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The Altar

by Heinrich Kahlefeld

The liturgical revival movement, so influenced by the studies of Romano Guardini, tends towards a freeing of ritual actions from the abstract forms grafted onto them in the course of the ages and towards a replacement of them by forms stemming from concrete concepts so that the meaning of the liturgy is shown clearly to the congregation. This movement could not help but have an effect, amongst others, on the form that the altar must assume. Originally this was in essence the equivalent of the table at the Last Supper, the holy table where the communicants present find themselves to be in the literal sense of the word "table-companions", the congregation ("ekklesia" whence "église") surrounding them at a close distance. It is only subsequently that the sacrament of the eucharist ceased to be celebrated at the "table" itself (the altar), at the same time as the development took place where the spoken office was "presided" over by the bishop or priest officiating, the Mass continuing to realise on every occasion both the participation in the divine nature of Our Lord and the "sacrifice", not of a victim as is the case with pagans, but of the believer himself, who gives his person entirely up to God. Consequently, the altar must satisfy the following conditions: 1. be placed as near as possible to the congregation; 2. in so far as its shape is concerned, the altar in its role of holy table should hold nothing but the bread and wine and, architecturally speaking, be the very hearth, the focal point, of the house of God; 3. the tabernacle should, wherever possible, be placed on a subsidiary altar; 4. whatever be the side from which the priest officiates, his seat—the symbol of the single heavenly throne—should be at the centre of that part of the building coming behind the holy table. With so many questions to be resolved, it is to be hoped that artists and theologians will come together more and more in mutual and fruitful collaboration.

The Dominican Monastery of La Tourette

1958-60. Architect: Le Corbusier, Paris

Sited near Evieux-par-l'Arbresle (Department of the Rhone) at the edge of a forest that flanks it to the south and east, but facing in the direction of west a vast countryside of hills, the building, which is almost square, was designed by Le Corbusier according to the triple principle of the Dominican order: study (cells), life in common (general rooms) and prayer (chapel). Huge and well-proportioned, the church, which like the rest of the building is executed in concrete, only admits daylight by way of a few vertical slits. The building as a whole is of a perfect and thoughtful simplicity.

The Church of St. Nicholas of Flüh at Birsfelden near Basle

1958. Architect: Hermann Baur FAS/SIA, Basle

This church, where the stress has deliberately been laid on the collective character of the congregation, possesses a truly plastic design which is most likely to accentuate its difference from its workaday surroundings, whereas the interior underlines both the unity desired and the polarity of that part where the congregation is assembled and that where the altar stands.—Sculptures by Paul Speck, Pierino Selmoni and Albert Schilling.

The Church of St. Nicholas of Flüh at Winkeln near St. Gallen

201. Architect: E. Brantschen FAS/SIA, St. Gallen, in collaboration with A. Weisser, architect, St. Gallen; H. Hosdorf, engineer SIA, Basle, and E. Grünenfelder, engineer, St. Gallen

This church is born of the synthesis of its interior conception and that of its sculptural exterior. The church, with its severe, almost square, ground plan, has a concave ceiling that rises between the altar and the entry. As for the concrete roof, this has been carried out by H. Hosdorf with the enthusiasm of the engineer who is aware of the necessity of knowing nowadays how to place technique at the service of the evolution of modern architecture.

Chapel at Nesselbach, Aargau

1958. Architect: H. U. Gübelin SIA, Lucerne

A chapel capable of holding sixty people. The interior is aligned on the altar, above this the roof slopes up gradually. The ornamentation is due to H. Blättler and E. Stanzani, who worked in close collaboration with the architect.

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Church at Hem near Roubaix

Architect: H. Baur FAS/SIA, Basle

This little church of St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus was built at the expense of a big industrialist to be used by some of his workers. The materials employed and the character of the church are in keeping with the mining villages in the neighbourhood. Stained glass windows by Alfred Manessier.

The Church of St. Joseph at Merzig

Architect: H. Baur FAS/SIA, Basle

After a walled parvis, one comes to a second enclosure at the centre of which is the church, oval in shape, surrounded by a wall of glass. The roof is at its highest above the altar, which is itself placed at one of the foci of the oval. The basic principle is to stress the intimate union, along with differences, holding between the priest officiating and the congregation.

Centres of Pilgrimage and Processions

by Hermann Baur

The fine ancient sanctuaries to be found at centres of pilgrimage, of which the last—the church at Einsiedeln—goes back to the baroque period, were succeeded all too often by structures that, in the nineteenth century especially, were warped by the decadence in religious architecture, and this at a time which, by a strange paradox, was to see the proliferation of pilgrimages to sites where great supernatural apparitions were reported: Lourdes, Lisieux and Fatima, amongst others. However, from the point of view of architecture, a fortunate redressing of the balance is making itself felt and this is due in part to the impulse given to creative spirits by the example of Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp, the work of Le Corbusier. As regards the latter, it can be said that it is characteristic of this great architect, who previously had always refused to build any church at all, be it Catholic or Protestant, that he should have accepted to carry this one out just because here it was a question of a pilgrims' sanctuary, in other words a sacred building sharing, as he has said, both in the community spirit and in that of the mysterious.—This redressing is still accompanied by the childish disorders of gigantism (Syracuse) and neo-formalist symbols—provisional dangers it is to be hoped. As for the collective manifestations of faith such as processions, the author believes that these should take forms in keeping with modern civilization, where the crowd becomes a constituent factor in the overall pattern: for example, neighbourhood processions on Corpus Christi gathering together within the vast space provided by a stadium.

The Altar of the Chapel of the Teachers' Training College at Menzingen

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Altar in white marble contrasting with the darkness of the benches and the black floor—carried out by the sculptor, Josef Rickenbacher, Steinen.

Restoration of the Augustinian Church in Zurich

by Eduard Plüss

This is the main church in Zurich of the Old Catholic faith, and the building has just been restored by the architect Max Kopp FAS/SIA and sculptor Franz Fischer, under the auspices of Professor Linus Birchler. The article in the present issue deals essentially with the work accomplished by the sculptor, who, where the altar, the tabernacle door and a crucifix are concerned, was fortunate in his efforts to discover for these works of religious art a style that would be modern and free of historical overtones. It is a pleasure to note the conscious and perfect nature of the agreement of the architecture with a plastic art which, without dogmatically opposing the figurative and abstract, succeeds in being highly personal.

The graphic work of Armin Hofmann

by Hans Peter Baur

In the hierarchy of modern art it has often been agreed that architecture, or, more recently, the graphic arts, assumes first rank. From this point of view it is impossible to rate too highly the work and influence of A.H., director of the class of "graphic art A" at the Basle School of Applied Arts and professor in the U.S.A. Both in his work and in his teaching he has never ceased to demonstrate the importance of analysis, which is as vital visually as it is in music.

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