

Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 11

Objects and Furnishings in the Service of the Liturgy



12th century Chalice of French Abbot Suger

When a parish gathers for the Eucharist, the objects and furnishings used in the celebration demonstrate how the community understands what is being accomplished.

The care with which these elements are designed and crafted should mirror our understanding of the liturgy as the source and summit of our lives as Christians. These objects may also mirror the distinct community for which they are created. Communities are not bound to choose mass-produced articles found in catalogs. Local artists can be sought who will offer designs that are unique and carry both the symbolic and functional requirements of the liturgy.

The processional cross should be a sign that we are united as a family in the journey toward the altar, just as we live by the sign of that cross in our daily lives. The liturgical books—the lectionary and the sacramentary—should be made of fine materials and good design, as a sign of our reverence and love of the word of God and our common prayers.

The vessels (chalice, flagons, cups and plates) used for the Eucharist should show that this community takes seriously Christ's command to "take and eat—take and drink." They derive their beauty not so much by the preciousness of material as by the clear and evident

honesty of materials and the quality of the design. While they are distinguished from cups and plates we may use in our homes, they still serve the function of sharing the Eucharistic food and drink. They should be large enough to hold the elements of the Eucharist to be consumed and to capture the attention of the assembly.

In contemporary churches, candles no longer provide the principal lighting as they once did. However, they do more than simply mark a special occasion as they might at a holiday or birthday dinner. They are also symbols of the presence of Christ, the light of the world in our midst. Just as the Eucharistic elements are consumed in the liturgy, so too is the wax of the candle consumed in its use.

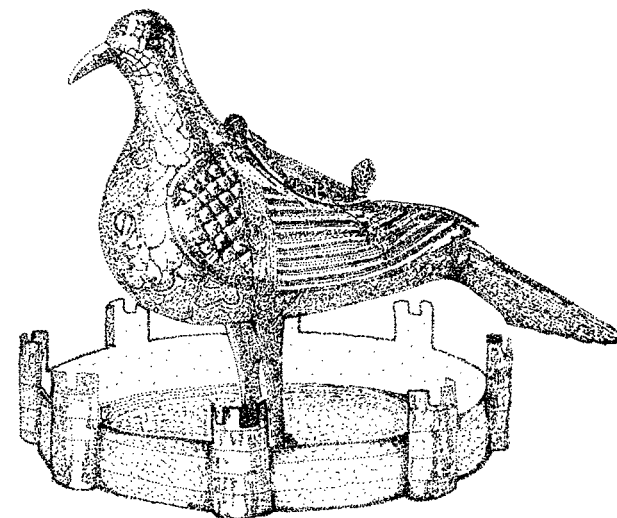
The largest candle is the paschal candle, first lighted at the Easter Vigil. The paschal candle remains prominent throughout the fifty days of Easter and each time the parish celebrates a baptism or a funeral. The presence of this candle proclaims our faith in the resurrection of Christ the unquenchable light.

The design of each of the objects and furnishings should relate to the design of the entire space, creating a harmony of elements. These elements become sacred in the way that they encourage an assembly to fully enter into the mysteries of our faith.

6th century paten with a depiction of Christ sharing the Eucharist with the apostles, Riha, Syria.



13th century French pyx in the form of a dove, gilded copper with enamel. The reserved Eucharist was placed in these often suspended vessels.



Excerpts from Built of Living Stones

The Cross: The cross with the image of Christ crucified is a reminder of Christ's paschal mystery. It draws us into the mystery of suffering and makes tangible our belief that our suffering when united with the passion and death of Christ leads to redemption....(BB 1233) Since a crucifix placed *on* the altar and large enough to be seen by the congregation might well obstruct the view of the action taking place on the altar, other alternatives may be more appropriate.... A processional cross of sufficient size, placed in a stand visible to the people following the entrance procession, is another option. If there is already a cross in the sanctuary, the processional cross is placed out of view of the congregation following the procession. (cf GIRM 122) [91]

Candles: Candles, which are signs of reverence and festivity, "are to be used at every liturgical service." (GIRM 307) The living flame of the candle, symbolic of the risen Christ, reminds people that in baptism they are brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light. For the celebration of the Eucharist it is appropriate to carry candles in the entrance procession and during the procession with the *Book of the Gospels*. (GIRM 117) At least two candles are placed near the altar in the sanctuary area.... [92]

Candles for liturgical use should be made of a material that provides "a living flame without being smoky or noxious." To safeguard "authenticity and the full symbolism of light," (N 10:80, 1974, no 4) electric lights as a substitute for candles are not permitted. [93]

The Paschal Candle: The paschal candle is the symbol of "the light of Christ, rising in glory," scattering "the darkness of our hearts and minds." (Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 12) Above all, the paschal candle should be a genuine candle, the pre-eminent symbol of the light of Christ.... During the Easter Vigil and throughout the Easter season, the paschal candle belongs near the ambo or in the middle of the sanctuary. After the Easter season it is moved to a place of honor in the baptistry for use in the celebration of baptisms. During funerals the paschal candle is placed near the coffin as a sign of the Christian's passover from death to life. (PCEF 99) [94]

Vessels: As in the case of styles of architecture, there is no particular style for sacred furnishings for the liturgy. (GIRM 325) Sacred vessels may be in "a shape that is in keeping with the culture of each region, provided each type of vessel is suited to the intended liturgical use and is clearly distinguished from [utensils] designed for every

day use." (GIRM 332) Materials used for sacred vessels such as the chalice and paten should be worthy, solid, and durable, and should not break easily. ... The vestments worn by ministers symbolize the ministers' functions and add beauty to the celebration of the rites. "In addition to traditional materials, natural fabrics proper to the [local area] may be used for making vestments; ... The beauty and nobility of a vestment should derive from its material and design rather than from lavish ornamentation." (GIRM 342-344) [164]

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Environment for Catholic Worship

Part 12

What Does a Church Look Like?

Parish communities about to renovate or build a church struggle with the question—what should it look like. In the first article in this series we discovered that the word “church” refers first, to a people—a community of faith united with Christ as its head. The building we often speak of as “the church” is the particular home of the Christian community, the place where households of faith come to remember and celebrate the covenants between God and our forebears in faith.

Just as our homes are places where significant moments of family life are remembered and celebrated, the church building is the place where we gather in response to Christ’s invitation to join in the praise and thanks of God, our creator and source of life.

There, we are bathed and anointed in baptism. There we are fed the bread of life and the cup of salvation. There, we are reconciled with God and the community. There, with the Church as witness, we pledge ourselves in life-long commitments. And it is there that we recall the promise of eternal life given at our baptism even as we are given back to God in death.

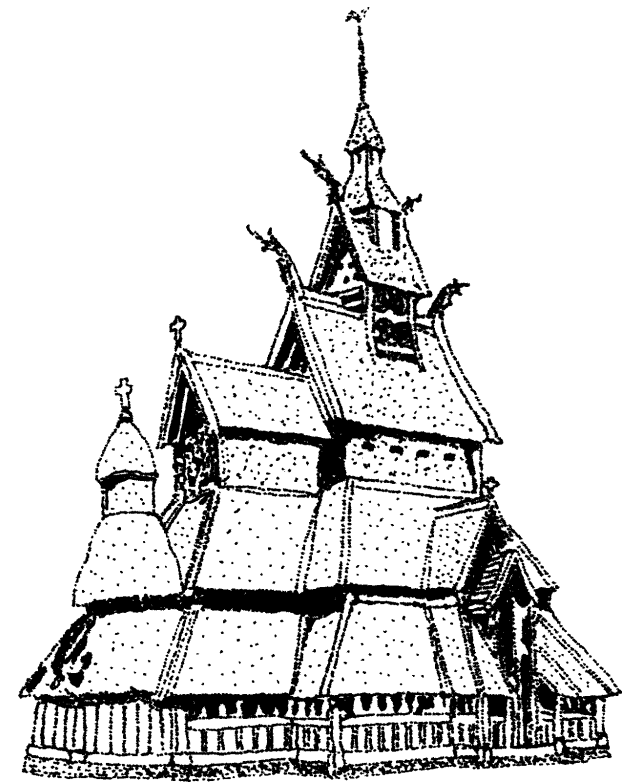
Just as our homes differ widely according to climate, age, culture, wealth and size, so too do Christian churches exhibit a variety of styles. In fact, it has always been the

case throughout the life of the church. The Catholic tradition has been truly catholic, that is, universal. From the first houses that were converted to use as a place of worship in the second and third century to the modern era, the design of places of worship has evolved in wide-ranging variety of shapes and styles.

While we tend to think of architecture in terms of a historic progression—Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque—the evolution was not a straight line from period to period. In every age, churches were built as a response to the way a Christian community expressed itself in worship. That expression has changed over time, and, in response, so has the design of worship spaces.

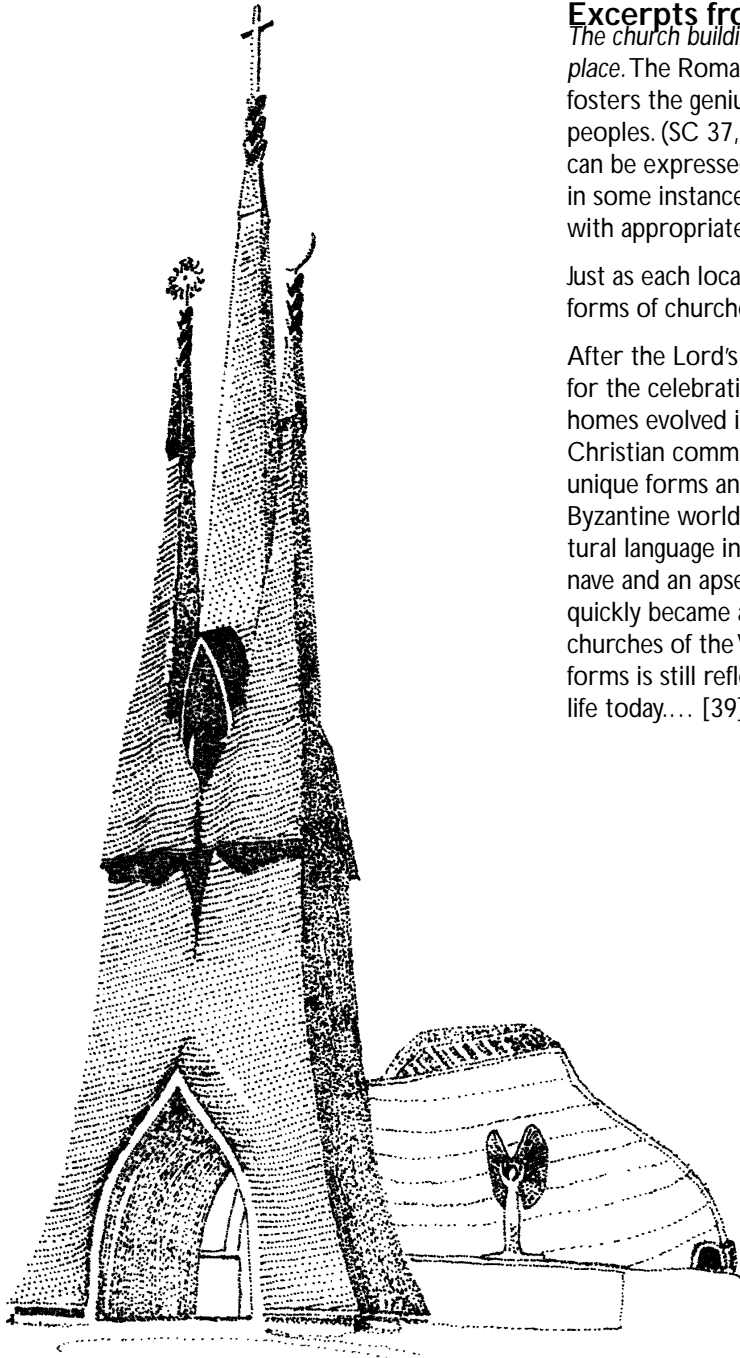
In our own day, there is sometimes a desire that the design of a church should copy or imitate a style from a former time. Certainly, we have much to learn from a careful study of the past. Yet, with a renewed understanding of the ways we experience Christ’s presence in the liturgy and our own participation in the mysteries, we realize that not every former style supports and encourages our present understanding to the same degree.

Churches are more than meeting rooms in which various activities must be accommodated. They are also symbols of the presence of Christ in the world and a beacon of



12th century stave church, Norway

hope to the world. By their design, they can announce to the world that the living Body of Christ gathers there to remember and celebrate the marvelous works of God.



Excerpts from *Built of Living Stones*

The church building respects the culture of every time and place. The Roman rite respects cultural differences and fosters the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. (SC 37, 119; CCC 1158) This cultural diversity can be expressed in architectural styles, in art forms, and in some instances in the celebration of liturgical rites with appropriate adaptations. [38]

Just as each local community is different, styles and forms of churches will vary. . . .

After the Lord's ascension, believers gathered in homes for the celebration of the "breaking of the bread." Such homes evolved into "house churches" and became the Christian community's earliest places for worship. The unique forms and architecture of the Roman and Byzantine world provided the Church with an architectural language in the form of the basilica. With its long nave and an apse for the bishop and clergy, the basilica quickly became a standard architectural form for churches of the West. The effect of these architectural forms is still reflected in the structure of our liturgical life today. . . . [39]

The rich history of Catholic worship space traces a path through every people and place where the liturgy has been offered. . . . Since the Church is not wedded to a single architectural or artistic form, it seeks to engage the genius of every time and place, to craft the finest praise of God from what is available. (cf SC 123, GIRM 289) The rich dialogue between the Church's liturgy, as a singular expression of divine revelation, and a local culture is an essential ingredient in the evangelization of peoples and the celebration of the Roman Catholic liturgy in a given time and place. . . . [40]

Parishes in the United States today often find their places of worship shared by people of varied languages and ethnic backgrounds and experience vast differences in styles of public worship and personal devotion. 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. (CCC 1157-1158, cf SC 119) [43]

20th century Catholic church, Paka, Hungary. Architect: Imre Mackovecz