

Tridentine Community News

April 2, 2006

Encouraging Signs for Traditional Architecture

If you appreciate traditional church architecture, you might be tempted to despair when driving around and observing the modern churches typically being built. In so many cases, it appears that the architects have failed to grasp the most essential concepts of inspiring architecture of the past. Have they had no grounding in the Catholic faith? Have they not visited the great cathedrals? Have they not driven around downtown Detroit and Windsor and looked at the jewels we have here? How could our relatively poor ancestors have built such beautiful temples 100 years ago, while today, with superior building technology and wealth, we build bland structures with third-rate art? Fortunately, the pendulum appears to be swinging back.

Two relatively young architects, who are also professors of architecture at Notre Dame, are leading a resurgence of classical church design. Duncan Stroik

(www.stroikarchitect.com)

and Thomas Gordon Smith (www.thomasmordonsmitharchitects.com) have, in their classes and in their own professional work, advocated a return to the classical church styles that speak to the soul and express our Holy Faith. Smith is best known for having designed Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Denton, Nebraska. Stroik is the editor of Sacred Architecture magazine (www.sacredarchitecture.org) and a prolific writer and speaker.

Impressive for a university not known for its orthodoxy, the School of Architecture at Notre Dame (<http://architecture.nd.edu/>) has refocused its

entire curriculum around traditional design. The student projects are especially encouraging.

Metro Detroit residents are no doubt familiar with the architectural record of Ralph Adams Cram, locally noted for St. Florian Church in Hamtramck and St. Mary's of Redford. An enterprising architect, Ethan Anthony, has taken over the successor to Cram's firm, HDB Cram & Ferguson (www.hdb.com), and has brought new life to his predecessor's legacy of traditional church design projects.

A new web site, www.dellachiesa.com, is devoted to examples of the history and tradition of traditional church architecture.

A new coffee table book about the great churches of Chicago, "Heavenly City: The Architectural Tradition of Catholic Chicago" by Denis R. McNamara (with an introduction by Stroik and Smith, no less), reminds us of the hidden treasures in our midst.

Such a book could never be written about the uninspiring architecture we see so often today, nor would tours be offered of such structures.

Inspiring architecture may be the beginning, but proper maintenance and restoration keep a traditional church going. In a future column, we will examine the work of some artists whose talents ensure that our beautiful historic structures have a long life ahead of them.

Let us pray that traditional standards of sacred architecture are fostered, and that church authorities once again encourage genuine architectural creativity in the service of God.

