paschal mystery. In Part Three I will review a seemingly endless flow of new intelligence regarding the impact of architecture and art on human behavior in places of worship. I will also examine why there are such strong opinions about traditional and modern styles. In Part Four I will personify the church building as a sacramental minister and point out how various spaces, furnishings, and artifacts are required by the building in order for it to be a servant to the congregation. In Part Five I will examine generational expectations and emergent churches, two subjects that are related to the dramatic shifts in religious behavior in the United States. In the concluding section I will offer a vision of what church complexes might look like in the future.

The title of my book borrows from the one used by renowned architect Edward A. Sövik (1918–2014) in his concise and influential work.⁸ I inserted the word “congregational” not because Sövik overlooked the importance of the assembly. He believed the primary

8. Edward A. Sövik, *Architecture for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973).

function of any house of worship is precisely to serve the members and their mission in the world. He also promoted the challenging idea of a “non-church church” suggesting that our houses of worship must be more than just a place for liturgical activity.⁹ During a visit with Ed shortly before he died I asked him what the most important thing is that artists and architects should know today. His incisive and lucid answer was one that he had repeated frequently throughout his professional career—“theology!” One might deduce from his answer that an essential question to ask is: What theology is expressed in this place of worship?

Allow me a few disclaimers. 1) If you want an exhaustive theoretical treatise on sacred art and architecture, this is not it. Selected resources for further reading are listed at the end of this book. 2) If you are looking for an exacting “how to do it” manual or to browse through nice photos of liturgical places, this is not it. Countless other books and journals might be more useful. 3) If you are hoping for an apologetic treatise that defends traditional or Post-Modern architectural styles, this is not it. I am searching for a paradigm that balances what is new with what is old. 4) It is not my intent to offer a compendium of significant studies dealing with so-called sacred places or ritual performance. Nevertheless, I hope you will appreciate my effort to weave brief excerpts from the writings of theologians, architects, artists, and others that are directly related to the fields of worship, art, and architecture. Finally, 5) Although much of this book may appear to be iconoclastic in terms of hierarchy, rituals, art, and architecture, I fully acknowledge with abundant gratitude the uncountable ways in which Christianity at large and the Catholic Church and other faith traditions in particular have contributed to the rise and welfare of civilizations over the centuries. I am also mindful of the many risks taken by the laity and clergy to promote justice and

9. See Mark Torgerson, “Sövik’s House for the People of God,” *Faith & Form* 51, no. 2 (2018): 22–27.

peace for all human beings. There are, of course, many issues that Catholics, in particular, have to deal with in terms of credibility, trust, leadership, and governance. The future of the liturgical life of the church will depend on what all members of the Body of Christ will do to address these concerns. My thesis is specifically related to art and architecture as valuable agents in celebrating the presence of God at work within living stones. My hope is that this book, based on fifty years of experience as a designer, consultant, educator, and liturgical presider, will broaden perspectives. May it also assist congregations, leaders, artists, and architects in moving to a common ground where humility, truth, and beauty can serve a world desperate for moral moorings.



2. Polarizations Everywhere

“Healing yourself is connected with healing others.”

—Yoko Ono

Why write a book on church art and architecture as a way to seek a common ground—something we desperately need in both the religious and the secular worlds? Polarization and its effects are not only a problem of the church. There is without doubt a deep strain of tribal politics, manifested in nativistic or nationalistic behavior that is dividing societies around the globe. Former president of the United States Barack Obama said recently that in the great arc of American history there has always been a push and pull “between those who want to divide and those who are seeking to bring people together.”¹ Sadly, organized religions are also dealing with tensions that split their members into separate and opposing camps. Throughout history the Christian religion has been fractured by conflict over doctrinal, ministerial, moral, and territorial issues. We have learned that divisions arising from such disputes do not heal but wound the church. Although tensions in life are inevitable and can act as healthy tools when seeking the common good, they can be destructive and self-serving when opposing parties are unwilling to compromise.

1. The World News, <https://theworldnews.net/us-news/obama-campaigns-in-california-says-2018-brings-a-chance-to-restore-sanity-in-politics>.

There is another, more constructive way to understand and deal with the reality of tension. Ever wonder why our church buildings do not fall over? Buildings stand because of the tensions between certain parts of the structure pushing against other pieces. The magnetic force that can pull things apart can also exert tension to keep things together. We need a positive viewpoint of our own centers of gravity, our moorings or bearings, to prevent religious and secular worlds from tumbling down.

Even a cursory glance at news reports shows disturbing evidence that conflicts and divisions have reached a dangerous level. In the United States hate crimes and brutal acts of prejudice are on the rise. Murderous acts are occurring in schools, churches, offices, and entertainment venues. Bullying is rampant on the Internet and age-based and gender-based harassment in the workplace is on the rise.² Uncivil behavior is fueled by strong divisions in society over gun control, immigration, health care, women's rights, climate change, housing, and voting rights. Drug use and the number of suicides is on the rise in all age groups. The vast gap between wealthy and poor people is another dividing factor. According to Jonathan Rauch, who writes about the connections between income inequity and happiness, "Like it or not, inequality in today's America drives politics toward rage and polarization, and toward destabilizing and dangerous populisms of both left and right."³ Two things are clear. First, we human beings are responsible for these problems. The polarizations in American society are the symptoms of just how narcissistic and self-centered we have become as a nation. Second, most people are frustrated and want to see an end to partisan pillorying fueled by media

2. See Chai R. Feldblum and Victoria A. Lipnic, *Report of the Co-Chairs of the Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace*, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Washington, DC (June 2016).

3. Jonathan Rauch, "Why Prosperity Has Increased but Happiness Has Not," *The New York Times* (August 21, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/opinion/happiness-inequality-prosperity-.html>.

personalities as well as by leaders of government and religion.⁴ In one of his columns David Brooks analyzed the problem in this way. “From an identity politics that emphasized our common humanity, we’ve gone to an identity politics that emphasizes having a common enemy.”⁵ Brooks is referring to the sad reality caused by politicians and lobbyists who support populist ideologies that further divide people into tribal camps. Candidates for office make promises to disenfranchised voters with no reasonable strategy for achieving them; their pitch consists solely in blaming the other side. When promises are not kept, people get angry, and when people get angry they mistrust and fight one another.

What do these frightening phenomena of contemporary life in the United States have to do with church art and architecture? They should cause us to ask serious questions about the symbolic statements that are made by our church buildings. Like it or not, the prevailing physical separation of clergy and laity in church buildings during liturgy is an expression of the divisions and polarizations that exist in the church. Massimo Faggioli, theologian and frequent author on ecclesiastical affairs, wrote that “the church appears to represent something very different from a community of unity and reconciled diversities.”⁶

4. See two commentaries: Matt Malone, SJ, “Who Is the Cause of Society’s Polarization? All of Us,” *America: A Jesuit Review* (April 30, 2018), <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/04/20/who-cause-societys-polarization-all-us>; and Jay W. Cobb, “Enough Tribalism,” *The Buckley Club* (November 4, 2016), <https://thebuckleyclub.com/enough-tribalism-4827f9718380>.

5. David Brooks, “The Retreat to Tribalism,” *The New York Times* (January 1, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/opinion/the-retreat-to-tribalism.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fopinion&action=click&contentCollection=opinion>.

6. Massimo Faggioli, “Polarization in the Church and the Crisis of the Catholic Mind,” *LaCroix International* (November 27, 2017), <https://international.la-croix.com/news/polarization-in-the-church-and-the-crisis-of-the-catholic-mind/6444>.

Faggioli is focusing on church-related divisions, but many cultural and moral issues are just as problematic for society as a whole in the United States and have spilled over into the church. A couple of examples pertain to our broken immigration system. The policy of separating children from their parents who are seeking asylum and the proposal to construct a wall between Mexico and the United States have divided Catholics into opposing camps. Recent polls say that a 55-percent majority of white non-Hispanic Catholics favor the wall, while fully 83 percent of the Catholic Latinx population is opposed to an expanded rampart. In the context of American Catholic history, perhaps this should not surprise us. As history professor Julia Young wrote, “Catholic nativism toward other Catholic immigrants is a recurring sentiment that dates to at least the second half of the nineteenth century, when the influx of Catholics changed the religious landscape of the United States.”⁷ Yet, it remains a troubling divide. This is why it is impressive to see some bishops and others taking their place among migrant workers and immigrants seeking asylum along the Mexican–U.S. borders and advocating for their human rights. Would we Catholics in the United States step up our resistance to social injustice if every one of our bishops showed up as a group at the border wall that separates Nogales, Arizona (U.S.) from Nogales, Sonora (Mexico) to protest? A more united church would indeed make a difference.

Most Catholics and Protestants agree that immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children should be granted permanent legal status. Yet, although the United States Congress is 88.2 percent Christian, with Catholics comprising one-third of the House of Representatives and about 22 percent of the Senate,⁸ elected officials continue to be passionately divided over the Deferred Action

7. Julia G. Young, “We Were Different: Why Nativism Persists Among U.S. Catholics,” *Commonweal* (March 9, 2018): 10.

8. These are the figures as of the 2018 mid-term elections in the United States.

for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) and immigration laws in general. To its credit, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) joined other Christian denominations and groups such as Advocates for Justice Inspired by Catholic Sisters (also known as Network) in supporting federal laws that would protect undocumented children from deportation. But are the Catholic people united with their bishops in this effort? Or are they, too, caught up in the political gridlock of opposing camps?

In another example, the USCCB published strong objections to President Donald Trump's travel ban denying entry into the United States by refugees and citizens from several countries heavily populated by Muslims. The Conference wrote: "Such blatant religious discrimination is repugnant to the Catholic faith, core American values, and the United States Constitution. It poses a substantial threat to religious liberty that this [Supreme] Court has never tolerated before and should not tolerate now."⁹ Despite strong denunciations such as this, the Supreme Court¹⁰ ruled that, aside from what his personal feelings may be, President Trump's decision to impose the ban was within the limits of his executive authority. Tensions remain.

It is understandable that these divisions within this country did not emerge overnight. The 2016 presidential election campaign gave witness to a growing dissatisfaction with government in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (PEW) 60 percent of white Catholics voted for Donald Trump while 37 per-

9. Brief *Amici Curiae* of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. in the Supreme Court of the United States Inc. in Support of Respondents (No. 17-965): 6, https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/17/17-965/41839/20180330170127467_No.%2017-965%20Amicus%20Brief%20ISO%20Respondents%20Final.pdf.

10. At this writing there are six Roman Catholics on the United States Supreme Court if you include Neil Gorsuch, who was raised Catholic but now attends an Episcopal Church. The other three are Jewish.

cent of Latinx Catholics voted for Hillary Clinton. White Evangelicals voted overwhelming (80 percent) in favor of Trump and his platform. Not all Christians are on the same political page when it comes to human rights, income inequality, climate change, gun control, and war.

An issue that will most likely intensify polarizations among Catholics in the United States concerns capital punishment. In August 2018 Pope Francis revised No. 2267 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to read, “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person.”¹¹ Although the U.S. Catholic bishops immediately announced their support for the pope’s action (a doctrinal change that has been in the works for years), how Catholics will respond to this development in church teaching cannot be gauged.¹² As recently as June 2018 the PEW research center reported that 57 percent of *white* Roman Catholics in the United States favored the death penalty.

Indeed, there is no way for Catholics to know if even the U.S. bishops are all on the same page in any ecclesial or civic matter. In principle the bishops act collegially (as a college), but the Conference as a whole has little power. Committees of the USCCB have at times produced very helpful and sometimes controversial pastoral statements, such as the landmark pastoral letters about the

11. Edward Pentin, “Pope Francis Changes Catechism to Say Death Penalty ‘Inadmissible,’” *National Catholic Register* (August 2, 2018), <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/pope-francis-changes-catechism-to-declare-death-penalty-inadmissible/>.

12. A trio of bishops urged action to halt an upcoming execution in Nebraska while the Catholic governor said that he remains in support of capital punishment. See Joe Duggan, “As Vatican seeks to abolish death penalty, local bishops urge Nebraska to halt Moore’s execution,” *Omaha World Herald* (August 3, 2018), https://www.omaha.com/news/courts/as-vatican-seeks-to-abolish-death-penalty-local-bishops-urge/article_dea3ef07-7ce9-5250-9e1e-592fdb453c9f.html.

economy, war, and the arms race.¹³ However, archbishops and bishops are autonomous authorities in their own archdioceses or dioceses. They answer to the Vatican and not to the leadership of the USCCB. Increasingly, the Conference itself appears to be polarized. One example of the divide in the USCCB can be found in the way the bishops responded to Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's "Testimony."¹⁴ That letter accused Pope Francis and many high-ranking prelates of sheltering and promoting known sexual abusers and "homosexual networks" in the church, and it called on Pope Francis to resign. Some American bishops vociferously supported Viganó while others dismissed his charges as totally unsubstantiated. The varying responses revealed an underlying rift between Francis and certain bishops that seems to have little to do with the abuse crisis and more to do with enmity and partisanship in church politics. Historians of the papacy such as Michael Walsh, an editor for the *Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, remarked that tensions between Francis, who is seen as a reformer, and conservatives such as Viganó have been brewing for some time.¹⁵

The popular perception is that the United States bishops are in solidarity on certain pro-life matters. Yet, it is also clear that the "Seamless Garment" mantra of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (1928–1996) is not their overarching guidepost for the so-called "life" issues. Cardinal Bernardin was deeply committed to reconciling differences and bridging polarities in the church, not only concerning "life issues" but also in other contentious areas. He founded

13. See, for example, *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, November 1996, and *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, May 1983 (Washington, DC: USCCB).

14. Carlo Maria Viganò, *Testimony*, trans. Diane Montagna (Rome, August 22, 2018).

15. Saphora Smith and Claudio Lavanga, "Clerical Sex-Abuse Scandal Exposes 'War within the Vatican,'" in NBC News online, August 28, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/clerical-sex-abuse-scandal-exposes-war-within-vatican-n904376>.

the Catholic Common Ground Initiative¹⁶ in 1996 with the National Pastoral Life Center in pursuit of that effort. Yet, this initiative met with only limited success. Today, to the extent that bishops represent a cross section of the U.S. Catholic population, the red, blue, and purple state categories also define the Conference. It is more than likely that bishops will not agree as a group on issues that affect our common life, and they will teach from a partisan point of view when they get back to their own dioceses. This is unfortunate. When any conference of bishops in any country remains silent or shows discord on certain moral matters, the seamless garment is torn asunder and Catholics in those countries will remain fragmented as well.

The premise of this book is that the church's own symbol system calls us to something better. The fissions between the laity and their clergy that are demonstrated in church buildings that physically separate the two groups do not need to prevail. Other, better models are available. In truth, while countless congregations, clergy and laity, do worship in a spirit of unity and act as agents of justice in a spirit of solidarity, most church buildings do not give testimony that such collaborations exist. The interior design of church buildings and rituals that occur inside a church point out clearly that clergy and laity are two separate estates. The voices of the clergy are more important than those of the laity, and they talk past each other in a way that is more often reflective of our fractured secular order than of the Gospel.

Internal rifts must be addressed before any religion can present itself as a peacemaker in world affairs. This is an ongoing struggle. Indeed, no religion or Christian denomination is impervious to such tensions. In October 2017 an Anglican Inter Faith Commission was created at the Anglican Communion's Primates' Meeting in Canterbury, England. According to the Episcopal News Service, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said that "the issues

16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Common_Ground_Initiative.

of interfaith strain, stress, even conflict, are global, they are generational and they are ideological.”¹⁷ In part, tensions between the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Anglicans in the United Kingdom and other countries stem from the ordination of a gay bishop and the marriage of same-sex partners. More recently, in July 2018, polarized reactions erupted when Episcopal Church leaders in the United States passed a new rule allowing a parish priest to preside at a gender-neutral marriage rite even though the local bishop may oppose same-sex unions. Some members of a church will wonder how a religion like Christianity can boldly profess that it stands for peace and harmony regionally or globally when it cannot resolve the divisions that exist within its own ranks.

Furthermore, there is evidence of an insurmountable rift at the top levels of the hierarchy in the Catholic Church. Some cardinals from various countries as well as within Vatican offices have publicly opposed and brazenly reprimanded Pope Francis for his attempts to instill fresh interpretations of such subjects as liturgy, marriage, family life, homosexuality, and climate change. How many lay Catholics are no longer willing to take moral advice from the bishop of Rome or any bishop? According to Eric Hodges, a senior priest from Melbourne, Australia, “Over the last 50 years Western culture has dramatically changed. Contemporary culture is secular and pluralist. Authority, once derived from status, now must be won. Where bishops once had the last say, they are now just another voice in public debate.”¹⁸

The fragmentations found in the secular world also exist within the same congregation of a church. Disagreements over laws in the United States that challenge religious liberties have caused a

17. “Global Anglican commission to tackle inter-religious tensions” (October 6, 2017), Episcopal News Service, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/global-anglican-commission-tackle-inter-religious-tensions>.

18. Eric Hodgens, “Spare a Thought for the New Archbishop,” *LaCroix International* (July 23, 2018), <https://international.la-croix.com/news/spare-a-thought-for-the-new-archbishop/8113>.

wide range of reactions within almost every denomination. Consider how some of the evangelical churches and other Christian denominations in the U.S. are split when it comes to issues regarding human life, gun control, capital punishment, and religious liberty. In June 2018 the Initiative for Catholic Social Thought and Public Life hosted a conference called “Though Many One: Overcoming Polarization Through Catholic Social Thought.” The discussions focused on how to dialogue about the divisions within the Catholic Church in a civil manner.¹⁹ One theory that emerged was that any discourse dealing with these tensions will be ineffective if the agenda is so designed that opposing groups are expected to surrender their values. The idea was that diverse groups should come to a middle or common ground on which they can approach a fruitful compromise. To do so requires that disparate groups listen to one another.

The situation is not entirely bleak. Innumerable Catholic organizations and movements in the United States continue to serve as strong advocates for people who are poor and ostracized for whatever reason. And there are many outstanding bishops who promote and practice charity in the wider community. Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen (1921–2018) was exemplary in this regard. He was willing to risk his career and his standing among his brother bishops by opposing gender inequalities and criticizing U.S. defense budgets. Father Michael Ryan remembered Hunthausen with these words: “As a bishop he was called to be a unifier, but he came to know that being true to God and conscience can sometimes lead to division.”²⁰ Tearing down the fences to find a common ground

19. See Michael J. O’Loughlin, “Catholic Leaders Confront Polarization but Skirt Polarizing Issues at Georgetown Forum,” *America: The Jesuit Review* (June 8, 2018), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/06/08/catholic-leaders-confront-polarization-skirt-polarizing-issues-georgetown-forum>.

20. Michael Ryan, “Archbishop Hunthausen Was a Man of Prayer, A Man of God,” *National Catholic Reporter* (July 23, 2018), <https://www.nconline.org/news/people/archbishop-hunthausen-was-man-prayer-man-god>.

today is not easy even for bishops who have enjoyed, for many centuries, the uncontested trust of their members.

In an ever-developing technological world the so-called “cyber militias”—loosely related gangs of trolls and bullies that are motivated by extreme rhetoric online to attack and threaten their perceived ideological enemies in a vicious way—cannot be overlooked as agents in the spread of vitriolic hostilities. It has been substantiated now that election campaigns and voter results in the United States have been the target of influence by outsider interests, mediated by the Internet. Also, by using the Internet extremist Catholic movements have demonstrated that they have the power to pressure bishops and organizations to cancel lectures and concerts by credible speakers, authors, and artists. Mean-spirited bloggers and trolls use social media to alarm and entice church leaders into adopting status quo strategies with regard to the role of the church in society. In some cases, bloggers post bitter attacks based on alternative facts to demean individuals who are doing good work and destroy their reputations. They take no responsibility for the falsehoods they spread but, rather, place the burden of proof on those they have wantonly attacked. Faggioli describes this unfortunate period of church history as the “age of anger.”²¹

This is where we are. How do we get to a new place? Each of the following chapters is linked to the well-researched understanding that our built environments shape human behavior. The architectural and artistic settings for worship can help heal divisions when they are designed to unite a congregation of clergy and laity without distinction or physical compartmentalization that compromises their common identity and mission. When people are gathered around the altar table as a collaborative assembly of God, it will become clear that everyone present is called

21. Massimo Faggioli, “Catholic Cyber-Militias and the New Censorship,” https://international.la-croix.com/news/catholic-cyber-militias-and-the-new-censorship/5923?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_content=29-12-201.

not only to celebrate the indwelling of the Spirit in the assembly but also to help close the rifts that exist in the world around us. Disagreements over architectural styles are not helpful in this regard. What matters is the understanding that liturgical action around the altar table is linked to what happens outside the church walls.



3. Reformations Redux

“The primary and exclusive aim of the liturgy is not the expression of the individual’s reverence and worship for God.”

—Romano Guardini

Establishing a common ground in matters pertaining to church art and architecture will not by itself lead to the elimination of the cultural wars in the religious or secular worlds. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that church art and architecture can play a role in forming communities for mission by increasing their sense of graced solidarity—with one another, with all people, and with creation. A more united faith community can work wonders in the public sphere to correct the inequities and counteract the ideologies that divide people. This cooperative effort emerges from the relationships that members of a faith community develop not only with one another around the communion table but also with people not at the table—especially those who are disadvantaged economically, socially, and in need in any way. It is grounded in a congregation’s collective moral response to the biblical call to work for the common good. One might think that listening to the word of God and sharing in a holy communion would automatically diminish or even eliminate divisions within our faith communities. We might speculate that having a sense of a united front would inspire entire congregations to take to the streets in proactive work for justice, peace, and the common good in our society. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. The act of worshiping God by

itself is not a remedy for the ills of humanity. When we honor and thank God for God's abundant mercy, it should remind us that we still have work to do.

Although liturgical rituals can take place anywhere, they traditionally occur within a building purposely designed to accommodate a certain style of worship. The forms used for praising or honoring God can unify people, but they can also generate alienation and division in the large church community. Robert Hovda (1920–1992), a well-known social activist and liturgical sage, contended that it takes a long time for a congregation to learn how to worship together. The ritual actions that occur in a church are shaped by many factors: The full-bodied participation of the worshippers, the proclamation of scriptures, the content of homilies, the performance of music, the presentation of gifts, the bidding prayers, the prayers of thanksgiving, and words of commissioning or sending forth together make up the liturgical experience. These elements create a matrix within which acts of regeneration, forgiveness, healing, and communion occur. They simultaneously affirm whatever is the dominant culture, meme, or customs of a congregation. In an ecclesiological context these attributes are reflectors of the membership's understanding of its organic self, its belief system, and its current mission. Strangely enough, worshippers are responsible for shaping the liturgy and also the place of worship that will affect their spiritual, sacramental, and social actions. We are shaped by what we shape.

In today's Catholic Church, for example, the intramural disputes over the style of worship, the translation of texts, and which Order of Mass to use are sadly dubbed the "liturgy wars." Massimo Faggioli asserts that theological extremism has become mainstream and has been accelerated by the movement known as the "reform of the liturgical reform."¹ This is a serious problem. Worship, which influences the behavior of faith communities in

1. Faggioli, "Polarization in the Church."

the public square, now sadly is being used as a means of bolstering a conservative or liberal agenda when dealing with specific secular and religious issues. These internal tensions are not helpful in fostering healthy relationships within a congregation, not to mention the ongoing reformation and renewal of the church at large. Intramural rifts can also sap the energy of the faith group as it works for the common good in society.

There are those who dispute the existence of polarizations in the church at the grassroots level. In a recent issue of *America* magazine, playwright and actor Joe Hoover, SJ claimed that the “church in the United States is not divided, it is not polarized, it is not at war with itself.” Hoover stated that Catholics do not have the time to be concerned about “liturgical styles, homosexuality, Vatican II, priestly genders, Mass translations or what kind of pills a woman can morally ingest.”² He may be right in pointing out that most Catholics do have more urgent things to worry about in their personal lives. He may even be right in thinking that small groups of Catholics are more vocal than most. And he is correct in referring to the good work done by Catholic missionaries, social workers, educators, and health care providers. Nevertheless, the slow and steady exodus of believers from the Catholic Church and other Christian churches cannot be overlooked. The disaffection, expressed by young and old members alike, is precisely linked to issues pertaining to worship and justice.

It is now apparent that not everyone in the Catholic Church’s hierarchy embraced the sweeping updating of the church ushered in by the Second Vatican Council.³ That pastoral conclave called for a radical movement away from an older perception of the

2. Joe Hoover, “No, There Is Not a Civil War in the Catholic Church,” *America: The Jesuit Review* (August 27, 2018), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/27/no-there-not-civil-war-catholic-church>.

3. See Piero Marini, *A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal, 1963–1975*, ed. Mark R. Francis, CSV, John R. Page, and Keith F. Pecklers, SJ (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

Catholic Church as a powerful, autocratic, and self-centered institution fortified against the outside world. The Council called Catholics to open their hearts and minds in dialogue with the world, to respect and learn from other faith traditions, and to cooperate with other religions to improve the human condition. The bishops at the council produced documents that exhibited a constructive and welcome balance between the pastoral and doctrinal strengths of the church. However, a reaction against the council's reforming vision emerged among some bishops even before there was a chance for the church at large to reap the benefits of the full implementation of the proceedings.

Today, no bishop who is canonically responsible for a diocese in the United States was present as a voting member at the council. This makes sense, of course. The council ended over a half century ago. However, it also means that bishops who are now the chief liturgists in their local churches do not have a first-hand experience of the spirit that prevailed at the council. Small groups of bishops argued then, and others continue to do so now, that the council ruptured continuity with the traditions of the church and divorced itself from original sources. There should be no reason why a spirit of *aggiornamento* and true *ressourcement* cannot live side by side as “twin streams of renewal,”⁴ yet the renewal itself is contested by some as a “wrong turn” that needs to be corrected. The architectural manifestation of a determined retreat to previous ages is found in those areas in the U.S. where pastors and bishops approve plans for remodeled or new churches that replicate those designed *before* the council. It is as if they wish to make a statement that “nothing has really changed.”

Although the advancements and transformations inaugurated by the council are regarded as indisputably positive and encouraging

4. This expression was used in *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal*, Agreed Statement of the Third Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, No. 3 (Erfurt: SPCK, 2017).

by most Christians of all denominations, various Catholic voices continue to resist the teachings found in the sixteen documents published at the council. The eminent historian of the council Joseph Komanchak found in his research that some theologians said just “recently” (fifty years after the council!) that it was still too early, perhaps, to draw conclusions about the impact of the pastoral awakenings of the council. Komanchak wrote in 2015, “Some are using the texts in a way that other people believe betrays not only the Council’s intentions but what it actually said.”⁵ Regarding this situation Archbishop Emeritus Rembert Weakland asked a poignant question about continuity: “What are the precise criteria by which one can judge which elements of the past must be retained and their growth fostered? Without such criteria, continuity becomes a vague and subjective process.”⁶ I would ask, just how far back will this process of “looking in the rear-view mirror” go? Is Trent and the Tridentine liturgical synthesis its final destination? Will it retreat to a medieval time preceding the Council of Trent? Or will it perhaps retreat further to recover older and even more traditional settings for the Eucharist? One might legitimately ask: Why is it that church buildings today are not modeled after the simple, more domestic Christian house churches that predated the imposing imperialistic basilicas?

A well-known example of liturgical tension has been institutionalized by the policy Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI put into place in 2007 restoring the free use of the rites as they were practiced prior to the council, alongside the rites as they were reformed in light of Vatican II. Benedict’s apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum* (called *motu proprio*, which means it is issued by the

5. Joseph A. Komonchak, “Interpreting the Event of Vatican Two,” in *The Contested Legacy of Vatican Two: Lessons and Prospects*, ed. L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, and T. Merrigan (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 1–5.

6. Rembert Weakland, “The Liturgy as Battlefield: What Do ‘Restorationists’ Want?,” *Commonweal* (January 11, 2002), <https://www.commonweal.org/liturgy-battlefield>.

Pope's own hand) permitted the liberal use of the Mass and all of the rites of the sacraments as they were in 1962, before the council reformed the liturgy. The result is that we now have a set of rites that contrast and conflict with the standard ordinary rites (the Missal was originally published in 1970 and has been updated most recently in 2002) in terms of textual translation, music, vesture, calendar, ritual action, and the architectural setting for the Mass. The stated justification for the permission to use the older rites, which were untouched by the reforms of the council, was to satisfy the faithful "who remained strongly attached to this usage of the Roman Rite, which had been familiar to them from childhood" and who desire "to recover the form of the sacred liturgy that was dear to them."⁷ Yet, this irenic pastoral vision seems not to have taken into account that the council really did make a difference in how we understand, and therefore how we celebrate, the liturgy. Liturgical scholar John Baldovin, SJ wondered why the pope did not "take pains to insist that those who adopt the Missal of 1962 should be clear about their allegiance to church teaching, in this case, Vatican II."⁸ Baldovin raises this reasonable question because many of those who are delighting in the pope's permission are critics not only of the liturgical reform but also of the council's other teachings. "This document will only give them hope that the last forty years can be reversed."⁹ Unwittingly, perhaps, the permission to use the so-called Extraordinary Form of the rites has fueled more division in a church already split into conservative and progressive branches. This is a big price to pay for satisfying the nostalgic appetites of a small group of

7. Benedict XVI, *Summorum Pontificum* (On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970), July 7, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html.

8. John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 132.

9. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy*, 132.

Catholics that, many believe, will fade sooner than later. Of course, it may be that the continued celebration of rites untouched by Vatican II was the goal all along of those who lobbied for this change—quite apart from a pastoral concern for those who were attached to the older rites from their childhood. Faggioli remarked, “We are well beyond the point when Catholic theologians and liturgists worried about the appearance of a new ‘bi-ritualism’ within the Catholic Church: thanks to Benedict, a bi-ritual Roman rite is now a *fait accompli*.” Faggioli continued, bi-ritualism is “aimed at a new generation of traditionalists, born after 1964.”¹⁰

A more recent voice advising Catholics about the correct way to celebrate the liturgy comes from Cardinal Robert Sarah, the current prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship in the Catholic Church. He recently suggested in his preface to a new book by Federico Bortoli¹¹ that the practice of taking the Eucharist in the hand is unsuitable and the “work of the devil.” Although his words were applauded by some, many mainstream commenters were appalled by this apparent broadside on an accepted and innocuous liturgical practice. Rita Ferrone commented in *Commonweal* magazine, “One must reluctantly conclude that Cardinal Sarah—despite holding a mainstream office—really does not speak for the mainstream of the church.” In her critique, Ferrone enumerated some of Sarah’s previous efforts at leadership (such as advocating Mass celebrated facing east rather than facing the people, delaying Pope Francis’s plan to allow women to participate in the Holy Thursday foot washing, and misrepresenting the pope’s call for local bishops’ conferences to take responsibility for liturgical translations) as further proof that “what he really does best is sow

10. Massimo Faggioli, “Extraordinary Divisions,” *LaCroix International* (August 9, 2018), <https://international.la-croix.com/news/extraordinary-divisions/7004>.

11. Federico Bortoli, *The Distribution of Communion on the Hand: Historical, Juridical and Pastoral Profiles* (Siena, Italy: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2018).

division.” She concluded that the cardinal’s comments on communion in the hand “reveal either an appalling ignorance of or an indifference to liturgical history . . . he is disparaging the faith of many centuries of Christians.”¹² The back cover of the cardinal’s own book, on liturgical silence,¹³ includes other fulminations against various liturgical practices, and provides evidence of the discord in church circles. Yet, Sarah is described by one reviewer as “one of the most spiritually alert churchmen of our time.” Another reader described the book as “a treasure chest of wisdom.” It would be a real shame if future historians were compelled to record that it was the worship of God in the twenty-first century that fractured the church into pieces.

Ferrone and others agree there is little doubt that those responsible for the ritual performance of the sacramental system of the Catholic Church would benefit from learning more about the art of celebrating according to the so-called Ordinary Form—the rites as they were reformed after Vatican II. There are countless examples that reveal a lack of understanding of the Mass, much less about how to go about gracefully enacting it in a decorous and hospitable way. However, the current liturgical dissimilarities among worshipers, presiders, teachers, and members of the hierarchy, along with the diverse inclinations of the church’s lay membership about improving worship as well as the church’s role in society, make the search for a common ground in church art and architecture difficult but not impossible to achieve.

12. Rita Ferrone, “Cardinal Sarah Does It Again,” *Commonweal* (March 23, 2018), <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/cardinal-sarah-does-it-again>.

13. Robert Sarah, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).



Figure 1: St. Vincent de Paul Church, Albany, NY. Before renovation.



Figure 2: St. Vincent de Paul Church, Albany, NY. After renovation.
Liturgical Designer, Richard S. Vosko, Hon. AIA.

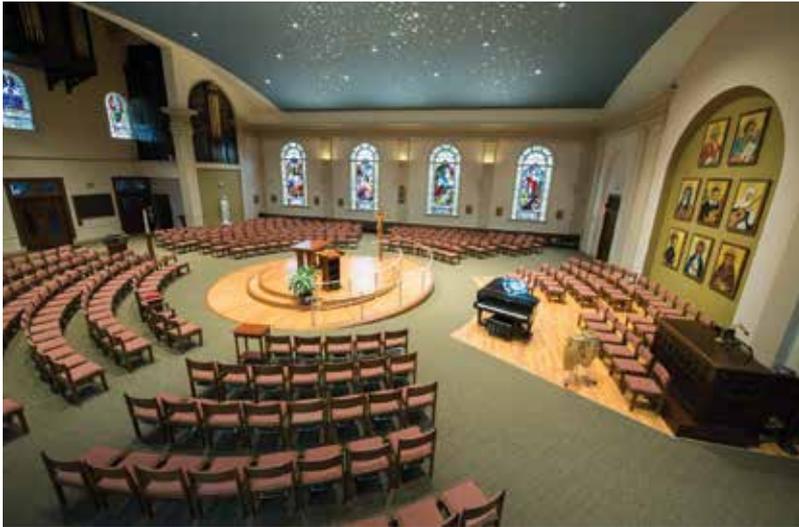


Figure 3: St. Vincent de Paul Church, Albany, NY. After renovation with new icons installation.

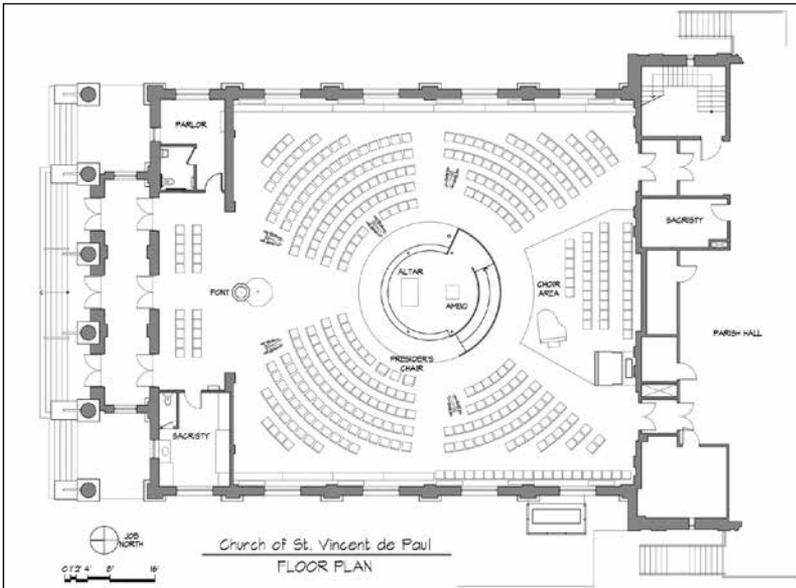


Figure 4: St. Vincent de Paul Church, Albany, NY. Floor plan. Project Architect, Lacey Thaler Reilly Wilson LLP.



Figure 5: Butler Memorial Chapel, Marymount Convent, Tarrytown, NY.
Before renovation.



Figure 6: Butler Memorial Chapel, Marymount Convent, Tarrytown, NY.
After renovation. Liturgical Designer, Richard S. Vosko, Hon. AIA.



Figure 7: Butler Memorial Chapel, Marymount Convent, Tarrytown, NY. After renovation.



Figure 8: Butler Memorial Chapel Art Work, Marymount Convent, Tarrytown, NY.

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