From the Bauhaus to the House of God's People: Frank Kacmarcik's Contribution to Church Architecture and Art

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Without a doubt Frank Kacmarcik has had a significant influence on the development of religious architecture and art within the United States over the past four decades. A strong personality possessing intuition, creative imagination, vision and breadth of experience, Kacmarcik has left his distinctive mark on every aspect of church design, furnishings, ritual space, and liturgical art. For over forty years he has designed the covers for *Worship,* the journal of liturgical studies published by Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota.

Kacmarcik was born on 15 March 1920 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, into a pious Catholic family with Slovak-Polish roots and a keen appreciation for both the visual arts and music. In 1938 he was awarded a scholarship to the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where he came under the special influence of a young Jewish professor, Alexander Masley, who encouraged his sense of design and confidence in his basic intuitions. Frank Kofron, another professor in the college, planted in Kacmarcik a profound appreciation for the printed word, the beauty of type faces, and the art of the book. While a student at the college, he frequented the library at the Dominican Priory in Minneapolis and became acquainted with *L'Artisan Liturgique*, a publication of the Belgian Abbey of Saint-André, and *Orate Fratres* (*Worship*), the liturgical journal published by the monks at Collegeville. At that time he also became familiar with the writings of Eric Gill. After three years at the College of Art, he became a novice at Saint John's Abbey and came under the influence of Brother Clement Fischauf, a German monk who had been trained in the Beuronese school of religious art. He left the monastery and joined the army in 1944, serving in Europe where he became familiar with the many distinguished cathedrals, monasteries, museums and monuments.[1]

1. Frank Kacmarcik, "The Berakah Award 1981," *Worship* 55 (1981) 360-62.

After his military experience, he returned to the United States to spend another year at the Minneapolis art college. He then went to Paris to study painting at the *Académie de la Grand Chaumière* and the *Centre d'art Sacré.* At that time he began to assemble a remarkable collection of fine and rare books, manuscripts and religious art objects. The collection is now housed at Saint John's University and is one of the richest private collections of its kind anywhere in the United States. Kacmarcik's distinctive style evolved during his years in Europe. One sees within his drawings as within his architectural plans his interest in woodcuts, old engravings, medieval manuscript illustrations and Eastern Christian icons.[2]

In 1950 Kacmarcik returned to the United States and became a professor of art at Saint John's University in Collegeville. After four years of teaching, he moved to Saint Paul to work full-time as a consultant in church design, printing and the graphic arts. As he developed his new vocation, his mentors were Augustus Welby Pugin and Ralph Adams Cram, as well as Eric Gill, Jacques Maritain, Graham Carey, M.A. Couturier, P.-R. Regamey and H.A. Reinhold. His vocation was clarified as that of a minister of sacred art, a deacon preaching visual theology. He became increasingly convinced that visual forms are indeed formative and that we are either formed or deformed by our surrounding environment.[3]

In 1953 he began to collaborate with the famous Bauhaus architect, Hungarian-born Marcel Breuer. The Bauhaus, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, was a school of architecture and the applied arts which became the center of modern design in Germany during the 1920s and played a key role in establishing the relationship between design and industrial techniques. Although the emphasis was on architecture and design, the teachers in the early days were mainly painters, among them Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. A close relationship was established with industry, and many products of the studios, for example, furniture, textiles and electric-light fittings, were adopted for large-scale manufacture. The characteristic Bauhaus style was geometrical, severe, and functional, with a refinement of line and shape that comes from a strict economy of means and a close study of the nature of the materials used. There is nothing fake, nothing superfluous.[4] The style was consonant with the characteristics that would later distinguish Frank Kacmarcik's own style.

Marcel Breuer was born in 1902 of Jewish parents in Pecs, in southwestern

2. Ibid., 362; Frank Kacmarcik and Paul Philibert, *Seeing and Believing: Images of Christian Faith* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press/A Pueblo Book, 1995) 194; Robert L. Tuzik, *How Firm a Foundation: Leaders of the Liturgical Movement* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications 1990) 328.

3. Kacmarcik, "The Berakah Award," 363.

4. Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988); Gilian Naylor, *The Bauhaus* (London: Studio Vista Limited, 1968).

Hungary, but he rejected religion at a young age. He began his career as a student of the Bauhaus and by 1925, as Gropius' protégé, had become master of the furniture workshop. Throughout his life his concern was with volume — space enclosed by planes or surfaces — rather than mass. He vigorously avoided any ornament or pattern in an effort to achieve the clean perfection of surface and proportion. In 1933 the Nazis closed the Bauhaus, but the emigration of staff and students helped to disseminate Bauhaus ideas in many countries, with the result that they have had enormous influence on art education throughout the Western world. Breuer migrated eventually to the United States where in 1937 he joined the faculty at Harvard's School of Architecture.[5]

Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota

In 1953 the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville invited eleven distinguished architects from various parts of the world to prepare a comprehensive plan for the abbey and university. The community decided to work with Marcel Breuer. A monastic wing, the first unit constructed, was completed in 1955. The second unit, completed and consecrated in 1961, was the abbey church which is undoubtedly a major accomplishment in the history of church architecture. The community's long-time involvement in liturgical and theological scholarship was a critical asset; so was Frank Kacmarcik's close collaboration with Breuer throughout the development of the project. The first phase involved the development of a master plan for the whole campus, so that the future of the abbey and the university could be somewhat projected and the placement and design of the buildings could respect both the mission of the abbey and the contours of the 2,400-acre property with its gently rolling hills, lakes and woods.[6]

The abbey church, contemporaneous with Coventry Cathedral in England, is one of the first, if not the first, cathedral-scale church buildings designed for the active participation of the entire liturgical assembly. In light of the extraordinary developments in our understanding of liturgical space since the Second Vatican Council, it is easy to criticize certain aspects of the building; nevertheless its profound respect for the importance and priority of the whole assembly as the principal celebrant of the liturgy is both pioneering and remarkable.[7]

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5. Tician Papachristou, *Marcel Breuer: New Buildings and Projects* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1970) 9-10. See also Peter Blake, *Marcel Breuer: Architect and Designer* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949) 8-61; *Marcel Breuer: Sun and Shadows*, ed. Peter Blake (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1955).

6. The church is described in a booklet issued by the abbey: "Abbey and University Church of Saint John the Baptist." It was also featured in various architectural journals: *L'Art d'Eglise* 27 (1959) 145-54 and 29 (1961) 97-107; *Architectural Record* 80 (1961) 132-42; *L'Architecture d'Au-jourd'hui* 33 (1962) 40-47; *The Architect and Building News* (13 June 1962) 686-87.

7. Kacmarcik, "The Berakah Award," 365-66.

As completed, the church is a trapezoid covered by a thin concrete shell which is pleated into deep folds on either side. The shell rises from the ground by means of narrow concrete piers; the intervening space is closed with plate glass windows looking into enclosed gardens, which in turn are closed off by parallel cloister corridors linking the church with the monastery. The structure is ninety feet across, bridged without columns, creating a wonderful place for people. A chapter house for community meetings, of kite-shaped form, is attached to the east cloister.[8]

In the church, the altar, located along the central axis, divides the plan into two similar trapazoids. The choir stalls, where the monastic community and guests celebrate the liturgy of the hours, are arranged around the altar, with the abbot's place facing across the altar toward the nave. The wider end of the main trapezoid is occupied by the students, parishioners and guests of the monastery during the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. At the rear of the nave is a balcony raised on concrete piers independent of the walls — an achievement that engineers and architects still marvel at. The north wall is a textured screen filled with glass designed by an amateur artist, probably the least impressive element in the ensemble. The window was a great disappointment to Breuer who had hoped that his friend and Bauhaus collaborator, Josef Albers, would be commissioned to design the glass.[9] A rather abstract figure of the triumphant Christ, to be designed by Ben Shawn, was planned for the large space behind the abbot's throne, but it was never actually commissioned, since some of the monks feared that the church would become a museum.

Abutting the north wall of the church is a low atrium housing a depressed square baptistry. Overlooking the baptistry is a remarkable sculpture of John the Baptist, patron of the abbey, designed by Doris Cesar. Before the atrium stands the bell banner, the most memorable feature of the church. It provides a striking entrance to the church under its sweeping parabolic arch and clearly designates the church as the primary building on the monastic and university campus. The banner holds both the bells and a cross, proclaiming Christian faith and the Christian identity of the institution. The church building houses various works of art by some of the most distinguished artists living at the time of construction. A shrine at the rear of the church contains an elegant twelfth-century wooden figure of Our Mother of Wisdom which originated in southern France.[10]

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8. R. Kevin Seasoltz, "Contemporary Monastic Architecture and Life in America," in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. Timothy Gregory Verdon (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1984) 322.

9. Howard Niebling, 'Modern Benedictine Churches: Monastic Churches Erected by American Benedictines since World War II," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University 1973) 229. The dissertation was summarized in two articles published in *The American Benedictine Review* 26 (1975) 180-226; 26 (1975) 298-340.

10. Seasoltz, "Contemporary Monastic Architecture," 322-23.

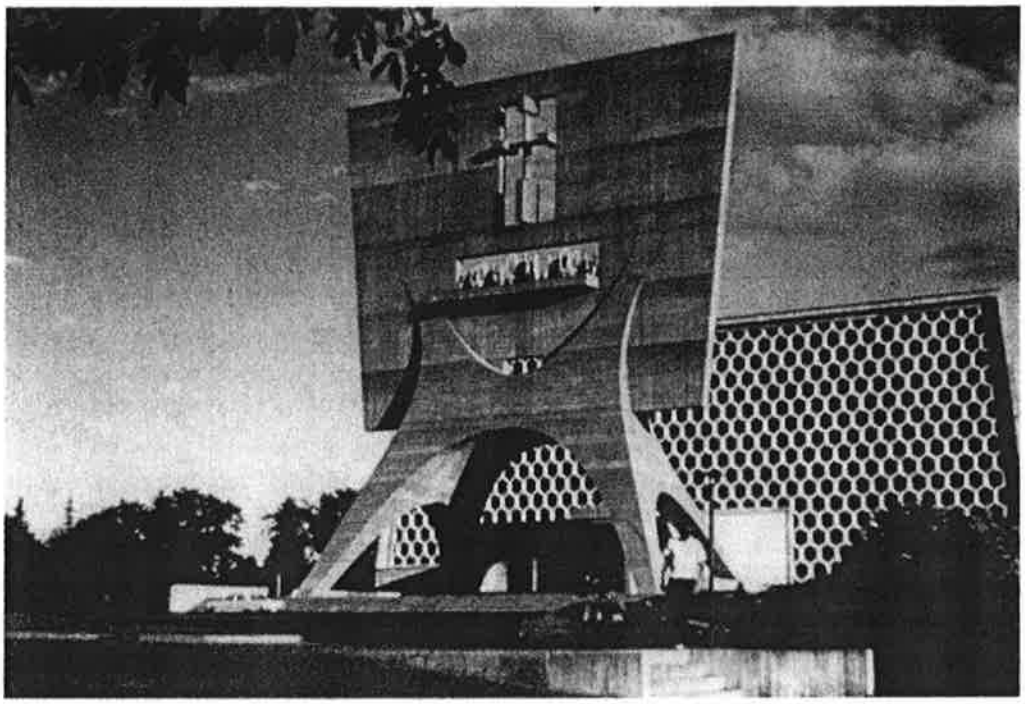

Fig. 1: Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota (All photos in this article are courtesy: The author)

The abbey church stands for honesty, simplicity and beauty, and is carefully integrated with the rest of the university campus. In many ways it anticipated the changes inaugurated in church building by the Second Vatican Council, but it also reflects the hierarchical ecclesiology that was prevalent in the 1950s. When it was built, no one suspected the complex developments in religious and liturgical life which would be set in motion by the Council. The same church would not be built by the monastic community today because the celebration of the liturgy has been simplified so that the whole community, including the non-ordained monks and the monastic guests, are able to take an even more active role in the liturgy as a closely united assembly. Likewise the monks no longer think of the abbey primarily in hierarchical terms but rather as a fraternity whose symbol of unity and direction is the abbot.[11] Hence, the abbot uses the throne only for the most solemn celebrations and even then he does not wear a mitre or ring.

Breuer designed a number of other buildings for the community, including a library, science hall and dormitories. Several years ago his master plan was revised and brought up to date by Hugh Jacobson, a distinguished Washington architect, who also designed an art building and made provision for handicapped access to some of Breuer's structures.

11. Ibid., 323.

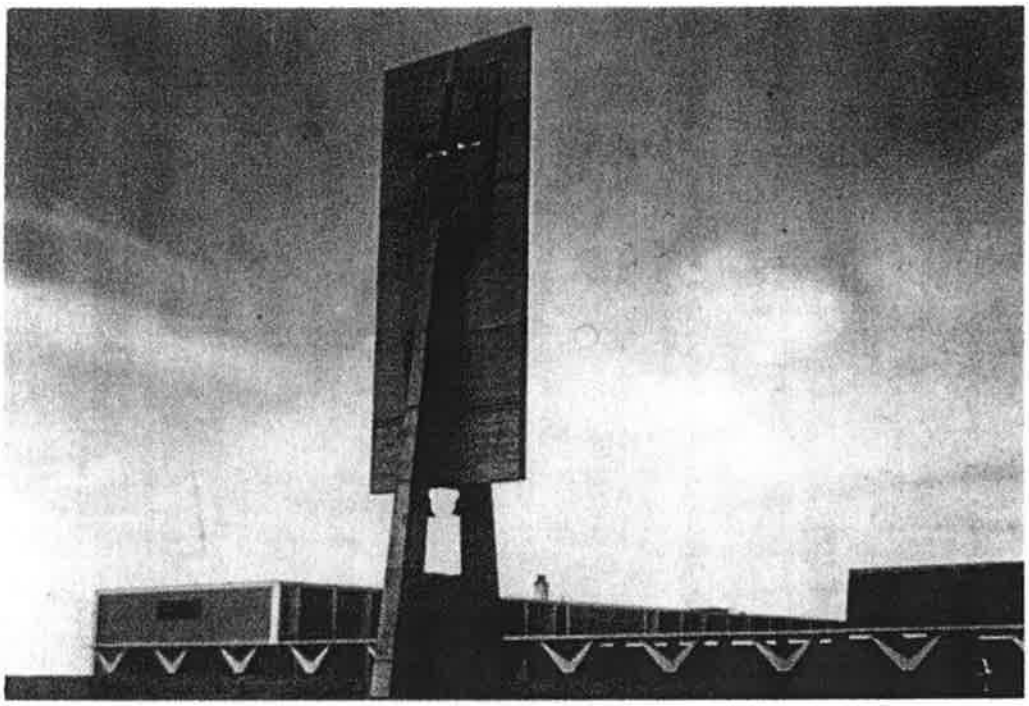

Fig. 2: Annunciation Priory, Bismarck, North Dakota

Annunciation Priory in Bismarck, North Dakota

Impressed by the work at Collegeville, the Benedictine Sisters at Annunciation Priory in Bismarck, North Dakota, asked Breuer and Kacmarcik to help them plan a new monastic complex on a site five miles north of the city, overlooking a branch of the Missouri River. The land still has an almost primitive beauty; the low hills are worn smooth by strong winds, with few trees on the exposed slopes. There is a sense of great space and distance. The buildings are connected by covered open walkways which serve to pull them into unity and also to define courtyard spaces and to give the scheme an appropriate human scale. The bell tower rises above the rest of the construction; from afar it makes a distinctive silhouette in the otherwise fairly empty landscape, and from nearby it marks the approach to the chapel.[12]

The exteriors of the buildings show an interesting juxtaposition of forms, patterns, materials and textures, typical of the Bauhaus. The basic pattern is rectilinear, made up of projecting slabs and columns of white-painted concrete, which cast sharp shadows into the in-filling panels. The concrete is used four ways in the project: as a white-painted modulation of the building plane; as a

12. See "North Dakota Community for Benedictine Sisters," *Architectural Record* 63 (1963) 95-102; "Annunciation Priory — Bismarck, North Dakota," *Liturgical Arts* 32 (1964) 50-59; Frédéric Debuyst, "La Prieuré de l'Annonciation à Bismarck," *L'Art d'Eglise* 29 (1961) 108-11.

sculptural material for fireplaces and stairs, where it is bush-hammered to reveal aggregate; as a patterned natural surface of controlled texture and recessed lines; and as an expression of generating geometry, as in the bell tower. The materials used had such quality that applied finishes were not necessary. The factor of availability in the sparsely settled region was important. Also it was thought desirable to use materials that would have the character of permanence and that would age gracefully. After finishing the main monastic complex, Breuer also designed a number of other buildings for the university. He was convinced that contemporary architecture should show organic growth but not be a replica of the past. Each building should be young and living, expressing the culture of its own time.[13]

Saint Patrick's Church in Oklahoma City

Kacmarcik's collaboration with Breuer firmly established his reputation as a liturgical and architectural consultant. In the late fifties and early sixties he worked on several other distinguished projects with well-known architects around the country. The Church of Saint Patrick in Oklahoma City, designed by Robert Lawton Jones, collaborating not only with Kacmarcik but also with the brilliant Mexican engineer, Felix Condella, won fourteen awards for design. The structure normally holds five hundred people but can be opened out to accommodate at least three times that many. Interesting aspects include the sculptured wall with its twenty-four-feet-high angels and the reredos behind the altar, constructed of gold-leafed cement block and designed by Josef Albers. There is a mystical sense of transcendence in the space.[14]

Saint Richard's Church in Jackson, Mississippi

Another award-winning church, built and consecrated in the early sixties, was the Church of Saint Richard in Jackson, Mississippi. Kacmarcik worked on that project with the Minneapolis architect, Theodore Butler, from the firm of Hammel, Green and Abrahamson in Saint Paul. That marked the beginning of a long and successful collaboration between Kacmarcik and Butler. The building is spacious, with emphasis on the whole assembly as celebrant of the liturgy, though the presider now appears to be excessively distanced from the rest of the community. Unlike the altar at Collegeville which was designed by Breuer himself and which is quite large, the altar at Saint Richard's is in scale

13. Breuer himself commented on the project in the article in *Architectural Record*, 96.
14. Kacmarcik, "The Berakah Award," 366.

with the rest of the building. Noble in design, it derives its strength not from its massive size but from its line, color and material. The people enter the church under a tower which proclaims the gathering of the assembly and then pass through a baptismal area centered on a large sculpted font with running water. A structural wall, built of sand-blasted concrete and gold-leafed, serves as a foil to the liturgical action. There is an abundance of light in the edifice so that the people are able not only to see the liturgical actions but also to see other people. The space is enriched by a fourteenth-century madonna and a thirteenth-century Spanish crucifix.[15]

Church of Saint John the Evangelist in Hopkins, Minnesota

Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, which ended in 1965, Kacmarcik collaborated with architect George Rafferty on the design for the Church of Saint John the Evangelist in Hopkins, Minnesota. Kacmarcik is especially proud of this project; in 1995 the Minnesota chapter of the American Institute of Architects chose the church for its 25-Year Award for Architectural Excellence. The church was designed to be neither triumphal nor institutional. It was there for the first time that Kacmarcik emphasized what has come to be known as a gathering space. His concern has always been with people — who they are, what they want to become, how they relate not only to themselves and one another, but how they relate to the world around them. Hence the gathering area serves as a transition space as people move to and from the church; it is there that they can prepare for the liturgical celebrations; it is there that they can socialize after the celebrations. The people converge from various directions and pass into the building through a large broad corridor which leads to a single ceremonial entrance. They walk through the baptistry area containing a font seven and a half feet in diameter. All the people in the church can see the font, most are able to gather around it.[16]

The assembly sits on ramped seating under a high roof; the walls of the building are white so that the architecture clearly appears to be a simple container for the community. The environment is flooded with natural light. Behind the altar is a highly polished chrome cross. Although the church was designed at a time when ecclesiastical directives still required that the tabernacle be placed on the main altar, the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in a special Eucharistic chapel which allows for personal prayer and devotion. Careful attention has been given to all the focal points of the liturgical celebration, such as altar, lectern, and presider's chair. Provision has been made for face-to-

15. Ibid., 366-67.
16. Ibid., 367-68.

Fig. 3: Saint John the Evangelist Church, Hopkins, Minnesota

face reconciliation, for vesting, for parish library and offices, and meetings rooms.[17]

Saint Mark's Church in Shakopee, Minnesota

The church at Hopkins stands in marked contrast to the Church of Saint Mark in Shakopee, Minnesota. There a very traditional German parish sought, within the confines of a building erected in 1859, to adapt minimally to the liturgical requirements of the Second Vatican Council and to restore and preserve as much of the old as possible. The pews were simplified, floors carpeted, wood carvings restored, new lighting installed, the floor of the sanctuary raised, and a new tracker-action organ installed. The seating arrangement could not be altered. Parts of the old carvings were used to create new furnishings. Kacmarcik considered this the minimum in renovation.[18] He took the same approach in renovating the parish church of Saint Paul in Sauk Centre, Minnesota. Good furnishings in the church were retained and refinished; what was tawdry was either discarded or sold.

17. Ibid., 369.
18. Ibid.

Abbey of Our Lady of New Melleray in Peosta, Iowa

The project at the Abbey of Our Lady of New Melleray in Peosta, Iowa, was in many ways uniquely challenging. Since the 1840s the Trappist monks of the abbey lived first of all in primitive quarters, then in a complex designed by John Mullaney who had been associated with Augustus Welby Pugin, the English architect well known for his neo-gothic structures. Mullaney was obviously influenced by Pugin's preference for pointed architecture, his use of arched windows, and his penchant for simplicity and economy of form. For many years the community worshiped on the second floor of the north wing of the monastic complex in what can only be described as an incredibly ugly space.[19]

In 1973 the community decided to remodel the north wing for the permanent location of their church. Initially Willoughby Marshall was asked to draw up the plans. The second floor was removed from the north and an adjacent kitchen wing; likewise the interior moldings and plaster were removed. It was at that point that Kacmarcik and Butler were engaged to complete the project.[20]

With the unnecessary partitions and ornamentations stripped away, an open space of exceptional beauty was created in the north wing, emerging as a marvelous shelter capable of revealing God as mysteriously transcendent but also warmly immanent in wood and stone, and above all in the community of monks and their guests gathered for worship. The beams and purloins were sand-blasted so as to appear in a natural finish. Douglas fir was used for decking in the roof which arches forty-nine feet above the red-gray tile used as paving throughout the project. The native light honey-colored sandstone walls have been left bare; they are pierced by arched windows running along both sides of the building and filled with clear glass so that sunlight plays on the walls and furnishings, thus changing the mood of the church throughout the day. In a sense the space is grand, but it does not dwarf those who gather for worship; it rather generates an atmosphere that is unified, mysterious and inspiring.[21]

In order to offset the length of the church, the sanctuary at the east end and the guest area at the west end have both been elevated somewhat, thus facilitating visibility and pulling the two ends of the building toward one another. As a monastic church the building is used primarily for the celebration of the liturgy

19. The history of the monastery and church is set out in a booklet: *An Historical Sketch of the Abbey Church* (Dubuque, Iowa: New Melleray Abbey n.d.); the spirit of the community is described in another booklet: *New Melleray Abbey: Cistercians of the Strict Observance* (Dubuque, Iowa: New Melleray Abbey n.d.). I have described and evaluated the renovation project in "L'Abbeye Notre-Dame de New Melleray," *L'Art d'Eglise* no. 186 (1979) 1-7, and also in "Living Stones Built on Christ," *Worship* 57 (1983) 101-05.

20. Seasoltz, "Living Stones," 103.

21. Ibid., 104-05.

of the hours seven times a day and also for the daily celebration of the Eucharist. The latter has rightly placed the strongest claims in determining the furnishings of the space, but through effective lighting the sanctuary area recedes in prominence during the liturgy of the hours. A gray-black opalescent granite altar centers the space in the sanctuary. The rest of the furniture is made from solid butcher block red oak with oiled finish. On each side of the church is a single row of choir stalls; a tracker-action organ stands at the foot of the choir stalls on the right. Pews at the rear of the church rest on slightly raised tiers, accommodating about eighty guests. The community at the time of renovation insisted on a single wrought-iron grate separating the monks from the guests, which is problematic during the Eucharist, above all during the Communion rite.[22]

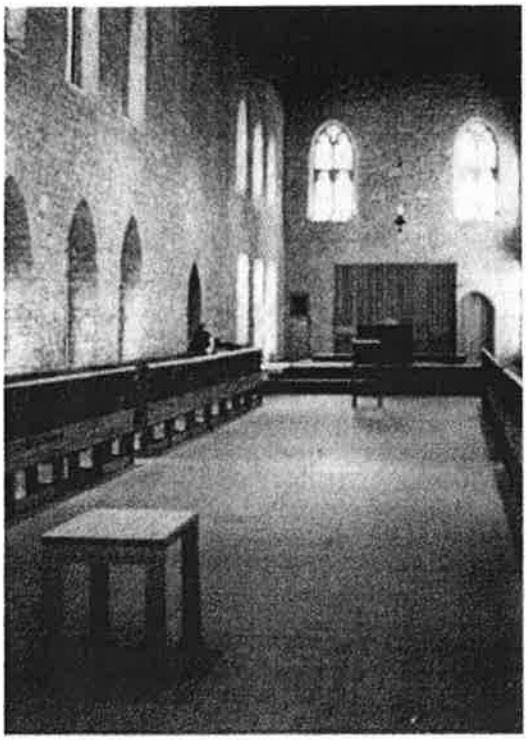

Fig. 4: Abbey of Our Lady of New Melleray, Peosta, Iowa

Of special interest is the successful handling of the place for the reserved Eucharist. The monks wanted to emphasize the primacy of the Eucharistic celebration, but they also wanted the reserved sacrament to be related to the larger Eucharistic space. Hence the reserved sacrament stands in a large tabernacle house built of red oak directly behind the presider's chair in the sanctuary. The edifice provides an effective backdrop for the sanctuary area and can accommodate several monks for Eucharistic devotions and personal prayer. Apart from the processional cross, the only image in the church is an icon of Our Lady of Vladimir mounted on a wrought iron stand. This is in keeping with the Cistercian tradition which on the one hand has maintained a strong devotion to the Mother of God but on the other has been reserved in its attitude toward paintings and sculptures in monastic buildings. The overall effect of the renovation project is powerful; it has been and will continue to be formative of both the monastic community and their guests. It rightly received an honor award from the American Institute of Architects.[23]

22. Ibid., 104.
23. Ibid.

Church of the Seven Dolors in Nerinx, Kentucky

Another interesting project is the renovation of the Church of the Seven Dolors, the Loretto Motherhouse in Nerinx, Kentucky. In the 1860s the sisters built a complex of structures which were strongly influenced by the Shaker architecture in their area.[24] By the late 1970s their church was badly in need of repair. The project was entrusted to the Kacmarcik-Butler team. The axis of the church was changed. A platform was built against the west wall in the middle of the nave to support the altar, presider's chair and lectern, and the pews were arranged on three sides of the platform. What was formerly the sacristy at the north end of the building became the entrance and narthex. The plaster was removed from the interior bricks; the choir loft was eliminated; and the vaulted ceiling was covered with southern pine, thus creating a light golden dome over the whole church interior. Most of the stained glass was replaced by solar-gray windows. The organ was rebuilt and enlarged. In addition to a reconciliation room, provision was also made for a Blessed Sacrament chapel and a devotional chapel honoring the *Pietà*. These were both appointed with some of the community's cherished artistic heirlooms.[25]

When the chapel was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, 1980, Sister Marian McAvoy, the President of the Sisters of Loretto, gave a homily that was truly insightful. She reflected on the community and the church in light of Denise Levertov's poem, "What My House Would Be Like If It Were a Person." She noted that the church, with walls stripped to the original bricks made on the property, freed now of external decorations so that the strong, simple lines of its beginning are revealed, reflects the community's passage through renewal in recent years. The sisters had rid themselves of many externals while searching deeply for the essentials of a gospel life. She commented on the new windows especially, which now allow the world outside to be seen, inviting that world to be with the community at prayer rather than closing out the world as a distraction from their private life with God. The church symbolizes a community dedicated to both worship and service, thanking and praising God and ministering to God's people. The Loretto Sisters are deeply committed to social justice and peace and the alleviation of the world's suffering. The church was dedicated at a time when some Christians working earnestly for social justice objected to money spent on church renovations. But Sister Marian stressed that the Loretto chapel was renovated with some of the community's material

24. The early history and apostolate of the community are chronicled and analyzed by Barbara Misner, "A Comparative Social Study of the Members and Apostolates of the First Eight Permanent Communities of Women Religious Within the Original Boundaries of the United States, 1790-1850" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1980) 33-34. See also Florence Wolff, "Church of the Seven Dolors 1863-1980" (Nerinx: Loretto Motherhouse, 1980) 2.

25. Seasoltz, "Living Stones," 111-12.

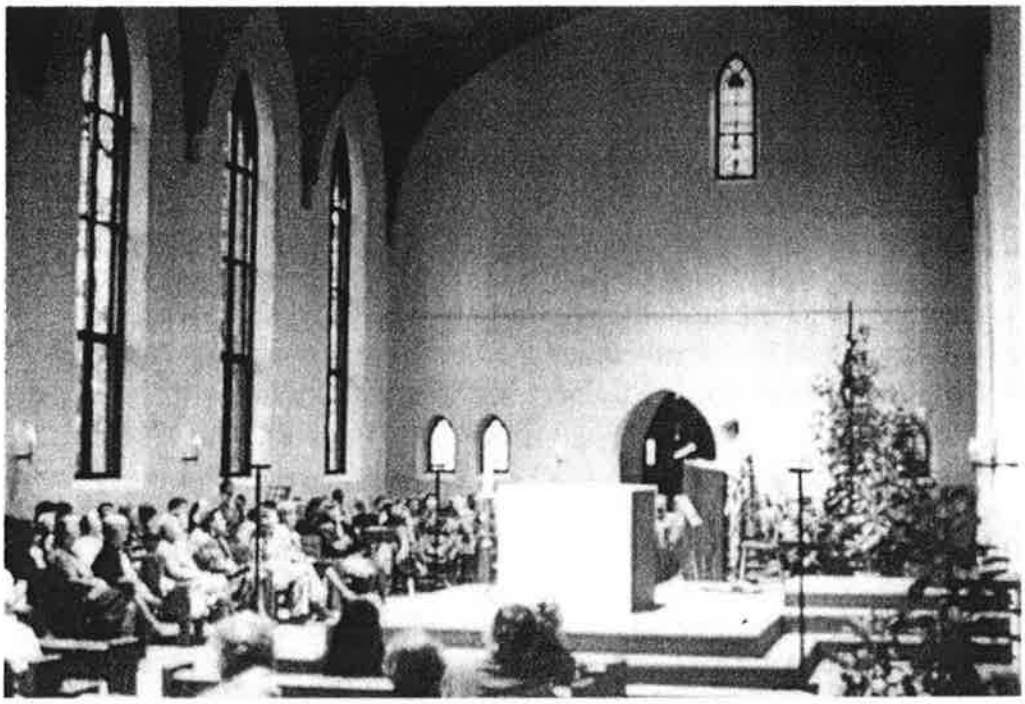

Fig. 5: Church of the Seven Dolors, Nerinx, Kentucky

resources so it would bear witness to the preeminence of the sacred in human life, in keeping with the Church's affirmation that art, music, and space for worship nourish the community to grow more and more into a holy temple where God can dwell and set about the work of transforming the world.[26]

Church of Saint Peter in Saratoga Springs, New York.

The approach taken in Kentucky was also taken in the renovation of the Church of Saint Peter in Saratoga Springs, New York. The axis of the church was shifted from an east-west to a south-north direction; consequently the main entrance to the church was transferred from the wall facing out on a busy street to the south-west end of the wall adjacent to the rectory. The former main entrance was blocked in unobtrusively. A courtyard was developed between the rectory and the church in order to provide a gathering place for the community and a quiet area for recollection and sharing, at least during pleasant weather. The noise and bustle of the main street and parking lot have been shut out by means of high stuccoed block walls. A Blessed Sacrament chapel was built in what was formerly the priest's sacristy; it stands immediately on the left as one passes through the doors into the church proper. The appoint-

26. Ibid., 112.

ments in the room, especially the tabernacle, clearly affirm its importance. The fact that the chapel is separate from the major worship space of the church helps people distinguish between the celebration of the Eucharist by the whole community and the reservation of the sacrament for taking Communion to the sick and for personal Eucharistic devotion.[27]

The centrality of the sacraments of initiation in the Christian economy is likewise affirmed by both the design and the placement of the baptismal font, which is relatively small because of the limited space in the building. Made of dark green granite, the font stands in an open area immediately inside the entrance to the main worship space. Its location allows full community participation in both the rites of the Easter Vigil and the regular celebration of baptism.[28]

The new altar is clearly the dominant symbol in the principal worship space; the table surface is designed to accommodate comfortably the essentials for the Eucharist: the bread, the wine and the sacramentary.[29]

The primacy of people over things is communicated in the design and placement of both the presider's chair and the benches for the people. The community gathers on three sides of the sanctuary platform with a clear view not only of the special liturgical ministers but also of one another. The interaction is not distracting, since it takes place in a spacious area with a distinctively religious character. This has been enhanced by the finish of the interior walls and ceiling and by the absence of non-essentials in the space.

Except for a stylized Byzantine cross sculptured on the west wall of the church and the stained glass windows, there are few images in the church. A touch of elegant richness is provided in the processional cross. The gold-plated corpus, designed by Gerald Bonnette, projects the death and resurrection of Jesus and is surrounded by four gold cubes. Five gold cubes set in the surface of the other side of the cross symbolize the glorious wounds of our Savior.[30]

Saint Benedict's Monastery in Saint Joseph, Minnesota

In the 1980s the Kacmarcik-Butler team set about work on a major project for Saint Benedict's Monastery in Saint Joseph, Minnesota. The college had originally developed out of a simple high school and college program for the Benedictine Sisters themselves, but the number of lay women grew steadily until it was rather difficult to distinguish between what was college and what was monastery. So the sisters decided to build a significant entrance to the

27. Ibid., 106-07.
28. Ibid., 107.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.

Fig. 6: Saint Benedict's Monastery, Saint Joseph, Minnesota

monastery which would give them their own gathering space and which would emphasize the church as the dominant building on campus. The entrance to the old chapel was reversed and a large gathering hall was erected. It is used creatively by the sisters both for meeting guests and for community and college events.

Architecturally the renovation of the church has been described as impeccable. The dome was a determining factor in positioning the altar so that the community gathers on four sides of the altar. No matter how one stands or sits when presiding, there are always people behind — which makes communication difficult. Likewise the placement of the lectern has not been thought out adequately; one reads and preaches across the altar with part of the community sitting behind. A beautifully designed large chest for relics has been placed beneath the altar. Unfortunately, with its gold inlaid cubes, it becomes the central focus in the building and draws too much attention to the relics which are of secondary importance in the Catholic liturgy.

The space has been considerably lightened by the use of Remy glass made in Germany, replacing the stained glass in all the windows. A separate chapel for reservation has been handsomely designed. In many ways the renovation is remarkable, but there are inherent problems. One gets the impression that architectural concerns were primarily determinative of the arrangements and that more concern should have been given to the liturgical requirements.

Mepkin Abbey, South Carolina

The new church at Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina is eminently successful from both architectural and liturgical points of view. In 1949 a group of Trappist monks came from the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky to bring the monastic life to Mepkin. The property, a splendid old plantation, belonged to Henry and Clare Boothe Luce, who donated it for the founding of a new monastery. The monks built a provisional church in 1950 and worshipped there for about forty years. In 1989, before the arrival of hurricane Hugo, the community began discussions concerning a renovation of that temporary edifice. The arrival of the hurricane delayed the project until 1991 when the community, now under the direction of a vibrant young abbot, Francis Kline, took up the process once again.[31]

After interviews with several liturgical consultants, the community chose Frank Kacmarcik with Theodore Butler as architect. They discussed at length their identity as a community — how they worshipped together, how they prayed as individuals, how they celebrated the liturgy with retreatants and guests, and how the Eucharist and the liturgy of the hours related to one another in their daily life. During those deliberations they found they were examining the whole of their monastic life: what it had been, how it was currently expressed and what they hoped for the future. It became clear that the emerging floor plan of an entirely new church and the relationship of proposed spaces in the House of the Church were, in fact, expressing their identity as a monastic community and their vision for the future. The centrality of the altar to the entire space; the relation of the choir to the altar; the relation of retreatants to the monastic community; the placement of casual visitors; the creation of a smaller, more intimate space for personal prayer and Eucharistic devotion; the very location of the building itself in the monastic complex — all these factors they discovered spoke of a theology of monastic life, their vision of Church, and their faith in the Risen Lord.

The layout of the monastic complex is composed of a number of buildings or houses: dormitory, refectory, chapter room, library, scriptorium, guesthouse and farm houses. The church is not just another structure in this complex, but the first house among houses, the very heart of the abbey. It is the heart of the abbey because it is there that the Church of Mepkin, being at the heart of the Church, experiences in a profound manner its contemplative call to conversion of heart and the glorification of God.

The new church provides both monks and guests with a wonderful experience of both God's transcendence and immanence in the community. One is

31. A short history of the monastery is set out in a brochure published by the abbey: "We Are Building a House for the Church of Mepkin."

aware of others, but not too aware. There is a profound sense of beauty in all that is there — in the altar, in the lighting, in the organ, in the woodwork, especially the ceiling, in the choir stalls, in the image of Our Lady, in the holy water font, and above all in the people who gather so prayerfully and reverently for liturgy eight times a day. The church was dedicated on 14 November 1993.

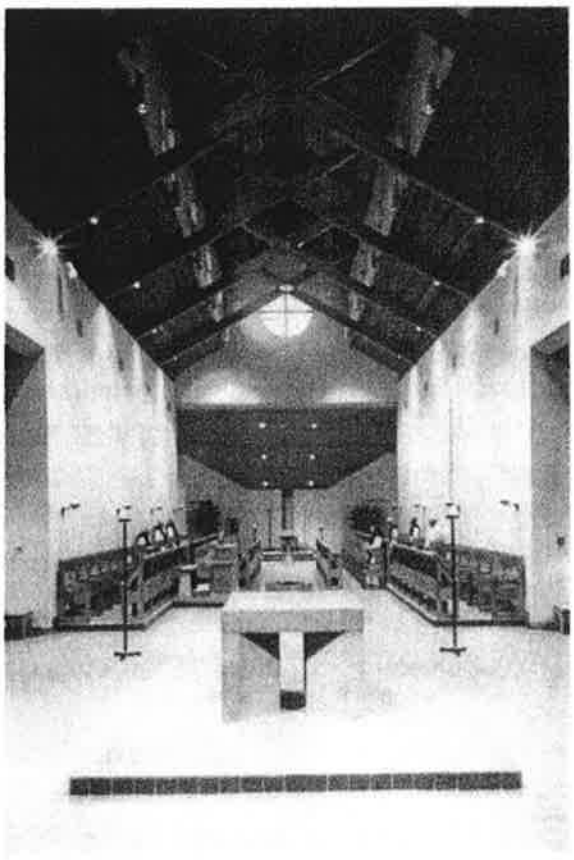

Fig. 7: Mepkin Abbey, South Carolina

Conclusion

After the completion of the church at Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Frank Kacmarcik built a house and studio designed for him by his friend and colleague Marcel Breuer. When Breuer presented the plans for the house, he told Kacmarcik, "There is no bill. This is my way of telling you that Saint John's Abbey Church would not be as it is except for you."[32] This characteristically handsome creation of Breuer's, a functional modernistic house fitted into a knoll overlooking the Mississippi River, became Kacmarcik's refuge: a home, a library, a studio, and a hermitage all in one.

In 1981 the North American Academy of Liturgy offered Kacmarcik its highest award, the Berakah, to honor his distinguished contribution to the renewal of liturgical art and architecture. The citation for the award reads in part: "Frank Kacmarcik has served the churches of this country as a minister of visual environment. His work in graphics and in pioneering the role of artist-designer-consultant for church building, renovating and furnishing embodies commitment to high standards, freedom from fads, conviction that tradition lives, and remarkable correspondence with the best insights of a Church in process of renewal."[33]

32. Paul Philibert, *Seeing and Believing*, 195.
33. Ibid., 197.

In 1987 Kacmarcik was made an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects. He has been awarded more than sixty national and international awards for his book designs and graphic arts, as well as numerous awards for building and renovation projects, including six coveted national A.I.A. awards.

In 1988 Kacmarcik asked to enter the monastic community at Collegeville as a cloistered oblate and was accepted by the abbot. He now lives in the abbey as a member of the monastic community and continues his work of consultation and design in a small workroom at the back of The Liturgical Press. As Gerard Sloyan has said of him, "The monastic layman plies his craft as the sons of Benedict have done — and daughters too — for centuries."[34]

34. Gerard S. Sloyan, Foreward, *Seeing and Believing*, viii.