

SACRED ARCHITECTURE IN EAST AND WEST



EDITED
BY CYRIL
HOVORUN

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Inga Leonova

THE QUEST
FOR AMERICAN
ORTHODOX
ARCHITECTURE:
MODERNISM
MEETS TRADITION



The history of church architecture in America reflects in wood, brick, stone, and concrete the turbulent history of the establishment and development of Orthodoxy in America. The first missionaries in Alaska began by resorting to the tradition of house worship of the early years of Christianity, establishing chapels in houses of the Russian American Company and later, as the mission expanded, in homes of the converted native Alaskans. Their first church buildings reflected the architecture of the northern Russian wooden churches. As the mission moved its headquarters into the mainland, first to California and then to the East Coast, it carried with it the same tendency to construct its houses of worship in the image and likeness of churches of its homeland.

However, with the influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Western Russia in the first decades of the twentieth century, the establishment of the new parishes far outpaced the ability of the immigrant groups to finance construction of the new churches. Everywhere in the United States Orthodox parishes had to rely on the hospitality of neighboring Christian communities. Borrowing space for worship in the Episcopal, Congregational and other churches often led to purchasing these buildings, followed by modifications to accommodate Orthodox liturgy and to make them look more “Orthodox.” More often than not exterior changes were limited to the addition—usually highly incongruously—of onion domes. Most of the work done in the interior spaces, where iconostases, *panikadi-la*, and other Orthodox interior decorations and appointments were added, created a curious transition from a customary Protestant exterior to a fairly typical Orthodox interior. Around that time, however, a decidedly non-Orthodox element of interior space established itself in many Orthodox churches: pews, which were generally the legacy of the “previous owners.” In the early years of such conversions, pews were removed so as to imitate the open and more functional liturgical space of the home parishes. But as the immigrants became more assimilated into the American mainstream, pews began to become a familiar fixture of American Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox appropriation of those “foreign” buildings usually reflected the prevailing taste of one or another ethnic group, which is why

the ethnic pedigree of the Orthodox immigrant communities can be easily traced by the Byzantine, Carpatho-Russian, Ukrainian, Northern Russian, or Vladimir shapes of the domes on their churches.

For the multitudes of Russian, Greek and Eastern European exiles displaced by the upheavals of the early 20th century Europe, there was little felt need to establish an American Orthodox architectural identity. Their desire was for romanticized traditional church architecture, especially in light of proliferation of cheaply constructed edifices which utilized typical one-size-fits-all church blueprints prepared by American architects with minimal Orthodox “customization.”

It is true that most of the Orthodox churches, pan-jurisdictionally, tend to be designed as variations on the ethnic schemes of the distant “mother shores,” the more attractive of them being the near-exact replicas of some monument of the ancient past, such as St. Nicholas Cathedral in Washington, DC. And yet, even in the absence of any school or movement, there have been attempts, not always successful, but always interesting, to consider the interplay between traditional form, liturgical function, and contemporary architectural vocabulary.

It is worth noting that those attempts have been few and far between. Some have been controversial, some unsatisfactory for the purpose, but the various efforts of reimagining the traditional liturgical space in the context of a different epoch and different land, utilizing the new materials and technologies, are worthy of note and study. As Louis Kahn famously remarked,

“No architect can rebuild a cathedral of another epoch embodying the desires, the aspirations, the love and hate of the people whose heritage it became. Therefore the images we have before us of monumental structures of the past cannot live again with the same intensity and meaning. Their faithful duplication is unreconcilable.”¹

The architects who heeded this call have failed to establish movements or schools, but their contribution is nevertheless significant, and it gives hope for further development of an American Orthodox Church architectural idiom.

1 Louis Kahn, “Monumentality,” in Louis Kahn, *Essential Texts* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), 22.

LOUIS SULLIVAN: HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

By the end of the 19th century the Russian Metropolia in America has grown enough to require significant investment in church buildings for its numerous parishes. Holy Trinity Cathedral in Chicago is probably the earliest example of the work of a modernist American architect undertaking the design of an Orthodox church. Louis Sullivan, one of the greatest and most influential American architects who coined the motto “Form ever follows function” that became the battle cry of the next generations of modernist architects, believed that architecture had an important social function assisting in the development of a democratic society. He is known as both “the father of modernism” and “the father of skyscraper”, both titles well earned. Philosophically, Sullivan opposed the highly eclectic architectural aesthetics of the Beaux-Arts style and argued for the simplicity and clarity of form that took priority over decorative elements. He believed that architecture was inseparable from its epoch, and that architectural forms developed organically, or, rather, evolved with society. Therefore, copying of the forms of the past was antithetical to the very idea of natural and social evolution.

The development of a skyscraper which put the Chicago architectural school in the lead in American architectural world of Sullivan’s time was the clearest expression of Sullivan’s sociological theories. It is difficult to perceive after subsequent period of modernist radicalism just how daring Sullivan’s designs were for his time. However, the austerity of form was not the only goal of Sullivan’s architectural philosophy. Unlike some later modernists for whom the word “beauty” became taboo, Sullivan held beauty in the highest regard. Thus his buildings were never deprived of lavish and intricate decoration, the trademark Sullivan ornaments which were distinctly original and followed organic and folk motives.

It was not for nothing that the Chicago philanthropist Charles Crane, a great benefactor of the Russian Church in America, proposed Sullivan to the Russian Orthodox community as an architect for what was one of the most prestigious projects of its kind, partially financed by the grant from Tsar Nicholas II. Although by the end of the 19th century the celebrated Sullivan and Adler partnership has dissolved, and Sullivan

was working at a much smaller scale than in his glory years, Crane (and probably another of the Russian mission's benefactors Harold McCormick) who were Sullivan's clients for many years trusted this venerable architect with this challenging commission. Whether or not they were familiar with his aphorism, "what the people are within, the buildings express without," they could hardly bring in the more intellectual and culturally sensitive designer. The project had stirred such interest in the local architectural community that one John Clifford even presented unsolicited designs for the building in the grand style of Moscow and Novgorod cathedrals. Apparently, the size and the attached price tag did not meet the expectations of the Russian Diocese, and by the time Sullivan was introduced to his future client in 1899, the commission called for a significantly more modest building and a rectory.

Holy Trinity project was developed with the effort of two of the future American saints: priest-martyr John Kochurov, who at the time was a young rector of the Chicago parish, and bishop-confessor Tikhon (Belavin), head of the Russian Mission in America. From the surviving correspondence and memoirs it is evident that the relationship between the architect and his clients was very cordial. Moreover, Sullivan was so moved by his only ecclesiastical project and the relationships formed around it that he volunteered to reduce his fee by half which resulted in him effectively making a donation to the project. In a touching letter sent to the members of the Building Committee he writes:

"My usual charge for work of this character and cost, (and it is the standard design of the American Institute of Architects) is 10 % (ten per centum) upon cost. However, my relations with Baron M. Schippenbach (sic), yourself, and Mr. Charles R. Crane, have been so cordial, and our mutual desire to see a beautiful Russian Church erected in this city, so great and enthusiastic, that I consented to do the work for 5 % commission—which means—practically—cost to me—and in money terms, a donation of \$1250.70 to the church."²

Surviving correspondence shows that Bishop Tikhon took great interest in the project and contributed to speeding up the process of ap-

2 Letter: Louis H. Sullivan to Prince Nicholas W. Eugatiltcheff, Imperial Vice-Counsel, Chicago, August 21, 1903.

provals which was circuitous enough: the drawings had to be sent to the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg for the final approval. A cordial letter from Bishop Tikhon to Father John shows that the bishop concerned himself not only with the matters of the church proper, but also with ensuring the conveniences of the priests and their families in the adjacent rectory. Interestingly, though, neither he nor Father John seemed to realize that Sullivan, in what may have been an effort to streamline the form of the building, had designed a very undersized altar apse which proved to be rather inadequate for its use. Similarly, the small vestibule on the opposite end does not function as a narthex, whereas the narthex proper is too large and too open to the nave to perform the transitional function customary for the Orthodox churches.



+

Минувшии дни

О. Тихон

Почтеннъ и уваженнъ оубо, Агелана востанови
и насади въспетаннаго, Остроградскаго Храма,
Спасаго Мира и святаго манастира, — оубо и
Книжнѣ и свѣтъмъ божиемъ обстоищаго славы
набоженствѣ. Има какакова дама, ма и цѣль
прочеише иже знахъ въ управленіи, и иже
насади въ манастирѣ иже манастирѣ иже манастирѣ,
манастирѣ иже манастирѣ иже манастирѣ,
божіе и свѣтъмъ (Ахъ, насади манастирѣ и божіе
иже манастирѣ, свѣтъмъ божіе иже манастирѣ,
и какакова иже манастирѣ манастирѣ,
Свѣтъмъ манастирѣ и манастирѣ Мира иже манастирѣ,
Забвѣннѣ манастирѣ манастирѣ, иже манастирѣ манастирѣ,
иже манастирѣ манастирѣ оубо Храма

Figure 28. Fragment of letter from Bishop Tikhon Belavin to Father John Kochurov discussing the design for Holy Trinity Church, 1900.

Sullivan undertook serious study of Russian architectural prototypes. The shape of the main volume of the cathedral, an octagon on the cube (*vos'merik na chetverike*) is one of the most traditional forms of Russian church architecture. Having its origins in simple wooden churches, it was perfected in the churches of the Moscow Baroque period. Speculations that Sullivan was influenced by the design of a particular Siberian wooden church seem unsatisfactory in light of the evident study of numerous classical examples of such form. Moreover, the use of decorative elements shows the reimagining of both church and residential wooden architecture motifs, something that Sullivan, with his numerous residential commissions, would be naturally attracted to.



Figure 29. Watercolor rendering of church and rectory by Sullivan. HTC archives.

The Russian Mission purchased the site at the corner of Leavitt and Haddon streets in 1899, and by January 1900 Sullivan already presented his client with the first design estimated to cost \$20,000. Final design was approved in 1901, and by the end of 1902 construction was mostly completed. In 1904 master painter Louis Millet finished the work on the ornamentation. By 1911, the permanent iconostasis was installed and the wall icon murals completed.



Figure 30. Contemporary view of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago.
Photo: Inga Leonova.

The form of the Holy Trinity shows that Sullivan, in full accordance with his design philosophy, was quite far from simply copying the vernacular. Proportionally, the octagon of the cathedral is shorter than the lower cube, whereas in Russian prototypes it tends to vary from two shapes being equal to the upper form being considerably larger than the lower, especially in the Baroque period. Even more interestingly, in the interior space the octagon projects down into the space of the nave as assertively as it does in some of the early Gothic churches, which contributes to the perception of the interior space being larger and considerably grander than one would expect from the outside. Both the shape and the décor show that Sullivan spent considerable time researching not only Russian Orthodox prototypes but Byzantine and early Gothic as well. Like his Modernist followers, he studied various architectural influences that culminated in the design which cannot be tied to one particular tradition. And like other Modernists, he re-imagined traditional forms and developed a language that was strikingly modern. The streamlining of simple shapes and the magnified complexity of the folds, the change of proportions, the exaggeration of the eaves, overhangs and trim, all transformed the traditional into modern.



Figure 31. Entrance portal of HTC featuring an elaborate Celtic-esque ornament. Photo: Valery Leonov.

The demographic of the Holy Trinity parish which consisted mostly of immigrants from Ukraine and Carpatho-Russia afforded Sullivan a wonderful opportunity to revel in decorative motifs that he is so famous for. The congregation was most appreciative for the abundance of stencil work and of ornamentation that Sullivan and probably his master painter Millet have designed for both the exterior and interior of the church. The eclecticism of the ornamentation which ranges from customary Greek patterns to Gothic to vaguely Islamic to the unmistakably “sullivanesque” Celtic only served to delight the people seeking the picturesque.

It is unclear whether Sullivan designed the iconostasis for the cathedral (all drawings were lost in the 1950s). The first iconostasis was brought over from the previous parish and was a fairly simple structure with trellis-like Royal Doors that happened to fit the general ornamentation of the building. Being low, that iconostasis allowed for a good view of a half-domed ceiling of the apse and afforded a complete perception of the symmetrical space of the nave. However, the parish owned a large inventory of icons in the late westernized style that were destined for a later, permanent iconostasis donated by Crane and another of Sullivan’s clients and champions Harold McCormick. This exuberant, white-and-gold, highly decorative structure that reaches over the portals was

commissioned from Russia and designed to accommodate the cathedral's icons. Stylistically, it clashes badly with Sullivan's highly ordered architecture and décor, appearing more as a decorative screen than a coherent part of the building. Originally the main color sought to imitate pink marble with red graining which is found in the wainscoting of the church, and which may have made the structure less jarring than it is now when it looks like white porcelain.



Figure 32. Interior of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago. Photo: Valery Leonov.

Other less-than-successful part of the interior are the murals painted by artist Genrik Borutsky and his crew. The murals are copies of those in St. Vladimir's Cathedral in Kiev by Viktor Vasnetsov, Mikhail Nesterov and Mikhail Vrubel. However, Borutsky and his fellow painters were not professional iconographers (the story is that they made their living painting posters for traveling circus shows and local theaters), and the copies are somewhat crude and uninspiring.

In spite of this, however, Holy Trinity remains a magnificent example of Sullivan's deeply intellectual approach to design and his highly refined taste. For all of its seemingly folk, and even exotic, appearance it serves as a striking example of early modernist design, employing many architectural strategies further developed by Sullivan's most illustrious student, Frank Lloyd Wright.



Figure 33. Detail of the icon of St. John Kochurov with life showing Louis Sullivan with Father Kochurov and the foundation of the new church.

Photo: Joseph Clarke.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: ANNUNCIATION CHURCH, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

By the 1950s, Frank Lloyd Wright had well secured his stature as the most celebrated American architect. Taking Sullivan's architectural vision to completion, he succeeded in developing a uniquely American architectural style commonly known as "Prairie School." This type of architecture was mostly applied to residential structures. Prairie School houses emphasized horizontal elements, utilized only locally available materials, and were characterized by long rows of casement windows as opposed to traditional punched windows. They made a strong expression of geometric forms and accentuated them with deep overhangs, balconies, and juxtapositions of blocks. They also strove for organic flow of movement inside, and a "choreographed" arrangement of interior spaces.

Annunciation Church widely known under the irreverent nickname “the flying saucer” is, paradoxically, one of the least studied and described Wright buildings. It is often said that it stands apart in his oeuvre, but this is very much a misconception, probably due to the fact that Byzantine iconography and the distinct stylized décor add the veneer of exotic to the building. In fact, architecturally the church is much closer to Wright’s Unity Temple in Chicago than to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul whose architecture certainly had a great influence on Wright. Commissioned in 1955 by an ambitious congregation committed to the idea of introducing modern architecture into the traditional faith and completed in 1961 after Wright’s death, the church ended up a curious combination of Byzantine architectonics, Orthodox symbolism, and the austerity of form that hails back both to Protestant clarity and Modernist architecture.



Figure 34. Annunciation Church, view of main entrance.
Photo: Joseph Clarke.

Wright’s use of a circular plan as well as many arches and arched windows is characteristic of his later years when he became gradually drawn to the more literally organic forms. The popular story is that Wright’s design was originally inspired by his Serbian-born wife Olga Milanov who told him that the main symbols of Orthodox architecture were the cross and the dome. It appears that the architect took these words literally, since not only the plan of the building is a cross inscribed within a circle, but this combination is repeated, as is very typical of Wright, in both two and three dimensions throughout the church, from the layout of the nave to the architecture of the staircases to the covers of the air conditioning vents. In this, similar to Unity Temple, Wright introduces the literalism of the symbol into his architecture so that it becomes imprinted

upon the perception of the visitor. It is worth considering whether or not this literalism agrees with the Orthodox architectural tradition with its subtlety of symbolic language, or whether it is related to the direct symbolism of other modern architects who did not always practice the faith that they were designing for, such as Le Corbusier with his Ronchamp or Calatrava with the new St. Nicholas Shrine.



Figure 35. Annunciation Church interior. Photo: Joseph Clarke.

What happens at Annunciation Church is that Wright's Unitarian sense of worship resulted in the narrative structure corresponding more to the Protestant liturgical tradition than the processional liturgy of the Orthodox Church. Looking at the plan, one sees that the pews are arranged as three bars of a stylized cross with the altar space being the fourth, thereby creating a spatial focus in the center of the space. This may have been informed by the reconstructive images of Hagia Sophia which show the ambo in the center of the nave, but it does not work well with the choreography of the Orthodox liturgy, nor does it allow for focusing attention on the altar. It is unlikely that Wright was familiar with the spatial theories of Louis Bouyer, who had suggested the possibility of a circular plan organization (implemented in many post-Vatican II Roman Catholic churches.) But even if he was, Bouyer's plans had presumed the altar close to or in the center of the church with the celebrant facing the congregation. That is

not the case at Annunciation, and the arrangement of the pews created an awkward situation with a segment of the congregation almost facing away from the altar. In later years, the problematic layout had been somewhat alleviated by building the unusual ambo extending all the way into the center of the plan, but that does not change the inherent problem of the congregation being arranged like spectators, not participants, in the service. In addition, the pews are located in an amphitheater, with the second tier of seating in the balconies, just like at the Unity Temple, thereby increasing the impression of a theatrical space and widening the separation of the congregation from the celebrants.



Figure 36. Annunciation Church, view of the altar area and ambo.
Photo: Joseph Clarke.

The formalism of Wright's symbolic gesture that is unrelated to traditional arrangement of Orthodox liturgical space is also evident when one examines the plan. There are actually two crosses forming it: the traditional Greek cross and the implied cross of the pews with the altar turned 45 degrees in relation to the entry axis. As a result, one enters the church sideways to the altar, and the visual focus of the entry is one of the circular staircases.



Figure 37. Detail of a spiral staircase. Photo: Joseph Clarke.

The original altar design featured a latticework screen and minimalist modernist iconography, with the altar being largely open to the congregation. Later changes brought in a multi-tiered, more traditional iconostasis, and a gigantic icon of the Theotokos Oranta (“Of the Sign” or “More Spacious Than the Heavens”) was placed on the back wall, reducing the visitor’s ability to perceive the three-dimensional cruciform of the space.

Wright was greatly fascinated by the spaciousness of Hagia Sophia and its magnificent dome. Structural properties of reinforced concrete allowed him to realize his vision of creating an unobstructed space under a spectacular golden dome that, in homage to Hagia Sophia, is encircled with a row of windows. Wright was going for the same effect of a floating dome which he managed to achieve in spite of a much lesser height of the space. Circular staircases at the points of the cross serve as structural columns supporting the arches. In spite of its exotic form and historical allusions, Annunciation Church features many of Wright’s trademark modernist gestures, including geometric austerity accentuated by elaborate decorative details, exaggerated overhangs contributing to the definition of form, and the highly orchestrated design of people’s movements in the interior, the latter coming into predictable conflict with the multi-layered complexity of Orthodox liturgy.

CONSTANTIN PERTZOFF: HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AND THREE SAINTS CHURCH, ANSONIA, CONNECTICUT

Interestingly, the most successful modern church buildings from the liturgical point of view belongs to the hand of the architect of much lesser pedigree than Sullivan and Wright. Wright’s younger contemporary, the Russian-born architect Constantin Pertzoff, succeeded in creating liturgical spaces that were conducive to Orthodox liturgy, faithful to tradition, and daringly modern. Constantin A. Pertzoff was a White Russian immigrant who became a distinctly American modernist. He was a graduate of the Harvard Graduate School of Design at the time when aus-

tere Bauhaus Modernism brought from Germany by Hitler's exiles was triumphantly conquering the minds of young American architects.³ He went on to become a friend and colleague of one of the greatest Bauhaus architects, Walter Gropius, who founded the famous Boston office of "gentlemen architects" from Europe, The Architects Collaborative (TAC).

Pertzoff's professional legacy includes several houses, his own among them, in the modernist colony in Lincoln, Massachusetts; a fairly well-known 1944 master plan for the redevelopment of Manhattan; and a small but interesting collection of writings that are especially notable for his forward-thinking notions on sustainable architecture. In 1944, he co-authored an article ambitiously titled "An Organic Theory of City Planning." In it, he argued that modern city planning needed to recover the notion of the city as a community and to strive for re-establishment of social spaces. Without mounting a direct challenge to the governing American philosophy of redevelopment—exemplified, for instance, by the mercilessly pragmatic enterprises of Robert Moses in New York City—Pertzoff and his collaborators presented a distinctly contrary view of the modern city. In urban planning as well as in sustainable residential design, Pertzoff was ahead of his time in terms of his concern with human scale and with social engagement in urban development, notions which are only now gaining traction in American urban design. He was a committed modernist and viewed architecture in moral terms, a philosophy that he shared with his European modernist colleagues. He was also well educated in the history of European architecture, having supplemented his studies with extensive travel thanks to a Wheelwright Traveling Fellowship in Architecture.

Pertzoff spent the early years of his career working for architectural firms that were known for church architecture among other things. After returning from his travels in Europe in 1938, he set up his own practice, which focused mostly on residential design. Yet by virtue of being a parishioner of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Boston, in 1948 Pertzoff received a commission for the design of the new cathedral on Park Drive, which led to another church project in Ansonia, CT. The church of St.

3 The Bauhaus was a design school in Germany founded by Walter Gropius that synthesized education in crafts and the fine arts. Active from 1919 to 1933, it had a lasting influence on modernist architecture and design.

Nicholas in Whitestone, NY, designed by Sergey Padukow, who became a successor of sorts to Roman Verhovskoy as the spokesperson for the architecture of the Metropolia, exhibits interesting parallels with the design of Holy Trinity.

In a contrast to many of his compatriots, Pertzoff had been so successfully assimilated into American society that his 1937 marriage to Olga Monks, a niece of the art collector and philanthropist Isabella Stewart Gardner, took place in an elaborate three-stage ceremony that included two religious services (one Orthodox and one Episcopalian) and a reception in the Gardner Palazzo. Pertzoff family history maintains that this connection proved highly advantageous to the Holy Trinity parish when, a few years later, it was seeking a site for the new cathedral. Apparently the Gardner family had assisted the parish in their negotiations for the plot in the prestigious Fenway neighborhood across the park from the Palazzo. According to parish documents, Pertzoff, in addition to being the architect for the new cathedral and its iconostasis, was also one of its most significant donors, which allowed him to exercise considerable freedom in making decisions and to wield significant power in his relationship with the cathedral building committee.

The design and erection of the new Holy Trinity Cathedral was plagued by considerable financial difficulties and ultimately relied heavily on supplemental “penny collection.” In spite of that, the groundbreaking ceremony, presided over by Bishop Dmitri (Magan) of Boston and Fr. Theodore Chepeleff, took place on September 25, 1949. The first (lower) part of the building, at 165 Park Drive, was consecrated by Bishop Dmitri on February 3, 1952. The construction of the upper structure of the cathedral began in 1959, and on October 16, 1960, the new Holy Trinity Cathedral was consecrated by Metropolitan Leonty and Archbishop Ireney of Boston and New England. The consecration was attended by, among others, Bishop Valerian of the Romanian Diocese and Princess Ileana of Romania, who was apparently one of the most significant benefactors.⁴

4 Princess Ileana later became Mother Alexandra, founder of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City, PA.



Figure 38. Holy Trinity Cathedral, Boston, original appearance. HTOC archives.

Due to lack of additional funds, the construction of the iconostasis did not begin until 1968 at the earliest. The original design called for painted icons, but subsequently a decision was made to commission mosaics from Baron Nicholas B. Meyendorff, an iconographer residing in Vienna, Austria. Special collections were taken to cover the cost of each mosaic icon. In June 1969, Nicholas Meyendorff unexpectedly passed away, and the mosaics already started were completed by his daughter Helen. Ten out of the planned twelve mosaics of the Apostles were eventually completed and installed.

The architectural design of Holy Trinity Cathedral is completely unique in the fabric of Orthodox architecture, American or otherwise. Pertzoff's inspiration for the space was the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a grand volume of space uncluttered by structure and permitting unrestricted movement and visibility. The architect attempted to synthesize his knowledge of traditional Russian ecclesiastic architectural forms with the motifs of New England ship design, using glued

laminated wood beams as barrel ribs and wood planking as cladding to evoke the imagery of a boat's hold—a reference both to seafaring traditions and to the ancient Christian image of the church as ship. The architect's modernist sensibility is evident in the simplicity of the main volumetric solutions as well as in the use of light yellow brick, which contrasts with the traditional Boston red brick. In a rather charming nod to his modernist friends, Pertzoff used the same pendant light fixtures in the cathedral hall and wall sconces in the nave that had been used by Gropius in his projects at the Harvard Law School and in his own house in Lincoln.



Figure 39. Contemporary view of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Boston.
Photo: Inga Leonova.

The success of this synthesis is more evident inside the church than on the exterior. The cathedral's cruciform barrel vaults, completely uninterrupted due to the load-bearing structural properties of laminated wood, form a glorious open space that bestows a feeling of awe and of a soaring of the spirit on those who enter. The use of natural wood

allows for a more intimate feeling in the space than would be expected from its physical size. The abundance of natural light and the placement of the windows bestow a dynamic and sometimes mystical quality upon the space that enriches the experience of liturgical services. The absence of interior divisions in the nave, save for the iconostasis which separates the main space from the sanctuary, conveys the “oneness” of the church community in the celebration of the Liturgy.



Figure 40. Interior of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Boston. Photo: Christopher Smith.

The exterior form of the cathedral lacks proportional development and shows evidence of the difficulty of synthesizing disparate architectural traditions. The main cupola was redesigned several times, evolving from a classic Vladimir-style drum and cupola as represented in the early fundraising rendering to its ultimate form, sporting elliptical arches around the drum and an austere top. The original “space-age” form was replaced in 1990 by a more traditional Ukrainian Baroque onion dome, which resolved the practical problem of leaking but did not help alleviate a certain stylistic confusion.

Holy Trinity Cathedral is recognized as a Boston architectural Modernist landmark and is featured as such in the American Institute of Architects’ *AIA Guide to Boston*. The design brought Pertzoff the commission for Three Saints Church in Ansonia, CT. Completed and dedicated in 1965, the church in Ansonia represented the architect’s attempt to respond to an iconic New England church image with its tall white spires. The design was a true marriage of a traditional Orthodox temple with the local vernacular. It is both modern and traditional in lines and volume, and it walks that fine line gracefully.



Figure 41. Three Saints Church. Photo: Inga Leonova.

Like the Boston Cathedral, Three Saints appears much larger inside than it does from outside, another success of Pertzoff's command of volume and space. The interior volume is more partitioned than that of Holy Trinity, responding to the requirement to have secondary chapels in side naves, but the main space remains open and soaring. The demand for pews gave the building a more Western feel. There is a complexity of

architectural references in its design, such as the central cupola under the spire which simultaneously evokes the *shatyor* churches of medieval Russia and the spires of the American colonial era. The iconography, executed in close coordination with the design, enhances the richness of the experience of the space without overwhelming its clarity.



Figure 42. Interior of Three Saints Church. Photo: Inga Leonova.



Figure 43. Three Saints Church, main nave. Photo: Inga Leonova.

Constantin Pertzoff's explorations of the development of American Orthodox architecture in response to the emerging American Orthodox identity represent an effort which, while not completely isolated, is nevertheless unique in both its courage and the strength of its results.

Unfortunately, those explorations were conducted without the benefit of creative collaboration or theological dialogue, and therefore produced little ongoing development. Nevertheless, at their core they represented a response to the profound necessity “to build churches out of that reality which we experience and verify every day,” while remaining faithful to the definition of an ecclesiastical building as that whose primary function is to be an epiphany of divine and human transcendent co-celebration.⁵

CONCLUSION

The story of daring innovation will not be complete, of course, without the sobering note about the ensuing challenges. Daring forms are often accompanied by functional failures, and this was the fate of the more innovative churches. Aside from incurring customary “Wright” cost overruns during construction, Annunciation Church continues to spend significant amounts on building upkeep. The failures were many: the “trademark” Wright roof leaks, the collapsed ceiling, the inaccessible HVAC infrastructure, etc. The original dome of Boston Holy Trinity Cathedral leaked like a sieve until it was replaced in 1990 by a new bulbous dome, but it is also not free of water problems, and the barrel vaults let in enough moisture so that the congregation never dared to attempt to paint the icons on the ceiling over the altar for fear that it will fail.

Still, the attempts to find architectural language which is coherent to the world in which the Orthodox Church exists today are not to be dismissed as exotic quirks. On the contrary, their systematic study should inform further development of form conducive to function in today’s idiom. Recovering the freedom of creative thought that nourishes such experimentation is essential if American Orthodoxy is to gain its own unique architectural identity.

5 Rudolf Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate: The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 11.