ENHANCEMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

AN ARCHITECTURAL THESIS
MARK PLATT
ENHANCEMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE
PERCEPTION AND THE DESIGN OF RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

AN ARCHITECTURAL THESIS

MARK PLATT
AD 1986
This Architectural Thesis is dedicated to my parents, Faye and Thomas Platt. Your loving support has made this, and so much more, possible for me during my life. I don't know how to thank you enough, except to give to you what I have worked the hardest for. I love you both dearly.
The following Architectural Thesis is the culmination of a nine month study. It is concerned with the design of a Catholic Chapel based upon Christian beliefs as expressed as building, and how these beliefs may be perceived. The object of the Thesis is to create an original architectural design that may become an enhancement to the spiritual experience of worship.
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Man, as a spiritual being, has a need for beauty and worship. It is the obligation of the clergy as well as the architect to attempt to satisfy these important needs. Also, it is the duty of the individual to discover for himself his own personal understanding of the meanings of beauty and religion.

In this framework, architecture cannot create faith. It can, however, express those aspects seen as important by that faith. A religious building, designed with a clear understanding of its faith and function, will speak with an appropriate symbolic power to the world something of what that religion believes.

There seems to be a trend in small parish
churches in America wherein the design of the religious facility does not capture the spiritual essence that should be the primary concern of the architect. Many of these churches capture some of the functional nature of what a religious service is about, yet beyond objects placed within the structure do nothing to address the spiritual nature of a religious service.

I believe that successful religious architecture should be an accurate reflection of the spirit of the faith. Because of this, I feel that as an architect it is my obligation to try to work toward a religious architecture sympathetic to my position. The Architectural Thesis is the process that I discovered to allow me to develop a religious environment
that spiritually stands above the unfortunate norm that exists today.
Faced with improving the spiritual essence of a religious environment, the architect should know what is perceived as spiritual by the followers of the faith in a way this can be begun. I have developed a series of architectural "Constructs" that are important to Christian religious space. These "Constructs" are examples of religious meaning that exist in historical built expressions. All were chosen based upon what I believe could be perceived and understood in today's Christian society. I concentrated my research in the Early Christian, Romanesque, Byzantine, & Gothic periods. I feel that during these styles the methods of expressing symbolism in architecture were rooted deeply in Christian tenants. Periods
following these, while creating new architectural expressions
nearly followed or ignored the symbolic forms
developed earlier.

The Constructs have served as a guide for
myself in gaining insight into a symbolic building
language and as an outline for the design of a
spiritual environment. This spiritual environment
is a Catholic Chapel for Ball State University.
The chapel is a test of how well I, as a
designer, incorporated the constructs into a symbolic
whole. This includes the aspects of religious
perception in a modern society appearing as
recognizable Constructs which govern the holistic
architecture of the chapel.
As a personal justification for the construction of this project— or a means to get it built— I have given the chapel a patron. This person is an alumni of Ball State University and has a deep faith in his Catholic religion. A visit to the present Newman Center has convinced him that students of any intellectual community should have a religious center that can speak to them beyond the words of a priest. He sees a religious experience starting before the priest begins mass, an environment based solely on the idea of a spiritual and symbolic expression.

My patron decides that the Newman Center does not meet this criteria. He
proposes the creation of a new center with all of the services of the existing facility but designed according to his religious standards. He imagines an environment that can push the parishers (students & residents) toward new levels of understanding of their faith. The project is to be carried out within his parameters and funded by his patronage.
To educate myself in the field of religious symbolism as expressed in building it was necessary to look at the history of Christian thought in architecture. The resulting Constructs are what I found to be the strongest examples of symbolism that created and shaped architectural forms. The Constructs were dealt with both individually and in groups. Individually they were studied as architecture, symbolism, and perception (4) as understood in today's Catholic Community. In groups they were handled as related areas with most Constructs appearing in two or three areas. This directed me toward seeing them working together as a holistic system that could produce an environment greater than the sum of its
individual parts.

When working as a holistic system occasionally it became necessary to diminish the effect of one Construct in order to strengthen one or more others. This give-and-take occurred throughout the design process. It is my belief that an understanding of this process allowed the design to grow according to its strengths.
The basis of my Thesis Study is to provide an environment within which the individual worshipper may attain an enhancement of his spiritual experience. This will take place on many levels depending upon the individual's knowledge of the Catholic Christian faith, his effort at discovering the meanings present in the environment, and his ability to understand these meanings.

It has been assumed that the predominate user of this environment will be people with a basic understanding of this faith, or those with a "Symbolic Vision." These people will be able to understand the meanings built into the environment. An understanding of the Catholic Christian faith upon different levels is possible in these ways when
the encompassing environment is formed with the symbolic Constructs in mind.

The level of religious understanding that an individual may reach will always depend upon who is encountering the spiritual space, and how well that space has been designed. My goal is to allow more to be seen by any observer. The design of the chapel was undertaken with a goal to create varied and integrated stimuli that all people may react to from any point in any direction.

In a spiritual context what people see will be related to memories of past religious events and to knowledge of symbolic meanings of their faith. The most immediate perceptions of a spiritual environment will be Primary Receptions. These are known as
signs. The Crucifix is a sign. If you can read this page, you will immediately understand what a Crucifix means. No extra thought is ever needed to understand it.

A Secondary Perception is much more subtle. It can only be reached by making an attempt at understanding something that you observed. A Secondary Perception is a symbol. An example is the Construct of Enhanced Verticality. Once an observer comes to an understanding of why the environment is shaped in a vertical manner, he has understood a symbol.

It is, of course, impossible to say just how many people will be able to understand some or all of the symbols presented to them in
the final design. Those who are not able to reach any Secondary perceptions will, it is hoped, still perceive a spiritual ambiance. An example of this can be seen again using Enhanced Verticality. This Construct will be one of the most powerful generators of the spiritual ambiance of the design. People without a symbolic vision, or an ability to reach Secondary Perceptions, should still feel an awareness of vertical movement, or an uplifting.
The site that I chose for my project was selected based upon several factors:

1) It is located adjacent to the campus—but slightly separated from a dense concentration of buildings. This is important in that the chapel should be allowed to stand alone in the landscape.

2) The chapel, from the beginning, did not want to conform to a style of building already present on campus. Removing it from the center of campus lets it become its own expression.

3) Many people enter campus from the north on McKinley Ave. The chapel may become a recognizable landmark of entry to campus.
The following pages each contain a graphic and written representation of the religious constructs as well as a graphic and written representation of the constructs as they exist in the final design.
MEANING: Every person becomes part of one family when within God's House. Every part of God's House is important, take any part away and the whole is diminished.

DESIGN: The Congregation, laity, and Priest. All surrounding a central point. Forming a circle or a oneness.

The circle forming.....
LITURGY - THE FOCUS

MEANING: The congregation is to focus on the center of the liturgy. The altar, as well as the pulpit. The baptismal font is also included as a separate lesser focus.

DESIGN: The center becoming the action of the priest. This center becomes a stronger focus by the illumination that comes from above....

DESIGN: Sunlight creates a vertical shaft and backdrop to the center as the priests' stage. This light diffuses into the congregation drawing them to the focus of the Whole. This garment of light creates a....
MEANING: The image of God entering His house. Nature brought into the celebration. The play of light is to be mysterious, John's vision of the new Jerusalem - built of gold clear as glass. A garment of light.

DESIGN: This light from above has a mysterious quality - possibly God entering into His service - and spreading out over His people. Also spreading out to the people is the....
MEANING: The image of the altar as both a table for a Holy Meal, as well as a Sacrificial Altar. The table reaches to the congregation and is seen by all. The altar is a reminder of Christ's sacrifice.

DESIGN: Rising from the earth and spreading toward the congregation, the altar is the position of the center-the priestly action. The sacrifice is its massive stone form. The table is the movement toward the people as if to share. This center is also expressed with an....
ENHANCED VERTICALITY


DESIGN: The center is the highest position. Verticality is expressed with light and with form. All extents surrounding the center rise toward the light. This apex is an expression of....
MEANING: Church layout to suggest Christ ruling the earth from above-His celestial dome. The victory of life over eternal death. Levels within the service-Jesus, the Priest, the Laity, the congregation.

DESIGN: The form that rises does not rest upon the earth-it is suspended by a ring of light. This form is the dome of heaven, beyond our present reach. The dome lowers at the center to engage the priest. This dome is....
MEANING: The rock of salvation—a symbol and source of life. Peter, the solid foundation of the church. One is to ascend into the church, and then toward the altar.

DESIGN: Below the dome of heaven is a base of rock. This is the earth, where man dwells. Upon the rock is the....
MEANING: A special place within its surroundings. God's strength found within. An eternal presence. Symbol of Christ's body resting upon the earth. Built of living stones.

DESIGN: An expression of verticality from without. It becomes a special place in the landscape. A solid, everlasting symbol of God's power over the earth and man.

Within the mountain is the....
INTERIOR CAVE

MEANING: The celebration takes place within Christ's body. Not below ground, but inside the Holy Mountain. An unearthly landscape, dramatic and inspiring.

DESIGN: Where man dwells, within Christ's body. The habitation of the spirit. Stone is wall and roof.

The entrance of the cave forms the....
MEANING: Placed before the chapel serves as a reminder of the initiation into God's community. The cleansing.

DESIGN: The chapel's entrance. The baptismal font is the first experience upon entering. When you gaze upon the font, you can see your goal on the far side of it. Located at the font are the....
MEANING: The cleanser, that which brings life to all creatures, from God. Purity, a destruction of sinfulness. Contact means a regeneration.

DESIGN. Water is within one end of the wall that becomes the rock. The earthly form of the chapel. The wall surrounds the church and meanders down a hill to cross a natural presence of water. Between the chapel and the pond is a fountain, the sound of water....
MEANING: The voice of God. Must be powerful - the chapel should reverberate with His song of praise. A unity of all people in one voice.

DESIGN: Bells are above the fountain, the organ pipes are within. The congregation singing with one voice - the whole. A cohesiveness within and without. Another cohesive expression is ....
THE TRINITY

MEANING: Representation of God in three parts: The Father, a crown and staff; The Son, a crucifix; and the Holy Spirit, a dove or flame. Any use of three’s that work together in the chapel.

DESIGN: Three’s in the design: The Font, Chapel, and the Altar: The Earth (Rock), the Light, the Dome (Heaven). The church as all parts making up one unified form and symbol.
The following pages each contain a construct graphic plus written studies of what each mean in terms of Architecture, Symbolism, and Perception (Ψ). Also, each construct is followed with a description of how selected other constructs may relate to it.
LITURGY - THE FOCUS

In the worship service, the interior must focus on the focal point:
- **Symbol**
  - The worship service must direct the attention to the focal point.
- **Architecture**
  - The architecture must be directed toward the focal point.
- **Symbol**
  - All must see that the celebration of God's word is most important.

**Liturgy - The Focus**

- **Symbol**
  - The celebration is for the actions of the Liturgy. All present take part.
- **Architecture**
  - The celebration must be visible to all.
- **Symbol**
  - All must see that the celebration of God's word is most important.

**Liturgy - The Focus**

- **Symbol**
  - This includes the altar, lectern, and pulpit.
- **Architecture**
  - The altar, lectern, and pulpit are aligned properly.
  - **Symbol**
  - The church is centered on the altar, pulpit, and lectern.
- **Architecture**
  - All aspects of the altar are facing the congregation.
  - **Symbol**
  - The altar is the focal point.
  - **Architecture**
  - The congregation is centered on the altar.

**Liturgy - The Focus**

- **Symbol**
  - The church is centered on the altar.
- **Architecture**
  - The church is centered on the altar.
  - **Symbol**
  - The church is centered on the altar.
- **Architecture**
  - The church is centered on the altar.

**Liturgy - The Focus**

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  - **Symbol**
  - The church is centered on the altar.
- **Architecture**
  - The church is centered on the altar.
Sunlight

- Symbol
  + Christ of purification
  + In the early morning
  + Earthly colors
  + Heavenly colors
  + Symbol of Christ

- Architecture
  + Christ's Life
  + Redemption & Death
  + Connection with
  + the Church as the
  + Whole of Christ

- Sunlight
  - Christ as risen (morning)
  - Christ as dead (evening)
  - The image of God entering the Church

- Trinity
  - Play of light when it enters, how it strikes surfaces, what it illuminates

- Text
  - Can help signify things as a special place
  - Even special times of the day

- Library
  - A sense of the point (which is also part of the Library)

- Luminous interior
  - A blending of structure & wall
  - Part of the natural world presenting itself upon the body of the church, Gods image, mythical, etc.

- Cave
  - Play of light creates illusion of being within a cave; filtering down from the earth to illuminate this special moment

- Horizon
  - Focusing of sunlight upon the Library and symbolic positions, beams of light

- Verticality
  - Play with the light are handled in giving impression of a line toward the sky
LUMINOUS INTERIOR

Luminous Interior

- A sense of things beyond the walls of the church.
- An element that can be shared by all, gathered in the presence (God, light).
- Light to be together the space and the people.

Architecture

- East and west windows positioned for the best distribution of sunlight.
- Windows are scheduled for scenic effects in the interior.
- Spaces should be done windows that are still dark in mystery.

Luminous Interior - God's light (giver) shining that
the image passing shining upon all present.

Lighting: The whole - God illuminates all present.
Importance of all people on this occasion.

Sunlight - The idea of light approaching God (and):
When light enters the space in close-Church.
All in nature under God's control - nature
coming into the church.

Interior Case - God lights his house with his image
Light interacting with building to create
a sense of mystery.
DUAL ALTAR

Altar signifies a sacrifice and a holy meal.

Quality of Altar
- Must be preserved as more than just an altar or just a table.
- Very substantial and eventually understood (symbolic)

Symbol
- Represents both a meal of Christ's body and a sacrifice (dying his life)
- A very subtle handling of love, of peace, and decoration of altar
- Arrangement must be correct to work
- Must be in view of entire congregation at all times

Architecture
- Cloth table cloth
- Table meal
- Stone altar base
- Altar sacrifice

Quality of the Altar - Other Constructions which may be able to reinforce this Construction.

Library - The Focus - The altar will be the center of the focus.

Interior Case - Stone appearance supports the idea of the sacrificial altar, while cloth results will suggest table for meal (altar) altar grows out of the floor.
**Enhanced Verticality**

- An inner awareness of the direction of God.
- Without cognition there can be a lifting of the spirit.
- Reception that this space is important.

**Symbol**
- + God as the highest
- + The direction of Heaven.
- + Pointer to a goal.
- + Pathway of the spirit.

**Architecture**
- + Vertical elements are emphasized.
- + Express lightly in a vertical manner.
- + Correct proportions to enhance the vertical.

**Verticality** - The place where God is, means destination. A direction for the reason.

- **Trinity** - May be different regions when ascending the church (visually).
- Upon the Rock - Church (Christ's body) rests upon the Foundation (Earth), and ascends into Heaven.
- Help Mankind - Must make its gesture upward, higher than all around it.
- Interior God - Within must suggest space as upon the outside.
- Otherworld - More important than anything else in life, above all else.
- Sunlight - Can be perceived as coming from above.
Hierarch:

+ The visual presence of something greater
+ Triptych placed on the altar
+ Acceptance of the head of the church
  (the work to be done)

HIERARCHY

Hierarch:

The church above the earth.
The abduction above him people as a symbol of Christ.
The Holy Trinity above the church.
The Trinity: The presence of God’s persons surrounding this congregation. God–Man relationship.
God dwells above and all around.

Pinnacle of the Fount: Within the altar, a preliminary space before the chalice. Signifies the Holy Spirit.

Library: The books – The Apex. God is the highest position within the church. Positioned on the main altar (Most remote position with the congregation).

Sculpture: Where it stands, the pulpit, and within the space, what it means. Here Can Focus upon the Altar (Library) the Fount, etc.

Holy Mountain: Shusha, not for the earth. The highest mountain above all else.

Vertically: The spirit in above the church. A constant reminder of the greatness above.
BUILT UPON THE ROCK

Built upon the Rock

- A symbol of great strength in the foundation of the church.

- One rises into the church, higher than the rest.

- Built for eternity.

- Stairs must lead up into eternity.

- Foundation may extend out beyond the walls of the church.

- Built upon the rocky foundation for Heaven.

- The rock of salvation.

Upon The Rock - One is to ascend into the House of God.

(Peter: The Rock, "upon this rock")

Holy Mountain - You must scale part of the way up the mountain. Vertical movement.

The House of God not upon a solid base.

Verticality - The church built upon the rock and ascending to Heaven.
THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Holy Mountain - Embody wisdom as a special place within the community. A sacred/sacred/celestial structure cannot be destroyed. The presence of God upon the Holy Mountain. Christ's body (the Church).

Flux - 6 peaks may be expressed - each with a different aspect of holiness.

Habitat - God's Ark - Eden flows the earth and rock (nature) through heaven (Christ). Connection with heaven.

Interior Core - Cavern within the mountain sealed by God. Mountain as Christ's body - how people welcome into him.

Verticality - The Mountain as a visual connection with heaven. A way to ascend the soul or the spirit.

Horizontality - Stands out as having importance over its surroundings.
**INTERIOR CAVE**

**INTERIOR CAVE** - 

A chamber located in the mountain, carved out of a large rock and used for religious purposes. It is often used for meditation, prayer, or as a place of retreat.

**Symbol**: 

- **Cross**: Often used to represent the Christian faith, symbolizing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
- **Chalice**: Represents the Eucharist, the central sacrament in the Catholic Church, symbolizing the body and blood of Christ.
- **Knob**: This symbol might represent a particular aspect of the mountain or cave, possibly indicating the beginning or end of a journey.

**Architectural Features**:

- **Nave**: The central part of the cave, where the architectural elements are concentrated.
- **Apsidal Chancel**: A semi-circular or polygonal area at the east end of the cave, often used as a sanctuary.

**Layout**:

- **Main Entrance**: The primary access point to the cave, typically located at the west end.
- **Side Entrances**: Additional access points that might be used for different purposes or ceremonies.

**Function**:

- **Prayer and Meditation**: The cave is used for quiet reflection and prayer, offering a远离世俗宁静的环境.
- **Religious Ceremonies**: It can be the site of various religious ceremonies and rituals.

**Historical Context**:

- **Catholic Tradition**: The cave is often associated with various religious figures, particularly those who have sought solitude and spiritual growth.

**Practical Information**:

- **Access**: Access to the cave might require a specific invitation or permission, especially for religious purposes.
- **Guidelines**: Visitors are usually required to follow specific rules, such as silence, respect for the sacred space, and sometimes dressing appropriately.

**Conclusion**:

The interior cave, a place of spiritual significance, offers a peaceful retreat for contemplation and connection with the divine. Its architectural and symbolic elements serve as reminders of the rich tapestry of religious traditions and practices.
Font

+ Trigger memory
  + This is to be
  + a symbol
  + Will direct present
  + perceptions toward
  + the symbolic
  + attitude of the
  + church

Capital
+ A reminder of the
  + first steps taken
  + toward the existential
  + symbol of initiation
  + into God's community
  + of love.
+ Water is a cleanser
  + of the soul.
+ Use of a chalice.

Architecture
+ People must pass this
  + space entering the
  + church.
+ Location before the
  + sanctuary must be
  + most reinforced.
+ Must be seen as special.

Position of Font - Other Constructs that may possibly reinforce this Construct

Sublight - Will be able to call this out as a special
  + place outside the Chapel.

Library - The Library - Visual connection to the Chapel.
  + Apparent architectural connection suggesting
  + these two spaces are a single unit.

Library - The Library - Part of calling the font out as a
  + special part of the Library.

Interior Cave - Cave object must seem to be
  + a natural formation within the
  + spacious space.

Waters - The meaning behind the font - a serene,
  + cleansing of sins.

Hernshead - Within the Northern - a space that you must
  + pass thru before entering God's home.
  + Signifies Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit
  + (One of the Trinity - The Holy Spirit).

Trinity - Font can call out a level of the Trinity.
  + The Holy Spirit (God's Presence)
Waters - The initiation. Cleanses, Given new Life.
May happen in various places.

The Font - Baptism - most important concept of
the waters. Always a reminder of what
had to be done to enter Nation into
Christ (God) Family (Body)

Holy - The Holy spirit.
Music

Psi
+ Each member of the congregation becomes an important part of the liturgy.
+ The congregation singing with one voice.
+ The organ - its strong rhythmic vibrations can bring on perception of God's power.
+ The carpet...
+ Acoustics must be such that the space can echo with the music, yet spoken words are still intelligible.

Psychology
+ God's word.
+ The congregation singing with one voice.
+ The organ.
+ Acoustics must be such that the space can echo with the music, yet spoken words are still intelligible.

Architecture
+ Acoustics must be such that the space can echo with the music, yet spoken words are still intelligible.
+ The carpet.
+ The organ can be a focal point within the church.

Music

Music - The voice of God. Must be powerful. The church will resonate with this song. Everyone present should hear and feel the voice.

Liberty: The whole. Every voice in heard. An effort of all parts to speak as one.

Interior Case. - God's voice: through the Holy Mountain
when he seduces. All feel his power.
THE TRINITY

The Trinity - Represents God as three parts. Listed to the elements of the church. While 3 is a symbol for all major aspects within church help.

Sunlight - Window, shadow, light patterns can speak of the 3-Form God.

Holy Mountain - The exterior form of the church can suggest 3 beings within one church.

Interior Case - 3 major areas represented, with different characteristics, sound authentication in 5's.

Vertically - Suggestion of 3 layers appearing each representing one form of God.

Hierarchically - The idea of God within the form of the Church - can be touched. Speaks to the relationship between God & Man, between Creator & Creator.

First - Represents the Holy Spirit Water

Water - Represents the Holy Spirit Water/Fire
Pieces - Fragments that make up a whole

* Placed together within a composition in such a way that the individual fragments disappear because to become one composition.

holistic

* The Constructs are finite parts of the church - each has certain individual value - yet each can become enhanced when reinforced with another.

Individual Constructs

Construct Types

CHURCH

Holistic Religious Environment
Construct Groupings:
* Organizational - set up systems of spaces and forms.
* Intangible - dependent upon nature, entering the church.
* Tangible - part of the structure, built into the church.
* Literal - a translation from descriptions in written form.
* Cohesive - exist as unifiers through the entire building.

ORGANIZATIONAL: Liturgy the Focus; The Trinity; Liturgy the Whole; Placement of the Font; Hierarchy.

INTANGIBLE: Sunlight; Waters; Music; Luminous Interior.

TANGIBLE: Enhanced Verticality; Built Upon the Rock; The Holy Mountain; Waters; Interior Cave; Luminous Interior.
LITERAL: The Trinity; Dual Altar; Hierarchy; Luminous Interior; Built Upon the Rock; Enhanced Verticality; Sunlight; Placement of the Font.

COHESIVE: The Holy Mountain; Liturgy the Whole; Sunlight; Music; Interior Cave; Built Upon the Rock; Hierarchy.
The following graphics are psychological phenomena related to perception.
Perception:

Gestalt:

Phi Phenomenon: Light: $\Rightarrow$

Fine lights changes of different tones (steps)
(one at a time) give the appearance of moving for a bit

The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Gradient:

Gestalt Law of Simplicity: What we see is what is the simplest to see.

Perception as successive glances. (Mereotopy glance)

When you read, a certain very small part of that sentence
your field of vision that is in clear focus is about
the size of a full moon.
Symbolic Vision
- The invisible reality
- Truth that transcends human existence
(Architecture presents "Purpose")

Do not perceive (as head)
in one visual experience

Receive and experience as we move through space
Structures have different perceptual levels:

dual or plural

This is a block.
This is a hole.
This is a pile of blocks.
This is a structural pier.
This is a vertical element.
This is an articulated column.

A physical structure can be a musical composition, or a painting, or a building. (or a tree.)

Style:
(From which)

Theme:
(Individual development)

Design (Art)