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"VATICAN - "STONES, SOUNDS, COLOURS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD": Inspiring Principles for the building of churches and places for the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist(3)
by Bishop Mauro Piacenza

Vatican City (Fides Service) - Interior typology: the interior of the place of worship is articulated in various parts: baptistery, sanctuary, nave, choir stalls, confessionals, Blessed Sacrament Chapel, crypt, votive chapels, etc. Each area owes its identity to the fact that it is liturgical «place» and is part of the whole.
1) The baptistery is where catechumens become Christians. Since the catechumen is not yet a member of the Church, the baptistery must be distinct from the Nave and especially from the Sanctuary. For this reason the baptismal area must be clearly separated by lower flooring, walls and contained volumes.
2) the Sanctuary is the principal place for the act of worship and is reserved for the sacred ministers. This area is architecturally separated from the rest of the church with a system of graded platforms, chromatic markings, architectonic furnishings. It has three Christological poles - altar, lectern, chair - and is surmounted by the crucifix.
3) The Altar is the heart of the whole church plan, since on it the holy sacrifice is celebrated. It is the altar on which Christ offers Himself as sacrificed victim and as high priest; it is the table to which Christ invites His disciples for the holy supper in its aspect of memory and memorial; it is the tomb which recalls the death and resurrection of Christ.
4) Just as the altar is the table for the sacrifice, the Lectern is the table of the Word. It should be preferably permanent, distinct from the rest of the sanctuary, and with an embracing form.
5) The Chair is the sign of presidency where the celebrant, in persona Christi, presides the community gathered in holy assembly. From a planning point of view that altar, lectern and chair should be coordinated in style, to iconographically represent Christ-word, Christ-sacrifice, Christ-head.
6) The Tabernacle is where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved. In new churches it is opportune to plan a Blessed Sacrament Chapel in architectural continuity with the sanctuary; it could also serve as a chapel for weekday Masses. To meet liturgical requirements the place assigned to the tabernacle should be neither hidden nor architecturally inappropriate. When placed at the centre of the sanctuary, the tabernacle should dominate the general arrangement and be accessible during the Liturgy. In this case neither the Chair, if central, nor the celebrant when he uses it, should hide the tabernacle. To foster adequate respect for the reserved Blessed Sacrament and the Liturgical action, the Tabernacle should not be parallel to the lectern or interfere with the other celebrative places. With regard to structure the Tabernacle, besides guaranteeing prescribed inviolability, must be of noble and suitable iconographic form, in order to indicate the Real Presence and encourage adoration.
7) The Nave is the place for the congregation or assembly. It must be planned so that the faithful can move and stand with ease according to the ritual demands. Hence the necessity to arrange seating, kneelers (today too often forgotten), aisles, corridors. It important to guarantee the faithful visibility of the sanctuary, diffusion of sound to allow active participation. The plan of the Nave must include places for keeping furniture necessary for celebration of weddings and funerals.
8) The confessional area is for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Since the Church demands individual Confession, the area must include places suitable for private conversation between confessor and penitent.
The church may also include votive chapels for devotional prayer. However chapels must not overpower the general plan and the artistic and devotional criterion must be in keeping. Whatever the case, the installation of new images rather than suited to individual taste or wishes must be guided by people in charge of pastoral care and by art experts. Taste and devotion must be educated at the school of the unchanging faith of the Church.

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The church must therefore be a metaphor of the new Jerusalem, iconographically narrating the communion which exists between the pilgrim Church, the Church in purgatory and the Church triumphant. Figurative and non figurative symbols must therefore be used with theological hermeneutics in a liturgical context.
Conclusion In the mind of the Church, a church is not an ensemble of juxtaposed elements, but an un unum in se which substantiates itself in the celebrative event. Hence the need to avoid iconographic repetition, erroneous contents, muddled elements, depraved forms, etc. The system may be compared to a living body, although composed of numerous parts it owes its essence to the fact that it is an animated organism. Therefore, just as vivisection of the living person causes the loss of the proper element of life, so too lack of composition in the church building irreparably alters its essence.
Moreover, just as a living organism evolves in time while never changing its identity, so the church building changes according to liturgical requirements and historical situations while maintaining its essence.
Every part of the church is ordered to a superior whole and receives vital life by means of divine worship. It is an ensemble of countless tiles of a mosaic, whose ultimate architect is God, and whose plan celebrates in Christ incarnate His encounter with the community.
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