

WORSHIP WITHOUT WORDS

ONE
Sacred Places, Sacred Spaces

When you step through the doorway of a church you are leaving the outer world behind and entering an inner world. The outside world is a fair place abounding in life and activity, but also a place with a mingling of the base and ugly. It is a sort of marketplace, crossed and recrossed by all and sundry. Perhaps “unholy” is not quite the word for it, yet there is something profane about the world. Behind the church doors is an inner place, separated from the market place, a silent, consecrated and holy spot. It is very certain that the whole world is the work of God and His gift to us, that we may meet Him anywhere, that everything we receive is from God’s hand, and, when received religiously, is holy. Nevertheless men have always felt that certain precincts were in a special manner set apart and dedicated to God. (Romano Guardini)²



ECCLESIASTICAL BUILDINGS

Ecclesiastical buildings are divided into two classes: churches and oratories.

church. A house of God, dedicated exclusively for public worship. A sacred building dedicated to divine worship for the use of all the faithful and the public exercise of religion. There are five kinds of churches:

- **basilica.** A rectangular church with a semicircular **apse** and **narthex** copied after the ancient Roman justice hall. It is especially

designed for large **congregations**. Also the title given to specific Roman Catholic churches to which the pope has granted particular ceremonial privileges.

- **cathedral**. The chief church of a **diocese** where the **bishop's throne** (or *cathedra*, which is the Latin word for "seat") is situated.
- **collegiate** or **conventual**. A public place of worship served by a community of **regular clergy** (canons regular, **monks**, or friars).
- **metropolitan**. A church presided over by an **archbishop**.
- **parochial**. A *parish* church, with a baptismal **font**, a confessional, and a cemetery, and the liturgical equipment necessary for **baptisms**, **marriages**, and funerals.

oratory. A place of worship not intended for the use of all the faithful indiscriminately. These can be a public oratory, which is used by a religious community primarily, with limited access by the public; a semipublic oratory, which is intended for use by a special community and is not open to the public; and a private oratory, which is a small **chapel** or a room set apart for worship in a private house for the use of the family or an individual.

OTHER ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURES

catacomb. An underground cave or tunnel the early Christians used for burial and as a meeting place during the time of Roman persecutions.

manse. The residence of the clergy, particularly in the Presbyterian Church. May also be called *parsonage*, *rectory*, *vicarage*, or *presbytery* (Roman Catholic).

mission. An establishment of **missionaries**, which may include a church, a station, a school, a hospital, and other facilities from which the missionaries do outreach work. May also refer to a local

parish or church that is dependent on a larger church or religious organization for financial support or direction.

shrine. A building or other shelter that encloses the remains or **relics** of a **saint** or other holy person, becoming a site of religious veneration and **pilgrimage**. May also refer to a reliquary or receptacle for sacred **relics**, or to the niche holding a religious image.

MONASTIC ARCHITECTURE

abbey. A religious house under the direction of an **abbot** or an **abbess**. Also, an abbey church (such as Westminster Abbey).

cell. A small room in a monastery or convent.

cloister. The residence of those who have taken religious vows, such as a convent, monastery, abbey, etc. See also **Sacred Architecture**.

convent. A house for persons under religious vows, in particular, women or **nuns**. May also be called a *nunnery*.

monastery. A house for persons under religious vows, in particular, men or **monks**.

priory. A religious house under the direction of a **prior** or **prioress**.

refectory. The dining room in a monastic community.

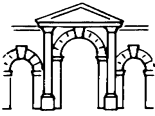
retreat house. The guest house at a monastic community.

SACRED ARCHITECTURE ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

cruciform. Cross-shaped churches, which have a **nave**, **transept**, and **chancel**. When looking down on this formation from above, it would appear to be in the shape of a **Latin cross**.



Gothic. An ornate style of architecture of Europe in the Middle Ages (twelfth to fifteenth centuries). Distinguishing features are pointed arches, ribbed vaulting, and slender spires. Rheims and Notre Dame are Gothic cathedrals.



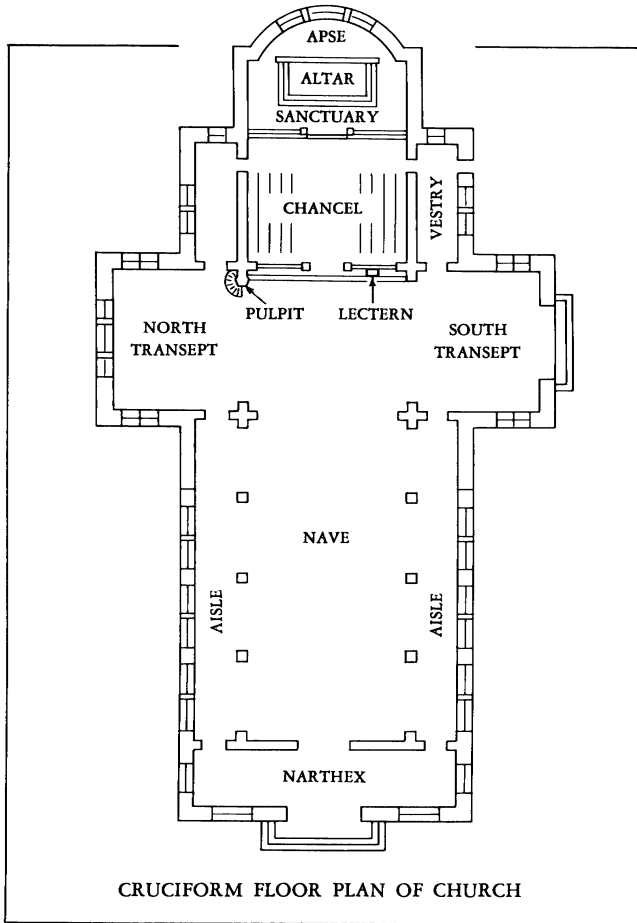
Romanesque. A style of architecture based on Roman building techniques, prevalent in Europe from the fifth century to the twelfth century. The distinctive features are the round arch and the barrel (or tunnel) vault. It is unadorned and massive.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

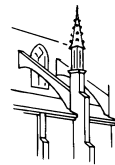
bells. The ringing of a church bell is an invitation to worship. If the bells are carillons, sacred **hymn** tunes are played. Bells are tolled for funerals.

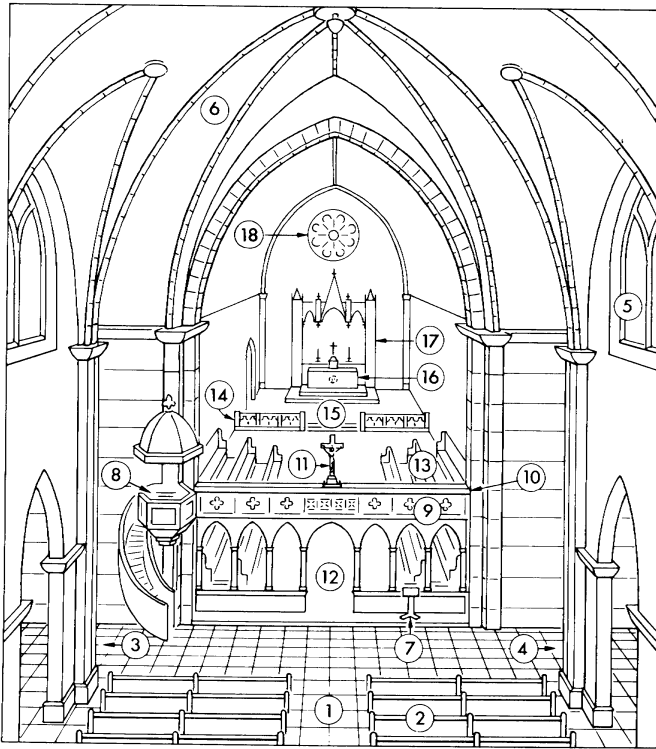


- **belfry.** The church tower where the bells are hung.
- **campanile.** A bell tower separate from the church, such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa.
- **carillon.** A set of large bells in the church tower on which **hymn** tunes are played from an electric keyboard. There are at least two octaves of bells, tuned chromatically.



buttress. An exterior reinforcement to strengthen the walls and support the roof of Gothic style churches. A classic example is Notre Dame Cathedral.





THE CRUCIFORM CHURCH INTERIOR

A view looking east from the nave of a church with a cruciform floor plan.

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|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. The nave. | 7. The lectern. | 13. The choir stalls. |
| 2. The pews. | 8. The pulpit. | 14. The altar rail. |
| 3. The north transept. | 9. The rood screen. | 15. To the sanctuary area. |
| 4. The south transept. | 10. The rood beam. | 16. The altar. |
| 5. The clerestory. | 11. The rood cross. | 17. The reredos. |
| 6. The vaulted ceiling. | 12. To the chancel area. | 18. The rose window. |

cloister. A sheltered corridor connecting the church building with other structures serving the needs of a **congregation**. See also **Monastic Architecture**.

doors. Church doors are often red, dating back to the Middle Ages when church doors were painted red to symbolize the Blood of Christ and to designate the church as a place of sanctuary. Lutheran churches have red doors because the Wittenberg Cathedral, where Martin Luther posted his 95 theses, had red doors. By extension, red doors can signify reformed churches. Some today suggest that the red door means that the mortgage is paid in full!

fleche. (French, “arrow.”) A very slender, “arrow-like” **spire** at the **crossing** on a church roof.

gargoyle. Grotesque figure of a person or a beast used as a water spout or decoration on the exterior of a Gothic cathedral. Gargoyles are positioned so that rain water gushes out of their mouths and away from the building. The word *gargoyle* is rooted in the Latin word *gar*, “to swallow,” and refers to sound of the water gurgling through these monstrous mouths. Some say gargoyles symbolize the evil that the gospel expels and that they ward off evil spirits.

pier. A support of masonry, steel, or the like for sustaining vertical pressure.

polychrome. Decorative painting in bright colors on wood. Beams in church ceilings, etc., may be ornamented in polychrome.

rose window. A round window with stone **tracery**, generally at the west end of the church.



spire. A steeple projecting high above the roof of the church. Points to heaven, encouraging godly thoughts.



tracery. Delicately carved stonework that forms the shape of the windows, particularly in Gothic architecture. Such work may also be done in wood on the **chancel** furniture, especially the **reredos**.

vaulted. In Gothic and Romanesque architecture, the domed or arched structure of the ceiling.

MOVING INTO THE CHURCH...
INTERIOR SPACES

It is the doors that admit us to this mysterious place. Lay aside, they say, all that cramps and narrows, all that sinks the mind. Open your heart, lift up your eyes. Let your soul be free, for this is God's temple.

It is likewise the representation of you, yourself. For you, your soul and your body, are the living temple of God. Open up that temple, make it spacious, give it height.

(Romano Guardini)³

aisle. The space between the rows of pews that worshipers use as a passageway to reach their places in the pews.

apse. (Latin, "arch.") The semicircular or rectangular recess of the chancel of a church in which the altar stands. The interior of the apse is called the **sanctuary**.

baptistry. This may be a separate building or a part of the church, usually near the entrance, where the sacrament of Holy **Baptism** is administered at a **font**. In some churches it is a large tank in the front of the church for baptism by immersion.

cantoris. The side of the choir where the choir leader or cantor or **precentor** sits. If the altar is on the eastern end, then this would usually be on the north side. For antiphonal singing, the side opposite is called **decani**.

chancel. The **sanctuary** of the church, raised by steps above the level of the **nave**. Separated from the nave by the **rood screen**. Symbolic of heaven or the **Church Triumphant**.

chapel. A small church with a **sanctuary** of its own, either as part of a larger church or separate. It is used for minor and occasional services and functions. A chapel may be connected with an institution such as a college, prison, or cemetery.

choir. The place in the church where the singers sit. May also be called a *choir loft*, especially when set in a gallery behind the pulpit or above the nave. (Also refers to the singers who help with the music of the service.)

clerestory. The upper part of the **nave** containing an arcade of windows. This is a feature of both the basilica and the Gothic-style church.

columns. In cathedrals, the tall columns draw the eye forward to the altar and toward heaven as if in praise to God. There are three traditional styles of columns:

Doric. Plain, unornamented, thick and sturdy, masculine in character. Often used in churches dedicated to male saints.

Ionic. Thinner and more delicate, with the head (or capital) decorated with what looks like opposing scrolls. These columns are viewed as feminine, celebrating wisdom and learning. Often used in churches dedicated to female saints.

Corinthian. The most lavish column, whose capitals are decorated with acanthus leaves and other foliage. Because of their beauty, often used in churches or chapels dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

confessional. In Roman churches, the boothlike structures on either side of the **nave**, in which private confessions are made.

consecration crosses. When a church is consecrated, the bishop makes the sign of the Cross with holy oil three times on each of the church's four walls. The twelve points of this anointing are

marked with crosses permanently rendered on the walls with paint or cast in metal or carved in stone. Some churches may have these on the outside walls as well.

crossing. The place at the front of the church where the **transept** and **nave** intersect in a **cruciform** church.

crypt. A vault under a church directly beneath the **sanctuary** or **choir**, used as a chapel or burial place.

decani. The side of the choir opposite the **cantoris** side, normally the south side.

Epistle side. Traditionally, the right side of the **sanctuary** as the **congregation** faces it. This is the side from which the Epistle is read. Also known as the *Epistle Horn*. See also **Gospel side**.

font. (Latin, “fountain.”) A round or octagonal receptacle of marble, wood, or metal that stands on a pedestal and contains the water for **baptism**. The number eight signifies regeneration; thus an octagonal font represents regeneration through baptism.



Gospel side. Traditionally, the left side of the **sanctuary** as the **congregation** faces it; the side to the clergy’s right. This side is the side of highest honor and from which the Gospel is read. Also known as the *Gospel Horn*. See also **Epistle side**.

horns of the altar. The Epistle side (horn) is the right front as the **congregation** faces the **altar**. The Gospel side (horn) is the left front. The Gospel and Epistle lessons may be read from these positions.

narthex. The vestibule entered by the main entrance and usually stretching across the entire end of the church. It may be under a balcony and is separated from the **nave** of the church by a wall. Today, this is often called a *vestibule*.

nave. (Latin, “ship.”) In ecclesiastical art, the Church is represented as a **ship** sailing toward heaven. The ship’s “passengers” are the parishioners who sit in the main part of the church, the nave. It extends from the **narthex** to the chancel from which it is separated by a communion rail and sometimes a **rood screen**. The ship (nave) is a symbol of the **Church Militant**, the Church here on earth, the means of our heavenward voyage.

piscina. A basin built into the church wall, having a drain to carry the unused wine from the Eucharist to the ground. A basin with a drain near the altar of a church for disposing of water from liturgical **ablutions**.

portal. Gate or door. The main door of a church or cathedral.

predella. The top step on which the altar stands. Also called *footpace*.

sacristy. A room for the pastor’s private use as an office, study, and robing room. A room in a church where sacred vessels and vestments are kept and where the clergy vests. Sometimes called a *vestry*.

sanctuary. The elevated place where the altar stands in the chancel, and where the ordained servant of the **congregation** leads the worship. It is the most sacred part of the church. In nonliturgical churches, may also generally refer to a place where worship services are held.

stall. The special seats in the **chancel** for the clergy. Those for the choir are called *choir stalls*.

transept. In a cruciform church, the area that corresponds to the arms of the cross. It is at the front of the **nave** and at the foot of the **chancel**.

worship center. Not an altar, but a focal point for worship as in a Sunday school room. May be a table with a picture, cross, etc., that suggests worship to those assembled there.

CHURCH FURNISHINGS

ambo. A raised desk, or either of two such desks, from which the Gospels or Epistles are read or chanted. Used especially in an early Christian church or in the Eastern tradition.

bier. The framework upon which a coffin rests.

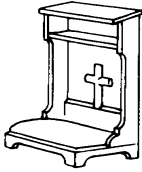
bishop's throne. Also called the *bishop's chair* or *cathedra*, it is permanently located in a **cathedral**, being placed near the altar on the **Gospel side** of the **sanctuary**.

credence shelf. A shelf or table in the **sanctuary** where the sacramental vessels are kept until carried to the **altar** for the Holy Communion.

lectern. (Latin, "to read.") A wooden or metal desk from which the Bible lessons are read. The lectern may be used instead of the **pulpit** for preaching in lesser services.

pew. A long seat with a back, but without divisions, to accommodate the members of the **congregation** at services. A hymn book rack, pew card holder, communion cup holder, and kneelers may be attached to the pew for the convenience of the worshippers.

presider's chair. The seat on which the presider or celebrant sits. Also called *celebrant's chair*.



prie-dieu. (French, “pray to God.”) A movable *prayer desk* with a kneeler for use in services by the clergy or by anyone in **private devotions**. May also be called a *faldstool* or a *litany desk*.

pulpit. (Latin, “raised platform.”) The place from which the **sermon** is delivered. It is located at the front of the chancel. It is raised so that the person speaking may be easily seen by the **congregation**. It may be octagonally shaped, symbolic of the regeneration of the spirit by the Word of God.

rood or **rood cross.** (Old English, “cross.”) A **cross** or **crucifix**; in particular, a large one at the entrance to the choir or chancel of a medieval church, often suspended on a **rood beam** or **rood screen**.

rood beam. A heavy wooden beam suspended from wall to wall at the entrance to the chancel. On top in the center is a carving or other representation of the crucifixion (**rood**) indicating that humanity must go to heaven by way of the cross.

rood screen. An open screen at the entrance to the sanctuary representing the gates of heaven. The rood screen separates the **nave** from the **chancel**.

sedilia. (Latin, “seat.”) Usually a series of three seats for the clergy officiating at a service.

stoup. A small vessel for holding **holy water**, placed at the entrance of a church. Worshipers dip the fingers of the right hand into the holy water and apply it to themselves with the **sign of the cross**, as a blessing and a reminder of **baptism**. Very often the stoup takes the form of a scalloped **shell**.

LITURGICAL FURNISHINGS

alms basin. A large plate into which the offering plates are placed or the offering poured for presentation at the **altar**. Sometimes called a *receiving basin*. May be made of wood, silver, or brass. A velvet pad may be fastened in the bottom.

- **alms bags.** Bags of leather or cloth attached to long poles used to collect the offerings of the people.
- **alms box.** A box placed near the entrance of a church for the collection of financial gifts for the poor or for other specific purposes.
- **offering plates.** Plates of wood or metal used for collecting the offering and then conveying it to the sanctuary. Sometimes wicker baskets are used rather than plates. Offering plates may also be called *collection plates* or *alms plates*.

banners. Large decorated cloths portraying the doctrine and work of the church, to be hung in the church or carried in **procession**.

memorial book. A book listing the memorials given to the glory of God and the church. Also, a book of memory listing the names of those who have served their country in time of war, with special recognition for those who have given their lives. The desk that holds the memorial book is called a **memorial stand**.

parish register. The book in each parish in which all **baptisms**, **confirmations**, **funerals**, and **marriages** are recorded and in which lists of members are kept. The desk that holds the guest or register book is called a **register stand**.

processional cross. A **cross** (or **crucifix**) attached to a staff and carried by a **crucifer** at the head of an ecclesiastical **procession**.

register board. Not unlike a hymn board, this one carries such information as the number of members of the parish register, the number present at worship, the amount of the offering, etc. Usually used for the Church School.

sanctuary bracket. A shelf for the **alms basin** and **offering plates** before the offering is received and placed on the **altar**. Usually made of wood, it is attached to the sanctuary wall on the Epistle side.

*Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors,
and the King of Glory shall come in.*

Heed the cry of the doors. Of small use to you is a house of wood and stone unless you yourself are God's living dwelling. The high arched gates may be lifted up, and the portals parted wide, but unless the doors of your heart are open, how can the King of Glory enter in?

(Romano Guardini)⁴

TWO

The Altar

The altar occupies the holiest spot in the church. The church has itself been set apart from the world of human work, and the altar is elevated above the rest of the church in a spot as remote and separate as the sanctuary of the soul. The solid base it is set on is like the human will that knows that God has instituted man for his worship and is determined to perform that worship faithfully. The table of the altar that rests upon this base stands open and accessible for the presentation of sacrifice. It is not in a dark recess where the actions may be dimly glimpsed, but uncurtained, unscreened, a level surface in plain sight, placed, as the heart's altar should be placed, open in the sight of God without proviso or reservation.

The two altars, one without and the one within, belong inseparably together. The visible altar at the heart of the church is but the external representation of the altar at the center of the human breast, which is God's temple, of which the church with its walls and arches is but the expression and figure. (Romano Guardini)⁵



The altar is the most important furnishing of the church; it is the church's focal point. In fact, a church is built for its altar and not the other way around. At its simplest, the altar is a table of wood or stone from which the **Holy Communion** is consecrated and administered. It is the Lord's Table.

In the early Church the commemoration of the Lord's Supper was part of a bigger meal, and most churches met in private homes, not in public buildings, consecrated or otherwise. So the **Eucharist** was simply administered on an ordinary wooden table used in the home. In the early second century, to honor the memory of those who had died for the faith, the Eucharist was also served on or near the tombs of **martyrs**, with the stone slab that covered the tomb serving as the altar.

It wasn't until the fourth century, after Christians gained the freedom to worship, that permanent altars of wood or stone were erected, as permanent houses of worship were established. Early Christians had carefully avoided using the word "altar" because of its pagan associations, but in the fifth century, references to altars began to appear in construction guidelines. Most stone altars, especially in Rome, stood over the tomb of a **martyr**, and by the early fifth century, a provincial council instructed that only stone altars could be consecrated.

Rules and sensibilities changed over the centuries, with altars in different **rites** taking different forms. But most altars intentionally echo the worship of the early Church by using a wooden altar or a stone altar or a combination of the two. In some large churches, such as cathedrals, both stone and wooden altars are used.

One way the altars combine wood and stone is through the use of a **mensa** (Latin, "table") or *altar stone*, which is a flat stone surface made out of a "single natural stone in one piece and unbreakable." The mensa maybe installed in either a wood or a stone altar. On the top of the *mensa*, five crosses are incised, one in each of the four corners and one in the center. The *mensa* of the altar is covered by the **fair linen**; the **missal** and the Eucharistic vessels are placed on top of the *mensa*, and from here the **Holy Communion** is administered.

Altars today may be permanent or movable, stand against a wall or be freestanding. In general, however, altars face the **congregation**, and the **priest**, whose face was formerly toward