

# Building the Modern Church

Roman Catholic Church Architecture in Britain, 1955 to 1975

Robert Proctor

Studies in Architecture

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# Building the Modern Church

Roman Catholic Church Architecture in Britain,  
1955 to 1975

Robert Proctor  
*Glasgow School of Art, UK*

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*To Mariadele and Nicholas*

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By permission of Peter Langtry-Langton. Source: souvenir booklet accompanying church opening, 1971, Leeds Diocesan Archives

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8.14 Aylesford Priory, Kent, by Adrian Gilbert Scott, 1954–64. Central sculpture of the Virgin Mary by Michael Clark. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

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8.17 'Shrines of Our Lady', from *Catholic Herald* (4 Dec. 1953), 7. Drawn by Tim Madden. Courtesy of the *Catholic Herald*, catholic herald.co.uk

8.18 Pilgrimage of Our Lady of the Taper, Cardigan. Undated photograph, appearing to show installation of new statue in 1956. Photographer unknown. Source: Menevia Diocesan Archives. Courtesy of the Diocese of Menevia and Canon Seamus Cunnane

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9.1 Basil Spence, design for St Martin and St Ninian, Whithorn, 1951. Photograph of model. Source: © Courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Spence, Glover and Ferguson Collection. Licensor, www.rcahms.gov.uk

9.2 St Martin and St Ninian, Whithorn, by H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, 1955–60. Photo: Ambrose Gillick, 2012

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9.7 Sacred Heart, Camberwell, London, by D. Plaskett Marshall, 1959. Connemara marble cladding added to piers later. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

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9.14 Notre Dame de France, London, by Hector O. Corfiato, 1955. Tapestry by Dom Robert, Tabard Workshop, Aubusson, 1955; chapel with fresco by Jean Cocteau of 1960 visible in the centre of the photograph; fresco © ADAGP, Paris, and DACS, London, 2013. By permission of the Rector and Trustees of Notre Dame de France. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

9.15 St Paul, Wood Green, London, by John Rochford, 1965–72. Vestibule

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9.16 St Mary, Leyland. Procession at opening ceremony, 1964. Photo: Tony Hart. Source: parish archive

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10.4 Our Lady of the Assumption, Langley, near Manchester, by W. & J. B. Ellis, 1956–61. Initial design proposal of 1956. Courtesy of Ellis Williams Architects. Source: parish archive

10.5 Our Lady of the Assumption, Langley, near Manchester, by W. & J. B. Ellis, 1956–61. In the final design the church's orientation was rotated by 90°, and its tower moved to the road junction; also visible here are a convent on the left and the presbytery on the right. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2013

10.6 St Michael and All Angels, Woodchurch, Birkenhead, by F. X. Velarde Partnership, 1962–65. Photographer unknown, c.1965. Source: Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection

10.7 St Michael and All Angels, Woodchurch, Birkenhead, by F. X. Velarde Partnership, 1962–65. Sculpture of the Virgin and Child by Norman Dilworth. By permission of Norman Dilworth. Photographer unknown, c.1965. Source: Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection

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10.11 Our Lady of Fatima, Harlow New Town, by Gerard Goalen, 1954–60. Photo: Ray Stebbings, c.1960. Source: reproduced by courtesy of Essex Record Office, Chelmsford

10.12 Our Lady of Fatima, Harlow New Town, by Gerard Goalen, 1954–60. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

10.13 St Catherine of Siena, Horsefair, Birmingham, by Harrison & Cox, 1961–65. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2009

10.14 Cathedral of St Mary, Edinburgh. Sketch proposal for rebuilding the cathedral by T. Harley Haddow & Partners, 1966. Perspective by Alexander Duncan Bell showing view from Leith Walk. Source: Scottish Catholic Archives, Edinburgh

10.15 St Gregory, Alresford, by Melhuish, Wright & Evans, 1968. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

10.16 St Gregory, Alresford, by Melhuish, Wright & Evans, 1968. Interior during Mass, as published in *Architectural Review* (1970). Photo: Peter Baistow, 1970. Source: Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection

10.17 St Bernadette, Bristol, by Kenneth Nealon, Tanner & Partners, 1966–68. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2013

10.18 Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, near Birmingham, by Rush, Granelli &

Partners, 1965–67. Interior viewed from within main entrance: lady chapel in centre; sculpture of the Risen Christ by Elisabeth Frink, left, © Estate of Elisabeth Frink, all rights reserved, DACS, London, 2013. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2009

10.19 Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, near Birmingham, by Rush, Granelli & Partners, 1965–67. Sculpture of Our Lady of the Wayside in wood by Walter Ritchie. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2009

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10.23 St Helen's Parochial Centre, Crosby, by Weightman & Bullen, 1973–74. Interior viewed from social room, arranged for Sunday liturgy. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2008

10.24 St Helen's Parochial Centre, Crosby, by Weightman & Bullen, 1973–74. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2008

10.25 St John Stone, Woodvale, Southport, by Richard O'Mahony & Partners, 1970–71. Interior in use at time of opening. Photo: James Hunter, c.1971. Source: archive of OMF Derek Cox Architects, Liverpool

10.26 Cathedral of St Mary and St Helen, Brentwood, alteration and extension of church of 1861, by Burles, Newton & Partners, 1974. View from sanctuary showing partitions. Photographer unknown. Source: Brentwood Diocesan Archive

10.27 Cathedral of St Mary and St Helen, Brentwood, alteration and extension of church of 1861, by Burles, Newton & Partners, 1974. View towards new entrance with original spire behind. Photographer unknown. Source: Brentwood Diocesan Archive

10.28 Lancaster University Chaplaincy Centre, Lancaster, by Cassidy & Ashton, 1966–69. View of central concourse towards Roman Catholic chapel with screens opened. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2011

10.29 Lancaster University Chaplaincy Centre, Lancaster, by Cassidy & Ashton, 1966–69. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2011

10.30 St George's Chapel, Heathrow Airport, London, by Frederick Gibberd & Partners, 1964–68. View from Anglican apse towards Roman Catholic apse. Photographer unknown, c.1968. Source: Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection

10.31 St Andrew, Cippenham, Slough, by Michael Hattrell, 1968–70. View from social areas towards worship space: font in timber and perspex at opening. Photo: Colin Westwood, c.1970. Source: RIBA Library Photographs Collection

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10.34 All Saints, Pin Green, Stevenage New Town, by Stevenage Development Corporation Architects' Department, 1970–74. Exterior viewed from within neighbourhood centre. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2013

10.35 All Saints, Pin Green, Stevenage New Town, by Stevenage Development Corporation Architects' Department, 1970–74. Design plan for church and community centre, 1970. Source: parish archive

10.36 All Saints, Pin Green, Stevenage New Town, by Stevenage Development Corporation Architects' Department, 1970–74. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2013

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1 St John Fisher, West Heath, Birmingham, by Sandy & Norris, 1963–64. *Dalle de verre* windows by Jonah Jones. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2009

2 Holy Trinity, Dockhead, London, by H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, 1958–60. Photo: Matt Clayton, 2013

3 St Luke, Pinner, London, by F. X. Velarde, 1958. Interior with Crucifixion by David John. By permission of David John. The original sanctuary fittings have been altered. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

4 St Augustine, Manchester, by Desmond Williams, 1965–68. Reredos sculpture, altar, crucifix and candlesticks by Robert Brumby; *dalle de verre* slot windows by Pierre Fourmaintraux of Whitefriars Studios. By permission of Robert Brumby. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2012

5 St Aidan, East Acton, London, by Burles & Newton, 1959–61. Sanctuary artworks: six of the Forty Martyrs in *dalle de verre* by Pierre Fourmaintraux of Whitefriars Studios and painting of the Crucifixion by Graham Sutherland, c.1964. Courtesy of the Estate of Graham Sutherland. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2009

6 St Bernadette, Lancaster, by Tom Mellor, 1958. Reredos painting by John Piper. Courtesy of the Estate of John Piper. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2011

7 Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool, by Frederick Gibberd, 1960–67. Stained glass by John Piper and Patrick Reyntiens. © Patrick Reyntiens, all rights reserved, DACS, London, 2013. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2012

8 St Mary, Leyland, by Weightman & Bullen, 1960–64. Frieze of the Last Judgement in ceramic by Adam Kossowski. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

9 Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul, Clifton, Bristol, by Percy Thomas Partnership, 1965–73. The original doors by William Mitchell have been replaced. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2013

10 Good Shepherd, Nottingham, by Gerard Goalen, 1961–64. Stained glass, 'Tree of the Cross', in *dalle de verre* by Patrick Reyntiens. © Patrick Reyntiens, all rights reserved, DACS, London, 2013. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2009

11 St Paul, Wood Green, London, by John Rochford, 1967–72. Sculpture by Michael Clark; stained glass by Moira Forsyth; resin and fibreglass painting in nave of the Seven Sacraments by Carmel Cauchi, added c.1980. By permission of Joseph Lindsey-Clark and Carmel Cauchi. Photo: Matt Clayton, 2012

12 Our Lady of Fatima, Harlow New Town, by Gerard Goalen, 1954–60. Stained glass by Charles Norris showing the Mysteries of the Rosary (transepts), Tree of Jesse and Our Lady of Fatima (nave). Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

13 Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, Blackpool, by F. X. Velarde, 1955–57. Sculpture by David John. By permission of David John. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2011

14 English Martyrs, Horley, by Justin Alleyne, 1959–62. Stations of the Cross in *dalle de verre* by Pierre Fourmaintraux of Whitefriars Studios. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

15 St Francis of Assisi, Cardiff, F. R. Bates, Son & Price, 1960. Stations of the Cross in sgraffito and ceramic by Adam Kossowski. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

16 Cathedral of St Mary, Edinburgh. Sketch proposal for rebuilding the cathedral by T. Harley Haddow & Partners, 1966. Perspective by Alexander Duncan Bell showing view from within the St James Centre. By permission of Alexander Duncan Bell and Harley Haddow. Source: Scottish Catholic Archives, Edinburgh

## PLANS

All plans are by Ambrose Gillick, 2012–13, and depict the buildings as completed and with liturgical arrangements at the time of opening, as far as can be deduced.

- 1a St Joseph, Wembley, London, by Reynolds & Scott, 1956–58
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- 1d St Luke, Pinner, London, by F. X. Velarde, 1958. By permission of OMF Derek Cox Architects, Liverpool
- 2a St Bride, East Kilbride, by Andy MacMillan and Isi Metzstein of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, 1957–64
- 2b St Paul, Glenrothes, by Andy MacMillan and Isi Metzstein of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, 1956–58
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- 3a St Mary, Leyland, by Weightman & Bullen, 1960–64. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool and Weightman & Bullen Architects
- 3b St Ambrose, Speke, Liverpool, by Weightman & Bullen, 1958–61. Courtesy of the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool and Weightman & Bullen Architects
- 3c St Agnes, Huyton, Liverpool, by Lionel A. G. Prichard & Son, 1959–65
- 4a Our Lady of Fatima, Harlow, by Gerard Goalen, 1954–60
- 4b St Gregory, South Ruislip, London, by Gerard Goalen, 1965–67
- 4c St Michael and All Angels, Woodchurch, Birkenhead, by F. X. Velarde Partnership, 1962–65. Courtesy of OMF Derek Cox Architects, Liverpool
- 4d Holy Redeemer, Pershore, by Hugh Bankart, 1957–59
- 5a Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul, Clifton, Bristol, by Percy Thomas Partnership, 1965–73
- 5b St Margaret, Twickenham, London, by Williams & Winkley, 1964–69. Courtesy of Austin Winkley & Associates, London
- 6a St Thomas More, Sheffield, by John Rochford & Partners, 1964–69
- 6b St Andrew, Cippenham, Slough, by Michael Hattrell, 1968–70
- 6c Lancaster University Chaplaincy Centre, Lancaster, by Cassidy & Ashton, 1966–69. © Cassidy + Ashton, Preston
- 7a St Bride, East Kilbride, by Andy MacMillan and Isi Metzstein of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, 1957–64. Map reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. © Crown Copyright 2013. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey licence number 100013973
- 7b St Michael and All Angels, Woodchurch, Birkenhead, by F. X. Velarde Partnership, 1962–65. Map reproduced

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## Introduction

On the evening of Wednesday 16 September 1959, the Roman Catholic parishioners of St Gregory the Great at South Ruislip in London gathered in their local primary school hall to hear their parish priest, Philip Dayer, describe his plans for the parish. Dayer's speech provides an insight into the thoughts of a priest charged with founding a new parish.<sup>1</sup> He had been appointed the year before by the archbishop of Westminster, William Godfrey, and had converted the garage of the house he acquired into a chapel.<sup>2</sup> Dayer insisted that the primary aim of the fledgling parish was to build a church.

*For thousands of years, the PARISH has been the unit within the Catholic Church by means of which its great mission of applying the fruits of Christ's redemption is brought about. A parish should have its Church – the focal point of worship where the sacrifice of Calvary is renewed day by day. It should have its font which gives birth to new children of God. The parish is a social unit, a family with a Father, it shows itself visibly as an entity. ... Until we have built our own Church we will not have reached our highest goal.<sup>3</sup>*

In this short statement of the vital connection between the church building and the institutional Church lies the central argument of this book.

The church building presents an image of the institutional Church, and, at the same time, when a congregation gathers within it for worship, it also constitutes the reality and local manifestation of that institution. This is not a new interpretation: it was an important idea in the mid-twentieth century when the churches in this book were built.<sup>4</sup> The church building is therefore a physical space which is also the social space of an institution, where that institution takes shape. Dayer's speech to his parishioners in South Ruislip emphasised this conjunction: worship, he said, is the 'focal point' of the parish and takes place in the church; the font, a designed object within the building, 'gives birth' to new members of the parish, reproducing and sustaining the Church; the 'family' of the parish, the 'unit' of the Church, 'shows itself' in the building.

The parish not only shows itself in the building, however, it is also constructed with it. The church is a social space produced by human reason and activity. The purpose of Dayer's speech, after all, was to urge his parishioners to give money and time towards the construction of both the social and physical fabric of this unit of the Church. In this book I accept the premise that '(social) space is a (social) product', constructed by people for the purpose of maintaining a model of social relations; space is not a neutral container, but 'a tool of thought and of action'.<sup>5</sup> As a tool, it is made. Social spaces are produced by many varied agents and influences. The institutional Church is produced in a new context, by different people, and therefore in distinctive forms each time a church building is constructed.

## SOCIAL AND URBAN CONTEXTS

The wider context for the church of St Gregory explains its presence and form. Before Dayer was sent to South Ruislip in 1958, Roman Catholics in the area attended a pre-war church in Eastcote, half an hour's walk away. After the Second World War, a scout hut was adopted as a chapel for South Ruislip, served by a priest from Eastcote.<sup>6</sup> The reason for this new foundation was a significant expansion of the population southwards into formerly rural South Ruislip as new housing developments continued throughout the 1930s and into the 1950s. Most was private suburban development, but there was also a local authority housing scheme. In Ruislip as a whole, the population rose from 16,000 in 1931 to 68,000 in 1951 and continued to grow.<sup>7</sup> The new parish therefore met a pressing need to serve a substantial new population. This was a period of massive population shifts overseen by the state, including vast new suburban housing estates surrounding cities, radical inner-city developments and the planning of entirely new towns. The Church followed and responded to these movements with programmes of new building.

The demand for new churches also resulted from the social context of the Church in Britain. Catholicism in Britain was largely a result of immigration, above all from Ireland, beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing throughout the twentieth. The decade of the 1950s was a period of peak immigration from Ireland and Europe as the post-war welfare state and recovering industries demanded labour.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile earlier generations of Irish immigrants had settled and established themselves in British society. Amongst Roman Catholics the rate of church attendance was extremely high, much higher than in other denominations, and the numbers attending church were increasing, peaking around 1960.<sup>9</sup> Since it was not until the 1970s that a serious decline in religious practice set in, the period leading up to this point, explored in this book, was one of enthusiastic optimism within the Church and apparent fervour amongst a burgeoning faithful.

Like other parishes that built new churches in the 1950s and 1960s, the parish of St Gregory was created because of population flows, themselves produced by cultural, economic and political circumstances, movements at a national scale that were particularly visible in parishes located in new areas of rapidly changing and expanding cities. As city authorities channelled and shaped this population

movement, urban planning became an important factor in the production of the space of the church. The Roman Catholic church building was therefore tied to the development of a modern Britain.

## CHURCH AS INSTITUTION

Following the parishioners' meeting in 1959, the parish priest of St Gregory organised its campaign for a new church. Soon they were ready to build, commissioning architect Gerard Goalen to provide plans and a model in 1965. The Archdiocese of Westminster had to give approval to these plans before they could proceed. The Roman Catholic Church itself was therefore another agent in this production of the space of the church, in two ways: firstly, in its practical organisation and provision of the means for building churches, as a patron; and secondly, in the effects of its changing principles, through an institutional discourse. The Church combined a centralised authority in the Vatican with local levels of power. The Vatican supplied both universal regulations and more general guidance, regulating the forms that churches could take. The hierarchy of bishops served a national area: England and Wales were combined and Scotland had its own bishops' conference; Ireland and Northern Ireland, not covered by this book, were governed by a single separate hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> The parish formed the smallest unit administered by the priest and his assistants, or curates. Both the founding of a parish and the building of a church were initiated by the parish priest and decided by the diocese. At South Ruislip, the Archdiocese of Westminster monitored the progress of the new church of St Gregory. At a meeting in 1965, Goalen arrived to present his plans for the church, and they were referred to the archbishop of Westminster for his personal approval.<sup>11</sup> While the diocese and the bishop authorised the building, members of the parish had to pay for it themselves. This is why Dayer was so keen to rally his flock and encourage their efforts.

One reason that South Ruislip could begin building in 1965 was that it did not have to pay for it all at once. To raise support for the building, Dayer issued a leaflet to his parish with an encouraging preface from Archbishop John C. Heenan explaining in detail how the building would be funded and proposing that every family commit to a weekly offering.<sup>12</sup> Around half the estimated cost of £55,000 was to be met with a loan. Like many parishes and dioceses at this time, South Ruislip benefited from the general prosperity of this period, when credit was relatively easy to obtain. From the end of the Second World War until the mid-1950s, it had been difficult to build new churches because all building was strictly rationed by the government: building licences ensured that scarce materials and labour were reserved for the highest priority buildings, while churches were low on the scale, classed with 'sports and entertainments'.<sup>13</sup> Restrictions finally eased in the mid-1950s, and Catholics grasped the opportunity, with hundreds – probably well over a thousand – new church buildings undertaken in the period considered here: one clergyman estimated that in the 1960s in England and Wales alone, 600 new Catholic churches had been built.<sup>14</sup> By the late 1960s and early 1970s, new building slowed and existing projects stalled as interest rates rose. Credit was squeezed in

the late 1960s, and one of the worst financial crises of the twentieth century ensued as the 1970s began. The later part of the period was inevitably marked by a lull in church building. The period of two decades until that time witnessed a boom in the construction of new churches, stimulated by loans and absorbing substantial capital from across the Church.

The Roman Catholic Church influenced the form of its church buildings through its written teachings and the wide-ranging discourse of commentary that surrounded them. New ideas in theology were so rapidly disseminated that within a few years they could have an impact on the experiences of a churchgoer in a London suburb. One of the most important reasons for examining the period ten years either side of 1965 is that this year marked the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The council consisted of a series of gatherings in Rome, beginning in 1962, at which all the bishops of the world revised and approved documents that had been prepared by committees of theologians. These documents summarised the doctrine of the Church in a way that was meant to be relevant to the modern world, responding to new theological ideas and liturgical practices that had developed in the century or so before. Many of the council's statements in such important areas as the liturgical rites and the nature of the Church marked an acceptance of new theological tendencies and had striking implications for how the Church's members should conduct themselves and understand their role. The ideas behind the documents of Vatican II were not new, and their impact had already been felt. Yet the effects of the council were swift and highly visible, above all as a radical reform of liturgy took place in the years immediately after it, transforming the daily practices of the faithful.

This reform principally concerned the Mass. The Church wanted to encourage the 'active participation' of the congregation in liturgy, as the Mass was increasingly interpreted as the communal worship of the Church rather than a ritual performed mainly by a priest. Before about 1960, the Mass was said throughout the Roman Catholic Church in the West predominantly in Latin, the congregation's role largely one of devout attention from the pews. The priest stood at the altar facing away from the people towards the back of the sanctuary, even for the readings, and had to say parts of the Mass inaudibly. The Mass as it was said in Britain in the 1950s had remained little changed since the Council of Trent, which had set down a version of the liturgy for near-uniform use across the Church in 1570. Slowly, however, the 'dialogue Mass' was introduced to Britain from Europe, involving congregational responses. In the new liturgy, developed in stages from the mid-1960s until 1970, the Mass was increasingly said in the local language and entirely so in its final phase. Then the priest would stand behind the altar facing the people; the congregation would join in with responses and singing, some giving readings from the sanctuary and forming an offertory procession; and the rites were radically simplified in texts and gestures. This shift in the forms of worship changed what the Church required from its buildings. The shape of the church and its congregation had to relate to the conception of the liturgy as a communal action; increased movement of both congregation and celebrants required new spatial forms; the sanctuary had to be designed afresh. Other rites were also reformed with further implications for the design of the church, most notably baptism.



In South Ruislip, Dayer and Goalen established their plans for the sanctuary layout in 1965 in direct response to the liturgical reforms emanating from the Vatican. The simple table-like stone altar was placed well forward in the oval sanctuary so that the priest could stand behind it to say Mass facing the people, and the tabernacle was placed in a broad niche on the wall behind it, an arrangement that served the new forms and conceptions of the liturgy just then enshrined at the council (Figure 1.1). Cardinal Heenan approved the plans himself shortly before setting out for Rome to attend the final session of the council.<sup>15</sup> The Church's reforms of liturgy and its approval of new theology thus had immediate effects on church architecture even in this suburban parish.

1.1 St Gregory, South Ruislip, London, by Gerard Goalen, 1965–67. View of nave looking towards sanctuary: sanctuary stained glass by Patrick Reyntiens, © Patrick Reyntiens, all rights reserved, DACS, London, 2013; clerestory stained glass by Charles Norris, added c.1987. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

## CHURCH AND ARCHITECT

Roman Catholic church buildings were also produced by their architects, and most were also members of the Church. At the time of his design for the church at South Ruislip, the architect Gerard Goalen gave his own talk to the parishioners. He began with a discussion of the Second Vatican Council, its 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy' of 1963, and the liturgical movement, the combined theological and architectural developments that led to the council's reforms. Goalen explained this movement's notion of the liturgy as a corporate action, a form of worship undertaken by all the people present, not just the priest. He went on to explain how this idea had motivated his oval plan for the church of St Gregory,

a free-standing altar opposite the entrance surrounded by arcs of seating (Plan 4b). The seating, curving around three sides of the altar and sloping gently towards it, and the absence of any heavy barrier between sanctuary and congregation would help to ensure that the faithful had a good view of the liturgy and could be closely involved in it.<sup>16</sup>

Goalen was designing not as a liturgist, however, but primarily as a modern architect. He explained that two principles of modern architecture had informed his work: the design of spaces according to function and the 'honest employment of modern methods of building'.<sup>17</sup> The church would be constructed with a reinforced concrete frame and brick walls, all exposed to view. More importantly, the novelty of its plan was a result of thinking from first principles, ignoring centuries of precedents for church architecture. 'The church I have been privileged to design for this parish', he said, 'may not look like a conventional solution to the church-building problem. It is the product of a reconsideration of the purposes of *your* parish church and a reconsideration of the ways in which a building can provide for those purposes'.<sup>18</sup> As the architect, proposing his own 'reconsideration' of the church, Goalen was perhaps the most obvious agent in the production of this space. The contributions of artists in stained glass, sculpture and other media, usually under the direction of architects, were also significant in producing the space of the church.

Another reason for choosing to look at the post-war period from 1955 to 1975 is therefore to examine how modern architecture affected church design. By 1955 modern architecture had become generally accepted in Britain, partly as a result of the constraints of limited materials and urgent building needs after the war.<sup>19</sup> The establishment of modernism in church architecture, however, was slower. Though perhaps first marked with Basil Spence's competition winning design for the Anglican Coventry Cathedral in 1951, it only seems to have reached a mainstream of practice in the Roman Catholic Church in Britain around the time that Frederick Gibberd won the competition for Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral the following decade in 1960. Before this date, Catholic church architecture in Britain was predominantly eclectic, using historical styles including Gothic and Romanesque or an uncontroversial modern style more typical of the 1930s. In the 1960s, the majority of church designs attempted a deliberate expression of new building materials, and, as at South Ruislip, often questioned the conventions of the building type. Post-war modernism in architecture, however, was very diverse.

St Gregory, opened in 1967, demonstrates the interests of its architect, Gerard Goalen, interests that existed in symbiosis with those of the Church. The visible roof structure of deep concrete beams followed Arne Jacobsen's dining hall at St Catherine's College, Oxford, a building that had a great influence on British architects in its severely geometric and rational use of reinforced concrete. The importance to Jacobsen of designing every element of the building and its furnishing and of commissioning original artworks in sympathy with it are also features of Goalen's church, with its custom-made benches with fine concrete supports and its expressive modern statues in bronze by Willi Soukop, a well-established artist. Such a cohesive approach to design had long been an important principle of modern architecture in Britain.

Goalen's internal ring of delicate reinforced concrete columns, their surfaces revealing the traces of their wooden shuttering, were likely to have been inspired by the early twentieth-century French architect, Auguste Perret, whose best-known building was a church with similarly made concrete columns, Notre Dame du Raincy near Paris of 1922. This church was well known by the 1960s because it had been included in histories of modern architecture as a pioneer of the expressive use of reinforced concrete, and had been praised in publications on modern church architecture as one amongst a canon of exemplary buildings.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile the use of exposed hook-shaped bricks on the interior walls at St Gregory, which give a rich expressive texture as well as acoustic dispersion, the brick and quarry tile paving and the exposed concrete structure further link Goalen to the younger generation of British architects who had come into practice in the mid-1950s, those such as Colin St John Wilson, James Stirling and James Gowan who had drawn on Le Corbusier's post-war architecture to create a style of rough, untreated materials broadly known as brutalism. Brutalism, however, began with prolific theoretical writing by architects such as Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson in the 1950s, demanding a strict approach to the design of a building according to its 'programme' and careful thought for the social implications of architectural forms and, in that sense, had a close similarity of purpose to the liturgical movement, an important connection I will examine shortly. This post-war modernist approach had become typical in architecture by the 1960s, and, as Goalen explained in his talk, led to his oval plan.

The church of St Gregory, like all the others studied in this book, can therefore be positioned in its period in terms of the contemporary context of architectural discourse and design practice. Crucially, it is the way architectural decisions related to the aims of the Church in its local contexts that is important here. The selection of a modern architect for St Gregory suggests that this parish was anxious to address the modern world and show its contemporary relevance. The parish evidently wanted a building that would confer upon it a high cultural status, since it chose an architect who had previously built Catholic churches that had been well received by the architectural profession.<sup>21</sup> The parishioners also demonstrated an interest in modern art. Goalen commissioned Steven Sykes to make a bold sculptural lintel in bronze over the entrance (Figure 1.2). Sykes was best known by then for his design in 1959 of the Gethsemane Chapel at Coventry Cathedral.<sup>22</sup> Patrick Reyntiens, who made the stained glass at St Gregory, and Ralph Beyer, who carved inscriptions there, had both also worked at Coventry (Figure 1.3). Their commissioning at South Ruislip therefore suggests a desire for an avant-garde image, and yet also for an uncontroversial acceptance within the modern British cultural mainstream. Positioned on the side of a main road through Ruislip, the church and its sculpture were prominent in the neighbourhood in an overt declaration of a Catholic culture that accepted modernity. Goalen's oval plan not only demonstrates his own acceptance of liturgical reform, but also the allegiance of the parish to new liturgical thinking. The building, as Dayer himself said, is an expressive statement about this particular parish and its ideas about the Church.



1.2 St Gregory, South Ruislip, London, by Gerard Goalen, 1965–67. View from street: lintel sculpture by Steven Sykes. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

These three primary agents in the production of the Roman Catholic church – the architect as designer, the Church as institutional framework and discursive field, and the city as social and spatial influence – can be distinguished in the creation of modern church architecture. Church architects were generally members of the Church, acting as expert laymen. They were also often involved in city planning and participated in a discourse of modern architecture in which urbanism was a central aspect. Each field underwent vital transformations in the two decades between 1955 and 1975, with important consequences for church architecture. Roman Catholic church-building in Britain, in the radical shifts in forms which it underwent during the period from 1955 to 1975, was a socially constructed artefact, its architecture making manifest the diverse and changing conceptions of the institutional Church held by its members. The architecture of the church, considered in its broadest sense, was produced only in part by architects; it was also the product of negotiation between architects, their patrons and their wider context.

## WRITING A HISTORY OF CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

One of the most difficult tasks in writing this book has been to select from the profusion of churches built at this time a smaller number for detailed study. My selections of case studies have been based on several criteria. Firstly, this book is chiefly focused on the parish church, and so monastic, convent, school and seminary buildings have been only rarely included in favour of this primary subject area.



1.3 St Gregory, South Ruislip, London, by Gerard Goalen, 1965–67. View into baptistery: statue of St Gregory by Willi Soukop; font lettering by Ralph Beyer; stained glass by Patrick Reyntiens, © Patrick Reyntiens, all rights reserved, DACS, London, 2013. Photo: Robert Proctor, 2010

Secondly, I have chosen buildings which seemed architecturally good or those that have been generally agreed to be of high quality and interest (especially during the period in question and also through more recent heritage designation). While 'quality' is an arbitrary value, and I have not sought to be specific about it, it tends to encompass buildings of comparatively large scale, high expense and architectural innovation. The danger of selecting in this way is that it can skew analysis towards exceptional buildings and validate a narrative of progress by over-emphasising the avant-garde. Therefore I have also aimed to choose typical buildings of different types, representative buildings of different architectural firms, and examples of liturgically interesting buildings regardless of apparent architectural quality; moreover, I have focused on buildings that still exist without substantial alteration, those for which there is archival material available for research and those in urban areas. Throughout, my selection has of course been motivated by what I have wanted to examine: the move from eclectic to modern architecture and from pre- to post-conciliar conceptions of liturgy and the Church; the parish church in a changing urban and social context; and special forms of church, notably the pilgrimage shrine. Inevitably, therefore, many buildings, and many that would be considered by some readers as important, are absent from this book and must be left for others to study.

Roman Catholic church architecture of the post-war period in Britain has barely yet been written about.<sup>23</sup> The book by Bryan Little, *Catholic Churches Since 1623*, remains the standard work on Roman Catholic churches built since the Reformation, ending at its point of publication in 1966 with the anticipation of some significant future buildings.<sup>24</sup> This and the few other published studies of the subject tend to be descriptive rather than interpretive, concerned with documenting architectural features, at their best selecting and arranging buildings typologically; some accounts are biographical; but few give any substantial analysis of their architectural, religious and social conditions.<sup>25</sup> There is little yet written even on twentieth-century British church architecture in general: Elaine Harwood's article of 1998 remains definitive.<sup>26</sup> There are, however, significant recent studies of the social history of the Church, most notably by Michael Hornsby-Smith, on which I have drawn.<sup>27</sup> The most serious exception to the piecemeal approach to modern Catholic church architecture in Britain is an unpublished PhD dissertation by Paul Walker, completed in 1985 at the University of Sheffield and discovered towards the end of research on this book.<sup>28</sup> Walker's thesis differs substantially in its approach to mine: writing close to the time of the buildings he was studying and as one involved in the post-war movement towards a modern church architecture, he was less inclined to view the subject as a historian, instead taking a theoretical and theological approach. Yet many of his sources coincide with mine, and some of his original research has been incorporated here.

This book makes some use of theory, although it is deliberately kept light in touch to avoid overpowering its subject matter. Theory is used more as a framework for selecting and juxtaposing particular sources, for reading them in certain ways and for an analysis of architecture. Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* informs the overall organisation and theme of the book, considering the church space as

actively produced rather than divinely given, naturally arising, developed through tradition or conjured by architectural genius.<sup>29</sup> Sources such as anthropology, sociology, geography and theology have seemed necessary to understand certain subjects. This remains, however, a work of architectural history, and I take no particular stance on theological or philosophical questions which others are better suited to answer.

One characteristic of much that has so far been written on modern church architecture is a polemical stance in a debate over modernism and tradition that has raised passionate opinions.<sup>30</sup> The purpose of this book is not polemic, even though it works by deploying arguments. I would not claim an impossible objectivity, but I have nevertheless attempted a few steps of academic detachment: I have sympathy for all the subjects of this book – the conservative and traditional as much as the modern and experimental.

## NOTES

- 1 Philip Dayer, 'General Parish Meeting, Deanesfield School Hall' (16 Sept. 1959) (parish archive, St Gregory, South Ruislip, London).
- 2 Ibid.; see also Peter Dayer, 'Philip Richard Dayer, 1912–2005: A Tribute by his Brother' (2005), St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip, <http://stgregory.all-catholic.net/philipdayer.html> (accessed 29 June 2011).
- 3 Dayer, 'General Parish Meeting'.
- 4 See Yves M. J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), 325, 435.
- 5 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 26.
- 6 Diane K. Bolton et al., *A History of the County of Middlesex*, vol. 4: *Harmondsworth, Hayes, Norwood with Southall, Hillingdon with Uxbridge, Ickenham, Northolt, Perivale, Ruislip, Edgware, Harrow with Pinner*, ed. T. F. T. Baker, J. S. Cockburn and R. B. Pugh, Victoria County History (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 144–5, British History Online, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22447#n2> (accessed 29 June 2011).
- 7 Ibid. 127–34.
- 8 See for example John Archer Jackson, *The Irish in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 9–19, 85–105; Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, 'A Transformed Church', in Michael P. Hornsby-Smith (ed.), *Catholics in England, 1950–2000: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (London: Cassell, 1999), 3–25 (8–9).
- 9 Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 25–6, 183.
- 10 Irish church architecture of this period, in contrast to that of Britain, has been quite well studied already (including Northern Ireland). See Richard Hurley and Wilfrid Cantwell, *Contemporary Irish Church Architecture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985); Richard Hurley, *Irish Church Architecture in the Era of Vatican II* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001); Ellen Rowley, 'Transitional Modernism: The Case of 1950s Church Architecture in Dublin', in Edwina Keown and Carol Taffe (eds), *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 195–216; Paul Larmour and Shane O'Toole (eds),

*North by Northwest: The Life and Work of Liam McCormick* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2008).

- 11 Minutes of meeting of the Council of Administration, Archdiocese of Westminster (26 May; 16 June 1965) (Westminster Diocesan Archives, London [WDA], He1/C23(a)).
- 12 Philip Dayer, 'A Personal Message to Every Catholic in the Parish of St Gregory, South Ruislip' (1965) (parish archive).
- 13 A. E. Holder, 'Extract from the White Paper on Capital Investment in 1948. Ministry of Works Civil Licence' and commentary; Ministry of Works (H. W. Clark) to A. E. Holder (15 Dec. 1947); Church of Scotland Building Licences Advisory Committee, Edinburgh (R. F. R., secretary) to James R. Lyons (solicitor) (5 Dec. 1947) (Glasgow Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Archives, Glasgow [GRCAA], PP/40/6).
- 14 Joseph Gray (auxiliary bishop of Liverpool), 'Modern Church Building', *Catholic Building Review*, northern edn [CBRN] (1970), 273–6.
- 15 Minutes of meeting of the Council of Administration, Archdiocese of Westminster (26 May 1965) (WDA, He1/C23(a)).
- 16 [Gerard Goalen], 'St Gregory the Great, South Ruislip' (n.d.) (parish archive). The design can be dated by its entry in the *Catholic Building Review*, southern edn [CBRS] (1965), 44–5; minutes of meeting of the Council of Administration, Archdiocese of Westminster (26 May 1965) (WDA, He1/C23(a)).
- 17 [Goalen], 'St Gregory'.
- 18 Ibid. On Goalen's work, see Cordula Zeidler, 'Die Einheit des Raumes: Kirchenbauten des britischen Architekten Gerard Goalen', *Kunst und Kirche* 3 (2003), 136–8.
- 19 Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), xi.
- 20 For example Peter Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture: A Study of Auguste Perret and His Precursors* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959); Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 424–6; Albert Christ-Janer and Mary Mix Foley, *Modern Church Architecture: A Guide to the Form and Spirit of 20th Century Religious Buildings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 5–6; Robert Maguire and Keith Murray, *Modern Churches of the World* (London: Studio Vista, 1965), 15–16.
- 21 A copy of an architectural journal with an article on a previous church by Goalen, the Good Shepherd, Nottingham, is in the parish archive, suggesting that the magazine was consulted as part of the decision over commissioning an architect ('Church, Nottingham', *Architect and Building News* [23 Sept. 1964]: 583–9; see also 'Church of St Gregory the Great', *Building* [Mar. 1968]: 95–8; 'Some New Ecclesiastical Structures', *Concrete and Constructional Engineering* [Jan. 1964]: 38–9).
- 22 Tanya Harrod, 'Obituary: Steven Sykes', *The Independent* (24 Feb. 1999), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-steven-sykes-1072852.html> (accessed 11 July 2011).
- 23 In contrast to modern churches more widely: see for example n. 11 above for Ireland; Hugo Schnell, *Twentieth Century Church Architecture in Germany* (Munich: Schnell & Steiner, 1974); Suzanne Robin, *Églises modernes: Évolution des édifices religieux en France* (Paris: Hermann, 1980); G. E. Kidder Smith, *The New Churches of Europe* (London: Architectural Press, 1964); Christ-Janer and Foley, *Modern Church Architecture*; Wolfgang Jean Stock, *European Church Architecture, 1950–2000* (Munich: Prestel, 2002); Andrea Longhi and Carlo Tosco, *Architettura, chiesa e società in Italia (1948–1978)* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 2010);

Jay M. Price, *Temples for a Modern God: Religious Architecture in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

- 24 Bryan Little, *Catholic Churches Since 1623: A Study of Roman Catholic Churches in England and Wales from Penal Times to the Present Decade* (London: Hale, 1966).
- 25 For example Denis Evinson, *Catholic Churches of London* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Christopher Martin and Alex Ramsay, *A Glimpse of Heaven: Catholic Churches of England and Wales* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2009); Paul D. Walker, 'Liturgy and Architecture: Catholic Church Building in the Twentieth Century', *Ecclesiology Today* 38 (2007), 43–51; Alan Powers, *Francis Pollen: Architect, 1926–1987* (Oxford: Robert Dugdale, 1999); id. (ed.), *H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, 1887–1959* (London: Architectural Association, 1987); Gavin Stamp, 'A Catholic Church in Which Everything is Genuine and Good': The Roman Catholic Parish Churches of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott', *Ecclesiology Today* 38 (2007), 63–80; Fiona Ward, 'Merseyside Churches in a Modern Idiom: Francis Xavier Velarde and Bernard Miller', *Twentieth Century Architecture 3: The Twentieth Century Church* (1998), 95–102; Robert Proctor, 'Churches for a Changing Liturgy: Gillespie, Kidd & Coia and the Second Vatican Council', *Architectural History* 48 (2005), 291–322; Diane Watters, *Cardross Seminary: Gillespie, Kidd & Coia and the Architecture of Postwar Catholicism* (Edinburgh: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1997); id., 'Post-War Church Patronage in the West of Scotland: The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History* 3 (1998), 44–51; Johnny Rodger (ed.), *Gillespie, Kidd & Coia: Architecture, 1956–1987* (Glasgow: Lighthouse, 2007).
- 26 Elaine Harwood, 'Liturgy and Architecture: The Development of the Centralised Eucharistic Space', *Twentieth Century Architecture 3: The Twentieth Century Church* (1998), 51–74; see also Peter Pace, *The Architecture of George G. Pace, 1915–75* (London: Batsford, 1990).
- 27 Hornsby-Smith (ed.), *Catholics in England*; id., *The Changing Parish: A Study of Parishes, Priests and Parishioners after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 1989); id., *Roman Catholics in England: Studies in Social Structure Since the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 28 Paul D. Walker, 'Developments in Catholic Churchbuilding in the British Isles, 1945–1980' (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1985).
- 29 Similarly, my thinking has been informed by Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1981); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); id., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984); Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002).
- 30 Recent books arguing against modern church architecture include Michael Rose, *Ugly as Sin: Why They Changed our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces, and How We Can Change them Back Again* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001); Moyra Doorly, *No Place for God: The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); and, with greater subtlety, Stephen J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council Through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

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## Tradition

By 1955, modern architecture had reached such widespread acceptance that it had become the prevailing mode of design for many building types, from housing and schools to offices. There were also several notable modernist church buildings: on the Lansbury Estate at Poplar in east London, Trinity Congregational church by Cecil Handisyde and D. Rogers Stark had been completed as a showpiece of the Festival of Britain's architecture programme in 1951 (Figure 2.1), and that year Basil Spence won the competition for Coventry Cathedral, arousing enormous public interest in modern architecture. Roman Catholics in Britain would eventually also accede to this movement; yet at first, their predominant reactions were compromise or stoic resistance in defence of a perceived tradition of church architecture.

A short walk from the strikingly modern concrete Congregational church, at the heart of the experimental housing estate of Lansbury, planned by Frederick Gibberd, stands the huge brick bulk of the Catholic church of Sts Mary and Joseph, Poplar, designed by Adrian Gilbert Scott (Figure 2.2). This church's foundations were just being laid while visitors to the Festival of Britain toured the estate in 1951, and the church was eventually completed in 1954. Its exterior is a strange mixture of parabolic arches in squat brick walls with patterned parapets and a copper-roofed central tower. It was seen – and intended – as a rejection of the modernity of its surroundings in favour of an expression of a lasting Catholic tradition. Architectural critic Ian Nairn derided its 'sprawling, lumpish mass' and dominating scale, its aggressively but superficially 'traditional' approach insensitive to real historical precedent, and its antagonism towards its surroundings.<sup>1</sup> While Scott claimed that he had designed the church to complement the neighbouring houses, also of brick, he deliberately eschewed Lansbury's progressive modernism for an architecture that declared a conception of the parish church as a bastion of enduring values in a transient world. Scott had 'intended', he stated, 'to follow the Catholic tradition of ecclesiastical architecture.'<sup>2</sup> Architects, he later wrote, had to respect 'the general demand that our churches should look like churches'; the Congregational church, 'locally known as the laundry', showed that modernism was unsuitable for sacred use.<sup>3</sup> Many Catholic architects and clergy agreed.

2.1 Trinity Congregational church, Lansbury Estate, London, by Cecil Handisyde and D. Rogers Stark, 1949–51. Photo: John Pantlin. Source: Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection



Following the controversy over this building, the archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal William Godfrey, wrote several pieces for the *Catholic Building Review* addressed to architects and clergy promoting tradition in church architecture in balance with the needs of modern times, advising against an excessive modernism:

*There is a happy mean. Our aim ought to be to preserve all that is precious in traditional art while keeping in mind the needs of the age in which we live. ... It would seem that some of the buildings today have departed too much from the traditional style of architecture.*<sup>4</sup>

Churches, he insisted, had to maintain an 'ecclesiastical character':

*One would not like to see the spire, campanile, belfry or tower disappear from the landscape. For centuries these have told us of the sacred character of our buildings and have led us to the house of God. A church should be recognisable as a church by the wayfarer, even from afar.*<sup>5</sup>

As the tide began to turn towards modernism even amongst his own clergy and architects in 1960, he maintained his position:



*It is said that we must build for our own time. True: but our own time can accept a lack of decorum which is not according to the mind of the Church. The old should not be set aside simply because it is old. The heritage of sacred art bequeathed by our forbears is precious. The barn-like church has nothing sacred or symbolic to commend it. It does not lift the mind to God.<sup>6</sup>*

2.2 Sts Mary and Joseph, Poplar, London, by Adrian Gilbert Scott, 1951–54. Photo: Stewart Bale Ltd, 1956. Source: parish archive

In arguing for a tradition-minded church architecture, Godfrey articulated the official position of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Vatican repeatedly reinforced the importance of 'tradition' in sacred art and architecture. Canon law stated that bishops 'are to take care that in the building or repair of churches the forms received from Christian tradition are preserved.'<sup>7</sup> Joseph O'Connell, a parish priest and writer on canon law and liturgy, summarised the Church's position in a widely distributed and popular book, *Church Building and Furnishing: The Church's Way* of 1955. The Church, he said, did permit modern art and architecture, but only when tempered by tradition and remaining recognisably sacred. O'Connell cited the Council of Trent: 'that nothing disordered may meet the eye, nothing distorted and confused in execution, nothing profane and unbecoming, since sanctity befits the house of God.'<sup>8</sup> Pius XII's encyclical letter of 1947, *Mediator Dei*, advised that 'these modern arts,