LITURGICAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION: A BALTHASARIAN APPROACH

• **Denis R. McNamara** •

"Active participation requires a perception of the reality in which one participates, the glory of the Heavenly Banquet. To understand the banquet as *heavenly*, signs and symbols of heavenly realities are required, which in turn requires noble beauty, a beauty that reveals the ontological reality."

1. Introduction

Although Hans Urs von Balthasar's writings on theological aesthetics address theology as their main object, certain applications of his ideas can be made outside the field of theology narrowly defined. The methodologies used in theological studies that earned Balthasar's ire also affect the study and design of architecture in similar ways, and application of his method to architecture is a fruitful exercise. Since the Enlightenment, architecture has been analyzed primarily in regard to its formal characteristics, particularly in regard to period, style, psychology, and evidence of a *Zeitgeist*. A Christian model of analysis is decidedly absent in the dominant art historical methodology, even when addressing church architecture. In current practice, the architectural profession is still grappling with the Romantic

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revivals of the nineteenth century, which bred the desire of twentieth-century Modernism to be "true to its age." In reaction to Modernism, a Neo-Romantic movement is well underway as more and more congregations demand buildings that "look like" churches.

Balthasar's theological aesthetics can be used to evaluate church architecture and rescue it from the restrictions of Romanticism and architectural Modernism. Fundamental here is the Balthasarian question of the theological reality of architecture: what is the church building from the Christ-centered view of the liturgy and theology? From this, and only this, is drawn a proper theology of liturgical architecture, rooted in scripture and tradition, one that protects and preserves the revealed form of Christ. Liturgical architectural norms should not be founded on the fact-based system of art historical criticism, the latest proposal of an experiential-expressive second-career liturgiological prodigy, or the imposition of a supposed *Zeitgeist* drawn from secular architects' desire to attract the attention of critics by making the built equivalent of a claim that "there is no Truth." Rather, the dominant model of liturgical art and architecture should begin with the form of Christ found in the Church. Only by beginning with an incarnational, christocentric liturgical theology, understood in relation to analogy of form, can a proper development of liturgical architecture take place, one which is truly based in architectural theological aesthetics.[1] Doing the opposite—beginning with architecture rather than theology—leads to an architectural aesthetic theology. To use Balthasar's language, "we must return to the primary contemplation of what is *really* said, really presented to us, really meant."[2] In the case of liturgical architecture, what is really presented under sacramental form is an image of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Here Christ is the Bridegroom of the Banquet of the Lamb meeting the living stones of his bride the Church, and this starting point will make particular demands upon the liturgical architect.

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[1]This topic is approached with two presuppositions in mind: first, discussion of liturgical architecture is necessarily theological in scope. Second, liturgical art and architecture are part of the symbol system of the rite, and therefore not a merely neutral or purely devotional element in worship.

[2]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord (=GL)*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press/Crossroads, 1983), 32, italics original. Subsequent citations will be given within the text.

2. Defining the current condition in liturgical art and architecture

We live in an era that is not known for making beautiful churches. In fact, the *sensus fidelium* seems to indicate that something is indeed severely wrong with the church architecture erected in the last few decades. Sometimes modern churches claim a vague Christian symbolism or association through shape or general motif, which is nonetheless found largely unsatisfactory. In other cases, purposeful attempts are made to avoid eschatological sacramentality. Many churches of the last half century seem to live up quite well to Balthasar's claim, adapted from Barth, that without beauty, theology does not inspire. If it is in the very nature of Beauty to transport us to joy, Balthasar asks,

> how could we then possibly dispense with the concept of the beautiful? "Whenever one tries to see and express the matter differently, the proclamation of God's glory . . . will always . . . have something joyless, lustreless and humourless about it—not to say something boring, and, finally, unconvincing and unpersuasive." (*GL* 1, 54)

This description certainly fits much of the church architecture of recent years. Yet, an unconsidered return to the Romantic historicism of nineteenth-century architecture cannot be a solution to today's problems, despite the calls for traditional architecture appearing today.[3] Even Ralph Adams Cram, the twentieth century's great proponent of a renewal of liturgical architecture through a return to medieval precedent, critiqued the nineteenth-century revivalists for their history-driven formalism. He called the Modernist "revolt" against the period's parade of styles a laudable thing, but could not agree with its solutions, since "they were measurably inferior to what they have decried."[4] Eighty years later we find ourselves in a similar dilemma. A return to a purely Romantic approach to architecture is not a true solution (though the earthly

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[3]For Balthasar's commentary on traditionalism in the Catholic Church, see *A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 114–118.

[4]Ralph Adams Cram, "The Limits of Modernism in Art," *Arts & Decoration* 20 (January 1924): 11.

beauty it encapsulates is often decidedly preferable to its alternative),[5] and it has been becoming more and more clear that the Modernist architectural experiment has failed society in many ways, particularly in Catholic liturgical architecture.

A Balthasarian approach to liturgical architecture can avoid the pitfalls of both Romanticism and Modernism. To canonize a particular "style" of architecture *only* because of a historical association is an architectural aesthetic theology.[6] However, the Modernist denial of historical styles precisely *because* of their historicity is also an architectural aesthetic theology. A Balthasarian solution beckons: begin by conceiving liturgical architecture as the form of Christ (*Christus totus*) in his sacramental, ecclesiological dimension in the liturgy. Liturgical architecture can therefore best be evaluated in light of its ability to bear the Christian message, that is, the "ontological secret" of the liturgical event, which by definition reveals beauty and results in joyfully rapturous discovery.

Balthasar writes about the apologetic nature of his "fundamental theology," saying "the heart of the matter should be the question: 'How does God's revelation confront man in history? How is it perceived?'" (*GL* 1, 173). One could ask the same question in architectural terms: "How does God's revelation confront man in liturgical architecture? How is it perceived?" Balthasar develops this concept further by writing:

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[5]Balthasar recognized that the Romantics were not entirely without merit. He claimed that the "spirituality of the Christian artists and esthetic philosophers of the last century (from 1860 to the present) is strongly brought out by their preserving a sense of the unity of beauty and religion, art and religion, when they had almost no support from theology" (*Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1: *The Word Made Flesh* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 125). Often this much cannot be said for twentieth-century Modernism.

[6]Balthasar's well-known writing on aesthetic theology and theological aesthetics can be applied to architecture directly. While a theological aesthetics begins with God's transcendent beauty and his desire to allow man to participate in his divine life, "aesthetic theology," by contrast, begins with the creaturely concept of beauty and attempts to universalize it. For this very reason, Balthasar warns against the "theological application of aesthetic concepts" (*GL* 1, 38). This is not to say that his theological concepts should not find an application in the earthly aesthetic realm. However, if one uses earthly standards of beauty as the basis for a theologically-informed aesthetics, the process will inevitably result in an "aesthetic theology" that sells out "theological substance to the current viewpoints of an inner-worldly theory of beauty" (*GL* 1, 38).

> . . . under the influence of a modern rationalistic concept of science, the question has shifted . . . to be re-stated in this manner: "Here we encounter a man who claims to be God, and who, on the basis of this claim, demands that we should believe many truths which he utters which cannot be verified by reason. What basis acceptable to reason can we give to his authoritative claims?" (*GL* 1, 173).

Similarly, one can ask:

> Here we have an architecture that is claimed to reveal the divine, and that, on the basis of this claim, demands that we should believe and therefore expend our resources in a certain way despite the clear, rationalistic overarching demands of economy, functionalist utility, and the *Zeitgeist*. What basis acceptable to the liturgical-architectural establishment can we give these authoritative claims?

Although the answer may seem redundant at first, it is worth stating that liturgical architecture is first and foremost *liturgical*, a bearer of the mystery of the anticipated eschatology of the Banquet of the Lamb. Balthasar speaks of the Church as an "event" in which the "power of the Christ-form . . . expresses and impresses itself," in which "the Lord becomes present in the assembly . . . manifesting himself within it" (*GL* 1, 530). Both the Eucharist and the scriptures are described as making no sense unless enjoyed as a means of "impressing the Christ-form in the hearts of men" (*GL* 1, 530). Liturgical architecture can be understood in a similar manner. Liturgical architecture (and of course, figural art), as symbol of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb of the Heavenly Jerusalem, would make no sense without the Christian's partaking in the invisible liturgy that it represents.

As part of an architectural theological aesthetic, liturgical architecture is not primarily an example of the trends popular in *Architectural Record*, a neutral setting for the horizontal activities of an improperly understood "People of God," or a "skin for liturgical action . . . which need not look like anything else."[7] Rather, liturgical architecture should be capable of becoming part of the cluster of symbols that make up the liturgical rite. In other words, it

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[7]Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Liturgy*, (Washington, D.C.: BCL, 1978), § 42.

should be considered *sacramental*, making present by way of foretaste the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in the Heavenly Jerusalem. "If beauty is conceived of transcendentally, then its definition must be derived from God himself" (*GL* 1, 68).

This emphasis on the sacramental, eschatological nature of Christian worship and its liturgical architecture finds a decided sympathy with Balthasar's writings. The liturgy is certainly one place where the encounter with Christ is made available to us, and as Christopher Steck argues, the liturgy is made up of two distinct movements. "First God is made present through words, signs, and symbols," then "people respond to God's presence in their midst through word, song, and action."[8] This second movement, Steck claims, is not a separate event, but a spontaneous response to the first. If architecture is part of the system of symbols that make God known, then it is not simply the neutral beige background common to the post-conciliar era, but part of the "eschatological orientation" that "endeavors to make the divine present through a type of eschatological anticipation."[9]

> Through its positive, beautiful images and sounds, and by its confident celebration of the eschatological banquet, it steps beyond the present-day signs of the kingdom's distance and anticipates the time of the kingdom's fullness. Thus . . . liturgical celebrations avoid the chaos, contingency, moral confusion, and existential anxieties that mark our transient lives . . . . Liturgy needs the kind of eschatological anticipation implied by these characteristics if it is to offer the believer an encounter with God, since most do not have the contemplative vision to find God in the type of muck found in our everyday lives . . . . If the salvific narrative, the "theo-drama," is to captivate us and elicit our response, we must encounter it in its fullness so that we can perceive its divine beauty . . . .[10]

These claims are easily transferable to liturgical architecture, which, along with its art, should present this eschatological dimension of the liturgy. The altar should be read more as the banqueting table of the Lord than merely a community table. The figural imagery is more

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[8]Christopher Steck, S.J., "Graced Encounters: Liturgy and Ethics from a Balthasarian Perspective," *Horizons* 30, no. 2 (2003): 264.

[9]Ibid., 264–265.

[10]Ibid., 265.

than abstract mood-evoking shapes or simple devotional imagery; it makes sacramentally present the *Christus totus*, including the heavenly assembly. The church building can present an image of the heavenly banquet in a building that images the Heavenly Jerusalem.

3. Classical architecture as appropriate mode for liturgical architecture: argument and case study

The leap from theological abstractions to claims for the physical manifestation of art and architecture brings with it the danger of arguing unwittingly for an aesthetic theology rather than a theological aesthetics. However, if a Balthasarian approach to Beauty is to have an effect on the practice of architecture, it must be attempted, especially because Balthasar himself rarely wrote in specific terms about architecture. Citing Johan Georg Hamann, the challenge that Balthasar sets forth is as daunting as it is strikingly clear:

> The real problem [is] how to construct a theory of beauty (*Aesthetica in nuce*) in such a way that, in it, the total aspiration of worldly and pagan beauty is fulfilled while all the glory is at the same time given to God in Jesus Christ. (*GL* 1, 80-81)

One way of building that approaches this goal quite closely is the rich tradition of Greco-Roman inspired classicism, broadly conceived to include all of its particular manifestations in ancient Greece through the twenty-first century (Gothic, Byzantine, Romanesque, Baroque, etc.), in the Eastern and Western Church. To avoid the pitfall of aesthetic theology, discussion of architectural classicism should not center on "style," even though classicism certainly does include the buildings of many stylistic periods. Rather, it is better to discuss architecture's ability to bear meaning.[11]

Architectural classicism might be better compared with language, which has conventionalized structure, syntax, and rules that are necessary to convey meaning in the best possible manner. Language can be flexible, but requires stability; poetic, yet precise;

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[11]It should be clarified here that the claims made about classical architecture to follow are not drawn from Balthasar's writings, but are rather the attempt of the author to apply Balthasarian principles to the field of architecture.

mundane, yet able to convey soaringly transcendent ideas. Words can be everyday slang or reserved for sacred occasions. Language by its very nature conserves, relying on stability to make it understandable. New words are invented as the need arises, but always within the stable context of a common grammar and lexicon. It has differing accents, regional turns of phrase, and local conventions. Language reserved for ritual behavior retains archaic forms that distinguish it from everyday speech ("Our Father, who *art* in heaven, *hallowed be Thy* name . . ."). Language expresses and conveys ideas, and the selection of words is tied closely to what is being said. In a similar way, ritual architecture depends upon a stable architectural lexicon and the careful choice of forms that express its ritual quality and place within the architectural hierarchy. In the Spirit, it reveals eschatological reality.

If architecture is to be understood as conveying information, it should use a system that, like language, is composed of recognizable conventional forms that are capable of bearing both the most grand and also the most subtle statements. In its rejection of conventional forms, architectural Modernism discarded most of the "dictionary," limiting itself to "words" related to earthliness, rationalism, vagueness, and the machine. Similarly, Romanticism uses a rich architectural vocabulary but produces the architectural form of emotional response. The eschatological reality demanded of liturgical architecture becomes very difficult to express within either set of limitations.

4. Natural sympathy between classicism and Catholic liturgical architecture

Moving from the theoretical to the specific, the broad language of classicism has at least six essential qualities that make it an intelligible language for revelation of the ontological secret of the liturgy, and thus uniquely suitable for Catholic liturgical usage: (1) its continued place in the western (and possibly global) cultural vocabulary, (2) its inherent respect for received tradition, (3) the integration of proportional systems in imitation of nature, (4) its anthropomorphism, (5) its poetic revelation of structure, and (6) its origins in festive architecture.

First: *classicism's forms remain potent in the dominant culture as markers of important buildings*. The language of classicism marks a

building of high status in many cultures, even among those without great understanding of its origins or terminology. The significant public buildings in western history are classical, and this understanding has not been erased by the glass and concrete monuments of recent years. Whether or not people can speak of volutes or triglyphs, Corinthian or Ionic, they know that important buildings are made a certain way, and in the West and Near East, that way has been derived from the classical tradition. Classicism therefore gives a church building a head start in being recognizable as an important place where important things happen. Since, traditionally, buildings acquire the status of the activities that happen within them, and by definition the beautiful must reveal what is true, a beautiful liturgical architecture can only be made when it reveals the reality of the importance of liturgy in the Church, and the Church in the civic realm. Only then will it attract people to itself.

Second: *classicism by definition maintains close ties to received tradition*. Balthasar claims that we ought "never speak of God's beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation history" (*GL* 1, 124), and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* asks "that sound tradition may be retained" (23). A language of architecture that emphasizes continuity speaks of the way God has manifested himself in history, especially by recalling the architectural motifs of pre-Christian and Christian history. The triumphal arch form, for example, was used in ancient Rome to mark the victorious entry of a significant person into the city, and the triple-arched Arch of Constantine, named for the first "Christian" emperor, retained a particular symbolic importance. It soon became a convention for the triumphal arch form to be added to the west entry of the church building to speak of the new triumphal entry, the victory of Christ over sin and death that allows our entry into the heavenly city. This form remained part of the Christian vocabulary through the Middle Ages and into the modern period, and continues today. Importantly, a triumphal arch entry is more than three doors in a row; it is a motif known through many years of tradition with recognizable pieces arranged in a particular way (in this case, the A-B-A rhythm of the Arch of Constantine). The use of the same pieces, elements, and motifs that were used in the fifth or fifteenth century makes that form legible as part of a Christian architectural continuity.

Architects of the Christian revelation have not denied the value of the architecture developed by pre-Christian societies, as

revealed by the fact that every Western Christian culture has appropriated some form of classicism for its liturgical architecture without fear of revivifying a pagan culture. One speaks of numerous "renaissances" in Christian history, whether Charlemagne's explicitly Roman architecture, Abbot Suger's desire for *spolia* from the ancient Roman baths for his Gothic church of San Denis, or the revival in the thirteenth century of Augustan sculptural forms on the portals of Rheims Cathedral. Christian revelation absorbed that which came before, just as Balthasar saw ancient philosophy as imbued with the pre-Christian *eros* that would then be fulfilled in Christian theology (*GL* 1, 70).

Dependence on precedent assures a building's cultural legibility and prevents an artist or architect from imposing a highly idiosyncratic, personal design that baffles those who use it. Like Balthasar's claim about magisterial announcements, precedent is not to be admired in itself, but *protects* the form of Christ. The common language of classicism, based on consistent principles, puts the building at the service of all comers, who can then compare the building with those they have seen before. They can then evaluate it based on established norms rather than merely attempting to assess an architect's emotional expression.

Third: *classicism places the harmonic proportional systems found in nature at its very heart.* From the discussions of Plato and Pythagoras through Aristotle, to the writings of St. Augustine and the medieval and Renaissance scholars, the notion of a harmonic relationship of parts has dominated the very discussion of beauty in the arts, and was understood in its framework of natural theology. Balthasar refers to Paul's declaration in Romans 1:20 that "all are without excuse who could not find this living God from the evidence of the created world" (*GL* 1, 71).

Every part of a classical building is designed with harmonic proportional systems in mind. Columns have height to width ratios in particular whole numbers, column bases are composed of parts with particular numerical relationships, and the scroll of the Ionic capital grows out of a mathematical formula based on the repeating numerical patterns found in nature, mathematics, and geometry. Since Catholicism affirms the goodness of creation and its ability to make invisible realities present to us in material form, an architecture in which every part, large or small, roots itself in the mind of God as encountered in creation forms a good starting point for Catholic architecture. Furthermore, certain proportions were given by God

in Scripture, from the Tabernacle of Moses (Ex 25–28), Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 6–7), to the heavenly city itself (Rv 9). Scriptural revelation combines with evidence in the natural world to establish the importance of proportional systems that precede and overwhelm the individual emotional expressions of any particular artist, producing instead a beauty that, although expressed by a human mind, remains rooted in the mind of God.

Fourth: *classicism is anthropomorphic*. Leonardo da Vinci's famous "Vitruvian Man," which shows the proportional and geometric patterns of the human form, aptly reveals the geometric underpinning of the body created in the image of God, a foundational concept for classical architecture.[12] The circle and the square formed by the human body are therefore foundational in classical architecture, although other geometric forms enter in gracefully to classical design as well. Moreover, classical columns are conventionalized forms directly modeled on the human body.[13] A classical column has a capital (L. *capita*=head). Many also have bases (Gk. *basis*= foot) and pedestals (L. *pede*=foot). Torus moldings at the base of columns are derived from the rope (L. *torus*=rope) used to bind the feet of slaves who did work similar to the drudgery of columnar support. A very old convention places twelve columns on church interiors, symbolizing the twelve apostles, the primary pillars upon which the Church was founded (Gal 2:9). Exposed steel I-beams, while they may be trendy and praised by architecture critics, simply cannot bear the same meaning, the same sacramental identity, that a properly constructed column can.

Additionally, the proportions of each of the three major column types, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, have been associated with different types of people since the time of Vitruvius, the first-century B.C. architectural writer of the influential treatise *De architectura*. The Doric, with its low, wide proportions was understood as an analog of the male body, and often used for buildings dedicated to warrior gods such as Mars. The slender Corinthian with its graceful proportions was associated with young maidens, and used

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[12]Modernism, by contrast, has often favored the sculptural, idiosyncratic shape determined by the emotion of the artist, or in the case of the Miesian glass box, which did embrace rigid geometry, a hyperrational antimaterialism.

[13]George L. Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 23.

for such "delicate" goddesses as Diana and Fortuna. The Ionic, with a proportion somewhere between the Doric and Corinthian, was associated with the "matronly" woman, the wife and mother.

If the Church is built of "living stones," that is, its members, and the building is an icon of that reality, then architecture better represents that reality when it expresses the anthropomorphic attributes of the Church it symbolizes. For instance, the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, the first church dedicated to the Virgin after she was defined as the Mother of God in 431, used two long rows of Ionic columns in its interior, clearly associating these otherwise merely structural members with the "motherly" anthropomorphic quality.[14] In a similar way, a church dedicated to a young female martyr might be built using the Corinthian order, thereby making the architecture itself resonate with the "pillar" of the Church that the building represents. One is reminded here of Psalm 144, when God is asked to make the daughters of Israel "graceful as columns adorned as though for a palace."

Fifth: *classicism reveals structure in poetic rather than literal form.* Following from the anthropomorphism and harmonic proportionality of classicism is a related corollary concerning the representation of structure. Unlike the Modernist building, which simply reveals the steel I-beam or heating duct in a confusion of "fact" with "truth," classicism applies convention, proportion, and allegory to structure. Already discussed is the anthropomorphism of columns, which gives structural members proportional and metaphorical qualities. Columns also indicate the processes of nature as gravity is at work; they incorporate *entasis*, or a subtle tapering at the top of a column's shaft, revealing the compressive forces thickening a column at the lower parts which bear more weight. Additionally, certain classical moldings indicate support, therefore revealing compression, while others indicate termination, revealing release. The size and proportion for ornamental trim is always based on the apparent weight it supports, even when it is applied to a surface. The thickness of a column or a beam is always proportional to the apparent weight it supports, even if steel or some other structure within actually bears the building's load. It forms a "virtual structure" which is then designed with harmonic proportions in mind,

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[14]See John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 67–68.

always revealing the nature of the otherwise invisible forces carried. This way of design often distorts the facts of building (i.e., a hollow column that literally bears no weight) in order to make the truth clear in a more beautiful way (i.e., the column encases a visually thin, unattractive steel I-beam yet reveals the compression caused by the roof above which it supports).[15] This visualization of otherwise invisible structural forces makes the reality of the building knowable in a way that simply revealing a steel skeleton cannot.

Sixth: *classical architecture has its origins in ritual festivity*. The scholarship on the origins of classical motifs reveals that ornamentation is closely associated with festive occasions surrounding the liturgy of ritual sacrifice. In ancient religious festivals, the first simple wooden structures were festooned with swags of fabric, flowers, beads, and bundled fruits. In addition, festive occasions called for celebrating through the night, so buildings were lit with torches and lamps. Eventually, these ornaments were absorbed into the very architecture itself. Classical architecture is full of meaningful ornamental enrichments such as the egg-and-dart, wave and leaf patterns, swags of fruit, urns, lamps, and the like. Even the very columns themselves came to be ornamented in the ways we ornament our bodies: beads are placed around the neck of columns and flowers emerge from the capitals like an adornment to the human head.[16] We can recall again Psalm 144, where the columns are not simply graceful, but adorned, and not simply adorned, but adorned for a *palace*.

The Catholic liturgical act is also festive. It is, among other images, the sacramental presentation of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the time of the consummation of the world when the Church as bride meets Christ the Bridegroom (Rv 19:7, 21:9). At the human level, we dress in our fine clothes and ornament ourselves properly for festive occasions; brides carry flowers and grooms wear boutonnieres. Bishops, priests, deacons, and servers wear attire specific to the festive community act of sacrificial worship. This sacramental expression is of the very essence of our ritual action, and if the church building is best to signify the "living stones" of the Church,

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[15]For more on the architectonics of classical architecture, see Robert Jan van Pelt and Carroll William Westfall, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), especially chapters 4 and 6.

[16]Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*, 11–42.

it will do what we do. So far, only architecture from the classical tradition has risen to meet Balthasar's challenge to develop so that "the total aspiration of worldly and pagan beauty is fulfilled while all the glory is at the same time given to God in Jesus Christ."

5. Conclusion: Balthasar's theology and Vatican II

Effective liturgical architecture uses highly specific, articulate forms, becoming, in the Spirit, the "symbols of heavenly realities" as described in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (122). In fact, in a Balthasarian reading of liturgical architecture, one cannot separate four phrases from the council's commentary on sacred art and architecture: "active participation" (14), "noble beauty" (122), "signs and symbols of heavenly realities" (122), and "turn men's thoughts to God persuasively and devoutly" (122). Active participation requires a perception of the reality in which one participates, in this case, the glory of the Heavenly Banquet. To understand the banquet as *heavenly*, signs and symbols of heavenly realities are required, which in turn requires noble (from L. *nobilis*, knowable) beauty in the Balthasarian sense, a beauty that reveals the ontological reality. The revelation of God's beautiful truth in symbol therefore turns the worshipper's mind to God, drawing him or her into the liturgical theo-drama. Thus, the imagery of liturgical architecture is exegetical. Balthasar writes:

> True exegesis means: to move to the point where the image (*das Bild*), in the Spirit, becomes transparent of him who made the image (*der Bildende*), and this maker of images is God and man in unity. For such exegesis historical expertise is, of course, needed; but to a far greater extent there is required the divining power of imaginative reconstruction (*Nachvollzug*)—that youth of the heart which is able to feel at one with the historical and the eternal youth of mankind. We may say that the dimension of the inspiring and revealing Spirit is "supernatural," and rightly so, since it opens up our path to God. (*GL* 1, 85)

Liturgical architecture is about imaginative reconstruction because in the Incarnation, the "decisive eschatological act has taken place," allowing an architecture which embraces this "realized

eschatology."[17] In appropriate liturgical architecture, as in good classicism, every piece is designed as part of the whole in an organized manner that represents theological and heavenly realities rather than merely the latest trend or most economical method. It remains a potent visual marker in culture for buildings of great significance, and therefore of important liturgical activity within. It stays close to precedent, thereby preserving the inherited tradition and protecting the form of Christ. It reveals the mind of God in its imitation of nature in mathematics, proportion, and the human form as revealed in history. As a festive architecture, it both displays and reinforces the notion of the sacrificial feast in the Eucharist. It does what walls of glass and exposed beams and bolts cannot do: it makes the very nature of the liturgical celebration visible in sacramental form. As such, it is an architecture that allows worshippers to enter something formative and sacramental. The worshipper is drawn in by its beauty, inspired therefore to participate in the liturgy, and once formed by the liturgy, to go out in mission of service to the world. □

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[17]Steck, "Graced Encounters," 262.