

*Can we design a modern building for our Orthodox Church? Why do we have to keep copying the past, isn't that a museum mentality? - Matushka Sarah Gascoigne*

When designing a building, many things need to be considered, site, orientation, materials, budget, apart from local laws governing public access, parking, bathrooms.

So what are our guiding principles for the design of a Church? In the early centuries the Church discovered that the building created a space, a space for the members of the Body of Christ to gather in and worship. These members are (astonishingly) the actual Temple, dwelling places made by God for Himself, and the temple we build needs to be a suitable place for such members, and as beautiful as we can make it. It should be more beautiful than our home, office or concert hall, it should be made and designed with utmost love.

I judge from my experience that if I travel to an Orthodox country, I shall be overcome and moved to prayer by the churches, even if there is no service in progress. I believe that generations of praying Christians is part of it, but what these Christians made sacrificially out of love for the Church are often overwhelmingly beautiful, even sublime. Can we say this of the majority of purpose built Orthodox Churches in the West?

As an artist I have thought about these questions a good deal, and recently I was given a copy of “An Aesthetic Approach to Byzantine Art” by P. A. Michelis (1955 in English). I strongly recommend this book to anyone involved in any element of Church design (and as compulsory reading for architecture students!) Michelis discusses the sublime, beyond the beautiful, which touches our hearts with God's Presence, beyond pleasing the senses.

The lighting should be quiet to facilitate prayer Aidan Hart “*Lighting in Orthodox Churches, Liturgical Principles and Practical Ideas*”

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/81745.htm1>. The walls are a canvas for icons, failing that, there should be a rich assembly of saints in icons, chosen for their appropriateness for the parish, more than for their color matching or uniformity of size and framing. Oil lamps reveal the faces of the Saints. (Hart)

Elder Paisios disliked the use of mathematically distributed bright electric lights. He liked God's distribution of lights, as in the night sky.

So if we are going to imitate the old, let us rather draw with a deep appreciation from ideas, structures, proportions, and layouts that worked; and if we are going to build in a modern style, let us be influenced by “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue and of praise” Phil 4: 8

May every element in our Church stand as a volunteer in the glorification of our Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of the Mother of God and of the Saints. *Amen*