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REVIEW

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Pour que tous soient un! L'espace architectural,
lieu d'une expérience croyante (Fons et Culmen 6),
Fribourg 2025

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Reviewed Book

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Review

STEINMETZ, Michel (ed.), *Pour que tous soient un! L'espace architectural, lieu d'une expérience croyante* (Fons et Culmen 6), Fribourg 2025.

LORENZO PENALOSA

The contents of the book, *Pour que tous soient un! L'espace architectural, lieu d'une expérience croyante*, can be traced back to the study days in 2024 organized by the *Institut des sciences liturgiques* in Fribourg, Switzerland, involving various architects, engineers, and liturgists. It is the sixth volume in the *Fons et Culmen* series, and the third in that series edited by Michel Steinmetz, a Roman Catholic priest of the Diocese of Strasbourg in France and professor of Liturgical Studies at the Université de Fribourg.

In the introduction, Steinmetz explains the use of the title, *Pour que tous soient un!* (*That all may be one*), from John 17:21. He writes, "Si ce verset est généralement appliqué au champ œcuménique, il peut l'être tout autant à celui de la liturgie. En effet, celle-ci n'a d'autre but que de nous introduire et établir – un peu plus à chaque célébration –, dans la communion trinitaire [...]" (7).

While the main aim of the work is to highlight communion – with God and with the Church – the book is also intended to address real, practical issues. Steinmetz writes,

En Occident, la question des lieux de culte, et plus spécifiquement des églises, prend de nos jours une acuité nouvelle. La baisse de la pratique religieuse, la diminution des effectifs ecclésiastiques, la sécularisation de la société et les scandales liés à l'Église sont autant de facteurs qui amènent à s'interroger sur l'avenir d'un nombre important de bâtiments jusqu'alors affectés au culte. (8)

Hence, these issues, as well as the challenges of postmodernity, require new paradigms in implementing the principles of the Second Vatican Council, which remains elusive even after over six decades.

Pour que tous soient un! consists of an introduction and conclusion from Steinmetz and 11 chapters written by different authors.

In *Le seuil dans l'espace liturgique, outil de la pédagogie divine* (15–30), Julien Sauvé reflects on the significance of the threshold in liturgical spaces. He focuses on Pope Francis' idea that time is greater than space,¹ as well as the Japanese concept of *kekai* (threshold), which unveils by veiling, reflecting the human desire to see what is beyond the visible and provoking a sense of movement. Sauvé enumerates three types of thresholds in a worship space: exterior (door, windows, smell), interior (columns, steps, grilles), and bodily attitudes (clothing/vestments, silence, Sign of the Cross, and bowing/genuflection). He concludes that God uses a pedagogy of the threshold to move humanity towards salvation.

In *Initier au Mystère de nos églises et par nos église: Essai d'établissement d'une grille, inspirée de l'initiation chrétienne* (31–49), Gilles Drouin uses Christian Initiation as a framework for the Christian life in general. He describes the liturgical space as a metaphor for the Christian journey. To support his claim, he provides 10 reference points: (1) considering the church outside the celebration, (2) keeping the primacy of the liturgical-symbolic instance, (3) thinking of experience as a process, (4) articulating messages and experience in order to pass from mediation to initiation, (5) honoring the kerygmatic dimension of the Christian Mystery, (6) respecting the freedom of visitors, (7) valuing the biblical, memorial, and anamnetic form of Christian memory, (8) recounting stories, (9) rendering the Scriptural body of the Mystery visible, and (10) considering humanity's relationship with the cosmos.

In *L'édifice cultuel comme espace esthétique et émotionnel: La réflexion de Giorgio Bonaccorso* (51–64), Paolo Tomatis highlights the importance of senses and emotions in the worship space. He draws the readers' attention to the role of atmosphere in understanding architecture and "l'adéquation" or suitability of a space, involving its form and function.

¹ Cf. FRANCISCUS, *Adhortatio apostolica Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), in: AAS 105 (2013) 1019–1137, here: 1111 f. (nos. 222–225).

The rest of the chapter reflects on the ideas of Giorgio Bonaccorso, OSB. Tomatis considers the liturgical space from the perspective of the phenomenology of the body as having three levels (proxemic, kinesthetic, and architectural) and three dimensions (synthetic, heterotopic, and initiatic). He concludes that taking into account emotions and feelings can enable us to enter into the globality of the space and discern the sentiments elicited by the liturgy and the actions and gestures involved.

In *Quelques considérations sur la lumière dans l'architecture pour la liturgie* (65–95), Paweł Sambor, OFM, reflects on the significance of light in both the liturgical space and the artistic pieces within it. First, he considers the meaning of perception as the ability to form interpretations mediated by language and culture. Second, he meditates on the symbolic value of light in illuminating material objects, enabling human beings to form interpretations and experience the atmosphere of a place. Third, Sambor explores the usages and interpretations of light in various architectural forms throughout history. Fourth, he evaluates contemporary liturgical architecture in light of the presence of Christ, the ecclesial character of liturgical celebrations, and the eschatological dimension of light.

In *Musique d'église et espace ecclésial* (97–116), Johannes Stückelberger discusses practical aspects regarding liturgical music in relation to church architecture. The first section involves a historical investigation on the placement of the *schola cantorum* and organ in the evolving arrangements of liturgical spaces. The second deals with current challenges in implementing the vision of the Second Vatican Council regarding music in both ancient and contemporary worship sites. Stückelberger closes the chapter by enumerating themes and points that deal with the connection between church music and the ecclesial space.

In *Principes de théologie liturgique et critères d'adaptation des espaces de célébration dans le diocèse de Rome* (117–156), Giuseppe Midili, OCarm, focuses on the important work of renovating liturgical spaces in light of the current theological and practical needs of worship after the Second Vatican Council. He provides case studies centering on the recent renovations of two churches in Rome – one built in 1584 and another dedicated in 1990. The first church is the Santissimo Nome di Gesù all'Argentina (more commonly known as the “Gesù”) whose presbyterium was renovated in 2022. The second is the parish church of San Vigilio, renovat-

ed in 2023. In both cases, Midili provides a rich theological reflection of the renewed space, considering the liturgical focal points, such as the ambo, the altar, and the presider's chair. He closes the chapter by considering the concept of inculturation and recalling the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy's statement that the Church does not wish to impose rigid uniformity, which also applies to architectural style (cf. SC 37 and 123).

In *L'espace liturgique de la chapelle Notre-Dame du Rosaire à Vence* (157–192), Charles Desjobert, OP, provides another case study. He explores the history and liturgical furnishings in the chapel of Notre-Dame du Rosaire in Vence, France, which was intended for a community of Dominican sisters. Desjobert documents the construction of the chapel from its initial planning, highlighting the collaboration between the artist Henri Matisse and the architect frère Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier, OP, between the years 1947 and 1951. Desjobert describes both the interior and exterior of the chapel, with its decisively modern style. He concludes the chapter by enumerating the limitations and noteworthy aspects of the chapel from both practical and theological perspectives.

In *Centres ecclésiastiques œcuméniques en Suisse* (193–225), Stefan Kopp considers certain ecumenical (Catholic and Reformed) centers in Switzerland. He provides the background behind these interconfessional efforts, especially as a response to the Second Vatican Council's promotion of ecumenism. He enumerates various typologies of ecumenical centers and lists several examples. The remainder of the chapter examines the history, arrangement, and current usage of two centers: Langendorf and Steinhausen. Kopp closes his contribution by acknowledging challenges faced by these ecumenical spaces and how much their successes depend on the people in their respective communities.

In *Des architectures plurielles comme réponses aux défis de la post-modernité?* (227–265), Michel Steinmetz opens with a provocative “parable” of Swiss cows watching as a train passes by, symbolizing traditionalists' skepticism of the march of contemporary culture. He explains that, nevertheless, the Church is involved in the state of the world and must engage with postmodernity and its challenges. Steinmetz indicates both points of opposition and of convergence between the Church and postmodernity. He highlights various contributions of the Church in combating individualism and consumer mentality. Steinmetz continues to reflect

on the significance of place (“lieu”) in considering the relationship between individuals and the community. He concludes his chapter by appealing to the need for diverse responses rather than a single paradigm in order to more effectively engage with postmodernity.

In *Plaidoyer pour un retour à la dimension eschatologique du lieu de culte* (267–293), Bert Daelemans, SJ, advocates for a “return” to an eschatological and synodal understanding of liturgical architecture. He examines the church of Saint-François-de-Molitor in Paris in light of five dimensions pointing to the Parousia: cosmological, sacramental, soteriological, synodal, and apophatic. In particular, he highlights the significance of the bright windows and the large cross in the “liturgical east” in this space as clear eschatological signs, serving as a reminder of the Resurrection and the heavenly Jerusalem awaiting believers. Daelemans closes his chapter by indicating examples from other churches that have strong eschatological symbolism.

In “*Le Christ au milieu de nous*”: *Perspectives architecturales pour une assemblée célébrante* (295–314), Jean-Marie Duthilleul reflects on space as the first gift of God. The experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden affirms God’s desire for man not to be alone and God’s desire to dwell with humanity. The Resurrected Christ’s encounter with Mary Magdalene in the garden outside the empty tomb reaffirms God’s commitment to providing space, this time through worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Hence, at the heart of the liturgical space is the mystery of God’s presence. Duthilleul enumerates five characteristics of church buildings as (1) revealers of human fraternity, (2) components of the culture of peoples, (3) a place of peace in the midst of the world, (4) a meeting place of love with God, and (5) a visible expression of the invisible universe. He concludes by considering the church building as a physical manifestation of the assembly gathered in the name of the Lord, the need to transcend the model of pagan temples, and the importance of testifying to the event of Christ’s presence with joy.

In the concluding section, *Ouverture* (315–319), Steinmetz restates what is at stake in the liturgical landscape of our times: In the midst of a globalized and relativistic world, there is often a tendency to be nostalgic for the perceived stability of past liturgical forms. He rejects the return to older – especially Tridentine – arrangements. Instead, he appeals to new

paradigms that both engage with our postmodern context and take into account the importance of the worship space, not simply for the Eucharistic celebration but for other liturgies, sacraments, and devotions. In highlighting the connection between the church building and Pope Francis' desired synodality, Steinmetz hopes that this book may lead to Christ's desire "that all may be one" (John 17:21).

Overall, *Pour que tous soient un!* features an engaging mixture of theoretical and practical issues – between general liturgical principles and real-world applications through case studies. While each chapter can stand on its own, the significance of the order in which they are presented in the book is not easily discernible. The inclusion of photos, especially in the context of the case studies, help make the discussion more concrete and easier to follow.

The variety of the authors' areas of expertise (as architects, engineers, liturgists, and professors) and provenance (Switzerland, France, Italy, Belgium, Austria, Germany, and Poland) make this work a very fascinating read, though the lack of representation from outside of Europe can betray a somewhat West-centric focus, as opposed to a truly "catholic" perspective. Moreover, while there is one representative from the Reformed tradition (Stückelberger), the work is clearly intended for and by Roman Catholics, especially ministers, with nine of the authors being ordained (eight priests and one deacon).

The editor and contributors demonstrate a deep concern for the legacy of the liturgical reforms after the Second Vatican Council and the Church's magisterium. The authors express their admirable desire for true renewal and flourishing of liturgical architecture in the context of a more globalized and fragmented world. While the appeal for new models in order to engage better with postmodernity is understandable and commendable, the rejection of past forms (and judgment of more traditionally-minded believers) can regrettably contribute to further polarization rather than to the building up of communion. The "tous" ("all") in the title, *Pour que tous soient un!*, demands the inclusion of believers from all sides – a truly challenging task. Nevertheless, this collection of essays makes a valiant attempt and offers a useful resource for liturgical scholars and practitioners, as well as enthusiasts of church architecture.