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Ronchamp and the new Church Architecture

by Hermann Baur

The pilgrimage chapel created entirely by Le Corbusier has given rise to such a plethora of often contradictory opinions that we have been induced at this juncture to make an attempt to examine the problem in relation to the whole modern renaissance of church architecture. The author is not satisfied merely to refute the objections made by two well-known professors, showing, on the one hand, that Prof. Alois Fuchs, who had written a whole monograph attacking Ronchamp, takes up an essentially personal point of view which can be defined as aspiring to a synthesis or to a compromise between tradition and modern style, and that, on the other hand, Prof. Linus Birchler, in his articles which have appeared in Catholic reviews, rejects utterly the idea of a modern church architecture in general. Hermann Baur in fact believes that some of the praise bestowed by the champions of this work of Le Corbusier likewise has contributed to the confusion reigning in this field. There has, for instance, been expressed the view, in this review, that Le C. had finally succeeded for the first time in creating a church which is an authentic church, a proper gathering place for worshippers. This is to misunderstand the effort made along precisely the same lines by all church architecture since the '20's, corresponding, moreover, to the parallel revitalization of ritual and liturgical conceptions within the Church itself. In reality, champions and opponents both have failed to realize fully the special nature of this pilgrimage sanctuary. It has been said of the achievement of Le Corbusier that it is, taken as a whole, admirable and dangerous; but it should be specified that this danger, if it exists, would arise only if others were tempted into slavish imitation of a work which is unique in a two-fold sense, both as architectural design and, functionally, as sanctuary.

The Parish Church of Parsch-Salzburg

by Jorg Lampe

With the exception of the revitalization of the spirit of the French Dominicans and a masterpiece such as that of Le Corbusier at Ronchamp, really worthwhile creations in the domain of church architecture are few and far between. The parish church of Parsch-Salzburg, the creation of the "Work Group 4" comprising the young Viennese architects W. Holzbauer, F. Kurrent and J. Spalt, is a refreshing exception, and it can be regarded as a real architectural event. The problem in this case was to convert into a church the stables of an old farmstead: just as Our Lord was born in a stable, so this church. The church proper (there was constructed a Parish hall above) has three naves, with bilateral lighting from stained glass windows by J. Mikl. First the porch, the steeply pitched roof protecting the clocks, a large skylight and a spotlight aimed at the altar. All the ornamentation kept severely simple. Above the north entrance, a Christ by Wotruba.

The Painter Ferdinand Gehr

by Hermann Baur

F. G. was born in 1896 at Niederglatt (Canton of St. Gall). He was a pupil at the school of arts and trades of St. Gall, then embroidery designer. In 1922, in Florence, he learned fresco painting, then, in Paris, under Lhote, acquired a familiarity with abstract art. His religious paintings begin with the church paintings of St. Georgen, near St. Gall. In this respect, his contribution is fundamental in that, more than any other, this artist endeavoured to arrive at a clear conception of the role of the painter in the church in the modern age. Everything he does represents an attempt to introduce an organic harmony between architecture and painting, with a view to making them really serve the ritual purpose of the church as a whole. See, for example, the Marienkirche at Olten. If the extreme severity of his manner has not always been understood, it nevertheless has never sought merely to shock conventional people, since it proceeds solely from an attitude of logical consistency based on a real grasp of the circumstances of our age.

The Saint Anthony Chapel at Plona (Canton of St. Gall)

1955; architects: E. and W. Heeb, St. Gall

Plona is a tiny mountain village above Rüthi, in the Rhine Valley, and nestled at the end of a lateral valley. Owing to the simplicity of the materials utilized, the St. Anthony Chapel is in complete harmony with the surroundings. The benches are all grouped together without any central aisle, so as to emphasize more effectively the spirit of togetherness. The triangle, symbol of the Holy Trinity, is the dominant element in the design. It was most fortunate that the mural paintings were entrusted to the painter Ferdinand Gehr.

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The Church of Notre-Dame de Compassion at Peseux (Canton of Neuchâtel)

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1953-56; M. Billeter, arch. FAS/SIA, Neuchâtel; in collaboration with Béate Billeter SIA

Church seating 300, with dais for the choir, tower and utility rooms. Everything is done to accent in particular the altar, also the choir, which the skylight and, by night, spotlights flood with light. Acoustics by L. Villard, Lausanne. Crucifix and Paschal Lamb by A. Ramseyer, tabernacle key by the medalist R. Huguenin.

The Stained Glass of the New Church of Baccarat

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For the side-aisles of the church of St-Rémy at Baccarat (1954-57, arch.: Nicolas Kazis), the sculptors François Stahly and Etienne Martin, in collaboration with A. Poncet and J. Delahaye, have created stained glass set as in the Middle Ages in stone tracery, but these stone elements are themselves handled like reliefs, modeled by the light coming through the stained glass. In this way it was sought to observe the modern principle of a synthesis of the arts.

The priestly Vestments of Sister Augustina Flüeler

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by Adolf Reinle

Sister Augustina was born in 1899 and was at first sewing mistress in the convent of St. Clara at Stans. She has, on the advice of Abbot Süess and with the support of the Bishop of Chur, undertaken to create modern priestly garments; this "modernism" moreover is at the same time a deliberate return to the fundamental designs of ritual garments from the earliest times, without making the slightest concession to anything that would be mere superfluous ornamentation.

The Village of La Martella, at Matera (Italy)

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Architects: L. Agati, F. Gorio, P. M. Lugli, L. Quaroni, M. Valori

The city of Matera (30,000 inhabitants) is a most curious urban centre out of the past, composed for the most part of houses excavated in the rocks. The site, in view of modern sanitary requirements, has become untenable. Thanks to American ERP funds and to the Italian "Cassa del Mezzogiorno", it was possible to create a new village for the most needy or the most badly housed, in which the endeavour has been made to take into account the habits and the wishes of the residents concerned. - La Martella (the name of the village) has running water, electricity and telephone.

The Church of La Martella planned to fit in with the simplicity of the surroundings consists of a square bell tower housing the presbytery, and the church proper, also square, with the altar in the centre.

Buildings of the Allschwil Cemetery

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1955-56; architects: W. Wurster FAS and H. U. Hugger FAS, Basle; engineer: H. Hosdorf, Basle

These buildings comprise a funeral chapel, a building of 4 cubicles for the dead on the occasion of burial services and administrative premises. Solid construction.

The Mural Painting of Helene Dahm at Adliswil near Zurich

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by W. Tappolet

The Evangelical-Reformed Church, of which this artist, now approaching her 80th year, is a member, had never applied to her. All the more ought we to praise the resolution of the parish of Adliswil for having entrusted to her the execution of this Pietà, which breathes the spirit of devotion.