

## **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### **Part One**

*The art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church is something that is unique in this world. It is unique because it is not understood as an end in itself but a means of communicating the presence of a new reality in this world: The Kingdom of God. Christ began his ministry with these words: "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). The Kingdom of God is the Church - the community of people who have received the Holy Spirit and are progressing along the path of "deification" - the path of becoming the persons we were created to be by being illumined and energized by God's grace. The art, architecture and hymnology of the Orthodox Church plays an integral role in this process of deification. The following article is the first of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

Many of the "Orthodox" Churches that have been built in America over the past century have been designed by persons who did not have the necessary theological tools to design an Orthodox church building. The church structure that many Orthodox communities have settled for certainly had to do with construction costs - it also had to do with the basic lack of understanding of how church architecture related to the theology of the Orthodox Church. Architects who had no understanding of the Orthodox faith and who had never worshipped in an Orthodox manner were often employed to build an Orthodox church building. If we wouldn't hire a deaf person to compose our hymns, or a blind person to paint our icons, why would we ask someone who has never worshipped with us to design a house of worship? Most likely because church architecture is something that is somewhat intimidating - and a professional who knows how to integrate the structural, mechanical, electrical, acoustical and luminous systems is needed. After the church is built the Parish Council is usually pleased with the architect's product - the drain pipes are in the right location, there is adequate lighting, there are adequate provisions for electric outlets, and the colors all blend; but is that all we should expect an Orthodox church building to be? Many of the churches that have been built in the last century are "functional" but do little to communicate the truths of the Orthodox faith. Superficial and uninformed understandings of the Orthodox faith have often dictated church design. Churches were sometimes understood to be "Orthodox" in design as long as the church faced east and certain externals were present: a dome and iconostasis.

Those who are involved in the process of designing and building Orthodox churches, however, must understand that the church building is more than this. The church building must be an image of the Kingdom of God. A truly "Orthodox" church building then, is one that has been designed in such a way that it manifests this new reality through the manipulation of architectural forms and symbols (in harmony with the placement of iconography; [and eventually with the melodies of Orthodox

hymnography]). Symbols in Orthodox usage and understanding do not represent something that is absent, but rather they express the otherwise inexpressible reality that is present! The symbol is not the truth, but the language by which the truth is revealed. The dome, for instance, is an architectural form that is used in Orthodox churches because it expresses the all-embracing character of Christ who is the Ruler of All (the *Pantocrator*). An icon of Christ Pantocrator is, therefore, painted on the interior of the dome - so that His gaze embraces the space that is formed by the dome (which is representative of the entire universe). The placement of the windows in such a way as to bring in natural light from above has also been used to communicate the presence of Christ who is the Light of the world. The interior plan of the narthex (entry), nave (central core), and sanctuary (space of the altar area) is a symbolic expression of our theology: that we must step from the fallen world (the narthex) into the transfigured world (the nave) and continually partake of the Banquet of the Kingdom (which is prepared in the sanctuary). There are, therefore, certain architectural forms that have been determined, over the course of centuries, to be most adequate to express our theology.

Orthodox church architecture (as in the case with iconography and hymnology) is a part of the Tradition of our church - and there are certain norms and principles, inspired by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which must be followed in building a church that is faithful to our Tradition. There is, however, room for creativity within these boundaries. Our creative talents have been given to us by God and are to be used to glorify God within the context of our being members of the Church. Like the various motifs of iconography, there are various architectural motifs (consider the difference, for instance, between a Byzantine church from Syria and a Byzantine Church from Russia) which expresses the same truths in different ways. An architect can develop various church designs incorporating various forms and materials (our Tradition does not constrain us to build with stone to the exclusion of structural steel), using modern methods and tools, while still remaining faithful to our Tradition. When Tradition is disregarded (often unknowingly by “professional” architects who are not of the Orthodox faith), churches will be built that do not communicate our theology and will serve to hinder the persons who will worship and pray there.

Orthodox church architecture must be such that it serves to inspire persons to want to participate in the liturgy. A church building is not simply a passive structure that “houses” the liturgy - it plays an active part in the celebration by both reflecting worship and inspiring worship. The interior and (to a lesser degree) the exterior of a church building should have a profound effect on those who worship there. Orthodox church architecture, along with the iconography and music should create an atmosphere that has a formative influence on the spirit of those who are encompassed by the structure. The architectural design must be one that is “transfigured” and different from common architecture - it must be one that is a “manifestation of majestic

meekness, humility and truth" (Fr. Thomas Hopko) which is expressive of our faith in the Gospel of Christ. The architecture must be sober where everything should have significance, with nothing for display or pretension. The church building as a whole must invoke in a person that it is a place that is somehow "not of this world." In a word, the Orthodox church building must be an image of that Kingdom toward which the Church leads the world. {end of Part I}

## **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### Part Two

*The following article is the second of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

In the last article we concluded that the architecture of Orthodox Church buildings must not be "of this world," but rather should be an image of "the world to come" (these are the words we say every Sunday at the conclusion of the Nicene Creed). The "world to come" is not here in its fullness yet - the world we live in is still fallen - but within the Church (which is "not of this world") we are called to experience the world as it was created to be - as something that is good (as God created it to be in the beginning: "And God saw that it was good" [Genesis 1:12]). The classical definition of the Church is that it is "the Kingdom of God on earth" — the experience of life as totally blessed, renewed, and saved. St. Gregory of Nyssa defined the Church as "the experience of God's good creation purged of all evil." He also said that the Church is the "re-creation of creation." In other words, the world which God created as good, because it had fallen away, had to be renewed and restored — and this was done by Jesus Christ who died "for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Life in its fullness and wholeness is available and is present to us in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. We experience the world as good, as "transfigured," particularly when we participate fully in the Divine Liturgy which begins with the words, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and ever and unto ages of ages." Christ is both present within us ("the Kingdom of God is within you" [Luke 17:21]) and in our midst ("For where two or three are gathered in my Name, there I am in the midst of them." [Matthew 18:20]). The church building is a special place which has been dedicated as a place where we are to gather to be with Christ, His mother, the saints, and the bodiless hosts (the angels) by the power of the Holy Spirit who is not constrained by time or limited by it. This is the reason why the priest censures the entire church, the icons, the people, and even the areas where people are not standing: because Christ, His mother, the saints, and the angels are present in our midst. The only way to express this otherwise inexpressible reality is through symbols: icons, architecture and sacred music. The iconography, architecture and the position of the singers and chanters of a church building (which must be considered together when designing a church) is the language by which the truth is revealed. To reveal the truth, however,

architects cannot use “reverse perspective” as do iconographers (painting in such a way that we are the ones being looked at from God’s perspective). True perspective must be used, just as rain water has to run off of the roof and away from the church building. This brings us back to this fact: the Church is “not of this world,” but it is certainly “in this world.” The architectural design of a church building, like all buildings, has to be the result of a correct balance and form, function and codes — and this responsibility lies with the architect. Being “in this world,” however, does not mean that we have to compromise our design because of finances. Architecture that is an expression of the Kingdom which is “not of this world” (a paradigm being Byzantine architecture) may involve more design thought, but it need not be excessively expensive.

In the upcoming articles we will explore the role of light and images, space and time. We have said that the interior of an Orthodox Church building should be designed in such a way that it has a formative influence on the spirit of those encompassed by the structure. When we pray and worship in church all of our senses are involved. Therefore there are certain experiences that an architect must consider. When we commune with God there is a sympathy in our soul for: a) the lighting intensity and quality of the early morning, before the sunrise when a candle flame is brighter and it is quiet; b) a faint holy fragrance and the movement of incense clouds mingled with our prayers now and at the judgment (Revelation 8:3). On these matters are: luminous considerations; heating, ventilating and air conditioning concerns. In the church the worshipper is surrounded and in the midst of holy icons, angels and saints in a common work in fear of God, in faith and love. There is a unity and harmony of the iconography with the architecture. Space considerations involve: standing, kneeling, prostrating, moving and sitting with a heart open to the Lord, together with others in this, our time and place. Finally, an acoustic quality should provide for the quiet, almost unheard melodies that in time fill the head and heart beyond measure keeping us undistracted in our peace for repentance. [end of Part II]

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#### **Part Three**

*The following article is the third of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

The luminous environment created by both natural and artificial lighting must be considered when designing a church. Those who visit the church of the *Hagia Sophia* (“Holy Wisdom”) in Constantinople [Istanbul, Turkey] (the classic example of Orthodox Byzantine architecture) are awestruck by the brilliance of its natural lighting. The light which streams in through the windows of its dome contributes to an interior environment that observers of every generation have called “heaven on earth.” Luminosity is also one of the three key elements (the others being harmony and

geometry) that the western architects of Gothic churches used to create an image of “heaven on earth.” The Abbot Suger (12th century “inventor of Gothic architecture”) sought to bring into church buildings as much light as possible through the expanded use of stained glass windows. Walls of shimmering glass held up by the smallest possible amount of structure (which led to a more popular use of “flying buttresses”) were erected. Abbot Suger’s understanding of the writings of St. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (5th century Eastern Christian mystic) led him to a fascination with the symbolism of light. The “natural” light received by stained glass windows, in Suger’s understanding, was transformed into “new light” (symbolic of Jesus Christ who is the “light of the world” John 8:12) after it had been refracted through the colored glass. This expanded use of stained glass, however, did not create an interior environment that was always bright. “The thick, colored panes of the stained glass glowed only under direct sunlight, and even then it was muted chromatic illumination they engendered” (Spiro Kostoff). While the use of stained glass in western churches was a means of creating a church that was an image of heaven on earth (“The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass” Revelation 21:18), its use never developed as a primary means of creating that image in the east. To be sure, stained glass was used in the east (such as the amber colored glass used in the 5th century church of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki) but it never was used as a primary medium to manifest the presence of Christ and the saints: icons, mosaics, and frescos did this. Windows were understood to not serve a “worship function” but a “practical function” of illuminating the church for daytime worship, and to contribute to the overall sense of the church building being an “image of the Kingdom.” It is interesting to note that the first period of stained glass in the west was called by art historians, the “Byzantine Period” because Byzantine icons were used as models by the western glaziers. They used Byzantine icons as the model and not Byzantine stained glass! Stained glass “icons” have not, in general, been used in the east because they are not in the Orthodox iconographic Tradition (that which has been passed down through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as essential for our faith). In the churches of the west (which generally do not have iconography that serves a worship function) the colored light that is refracted through stained glass usually does not interfere with the other interior features of the church (most of the time it serves to enhance the interior because of the spontaneous variation of lighting intensity on a particular day) — most often the refracted light simply reflects off plain walls, columns and stonework. When there is a great deal of interior iconography, as in the case of Orthodox churches, however, darkly colored and multi-colored stained glass (with or without anyone’s image depicted) should be used only with discretion. [end of Part III]

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Part Four

*The following article is the fourth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

There are, I believe, two reasons why many Orthodox churches in America incorporate stained glass windows into their design. The first is an inevitable result of living in a religiously pluralistic society. We see beautiful stained glass windows in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and the natural inclination is to want to incorporate them (or at least an "Orthodox version") into an Orthodox church. The fact that stained glass windows are not part of the Orthodox iconographic Tradition is not taken into consideration. The second reason, I believe, is an ignorance on the part of architects in understanding the design intention of an Orthodox church (which is to be an image of the Kingdom) and how to achieve this design intention through architectural forms. One can find in almost any city in this country (or Canada) examples of Orthodox churches which cannot be distinguished from church buildings of "other" denominations (apart from the existence) of a three barred cross or an onion dome). Many of these "generic" church buildings incorporate stained glass windows - the purpose of which is to "decorate" an otherwise inferior design (in the same way that onion domes are often used to make an inferior design "Orthodox"). The result has oftentimes been a church building with beautiful, or not so beautiful, stained glass windows which call attention to themselves as "art for art's sake" and do little or nothing to contribute to the overall sense of the structure being an image of the Kingdom. When a church building is being designed it must be understood that all the "parts" (which may or may not include stained glass windows) should work together as a whole to communicate the design intention. Stained glass should be incorporated only with discretion - in the context of the whole architectural design and iconographic plan. If the decision to have stained glass windows is made, care must be taken so that the stained glass does not hinder the window's primary luminous function. It is for this reason that light colored glass (with only one or a few complimentary shades of color), rather than dark colored glass should be used. Having to use artificial lighting during daytime liturgical services, because of the stained glass does not allow enough natural light, is an obvious design flaw. It can also be noted that stained glass in general, works better with mosaic than fresco because the mosaic stone is polished and is a better reflector of light. The interrelationship between iconography (in terms of style, color and placement) and the stained glass (in terms of style, color and placement, and the quality, intensity, and color of the refracted light) must also be considered. It must be made clear, however, that stained glass is not "necessarily" for Orthodox churches to be an image of the Kingdom - thousands of Orthodox churches over the past centuries have manifested this reality without it! Stained glass "icons," I believe, will never come to be universally accepted as icons (in the sense of wooden icons, frescoes and mosaics) because they cannot serve as a worship function 24 hours a day. Stained glass "icons" are not illumined at night — the place that was an "icon" in the daytime becomes a

black “hole in the wall” at night. We also cannot light a candle in front of a stained glass “icon” (as we can to illumine traditional icons) because the light will pass through to the outside — and viewed from the outside, the image is backwards! There is no question that stained glass can be beautiful in and of itself — but there is no “art for art’s sake” in the Orthodox liturgical arts — Orthodox Christian “art” is not an end in itself; it is there for a reason: to help the us move forward toward our salvation in Jesus Christ. [end of Part IV]

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### Part Five

*The following article is the fifth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

The interior design of the narthex, nave and sanctuary has come to be seen as an adequate expression of our Orthodox theology: that there are three levels of existence which man must experience to be saved. The narthex, the first area one enters in an Orthodox Church, is the image of “this world,” the fallen world, the unredeemed world. The interior design of this area, therefore, should be plain. The narthex, historically, is where catechumens went to the conclusion of the “Liturgy of the Word” (the first part of the Divine Liturgy, following the Epistle and Gospel readings); when the Deacon would say, “All that are catechumens, depart. Let no catechumen remain. Let us, the faithful, again and again in peace, pray to the Lord” [now just heard in the Pre-sanctified Liturgy of Great Lent]. Participation in the second part of the Divine Liturgy is reserved for the faithful (which is why it is called the “Liturgy of the Faithful”) — only those who will be partaking of Holy Communion would remain in the central area (the “nave”) of the church building. The narthex is a space which also has other specific liturgical uses. It is the space where the exorcism of baptism is done, where converts are received, where a new mother is churching, where the betrothal ceremony for marriage is to be prayed, and where certain services (such as Little Compline) and parts of services (such as the “Litiya” at a festal Vespers) are called to take place. Because the narthex has so many liturgical uses it must be designed in such a way that it can accommodate the various liturgical needs. In many churches today, the narthex (also called “vestibule”) has been designed to serve only the practical function of being a “cold weather area” before one enters into the nave of the church. This is not the purpose or function of the narthex. It is where one passes through a space (the unredeemed world — which we were all born into) and enters (through baptism) into the large, central area of the church building which is called the “nave.” The nave is the image of the redeemed or transfigured world. It is the place where the faithful gather to worship God with one mind and one heart “in spirit and in truth” — the place where we fulfill our baptism by communing with God and each other through prayer, song and the Holy Eucharist (Communion). The interior design of the nave,

therefore, must be different from the narthex. Instead of a plain space it should be a beautiful, transfigured space which bespeaks the reality of our being a new creation in Christ. [end of Part IV]

## **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### Part Six

*The following article is the sixth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

The sanctuary, the area which is often referred to as “the altar,” is the space that is behind the iconostasis, when correctly built, should not appear as a “wall of separation,” but rather as a “wall of interpenetration” between the nave and sanctuary. The iconostasis serves to protect the sanctuary and mark it off as a special space. The sanctuary is an image of the Holy of Holies (of the Jerusalem Temple), but today — the fullness of the Kingdom of God toward which we are moving in time. It is for this reason that the church building should face east — in anticipation of the day when Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, will come again in glory to inaugurate the “world to come.” The sanctuary is also raised up a few steps from the level of the nave — this is why we call it “the high place,” emphasizing through architectural design that we consider the Holy of Holies as being “forward” and “up.” This is also the reason why we consider it inappropriate to have pews that are raised in such a way as to look down toward the altar (such as in a theater seating arrangement or as in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin). A raised “solea” (the wide area that extends out from the iconostasis into the nave) that is a step or two up — is the space where the Sacrament of Marriage and the Funeral Service are done.

Because everything that is in the sanctuary would be an image of the Holy of Holies (i.e., the altar table is the image of the Heavenly Altar) it stands to reason that other things (such as the vestment closets, sinks, waste baskets, etc.) should not be there. There is no “heavenly image” which parallels a waste basket. The sanctuary should be exactly what its name implies: a holy place where the priest (who is the image of Christ — particularly when he blesses and brings out the Body and Blood of Christ from the “high place” down to the faithful who are gathered in the nave) and his concelebrants gather to offer the one eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Special rooms should be built to accommodate the practical needs of preparing the bread and wine and vesting. These rooms are historically called the “Prothesis” (preparation room) and “Diakonikon” (deacon’s room) — and are often located on both sides of the sanctuary. They are separated from the sanctuary by a few steps, a hallway, and/or door. To have a separate Prothesis room in modern designs makes sense liturgically. The Great Entrance, the long procession around the people in the nave and up the center aisle, was historically a transfer of the unconsecrated gifts (the prepared bread and wine) from a



separate room (sometimes it was even in another building) to the altar table in the sanctuary. To have this long procession, when the prothesis table is in close proximity to the altar table to begin with, does not make sense practically. The Great Entrance should not just be seen as a “historical liturgical movement” but also a practical movement — and this is made clearer when the prothesis area is in a separate location. The interior space must be laid out according to theological, liturgical and practical considerations. If we expect people to have a clear understanding of the movements of the liturgy, we must design a church that both reflects and inspires our worship. [end of Part V]

**“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**  
Part Seven

*The following article is the seventh of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. Bishop BASIL chose to use an excerpt from the book The Freedom of Morality by Christos Yannaxas, a highly regarded contemporary Greek Orthodox theologian. The following is a section from Yannaxas’ chapter entitled: “The Ethos of Technology in Byzantine Building.”*

Each Byzantine building is a eucharistic event; it is a dynamic art whereby each individual entity joins in the universal reality of ecclesial communion. This is a realization of personal distinctiveness, but a realization within the framework of communion, which means rejection of individual emotions, individual intellectual certainty and individual aesthetics. Every Byzantine building embodies this ascetic rejection and self-abnegation on the part of the architect, *and consequently manifests both his personal distinctiveness and at the same time the universal truth of the Church.* No work of Byzantine architecture is a pure type, a model which can be repeated . . . Each Byzantine church manifests an individuality, an act of emancipation from the model . . . the whole structure is a piece of music which the virtuoso craftsman has sung in a different way each time, and always so successfully that repetition is out of the question.”

The ancient Greek temple expresses the Greek view of the world as a given harmony and order, and consequently it gives reason and meaning to the actual natural environment by reducing it to relationships of proportional harmony. By the same token, *the Byzantine church expresses the Church’s view of the world, of the world’s participation in the dimensions of the life of the Kingdom.* It therefore recapitulates the personal distinctiveness of both the site and the building material, summing up the mode of created order and beauty as the locus for the relationships between created and uncreated — as the Church. Material creation is given form: it takes form of the flesh of the Word. The building of the Byzantine church is the body of the incarnate Word, the earthward movement of the “bowed heavens;” *it shapes the incarnation into the form of a cross.* [End of Part VII]

**“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**  
Part Eight

*The following article is the eighth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. Bishop BASIL chose to use an excerpt from a sermon given by Bishop JOB (OCA) at the 1987 Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at St. Vladimir’s Seminary Institute, that expresses the mind of the Church regarding the Orthodox liturgical arts.*

“Christian art [and architecture] is a basic component of theology which must adequately communicate the truth about God and creation . . . Within the liturgical worship of the Church, art [and architecture] manifests beauty, and it is in the context of beauty that God meets man, and where man with all of his senses encounters transfigured life . . . For the Orthodox Christian, the Divine Liturgy has to become the source and content of artistic creativity and the expression of art’s purpose.”

“St. Paul tells us: ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come’ (II Corinthians 5:17). Thus the function of liturgical art [and architecture] is to reveal that which will be fulfilled in the *future* and has begun to be revealed in the *present*. As a theological statement, liturgical art announces and witnesses to the interpretation of history and eschatology (the end of the ages).”

“For some, ‘renaissance’ has been understood as a re-birth which places us in the past. Consequently the past becomes the model — the norm — and is erroneously presented as something monolithic, without variation or nuance. This rebirth to the past suffocates creativity and at best produces ‘replicas’ of music, iconography and architecture. For others, the ‘renaissance’ is a re-birth into a kind of modernism which *refuses* to see itself in continuity with anything in the past. Both approaches stifle the working of the Holy Spirit. Rebirth to the past might produce a true theological statement, but its poetic power and vitality are lost within the insipid theological rhetoric of imitation. Rebirth into modernism produces another mind-set, a new theological statement, which does not connect with Orthodoxy and places the artist and his art in a vacuum of experimentation.”

“If liturgical art [and architecture] is truthfully to proclaim the Good News, then the Church as a whole must recover her eschatological (what transcends time) character and vision. Without this eschatological vision there no longer exists that necessary tension between the Body of Christ, the Church, and the fallen world. Without her eschatological vision, the Church succumbs to the world and is rendered incapable of carrying out her mission to renew the world. Without this eschatological vision, the

liturgical artist [and architect] will forsake his or her unique ministry, unique priesthood within the Christian community . . . [He or she] will only be capable of transmitting an art [or architectural] form which reveals *fallen* man's vision of God, *fallen* man's vision of himself, and *fallen* man's vision of creation." [end of Part VIII]

## **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### Part Nine

*The following article is the ninth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

Every civilization in history, be it Ancient Greek, Roman, or Christian, has created an architecture which makes a statement about its vision of the world. Orthodox Christianity has the fundamental vision that the Church is the place in this fallen world where life has been restored. The Church, being the Kingdom of God on earth, is of its essence something that is beautiful. This self-understanding is manifested to this world most visibly through the creative form of architecture. Orthodox Christians know that it is in the context of beauty that God meets man, and where man with all his senses encounters transfigured life. Beauty, both external and internal, is something that testifies to the good of creation. The faculty of sight is one of the primary means of impressing beauty upon the mind and it is of exceptional importance in Orthodox Christianity. We must see things, however, not only with our outer eyes but also with our "inner eyes," the eyes of our heart, our eyes as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. We need to learn how to see things in a new way, in their wholeness, in their totality, in the depth of their meaning. Orthodox church architecture must be seen and "read" with both our outer and inner eyes rooted in the understanding that our architecture is a part of our Tradition which is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We must understand the vocabulary and language of Orthodox church architecture. It is not a haphazard arrangement of space based on the subjective sense of the architect. It is something that has an inner logic of development based on our theology and liturgy which results in a design where all the parts (both interior and exterior) form an integrated whole, a complete design—a symphony of architectural forms, materials, and colors. This integration of the parts in relation to the whole is the primary means of expressing beauty through architecture. Alberti, a great architect of the 15th century, defined beauty to be "a harmony of all the parts, in whatsoever subject it appears, fitted together in such proportion and connection, that nothing could be added, diminished or altered but for the worse." We must understand that all the parts, like a composition of music, are in function of the whole—and to tamper with any part (such as would be the case in music of adding dissonant notes to a composition) automatically unravels the whole design destroying its integrity and the totality of its intent. Palladio, a great architect of the 16th century said that "Beauty will be the result

of a beautiful form and from the correspondence between the whole and its parts, and of the parts between themselves as well as to the whole; thus, buildings may appear as a single, well finished body, within which all the members agree, and all members are necessary for what is desired.”

We at St. Michael are building a church of integrity, a church that bespeaks the integrity of our faith, a church which inspires those who worship with us, a church which is effective in making a statement to our San Fernando community about the Orthodox Christian vision of the world. [End Part IX]

### **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

#### **Part Ten**

*The following article is the tenth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL. In this particular article His Grace, provides a historical background of the first Orthodox churches that were built in North America.*

The first Orthodox Church built on the North American continent was built in Kodiak, Alaska in 1796 by Russian Orthodox missionaries which included St. Herman. The current Holy Resurrection Church in Kodiak is the third church to have been built on the original sight (the other two preceding churches were destroyed by fire.). The first Orthodox church to be built in what is now called “the lower 48 states” was built within the Spanish territory of California in 1812. This church is known as the “Fort Ross Chapel” because it was built as a chapel of a Russian fort, now called “Fort Ross” (“Ross” being derived from the word “Roussiya” or “Russia”). This Russian fort, located 80 miles north of San Francisco on the Pacific coast and the Russian River, was a southern outpost of the Russian-American Company, which provided food for the communities of Alaska which could not produce their own. This Russian fort exists today as a National Historic Park. Orthodox services are still held in the chapel on the Fourth of July and on Memorial Day.

Two other churches in Alaska which deserve attention are the Church of the Ascension in Unalaska (a village on the Aleutian Island chain) and St. Michael Cathedral in Sitka (located in Southeastern Alaska). The Church of the Ascension was designed and built by Fr. John Veniaminov, an energetic and scholarly priest, in 1826. In 1840, Fr. Veniaminov was consecrated as Bishop Innocent of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands and was the first Orthodox bishop to serve in North America. In 1979, he was canonized as a saint — St. Innocent, Apostle to America. As bishop in Alaska he designed and built St. Michael Cathedral in Sitka. He consecrated this first Orthodox cathedral in North America in 1848. The original cathedral burned down in 1966 (as have many of the original wooden churches in Alaska) . Fortunately, St. Michael Cathedral had already been designated as a National Historic Landmark and complete blueprint sets of the original church were made and filed in Washington D.C. St.

Michael Cathedral was rebuilt in 1970 on the same site, this time with cement blocks, covered with a replica wooden facade. All of the icons, except for one, were saved from the fire and were replaced in the new replica church.

Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867. It was during this time and during the decades to follow that many Orthodox immigrants came to the United States seeking a better future. The first Orthodox church building in America, outside of Fort Ross in Alaska, was Holy Trinity Eastern Orthodox Church in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1864. There is evidence, however, that an Orthodox parish was formed in Galveston, Texas in 1862. Some of the people of the Galveston parish fought in the American Civil War. From 1859 to 1864, Orthodox services were periodically performed by priests aboard the warships of the Russian Imperial Navy visiting the port of San Francisco. In 1868 the first Orthodox parish called "The Prayer House of the Orthodox Oriental Church" was established in San Francisco, and the priest from Sitka was assigned to serve there. The first Orthodox parish on the East Coast of the United States was formed in New York City by Fr. Nicholas Bjerring in 1870. All of these were pan-Orthodox in character and included in their membership were Russian, Greek, and Arabic peoples. [End of Part X]

**"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)**  
Part Eleven

*The following article is the eleventh of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL. In this particular article His Grace, continues to provide us with a historical background of the first Orthodox churches that were built in North America.*

The first places of Orthodox worship in what is now called "the lower 48 states" were relatively simple structures. When waves of immigrants came to the United States at the turn of the century, larger and more elaborate churches were built. We do not have the space here to elaborate on every church built during this time period — but the common factor is that each ethnic immigrant group designed and built what they considered to be Orthodox churches — done in a style that resembled churches they had known in the "old country." Most of the Orthodox churches built in the early 1900's were built in the industrial centers of our nation — because it was in these cities that the majority of the immigrants found work and raised their families.

Only a small number of these churches, however, are of artistic significance. "Most were designed by indifferent contractors for congregations not thoroughly enlightened as to their own past." (Dr. Theodore Turak, *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. IX, No. 4, 1972) A few fine examples of Orthodox church architecture, however, are worthy of mention. Louis Sullivan's Holy Trinity (OCA) Cathedral (1903) in Chicago is a masterpiece done for a working class congregation on a limited budget. It is the sole religious structure designed by Louis Sullivan to survive as he had intended. Sullivan,

a world famous pioneer of skyscraper architecture in the 1880's designed this church after his study of Orthodox theology and liturgy under the supervision of the parish priest, Fr. John Kochurov (who was later to be the first clergyman martyred in the Russian Revolution of 1917). Sullivan also corresponded at length with Bishop TIKHON of San Francisco about his plans for the new structure. Bishop TIKHON was later elected Patriarch of Moscow and imprisoned by Lenin.

St. Theodosius Cathedral, which overlooks the steel mill flats of the city of Cleveland, Ohio, is another church of distinction. This cathedral, built in 1912, is one of the best examples of Russian monumental architecture in the United States. It was constructed, as had been Holy Trinity Cathedral in Chicago, partially from monies received from the Russian Czar. This church, used as a site for the filming of the 1969 movie "The Deer Hunter," is a giant square with an inscribed Greek cross and capped by a magnificent dome supported on arches and surrounded by a number of smaller external cupolas. [Note: the use of the "onion shaped" cupolas in Russia, unlike the Byzantine domes, served a very practical purpose of avoiding the accumulation of snow/ice during the winter months.] The interior of St. Theodosius Cathedral employs masonry vaulting and is completely frescoed with meticulous iconography.

St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn, New York, the first Syrian Orthodox Cathedral in North America, consecrated in 1903, was an Orthodox adaptation of an existing church structure. The structure was ornamented with Russian "onion domes" — characteristic of the fact that the Arabic community in the United States was under the jurisdiction of the Russian bishop at the turn of the century. The first Orthodox bishop consecrated in America (1904), St. Raphael Hawaweeny, was a Syrian whose mission was to serve the needs of the growing Arabic community in the United States. At the time of his death in 1915, there were thirty Syrian Orthodox parishes in the United States, with 25,000 faithful. The first church of architectural significance in what is now the Antiochian Archdiocese is St George Church in Norwood, Massachusetts — a church built in the Byzantine style in the early 1900s. [end of Part XI]

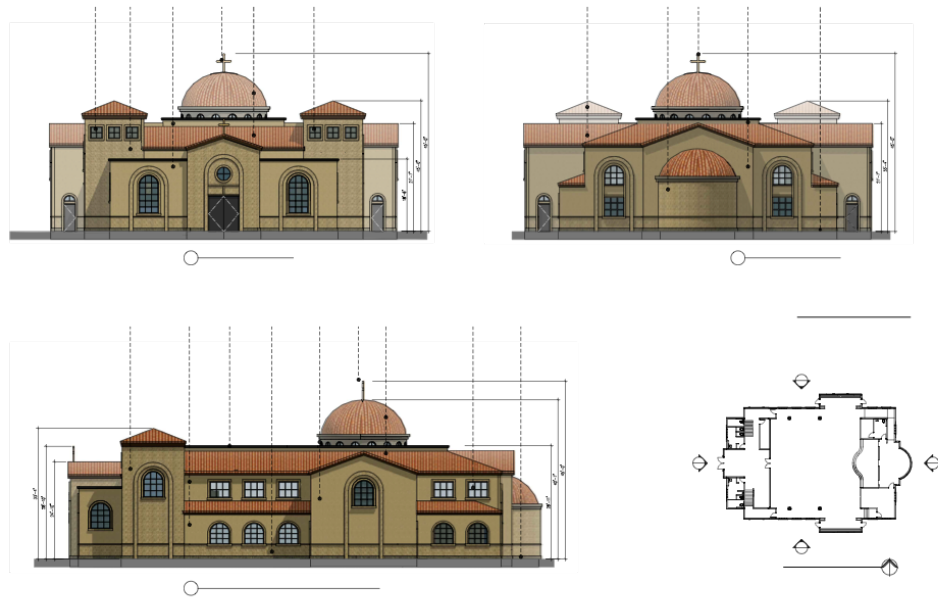
## **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### **Part Twelve**

*The following article is the Twelfth of a series of articles on Byzantine church architecture. The previous eleven were written by His Grace, Bishop BASIL. This article has been edited by Father Timothy Baclig to address the architecture of St. Michael Church.*

This article features a few drawings of our new church sanctuary that were originally prepared by Kamus & Keller Architects of Westlake Village, California. Kamus & Keller were selected to prepare the original design of our church based upon the recommendation of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church (Camarillo, California), and who designed the master plan for the construction of their church and "Agape

Center” (hall). Phase I included the completion of the “Agape Center” that is currently being used as their temporary church sanctuary since May 30, 2015. Mr. Keith Valle, Project Manager of St. Demetrios Church was hired by our Project Manager, Michael Malouf, as the electrical contractor of our project. In addition, Mr. Valle’s two sons are assisting in our project: a) Nathan Valle, who worked for Kamus & Keller Architects, now with Antilla Design Studio, and b) Harris Valle, hired as Project Supervisor, and Construction Manager of ZK Building and Development — serving as our General Contractor.



BUILDING ELEVATIONS

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The drawings with this article show: a) the longitudinal sections (along Vanowen Street), b) the sections the west and south elevations, c) the east elevation, and c) the first floor dimension plan. Note: There are a few modifications to these plans that were dated at the time of City approval: January 19, 2018. It is important to bear in mind that we are constructing the largest possible church sanctuary on our church property with a total of 149 parking spaces. The church structure includes: an 8,213 square foot first floor and mezzanine, a 40 foot height dome, three apses, altar space, sacristy, robing room, *solea*, nave, narthex with “cry room” and restrooms, with an occupancy for 299 persons. Our plans were approved to exclude water sprinklers with the provision for adequate fire doors and windows, and protected fire retardant steel. All of these requirements are based upon the California Fire Code that exempts the installation of fire sprinklers for religious worship spaces for this occupancy size. This exemption provided us with a significant cost savings (in excess of \$250,000) and avoids the high

risk of water damage that could result with mechanical malfunctions or earthquake damage that would be extremely detrimental to church icons and frescoes.

The church's distinctive exterior and interior design expresses our Orthodox Christian faith through architectural forms and colors. The materials will include: steel, aluminum and drywall framing, anodized aluminum dome and apse, stucco exterior finish with brick facade, tile roofing, wood and glass doors.

The church altar is positioned facing east and provides for three large aisles for liturgical processions both in the interior, as well as the exterior where a sidewalk encircles the entire building. The main entrance doors of the church is within forty (40) feet of the Assembly Hall and both entrances are on the same level.

In the tradition of the church's antiphonal music, the position of singers under two apses: one on the north and another on the south in the area of the dome, provides for the choir and chanters.

The use of cushioned chairs with padded kneelers (to be sponsored by members) will provide for the flexibility for large and small numbers of worshippers for service venues, with room for venerations and prostrations. A "cry room" within the narthex of the church, which provides visibility to the sanctuary through a large glass window and an audio speaker is located adjacent to the women's restroom; making it convenient for nursing mothers and parents with toddlers. [End of Part XII]

### **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4) Part Thirteen**

*The following article is the thirteenth of a series of writings by His Grace, Bishop BASIL that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

Orthodox people in America find themselves within a culture of competition and consumerism. It is a mass media "throw away" culture where everyone without exception is constantly bombarded with visual and auidial enticements to buy and experience a plethora of products. Within this culture, architecture plays a vital role because it is known to be a means of drawing consumers: people who want to "consume" in environments that cater to their particular needs or desires at the time of their "consumption."

In this consumerist society, modern and post-modern architecture has developed resulting from an architect's relationship between art and architecture. Since the invention of the camera, art has shifted from realism to the abstract, from objective art to subjective art. Architecture has followed suit because of the traditional link between the two disciplines. Architecture, like art, has shifted from content to form, from product to process, and the result is often an abstract or "artsy" building which can be called "consumer architecture." It is an architecture that has been developed to cater to our



consumerist culture. Buildings are designed in unique styles because it is known that visibility translates into money.

Contemporary architectural thought has the foundational belief that there are no constraints from the past that must necessarily influence the architectural designs of the present or the future. The traditional idea that “form follows function” has been deemed archaic, and the result is an architectural free-for-all. Peter Eisenman, a renowned contemporary architect, for example, said that his houses are not shaped for his clients’ needs but are “designed to shake them out of those needs!” Buildings are purposefully designed in such a way that they will glorify the architect, the client, or the potential consumer.

Within our culture, “religion” today has also become a commodity to be packaged and sold — resulting in church designs that could serve as being no different from schools, restaurants, office buildings or sports complexes. The majority of the architects of today prefer to wallow in “fashionable tide pools” rather than immerse themselves in mainstream or “traditional” architectural understandings. Very few architects would have the desire to have more than a superficial understanding of the Orthodox faith before attempting a design, and this where the problem lies. Without a sensitivity to and respect for the *ethos* of our faith (both on the part of the architect and the client) churches will be designed in such a way that they are either caricatures of Orthodox churches or buildings that are completely antithetical to our faith — buildings where “creativity” has been used in such a way that is outside our Orthodox architectural Tradition.

Many contemporary style Orthodox church designs are ones which do not witness to the reality of the richness of the life in Christ that is experienced in the Orthodox Church. They are designs that unfortunately do not glorify God as much as they glorify the architect or the “in-step with society” nature of the persons who worship in them. Furthermore, churches which are designed from the world-view of a consumerist culture present a compromised view of the place of the Church in the world. The church building is no longer an image of God’s Kingdom toward which the Church leads the world but, rather, is the opposite: an image of that fallen world toward which the Church is being led.

Most of these contemporary designs are ones that will, in a few decades become dated. Contemporary architecture is relatively easy to do because it is usually entirely subjective. Truly original (non-replica) Orthodox architecture is more difficult — but worth the effort. It requires an adjustment of our world-view from that which is common to a consumerist culture to a world-view that is common to the Church: a world-view that understands the Church to be the place in this fallen world where life has been restored and is experienced as blessed and saved through Jesus Christ. [End of Part XIII]

*This concludes the series of articles written by His Grace, Bishop BASIL. A series of additional articles is being prepared by Father Timothy Baclig that address the relationship of church iconography and music in the church, as having an integral part in traditional Byzantine architecture.*

## **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### **Part Fourteen**

*The following article is the fourteenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This, and subsequent articles are written by Father Timothy Baclig.*

For the past several weeks, His Grace, Bishop BASIL has helped us to understand from his articles that were first published in 1988 and reprinted in our Sunday bulletin, the meaning of Orthodox Church architecture. His Grace also included a history of Orthodox churches that were first built from the earliest settlements of Russian missions in Alaska (1796), to the later establishment of Orthodox parishes in the lower 48 states of North America in the 19th century, resulting from the early immigration of Orthodox Christians from the Mediterranean region. He also mentioned how many existing non-Orthodox church structures were purchased and remodeled. Also, how several modern and creative designs were incorporated among Orthodox church structures in the new world.

In the period of 1970's, there was a growing interest, with the help of many popular American architects, some mentioned in Bishop BASIL's articles, to design Orthodox Church structures that made a statement. Orthodox Christians who were now living in North America felt the need for the “ancient faith” to identify with modernity, and to therefore demonstrate that they were no different from their fellow Americans. This “need,” however, lacked a commitment to preserve the integrity of Holy Tradition. It manifested itself with not only innovative architectural concepts, but were seen in the varieties of Austria-Hungarian western artist's canvases that were used in Orthodox Churches, that abandoned the rules of Traditional Byzantine and Slavic Orthodox iconographic images. Schools of Orthodox iconography were non-existent in the new world, except for a few attempts by novices, if not western artists or students of iconographers, to portray images in the church, greatly influenced by western art; even to the extent of using Hollywood celebrities as models for images of the Holy Virgin. One classic example are the images found in St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles. The magnificent architectural structure, by architect: Gus Kalionzes and artist, William Chavalas, incorporated various artistic styles which included stained glass windows and crystal chandeliers. An organ, placed in a choir loft at the back of the church was introduced to the church with congregational pews that created a more “spectator” form of worship. The Liturgy [*Liturgia*], that literally means: “the work of the people” was “performed,” and the concert-like music of the choir often competed with the dichotomy of chanters. In the Slavic (eastern European and Russian) churches,

however, the choirs were highly developed, if not paid professional singers. Liturgical music was a major priority, but still within the realm of “performance” that limited if not prevented congregational participation. This “spectator” form of worship did little to help in the education of Orthodox worship, especially when professional chanters, using a foreign language added to the “concert atmosphere” of worship.

In the early period of Orthodoxy in North America, the first established Russian Orthodox parishes did much to set the priority in the use of slavic melodies. Music that was transposed from Russian to English was successful because of the frequency of the use of consonants in both languages, in contrast to the dominant use of vowels in the Greek and Arabic languages. Hence it was easier to transpose Russian liturgical music to English, then it was in transposing Arabic or Greek liturgical music to English. With the addition of the organ to the Liturgy in the church, it was not uncommon to find music in the North American Greek Orthodox Church sounding much like Protestant four-part hymnology.

One should understand and not confuse the practice of “congregational participation” as something that is contrary to the presence of trained singers (choirs) in the church. It should not be thought of as “either choirs or chanters” but how both aid in leading the congregation in a worship experience. Not everyone is a singer, just as not everyone is an altar boy, Subdeacon, Deacon, Priest or Bishop. “The Singers” had a very distinct calling in the church from the church’s early period. A *Proto-psalti* (first of chanters or singers) was: 1) the Bishop, 2) the *Proestamemos* (first priest), then 3) the head chanter, followed by 4) singers. All used the same book and were trained to: first, experience worship in the context of an Orthodox *ethos* (atmosphere). The training was not done in a classroom, but by an apprenticeship that required discipline in church attendance with a reverent attentiveness to the practice of daily prayers. This training included being immersed in the “prayer language of the church” in order that a singer was able to do so prayerfully and reverently. Moreover, it should be understood that singing was not something that everyone in the church did throughout the entire service. There were specific parts of a service that were designated for the Bishop, the Priest, the Chanter, the Singers and the congregation. To “make a joyful noise unto the Lord,” as the Psalmist declared, did not mean, participating in disorder or dissonance. Even when prayers were audibly said together by everyone, they were to be done “with one mind and one heart” in a rhythm that maintained a cadence and unified tempo.

In the next article we will further describe the position and role of chanters and singers in the architectural design of the church, as well as explore the antiphonal nature of responsive singing within Orthodox worship. [End of Part XIV]

## **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)** Part Fifteen

*The following article is the fifteenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the*

*presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This, and subsequent articles are written by Father Timothy Baclig.*

Worshipping God in an Orthodox church sanctuary can be best described as a concelebration. Unlike our personal, private and devotional prayers, when we gather as the people of God “putting aside all worldly care,” we enter the church in faith as believers of “one mind and one heart.” And while we may not all serve as a Bishop, Priest, Deacon, Chanter, altar server or a member of the choir, our concelebration means that we are not mere spectators to a performance. To sing in the choir is to lead in worship and not to be performing a concert, just as to serve in the altar is not being a help to the priest “backstage.” This also means that the selections of melodies chosen for the Liturgy should always encourage concelebration and be familiar to the congregation. They are part of a continuing whole in the Divine Liturgy and not sporadic interludes with “favorite selections” used to augment or break up the “usual melody” in the sequence of prayer. New melodies must be introduced at appropriate times and not disrupt the *ethos* and continuity of worship.

Music used in our church today have comprised a long history of musical arrangements by musicians and composers who have done a great deal to provide our churches with appropriate melodies that are compatible with the contemplative nature of Orthodox worship. Some of these musicians have included Dr. Frank Desby, Rev. Basil Kazan, the V. Rev. James Meena, and more recently, the V. Rev. John Finley. Since worship in the Orthodox church does not include the use of instruments, singing in a group requires attentive ears, which like the line and color images of iconography, form the appropriate sound with the use of trained voices. Most importantly, chanters, singers and readers must first think of using their voice in prayer.

Slavic chant melodies were of a distinct characteristic from Arabic and Greek chant. Over several decades, American musicians worked to write four-part choral music for choirs that aimed to preserve the integrity of Traditional melodies that were originally chanted by men. Throughout history there have been two distinct trends: One that formed more difficult “concert like” compositions (i.e., Rachmaninov Liturgy), and another that developed simple four-part melodies that encouraged congregational singing. Following the large influence and success of transposing slavic melodies to English that was mentioned in my last article, there evolved in time, a synthesis of Slavic-Byzantine melodies, such that it was often difficult to identify one from the other. This fusion was also evident in the iconographic images, being written by North American iconographers, that manifested a mixture of Slavic and Byzantine iconographic motifs in American Orthodox churches. The greatest success of any musician in arranging music for Orthodox worship is his or her ability to make the content of the text (the words of theology) the most important part of a musical composition. In other words, a congregant who attends the Liturgy or any prayer service of the church should be able to pray and not just enjoy or focus upon a melody or sound. Thus, the calling of a church musician (reader, chanter, or singer) requires someone who is steeped in prayer, is well trained in knowing the order within the

various church services, and understands the purpose and function of liturgical music. Such a calling is no different for someone who aspires to be an iconographer, sacristan or a seamstress in designing and sewing liturgical vestments.

While each person is called to serve in particular leading roles of the church, our prayers, whether they be said or sung, are something we do together in worshipping God at the appropriate times. This is the meaning of concelebration. Hence, no one serves as a “soloist” in saying the prayers or singing or chanting the melodies of the hymns in Orthodox worship. The prayers and hymns are ours in a contemplative way as we pay attention to the content of what is being said or sung and make it our own. Our participation is with an attentive meditation, and by responding in the “dialogue” within the Liturgy. The priest says, “Peace be to all!” and the people respond: “And to thy spirit.” Then he says, “Let us lift up our hearts.” And we respond, “We lift them up unto the Lord...,” and so forth. The structure of Orthodox hymnology is also *antiphonal*, meaning, it consists of two parts: a) the clergy and the people, also b) two choirs, when sections of the service are repeated. In the early period there was a “right” and “left” choir in services; most common during the services of a Feast, Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha. Hence, the design of two apse sections in the forward nave of the church. It was always understood that you and I need to have things repeated in prayer. The imperfect and distracted mind is not always able to comprehend the first time a lesson is heard. When Jesus cautioned his disciples against the use of “vain repetition” (Matthew 6:7). He was not speaking against repetition, only the pagan practice of what was not prayerful or meaningful.

Worshipping God together in God’s sanctuary therefore requires a discipline that includes: personal preparation, anticipation and attentiveness. Entering God’s earthly sanctuary must be unlike being present any other place or event on earth. Therefore, we must be aware of what is expected of us. “Going to church” to encounter God is first, a procession; like a pilgrimage. It begins with our decision to be present, to be on-time, to be in a right frame of mind, to focus our attention upon God’s word, His teaching, but is also a joyful entrance into His house with thanks and praise. Without discipline, our minds are easily overshadowed by the cares and worries of the world, and everything that preoccupies in our daily lives.

In many churches, singers of a choir dress in robes, like the altar boys, but are not in ceremonial vestments. There are a few choirs in North American Orthodox Churches with robed choir members, however this is more prevalent in other Christian churches today. Orthodox church choirs have taken on an “organization” status if not become a “club,” and in some communities its members are even voted into the choir in order to participate. It must be understood that the church’s Tradition did in fact consider “singers” to be persons “set apart” for a particular rank of ministry, similar to those who were called (selected) to serve in the altar and wore vestments. Canon 15 from the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), makes it clear that only canonical singers should be appointed for that kind of ministry in the Church; meaning: those who are “set apart” for a particular ministry with the rank of tonsured Readers. This was the case because it

was understood that there were certain qualities, skills and talents that were necessary. In the case of a Reader or Chanter, obviously, being able to read correctly, prayerfully and clearly; also to project one's voice properly. Bear in mind that in the early church, there were no public address systems. Consequently, Orthodox churches were also intentionally designed to provide for the proper acoustics. Curved apses and domes added to the profound quality of the sound in a church; which also in the earliest period did not include pews or carpeting. We will further explore the structural nature of the church sanctuary in upcoming articles.

In conclusion, as seriously as the ordained clergy need to prepare themselves to serve at the altar, so should those who fulfill the role as Readers, Chanters or "singers." Canonically, they are in fact among the orders of the Church that lead the assembled faithful in prayer and should regard their calling with a real sense of humility. [End of Part XIV]

{For further reading on this particular subject see Bishop BASIL's message: "The Ministry of Church Singers" on the Antiochian Archdiocese website: <http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/22680>}

## **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)** Part Sixteen

*The following article is the sixteenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This, and subsequent articles are written by Father Timothy Baclig.*

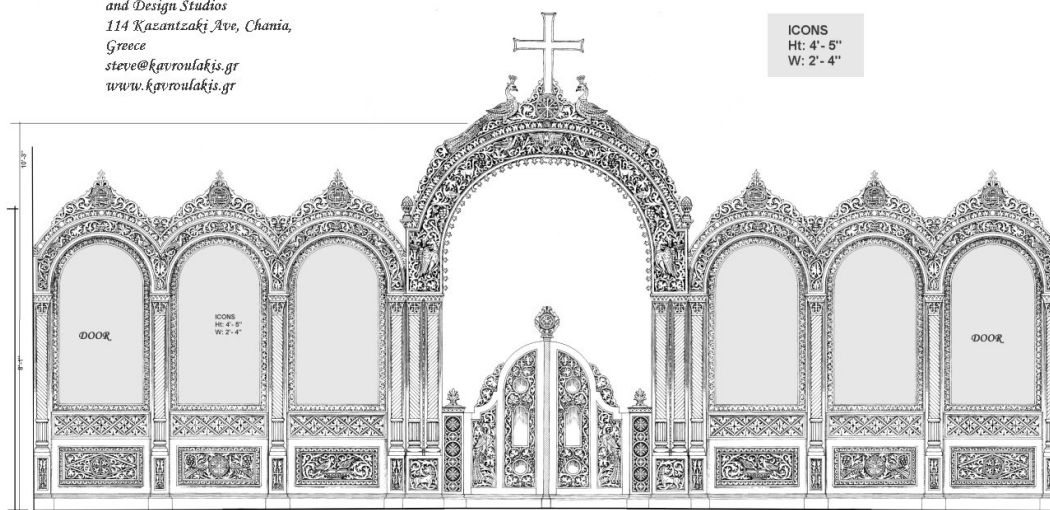
"We who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing to the life-giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn now lay aside all worldly care." These words of the Cherubic Hymn, sung by the choir and prayed by the priest that begins the *anaphora* (second part of the Divine Liturgy which follows the Entrance and Lessons), sharpen the focus of our worship in God's house. As members of Christ's Body on earth, we share in the timeless worship of the Holy Trinity together with all of the saints of all of the ages. We share a space with the bodiless powers that transcends all worldliness. Our presence is surrounded by the heavenly iconographic imagery that dons the church interior, especially at the place of the holy altar which is positioned (facing east) at the high place of the sanctuary.

The position of icons in the church follows a specific order beginning with the *Pantocrator* [Χριστὸς Παντοκράτωρ] Christ the Almighty and Omnipotent depicted in the high dome surrounded by angels, above the icons of the Holy Prophets. The dome is physically supported by four main pillars from which rise the images of the four Gospel Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Feast of the Crucifixion is depicted on north apse, and the Feast of Holy Pascha in the south apse. In the east apse within the altar space is the icon of the *Platytera* [Πλατυτέρα τῶν Ουρανῶν], or she who is "more spacious than the heavens," depicting Christ (the Creator of the universe)

in the womb of the Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God; signifying the “uncontainable God.”

The iconostasion [εἰκονοστάσι(-ον)], or icon screen, that separates the Holy Place of the altar from the central nave of the church has a long history. It began as a low (chancel) rail that marked off the definitive space for the clergy and all who served around and in front of the Holy Altar. By the fifteenth century, the iconographic images that surrounded the sanctuary formed a focal point in the development the iconostasion. In the Russian Church, this evolved with the expansion of a thick wall that included up to five tiers of icons rising from the altar floor. The Byzantine Church, however, maintained the tradition of two tiers: with the images of the Holy Apostles and a central Icon of the Mystical Supper above the row of primary icons that included: a) Christ, b) the Holy Theotokos, c) John the Baptist, and the d) Church Patron, e) two icons on the “Deacon’s Doors,” and possibly more as space would allow. The position of the Holy Apostles were in some sanctuaries substituted by the icon of “The Communion of the Holy Apostles” below the *Platytera* (seen in our worship space today), especially when an iconostasis was designed as a single row of icons. The “Royal Gate” or “Royal Doors,” at the center, and directly in front of the Holy Altar, included the icon of the Annunciation. The opening of the doors signified: the good news of Christ’s Divine presence as the priest, passing through them, blesses the faithful. Its closing with a *katapetasma* [καταπέτασμα] or curtain, served a liturgical function that placed emphasis, when fully drawn closed (especially during Great Lent), of our sinfulness and need of repentance. Its opening symbolized our restoration through Christ’s victory over the Evil One, sin and death; and our entrance to His Heavenly Kingdom.

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As a partition, the iconostasion, Royal Doors and curtain, heightens our awareness of the Holy Place that must be properly maintained and preserved as distinct from any other part of the church sanctuary. The exaggeration of a high and thick wall in the Russian Church is evidence of the great emphasis and seriousness placed upon the need for proper preparation by the clergy and the faithful in being united with God through the Holy Sacraments. During the era of modern Orthodox Church structures in the United States built in the 1970's (mentioned in earlier articles), there were creative attempts to design the iconostasion that were more open with transparent grills and lattice patterns. This trend did not last, especially when altar servers resisted the "overexposure," or were found to be a distraction to a praying congregation. One of the objectives was not only to reduce the size of "a wall," but to create a sense of closeness to the altar. This, however, tended to make the "holy place" too accessible and diminished a sense of reverence for the sacred space.

The *solea* [σόλιον], meaning: "an elevated place," is a lower extension of the high altar floor that also rises above the nave floor. The Traditional position of the two choirs, chanters and readers (right and left) are on the both sides of the solea on the nave floor. This position of two choirs toward the front — on the right and left side of the altar is also evident in Western churches, i.e, the Bristol Cathedral of The Church of England. The Western church, however, did not position choirs in a protruding alcove (under two apses) as in a Byzantine structure, but along a central aisle facing, each other, in a space between the altar and the nave — where the people faced the altar from a distance. The position of the choir on the floor plan of Holy Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Cathedral (OCA) in Los Angeles is literally on the right (and left) side of the elevated solea.

A balcony was never the position of a choir in the Orthodox Church. Balconies were the designated space for those who were not in communion with the church, and included the catechumens. At one time in the early period of the empire, the balcony was also known to be a place for women. Our new church sanctuary will include a small mezzanine that will serve the practical purpose of providing instruction for the older children during the service with a better view of the Liturgy.

In the church, one of the positions of the Bishop's throne is on the south side of the solea. In the fourth century of the Byzantine Empire it was the seat of the emperor; while the "high place," directly behind the altar and under the apse was the throne of the Bishop. Following the end of the empire, the bishop's vestments, inherited from the emperor, symbolized "the Lord as King... robed in majesty." The bishop also assumed the seat of the head of State on the solea (when not celebrating at the altar). The central position of the Bishop's Throne, however, has always remained at the "high place" behind the altar with additional seats for the celebrating clergy on his left and right.

Today, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is performed on the solea if not in a side chapel of the narthex. The solea is also where a couple is united in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony; also where the body of a deceased person is positioned, facing the



altar, for The Funeral Service. The original place of Holy Baptism was located outside of the main sanctuary, prior to one's entrance into the church nave and to the area of the solea where the Sacrament of Holy Communion was first received by the newly Baptized.

Generally speaking, the designated purpose of the elevated solea and altar floor is for the specific use by altar servers, Readers, and the members of the clergy. For this reason, there are no ramps to the solea or to the floor of the altar. The Church's Canonical Tradition clearly specifies that a person among the orders of service must meet the spiritual and physical requirements of their office. Hence, a physically disabled person would not qualify for ordination, or to serve as a bishop, priest, deacon, or member of the lesser orders. Based upon the American Disabilities Act, our church sanctuary will not need to include ramps to the solea or altar floor. This is also supported by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision that verifies: Churches, including places of worship, are exempt from the American Disabilities Act public building requirements (Section 307 of the ADA, 2001). Moreover, the church's Canonical Tradition is also supported by the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA; 2008).

In the next article, we will further clarify the place of the congregation (the nave) and the space for liturgical movement in church services. We will also address the place of entrance: the Narthex and its function. [end of Part XVI]

## **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)** **Part Seventeen**

*The following article is the seventeenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This article is written by Father Timothy Baclig.*

Designing and constructing an Orthodox Church sanctuary today in Southern California requires complying with many specifications, some of which were never considered by the church in history. These include several laws that are designed for public safety along with City Codes that have the purpose of ensuring environmental conservation. With this in mind it is important to understand that the approved plans for our church allow us to construct the largest Traditional Byzantine church sanctuary possible on our three acre church property. The building totals 8,213 square feet of floor space for an occupancy of 291 persons, with 149 parking spaces. The specified height of the dome is restricted to a maximum height of 45 feet (that includes a cross). The building's seating capacity was also based upon compliance with fire safety requirements. Our Project Manager was able to provide the City of Los Angeles with plans that fully comply with the City Code that exempts church sanctuaries from being required to include water sprinklers for fire. The code exemption, however, will not allow the church to have a fixed seating occupancy of more than 300 persons. As

mentioned earlier, this exemption afforded St. Michael church a cost savings of over \$250,000. Our structure, however, is required to have all “open steel” in cavities of the building sprayed with a fire retardant foam; also to include adequate exit doors and windows that meet emergency requirements. In addition, several environmental issues now require all construction to include an underground “filtration system” that prevents run-off rain water to carry pollutants into the sea. This installation was completed and approved during the grading phase of our property. Moreover, our parking lot is also required to provide long-term and short-term parking for sixteen bicycles, six car spaces for persons with disabilities, and four electric car stations. We should note that this parking provision has helped us to reduce the size of our church property by selling the two single family homes, originally purchased by the parish for the purpose of additional parking. Building Codes also now require efficient solar heating units in building plans. Our plans will provide for this on the roof of our existing assembly hall and a covered parking area for 39 spaces. Hot and cold air conditioning was never a consideration in the ancient world, however, in our construction plans we will be using the church roof space for several units, which otherwise would be an eye-sore on the ground space and a noisy nuisance during service processions along the sidewalk that encircle the building.

Seating in an Orthodox Church was originally provided for those who were either allowed to sit, i.e., the bishop and clergy, also the elderly or disabled. Worship in the Orthodox Church always allowed for movement that included *metanias*, including bows and prostrations for prayers, veneration, and ceremonial processions. Pews were an addition to the church in North America. It limited if not stifled the ability for movement in worship. It has long been the Traditional practice in Orthodox churches that the position of prayer in the church is either standing or kneeling. In the Russian Orthodox Church pews are very rare, if they exist at all. In fact, most seats are nothing more than a short stool for the elderly. Sunday is universally understood in the Orthodox Church as the Lord’s Day, when we stand to celebrate our Lord’s Holy Resurrection. This is true for the entire period of Holy Pascha (Easter) when there is no kneeling for forty days. Kneeling and prostrations are normative on weekdays, especially the four annual periods of fasting on the church calendar. Most who attend church, if regularly on Sundays, do not experience the full cycle of the weekday fasts and feasts of the church to know or understand the various liturgical movements, such as kneeling and prostrations, along with festal processions that accompany prayers and hymnology in worship.

The church has never prevented anyone from being able to sit, especially when necessary, however, the habit of sitting, especially sitting casually (with legs crossed) was considered disrespectful in the house of God. This also added another “regimen” to the order of worship. People needed to know when it was proper to sit and when it was appropriate to stand. In the earlier period of the Orthodox Church in the United States, priests were known to use a light that was turned on and off from the altar, in clear view of the congregation, in order to help let the people know when to stand and

sit. This became necessary when pews were added to the churches and when English was not used in the services. Such a practice further confirms how the church had lost its understanding and meaning of worship in the Liturgy.

In many Orthodox countries today pews have begun to be added, however, *stasidia* (meaning: “to stand”) Traditionally provided a type of seating with high arm support and a folding bench seat along the walls and between the pillars of the church, that lined the route of processions. It was not uncommon for the bishop’s throne to also be designed in this way. The *stasidia* are more commonly used in monastic churches, however, some of our urban churches have begun using them, especially in the area of the chanters. Several are in use at St. Andrew Antiochian Orthodox Church in Riverside, California. In addition to pews, seating for the congregation in our new church building will include individual cushioned chairs with kneelers. Individual chairs allow a flexible use of the worship space for various service venues. Attendance at the majority of church services will enable the chair seating to provide more room for the worshippers who will be able to position themselves closer to the solea and altar, choir and chanters, in the area directly under the dome. This is where the attendance of the majority of church services take place.

The narthex, or vestibule, which is a space at the west end, and a part of the church building, is not part of the church proper. The main church sanctuary is entered from a second set of doors in the narthex that lead to the nave. The narthex has mistakenly become for many a “lobby” or entry. However, it has traditionally served as a chapel and gathering place. It is where the bishop is received by the clergy and faithful before entering the church; also a place for offerings. It is where a bride (and groom) begins their journey into the church as husband and wife with their attendants. It is also where the clergy meet the body of a deceased person with family members before processing into the church. Hence, as a place for gathering, it is important for the narthex to be spacious. Icons with offering tables are part of the space of the narthex. As a vestibule, it is also where one dons an appropriate cassock or robe before entering the church. In some monasteries, the narthex is used for personal prayers and small gatherings for shorter non-Sacramental prayer services, such as Daily Compline, when the full sanctuary of the church is not needed.

Besides the narthex, the room for vesting is located on the north side of the altar space, where the clergy and altar servers enter the church. It is where robes and vestments are properly stored. At the south side of the altar space is the sacristy where the Holy Bread is cut, other Sacramental items are prepared. The room also provides for a French drain sink for the cleaning of items used in the services. [end of Part XVII]

In the next article we will further discuss the various technical aspects of a church building that includes the ornamental lighting, audio systems and the traditional use of oils and candles.

## **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### **Part Eighteen**

*The following article is the eighteenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This, and subsequent articles are written by Father Timothy Baclig.*

Two aspects of Byzantine architectural design that is often an afterthought are matters that pertain to light and sound. As previously mentioned, air conditioning units and modern technology were never a part of the ancient church’s construction plans. Similarly audio systems and various forms of artificial lighting were non-existent. That did not mean that there was no thought given to acoustics or natural light in the design and planning of early Orthodox Church structures.

Sound in the early period of worship in the church was never more than necessary. Church buildings were designed and built in such a way that a Reader, Chanter, or Singer did not need to strain in projecting his or her voice in order to be heard. This was also true because of the natural acoustics in the church design, but most importantly: those who reverently entered the church did not add confusion to what was heard being read, chanted or sung by being talkative or noisy. A person came to church to listen, to be attentive, and to meditate. It was understood that all conversation and all dialogue in worship is between God and His people. Hence, it was considered not just improper, but disrespectful to distract attention in the service by engaging in conversation, or to conduct oneself in the church as one would in a public social setting. The repeated call by the Deacon to “Attend!” or to “Stand upright!” were intermittently but intentionally heard within the Divine Liturgy precisely because of the need to restore order or to call the people to be attentive.

The antiphonal method of hymnology included both chanting and singing in the church that involved the clergy and laity taking turns with verses and stanzas. In addition, the responsive participation of a “Right” and “Left” choirs were not the only vibrant sound heard in church services. There were also overlaying melodies that sometimes created some confusion, especially if the clergy, chanters and singers were not well trained in knowing how to properly execute them. In fact, the increase of “multiple layering” of melodies in the Russian Church had become chaotic, that by the 17th century a reform was initiated to restore order in the services. This resulted in prohibiting the overlapping of more than two melodies at one time. The rule helped to ensure that what was being sung was not just heard but understood. A good example of this today can be heard during the “Little Entrance” led by the bishop in the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. While the hymn, “Come let us worship...” is sung, the clergy and choir simultaneously sing: “Many years to thee, Master!”

The appropriate times in the order of prayer services in the church were scheduled to follow the natural light in the sequence of the hours in a day, from sunrise to sunset. The earlier the Liturgy, the greater the Feast. Hence Holy Pascha, the Holy

Nativity and Holy Theophany were among the cycle of festal services that had the most voluminous content and rigorous intensity. The corresponding services of the Liturgy, i.e., Vespers and Orthros, as known to us today, begin at hours that do not often correspond to their prescribed times within a day. Hence, darkening a church can be quite challenging when a Vespers service, for example, which is normally done at sunset, begins in the middle of the morning. Also, because a Feast celebrated in the morning of a workday will not encourage lay attendance, the convenience of celebrating the morning Orthros followed by a Festal Liturgy in the early evening can seem very awkward. Needless to say, accommodating people's personal schedules has in many cases brought about a "light show," with the dimming and raising of lights in a church sanctuary in order to create an effect as prescribed by the appropriate hour of a particular service. This did not help the worshipper to experience the relationship of prayers prescribed to appropriate times of a day. Today not many are aware that the appropriate time to begin the Divine Liturgy in the morning is much earlier than 10 a.m., and certainly not near to the noon hour! Entering a church to begin the morning Orthros prayers was done while it was still dark, and as the sun gradually rose to the time of the start of the Liturgy. Artificial lighting therefore, has become a very important and useful aspect of a church's design. The ability to dim and raise levels of brightness has helped to create an effect that corresponds to the appropriate time and content of the services. Moreover, it should be mentioned that candlelight and oil lamps were among the first means of properly illuminating a sanctuary. Perhaps the greatest and most vivid example of this is known just before midnight of Holy Pascha when prayers are said and chanted in utter darkness before the procession begins with the Holy Light that leads us to the joy of the Empty Tomb and a fully lit church that also exemplifies a great earthquake with bright chandeliers in motion.

The "drama" that characterizes the services of Holy Week, especially those that walk us through the Twelve Passion Gospels depicting the Crucifixion, Death, and Entombment of Christ are among the services that do require appropriate lighting and is not always best experienced by electric artificial lighting. It is from the very dark and foreboding sadness of Holy Week to the fully bright and brilliant joy of Pascha that we learn by our prayers what we also fully experience: the two extremes of light and darkness.

Finally, more must be said about the vocal quality of Orthodox prayer services that cannot be substituted by instruments. Singing *a-capella* (without instrument accompaniment) is not very easy especially if a chanter or singer does not have a "musical ear." In the Orthodox Church Tradition, voices were trained in praying to read, chant or sing properly in the church by: 1) being in church, 2) being reverent and humble, 3) listening attentively, and 4) learning to pray as an apprentice from a lead chanter or *protopsalty* [Πρωτοψάλτη]. Notice that the objective as a Reader, Chanter or Singer is to pray. One prays in the Orthodox Church by reading, chanting and singing as a concelebrant and not as a soloist. Keeping the proper cadence for each melody is also necessary for various melodies. It is also important that prayer is a regular part of

the life of all who are called to serve as a reader chanter or singer, and not only at church services. The Orthodox *ethos* is enhanced by rehearsals in praying the hymns or chanting the melodies of the church. However, care must be taken in order that rehearsals do not heighten the concept of “performance.” With the many items used in the rituals of a service, it was not difficult for spectators to frequently perceive the ceremonial character of the Liturgy as a great “pageant.”

Byzantine melodies began being written in western notation in North America thanks to a special project that was initiated and funded by Metropolitan PHILIP (Saliba) of thrice-blessed memory. Prior to the monumental work of Basil Kazan Byzantine notation was all that existed for use by trained chanters. Kazan was commissioned to transpose Byzantine notation into “crude” melody lines by writing a musical score without following the “rules” of western notation. Kazan’s objective was to preserve the *ethos* of the Orthodox Byzantine pneumatic system that would otherwise be “frozen” if forced to be written in a strict western format that required proper key and time signature stanzas and measures. Byzantine notation, on the other hand, provided a gifted chanter with a “script” line and the underpinning pitch of a monotone *eson*. In the Byzantine churches the sound of male chanters often resonated in a sanctuary with good acoustics, just as a four part musical score was the norm in the Slavic (Russian) churches. With this in mind, the ability to augment the use of a good audio sound system in a well built Orthodox Church structure today is very challenging if professional expertise is not sought. Similarly, the proper artificial lighting of various settings must be carefully considered in the design phase of a church if the variety of Orthodox worship services are to have the appropriate ambience for prayer. [end of Part XVIII]

## **“O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House” (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### **Part Nineteen**

*The following article is the nineteenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This article is written by Father Timothy Baclig.*

If by coming to church we are to deepen our experience of being members of God’s Kingdom, it would help us to understand what is required of us in properly preparing ourselves to be participants at God’s Banquet: The Divine Liturgy. Within the service of the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist (Holy Communion) is the “Sacrament of Sacraments.” It is the culmination of all of the Sacraments, beginning with Holy Baptism (the Rite of Initiation), Holy Chrismation (Confirmation), and the repeated “Sacraments of maintenance:” Confession (Reconciliation) and Holy Unction (the Sacrament of Anointing for healing). The other two: a) Holy Matrimony and b) Ordination where both, at one time, fully contained within the service of The Divine Liturgy. Today, Ordinations remain the only Sacrament that takes place within the service of the Divine Liturgy when a Bishop is presiding.

In a previous article, mention was made about the place (within the church structure) where Baptisms occur; also about the "Service of Crowning," when a couple is united in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony in the church. Both of these Sacraments, along with all other Sacraments that are culminated in the Holy Eucharist, have their fullest meaning within the space of an Orthodox Church structure: an "Icon of the Kingdom." It is where the images of iconography together with the church's prayer language, as well as her hymnography, aid the worshipping participant in their spiritual ascent. This is precisely the reason why the full context of the Sacraments is known and experienced within the space of God's Temple: the Church sanctuary. The Sacraments are for us a very tangible "point of contact" with God, as we become full participants in the symbolic (but real) experience of being united to Christ in God's eternal Kingdom. And while some of these events have tended to be perceived as "private" if not "personal" family events in people's lives, they are still Sacraments of the Church and not any family's "private" or "personal" affair. To be united to Christ in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation; to be united to Christ by being reconciled to our brother and sister in the Sacrament of Holy Confession ("Penance"), also to be anointed for healing by Holy Unction; and to be consecrated for Holy Ordination in an rank of church service; or to be crowned in the Mystery of Holy Matrimony as husband and wife; and ultimately to be a recipient of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ "...for the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting," all of these encounters with Christ through the Sacraments of the Church have their place and appropriate time within the space of God's House, the Church sanctuary, and within the full context of the Church's prayers, hymns and iconography. As "timeless events," they are truly not of this world. Therefore they are found to have their proper context in God's Holy sanctuary on earth. It is precisely for this reason, for example, that weddings do not take place in parks or on beaches. A couple receives the blessing of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, and participates in the Sacramental life of the Church in the context of God's eternal Kingdom that is not of this world.

Varieties of weekday prayer services in the church, many of which occur during periods of fasting, enable us to better prepare ourselves for various Feasts of the year. One is never anxious or presumptuous in order to properly prepare to receive the Sacrament. Preparation is instead, serious and intentional; with humility, and at times, prayerful contrition. Numerous prayers are found in the prayer books of the Church that help us to recognize our need to be repentant. In a layman's Prayer on Entering the Church Temple are these words: *I will come into Thy house in the plenitude of Thy mercy; and in fear I will worship toward Thy Holy Temple... make my way straight before me, that with a clear mind I may glorify Thee...* And in a prayer said by the priest who prepares to literally enter into the space of the Holy Altar are these words: *How shall I the unworthy dare to enter the brilliance of Thy Holy Place, for if I dare to enter my garment will renounce me for it is not a wedding garment. Cleanse, O Lord, the defilement of my soul and save me, for Thou art the Lover of Mankind!*

Being mindful of our fallen state and sinfulness in order to repent is where one always begins. God's House, therefore, is for all of us, a place of refuge and a place of hope; a tranquil haven. It is as "the eye of a hurricane" is the calm and peaceful place of a world in a storm. We enter God's House, just as we would approach His Sacraments: "With fear of God, in faith and love..." And so, just as our entrance through doors that bring us into the sanctuary of the Church should never be with any sense of presumption, so must the Church structure provide for us a sense of the Holy. That experience is not known or realized without the exercise of earnest repentance. Hence, the glorious and brilliant imagery within the sanctuary cannot always be exposed as it is uniquely revealed each year during the forty-day period of Holy Pascha. Just as each of us must take seriously the labor of prayer and fasting in order to properly prepare ourselves to celebrate a Feast, so must the sanctuary of the church, at appropriate times, reflect the season with distinctive shades of dark and bright colors. Similarly, the function of the Royal Doors and the curtain of the iconostasion used at various times of the services are a visual aid to us in our spiritual quest to be properly united to Christ. [End of Part XXIX]

In the next article we will explore how all of the parts of our church sanctuary: the images, the sacred articles and rituals do not become for us idols, but "windows" and "points of contact" in our pilgrimage and ascent in prayer and worship of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## **"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 27:4)**

### **Part Twenty**

*The following article, by Fr. Timothy Baclig, is the twentieth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the iconography, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.*

We have explored in the previous articles how worshipping the Triune God in a Traditional Orthodox sanctuary includes a very intentional architectural design, iconographic imagery [εἰκόν ( "image") and γράφειν ( "to write")], and the sound of prayerful voices for contemplative worship. We have also explained how a worshipper's preparation for being a participant in the Liturgy [Λειτουργία; "work of the people"] and the Sacramental life of the Church is directly related to the nature, time and season of the various services, also the atmosphere of the sanctuary, which includes what one sees and hears.

Our eternal destiny is: God's Kingdom. It is where our attention is directed at the start of every Sacrament with the following words: *Blessed is the Kingdom: of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.* With this exclamation the presiding bishop or priest sets our course in worship. While this destiny is announced and proclaimed, for us mortals who remain a part of time and space, God's Kingdom is still to be attained. Similarly, salvation is past (in all that



Christ fulfilled by His atoning Sacrifice on the Cross), is also present (as you and I are “being saved” by the divine grace of God’s Spirit), but is also not yet (to be culminated in the world which is to come; unto “the ages of ages”). As mortals, therefore, we are in a procession, if you will; something that also typifies a primary liturgical movement in Orthodox worship services.

In the early period of Liturgy of “The Great Church” (Hagia Sophia; Αγία Σοφία) in Constantinople (4th century), the entrance into the church began with the faithful who met the presiding bishop at his residence and sang hymns in their procession to the church. Antiphonal hymns were sung, as they are now, within the first part of the Liturgy, in a procession with the Gospel Book—through the entrance of the church, ending at the Holy Altar, for the start of the lessons (Epistle and Gospel). It was a movement from “point A” (the residences) to “point B” (the Holy Altar). Today, this procession called: “The Little Entrance,” is within the Liturgy and moves from “point A” (at the Holy Altar) to “point A” (back to the Holy Altar). Similarly, what we know as “The Great Entrance,” was in the early period a procession from a place where the offerings of bread for the Liturgy were gathered and prepared (in a separate structure) prior to an entrance with the clergy to the Holy Altar in the church sanctuary at the time of the *anaphora* (offering) prayers.

Within the church sanctuary the Divine Liturgy depicts an unseen reality that is neither staged or contrived but experienced with the aid of Biblical prayers, images and hymns of remembrances that illumines the heart with the mind of Christ—who is King and is present by His Spirit. Perhaps one of the most vivid examples of this is seen in the Service of Crowning when a man and woman are united in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The crowns of the bride and groom are revealed. They are seen. However, they are not yet fully known or experienced. They are the rewards of martyrdom—something that is ultimately manifested in God’s eternal Kingdom from the experience of sacrificial love. The Sacrament becomes as the scripture clearly states: a revelation or the revealing of God’s glory. This was also evident following Christ’s miracle of changing the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee where the Gospel records: “This the first of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed His glory...” (John 2:11). It is worth noting that the only other time the Gospel similarly records Jesus’ glory being revealed in His earthly ministry was on Mount Tabor at His Holy Transfiguration (see Matthew 17 and Mark 9).

Therefore the Church imagery together with all of its melodies used within the space of an Orthodox sanctuary provide the *ethos* [ἦθος] of worship. It is “otherworldly.” And as such, cannot be compared to other gatherings. At the start of the *anaphora* [ἀναφορά] (at the second half of the Divine Liturgy that focuses upon our “offering”) the Cherubic Hymn begins with the words: *We who mystically represent the cherubim and sing to the life-giving Trinity the thrice holy hymn, let us now lay aside all worldly care; that we may receive the King of all who comes invisibly upborne by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!* The hymn is a reminder that it is us: “we,” who are

called to receive He who comes; and when present, *Alleluia*, becomes our response; an exclamation that means: “God is here.” The Sacraments and prayer services of the church therefore provide us the means of gaining God’s perspective; being in His presence. And it is precisely for that reason that all of the images and sounds are seen and heard by us for a distinct purpose: providing us with an aid in our quest for God’s Kingdom.

As we have already stated, entering the church sanctuary must be with great humility and a true sense of thankfulness. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican typifies this posture and state of mind. The word eucharist [εὐχαριστία] literally means “thanksgiving.” The braggadocious attitude of the Pharisee in the parable who thanks God that he is “not like all other men...” is contrasted to the humility and contrite confession of the Publican who prayed: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (see Luke 18:9-14).

Black is the attire of the clergy who, from being in the world enters the church. It exemplifies our sinfulness and need of forgiveness and is expressed in the priest’s prayer said in entering the holy place of the sanctuary. But before doing so, the priest venerates the icon of Christ, the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) and the saints. This is done while saying a series of prayers beginning with: *Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us; for laying aside all defense we sinners offer unto thee, as Master, this supplication: have mercy on us... We reverence Thy spotless icon, O gracious Lord, and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God: for of Thine own good will Thou was pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh that Thou might deliver from the bondage of the enemy those whom Thou has fashioned. Wherefore, we cry unto Thee: Thou has filled all things with joy, O our Saviour, for Thou didst come to save the world.* The prayers are followed by the veneration of each icon. In other words, the prayers (and as in some services: sung melodies) are accompanied (or paired) with specific iconographic images. An icon is an “image” that is written to express the theology of the Church. As such, icons are not artistic renderings. Nor are they personal interpretations or creative expressions. Icons convey the teaching of Orthodox Christian theology written in form and color. Icons present images in two-dimensions and are not three-dimensional. They provide us with a “reverse perspective” (as though we are being looked at from God’s perspective). Hence, they are venerated and not worshipped as idols. In the words of the late Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann, they are for us “windows into heaven.” They help us to gain a true perspective—God’s perspective. [End of Part XX]