

Zeitschrift: Bauen + Wohnen = Construction + habitation = Building + home : internationale Zeitschrift

Herausgeber: Bauen + Wohnen

Band: 12 (1958)

Heft: 11: Kirchenbau = Eglises = Churches

Rubrik: Summary

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 08.02.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Summary

Church Construction (pages 354—358)

One of the most interesting phenomena of our time is that so many churches are being built. What lies behind this tendency: Merely an attempt to renovate the already existing, or is there beneath the surface of our age a deep trend in the direction of a religious reawakening? These questions bring to the fore problems that every intellectually aware person will have to cope with. The architect, however, who is groping for a way out of the confusion, must act at the same time: his job is to elaborate a viable design for modern churches. The stagnation which characterized church architecture in the 19th Century could be overcome at the time when architecture again produced its own proper conception of space; the beginnings of modern architecture mark an epoch when a renewal again became possible. The fact, however, that already existent latent possibilities could be used is to be ascribed to the fortuitous confluence of architectural trends and a liturgical movement taking place at the same time, most evident within the Roman Catholic Church, but also perceptible in Protestant circles. Any attempt at a renewal in church architecture first had to grapple with problems of materials and types of construction. Steel and reinforced concrete, which in the 19th Century had been concealed behind eclectic designs, were very early made frankly visible in church building. In this way we broke away from the materialistic notion that such materials could be used only for functional structures and that only certain building materials were appropriate for ecclesiastical purposes. Auguste Perret, in the church of Notre Dame du Raincy in 1922, translated certain elements of modern architecture, which he had already utilized in the garage in the Rue Ponthieu, into an idiom capable of being used in church construction. The steel church in Cologne and the Corpus Christi Church in Aachen are characteristic of the high level of church architecture in our age. The fact that one is a Catholic church and the other a Protestant church seems in retrospect less important than what they have in common. In both churches the dominant spatial idea is an endeavour to create a large unpartitioned space comprising within an emphatic unity both chancel and nave. In the Catholic church the independence of the chancel is more sharply stressed than in the Protestant church, by the projecting steps. The community sense was promoted from the very beginning in Protestant church architecture. The asymmetry of the chancel has to be integrated within a larger harmony in order to achieve a balance between the dynamics of the architecture and the dramatic tension of the liturgy. In the Catholic Church the chancel had for centuries been a sacred reserved space. Even in the Catholic Church, however, the modern desire to create a more intimate relationship between chancel and congregation brought the idea of the unified central space into the very centre of the discussion. Above and beyond all liturgical requirements, the main problem in the Protestant Church, as in the Catholic Church, is the consecration of the building, for the church is supposed to be the place of encounter between Creator and His creature. What is it precisely that distinguishes the church building from that of an exhibition or concert hall, both of which nevertheless are erected with the same structural elements, with the same materials and with the same construction methods? Assuredly it is not the fixing of the cross on the back wall or the expressive disposition of altar, chancel and baptismal font. No matter how precisely the distinctions can be set forth we are still perplexed when it is a question of determining exactly what are the peculiar

features of a church as such. At the outset there is nothing more the architect can do than merely take hold of what lies nearest to hand, tackle immediate problems such as the integration of spatial organization and liturgical movement and the achievement of a harmony between the dynamics of the architecture and the dramatic tension of the service. As Otto Bartning puts it, "Every building possesses its own tension. Every act in the religious service possesses a liturgical dynamic expressed in the ordering of the congregation in relation to the altar and the chancel. When both these tensions are unified spatially they reinforce each other. If, however, the two tensions are kept spatially apart they are cancelled out... And again and again I have observed how in churches in which disunion prevails people are restless, and how, on the other hand, in churches in which service and architecture harmonize with each other people watch quietly: in fact, it could even be said they are prepared for meditation." (Otto Bartning, *Vom Raum der Kirche, Bramsche bei Osnabrück* 1958, p. 102f. and 127.) The basic type of church in our day is no longer the great cathedral but the small house of worship. In place of the anonymous mass congregation for whom divine service is a Sunday task imposed by social convention, we have the small but active church community whose devout observances are an expression of a basic philosophy of life. It is quite impossible to extend a church by adjoining community halls without utterly destroying its spatial unity; such compromises can only detract from the dignity proper to a house of worship.

Oskar Söhngen

The Protestant church as awardee of building contracts (pages 359—360)

Around the turn of the century the realization began to prevail that there is no permanent ecclesiastical style of architecture, but the latter has to be evolved afresh in each new period in terms of the architectural idiom and construction methods rooted in the given period. This has resulted in a state of affairs in which the architect has an almost frightening responsibility thrust upon him and a bewildering freedom, aggravated by the fact that modern technology confers upon him the power to build practically anything he may plan. It is precisely this dilemma in which the architect can do anything but does not know what should be done which causes him again and again to raise the cry: "Tell us what a church is and what it is supposed to be!" But at the same time there have been complementary transformations of attitude on the part of the churches themselves, the general view being that spatial unity must be achieved to correspond to the newly understood relationship of intimacy between priesthood and congregation. The chancel, at least as important as the altar, should be behind the latter and form an organic unit with the choir and organ loft placed in sight of the congregation. There arose in Germany the idea of the community center, which along with the church as such comprises all the premises needed for parish services of all kinds: parish rooms, youth center, kindergarten, sisters' lodgings, mission, parsonage, etc. However, since only small-scale, organically articulated communities can be living parishes, the large anonymous mass parish had first to be broken up. The church proper is really the liturgy itself, from the architectural point of view. The premises in which God is worshipped and in which the congregation assembles for devotional exercises can not fittingly be used for any other purpose. The great church struggle under the Third Reich taught the Church to take its doctrines and faith seriously. This new realization had an immediate impact on the liturgy itself: the non-conformist Protestant service concentrated much more emphatically on the sermon than was the case in the majority of Lutheran churches. Therefore the discussion over the last few years has had to do not with the design of the Protestant church itself but with the Lutheran as opposed to the non-conformist conception. An important distinction should also be made between law and gospel. Protestant belief is rooted in the idea of freedom. It rejects any legalistic restriction. This applies also to church construction. There is no church existing at the present time which could tell the architect so unequivocally what a church should be that there would emerge immediately a kind of standard model which could serve as a guide for any individual design. The architect's freedom is in keeping with the freedom of the parish community—a freedom which, to be sure, exists within the

scope of the minimum requirements for a house of worship. The Rummelsberg Manifesto has expressed the principle in the following terms: the church "should symbolize what is in fact taking place among the congregation when they attend divine service in terms of the spoken word and sacrament, namely a confrontation with the presence of Almighty God."

Otto Moosbrugger

The Catholic church as awardee of building contracts (pages 361—362)

According to the Roman Catholic belief, access to the new life is effected in the Mystic Body of Christ, that is to say the Church. With his baptism the Christian is purified and sanctified to God: he henceforth is a member of the Church and is grafted into the Mystic Body of Christ. The actual edification occurs in the Mass, which gives direction and meaning to all the other sacraments. In the Mass the event on the Cross is incarnate in the form of bread and wine. The altar, and the space in which it stands, is thus the point where God touches his creature and where new creation commences. Church architecture should aim to give visible expression to these mysteries. Nevertheless, modern church architecture must come to terms with traditional styles, but the Mass will have to be celebrated in a setting capable of arresting the attention of modern people. Every new generation has had to fight its way clear of the accumulated errors of the past. All observers are agreed that the younger generation is characterized by an earnest quest for the essential, a certain sobriety, which is at times somewhat disconcerting. The modern liturgical movement has been endeavouring to provide an answer for these young seekers. Modern people often have to be released from the sentimentality and formalism so often characteristic of devout observances. It is, above all, in the Mass that the spirit of community should blaze up again. Thus the liturgical renaissance stresses the unity and togetherness of all Christians.

The Church of St. André in Nice (page 363)

This modest structure shows that even with the simplest means a convincingly expressive design can be achieved. Simple though the lines are, its design is well thought out and strikes just the right note. The unified plan stands out sharply from the chaos of the neighbouring streets and indicates clearly that the building is in fact a place where God is worshipped. Interior and exterior design are identical; the walls and roof constitute at the same time the interior spatial limits. St. André in Nice was constructed in two weeks by two workmen for the Chiffonniers d'Emmaus of Abbé Pierre.

Country Church at Otaniemi (pages 364—368)

Fence, wall and building create together a sheltered area, which is sharply set off from the wild surrounding landscape. At the same time, however, this seclusion is modified from the interior in that the altar wall is entirely in glass and brings the interior into touch with the outdoors. Immediately behind the altar wall begins the forest; the cross stands in the open air and emphasizes the intimacy between interior and outdoor nature. The illumination of the church from the rear and the northern orientation of the altar wall save the congregation from being blinded by glare. Altar and chancel are so finely wrought that the effect of the continuous glass wall is not interrupted. The church is constructed with transverse lattice girders of wood. They contribute to focusing the attention on the altar. The disposition of the different elements reflects the interior organization: the church proper is situated beneath the elevated section; the utility rooms are situated in the annex on a lower level. The yard in front of the church is used for open-air services.

Church near Salsomaggiore (page 369)

This church demonstrates that even with purely technical elements a fitting place of worship can be created. The visible steel construction is painted black and contributes to the creation of an ascetic effect.

St. John's Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minn. (pages 370—372)

The plan of the church has two sections: in the south section the stalls of the brothers are disposed in a horseshoe arrangement around the altar; in the north

section is the nave proper with a seating capacity of 1126. In keeping with the expressed wishes of the Benedictine Brothers, the architect's plan even here aimed at the creation of a unified space, so typical of modern architecture. The two choirs are separated from each other only by steps. The altar stands in the very centre of the two sections. The baptistery ought, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Church, to be situated near the entrance in order to emphasize the significance of the act of baptism as the effective initiation into the Christian community. The architect has even gone so far as to give plastic expression to this idea in that he has placed the baptistery in the midst of the projecting narthex—on a slightly lower level. The significance of the entrance, a very plain room, is reinforced by the fact that the bell tower is placed immediately in front of it. The church is in a very particular way brought into intimate touch with the surrounding yard. The cloister does not run on past the church but abuts on the nave on both long sides.

St. Wendel Catholic Parish Church, Frankfurt o. M. (pages 373—374)

The elongated design stems from the notion of making the building express the movement of the people in procession up to the altar. The walls should, in the words of the architect enclose the congregation like a cloak without cutting them off from the outside world. The architect makes use of a constituent element of modern architecture, the "hovering" area; it delimits the space without sealing it off completely in the manner of a box. The walls, which in accordance with their aesthetic purpose, would have to be thin membranes, are in this case composed of mighty quarry-stones. Such heavy masonry gives an effect of crushing weight; it needs the solid earth as foundation. On the side by the entrance every material has received the treatment that is proper to it. On the lateral walls, however, the discrepancy between appearance and structure is particularly evident.

Dutch Reformed Church in Schiedam (pages 375—377)

The church is situated on a dike in a new residential district. There is a difference of 2.40 m. between the level of the district and that of the dike. The lower floor is entered from the district level and from the church proper at dike level. Thus there is a distinct and meaningful difference between the two entrances. The church has a seating capacity of 600.

St. Martin's Protestant Church, Hanover-Linden (page 378)

This church has a seating capacity of 575 in the nave and 200 in the gallery. The roof is supported by three-hinged headers. The ceiling sections between the concrete girders are of beading. The lateral walls of the nave are of recessed concrete blocks and coloured pines.

Plan for a Pilgrimage Church in Syracuse (pages 379—381)

In our day there is becoming apparent a new expressive urge which seeks to supplement the clarity of the cubic space by other kinds of design. The competition plan for a pilgrimage church in Syracuse, by Enrico Castiglioni, is highly problematical, but its level is far above that of the imitators of Ronchamp. What is involved becomes clear from an examination of the interior: thin finely corrugated partitions, like membranes, take on a thickness which has the effect almost of sculpture; recesses which trap shadows alternate with apertures which allow the light to stream in. There is no longer evident any visible articulation between supporting and non-supporting elements, in this building they are one. Since the span between the timbers in each section is too great for a simple slab construction, the roof is vaulted.

Heiligfeld Reformed Church, Zurich (page 382)

The church is connected with a parish center. Parish room and the foyer can be opened up to form one single room without destroying the interior harmony of the church.