

Book review by Alkuin
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Modern Architecture and the Sacred: Religious Legacies and Spiritual Renewal, edited by Ross Anderson and Maximilian Sternberg, New York – Oxford 2020, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, xii + 285 pages, abundantly illustrated with black and white graphics and photos, ISBN 9-781-3-500-9866-4

Historians working in the 20th century have often noted that the Cistercian movement is characterized by a special architectural aesthetic. Writers noted that the trademark architecture propagated by this monastic reform movement reached even the remote peripheries of European society within a short time. In contrast to their colleagues in the Early Modern period; modern scholars identified and praised the distinctive aesthetic phenomena that came to stand for Cistercian identity. The buildings themselves communicate religious ideals. Therefore the book at hand, devoted in a special way to religious legacies and spiritual renewal, is eminently applicable to Cistercian Studies, even though there is only one reference to the order in the index. While all the book's chapters have their value, this review covers only those contributions most closely aligned to specifically Cistercian subjects.

All the essays in the volume derive from a conference held at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge, in the Spring of 2017. Coming from various perspectives, they all share the conviction that modernity often invokes and imitates sacred contexts when it comes to building theaters, museums, memorials, and even rail stations.

In chapter two, entitled “Romantic *Kunstreligion* and the search for the sacred in modern architecture” (37–55) Gabriele Bryant concentrates on developments from Schinkel’s Altes Museum – presented by her as an ‘aesthetic church’ – to Peter Zumthor’s Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, which she explains in the context of a Gesamtkunstwerk and a ‘heavenly cave’. Starting around 1820, museums become temples. Art and exhibition spaces take the form of cathedrals. This is part of the German tradition of *Kunstreligion*, which Bryant traces back to the 18th century. The author, a German art historian with a PhD in History and Philosophy of Architecture from Cambridge University, proposes a “dynamic relationship between processes of secularization and sacralization” (38). Not just religious art, but all the art on display takes on a sacred aura. After explaining the cult of art in the first part of the essay, the author devotes the second to Peter Zumthor’s chapel in Mechernich-Wachendorf. By his own account, Zumthor was inspired by the Romantic Gesamtkunstwerk, perhaps more so than by Christian belief. Yet this architect’s “multisensory” style (52) has many similarities to the Cistercian patrimony.

Mary Ann Steane wrote the fifth chapter about light, form and *formación*. Her main emphasis rests on the use of daylight in new churches designed by members of the Valparaíso School (91–107). The author notes that the Valparaíso School in Chile is different from other architectural academies: It is openly Catholic and therefore does not suffer from “a spiritual void at the heart of the modernist project” (91), as is often the case elsewhere. Architectural training is especially prominent at the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso, which has a student body numbering approximately 15,000. Several priests serve on the faculty. The education in design is meant to lead students to create a “powerful esprit de corps” and “discover the rewards of austerity and of sacrifice in a common cause” (92). Echoes of the Cistercian movement are clear enough. Not surprisingly, several monastic building projects have emerged from the university, as have plans for many churches. It is revealing that light is a central element of the Valparaíso aesthetic, as it is for the Cistercians. Steane published a monograph on the architectural uses of light in 2011. She has also published (2004) on environmental factors, cultural assumptions, and the layout of larger settlements.

Maximilian Sternberg's article (the twelfth chapter) is about modern medievalisms and the sacred art held at the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne (208–221). This chapter is especially relevant to Cistercian Studies because of the author's 2013 monograph about the order's architecture and medieval society. Sternberg, a Senior Lecturer at Cambridge University, notes that modernist architects referred to and appropriated medievalisms "time and again" (208). The chapter is devoted to the Schnütgen, which opened in 1932 and presented exclusively medieval artifacts in 'white cube' architecture. In this case, the modernist project clearly feeds off of the medieval patrimony. His article mentions the major players of the antiquarian, liturgical, and modernist movements, noting that Mies van der Rohe "much admired" the theologian Romano Guardini (210). Sternberg's chapter then goes on to describe how the private (and clerical) Schnütgen collection developed into a public museum amid interrelations: Medievalism, modernism, and Guardini's liturgical movement came together.

The thirteenth chapter in the volume is devoted to Italian Fascism (222–240). Hannah Malone, a researcher on architecture, death, and nationhood, argues that modern authoritarian architecture in Italy combined Roman Catholic symbolism with modern aesthetics in order to "carry messages of political propaganda" (223). Christian tropes like martyrdom and redemption appeared often in Italian Fascism, as they had in Risorgimento propaganda a few generations earlier. Malone is largely concerned with the roughly 20 ossuaries built in the nine years after Fascists rose to power in Italy in 1929. These repositories of bones were highly ideologized efforts to centralize the remains of soldiers and to exercise control over the memorial culture of war casualties. Medieval chivalry and modernist ideals meet in this case, seeking "to evoke timelessness and sacrality" (227). Malone also describes some quasi-liturgical Fascist rituals which are very close to monastic funeral practice. When a Fascist leader calls out the name of a dead soldier, the comrades answer *presente!*, suggesting that the dead live on in the disciplined community of *milites*. Patristic and medieval sources remind us that monks living under the Rule of St. Benedict were often called *milites Christi*.

The book closes with an extensive bibliography (255–272) and an index (273–285). The index has many advantages since it lists names of architects, theorists, and others. It also helps to find certain churches and chapels quickly. Yet the more abstract terms like "symbols and symbolism" are not treated in a manner systematic enough to be useful; it is difficult to attain the necessary precision in a book of conference proceedings. The considerable value of the

book lies elsewhere: in its fresh approach to the profound religious content of modernist architecture. Since there is not much scholarship on Cistercian architectural aesthetics, Anderson and Sternberg's volume will provide valuable stimuli for future work. That is why they include the word "renewal" in their title.

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