

God's House is Our House: Re-Imagining the Environment for Worship

Richard S. Vosko

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Fr Richard Vosko has been a design consultant for worship environments since 1970. He has worked mainly in the United States and has been acclaimed for liturgical and design excellence. *God's House is Our House* is the fruit of his work. It has been written primarily for those involved in the building and renovation of cathedrals, churches, chapels and other worship spaces. However, it has catechetical and educational value to others outside that audience.

God's House is Our House offers commentary on building architecture and internal design for worship. It focuses on the worship space for the two premier sacraments, baptism and eucharist. Whilst it has a concern for the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council it is also informed by scripture, early church history, early church architecture and theology. The book includes an introduction, 32 chapters divided into three parts, an afterword, a glossary and a listing of selected resources of books and videos. It is splendidly adorned with 111 photographic images including eight pages of colour images. The images are conveniently placed within the text for ease of reference for the reader. They complement Vosko's text and literally illustrate Vosko's ideas and suggestions. The photographic images are a feature of the book.

In his introduction, Vosko sets out the principles of Vatican II's liturgical renewal. It is these principles that underpin his ideas of design and planning:

- All baptised members of the Church have been called to holiness.
- The Church is the sacrament of unity.
- The baptised are obligated to participate in worship as partners and not spectators.
- Our church buildings are metaphors for this Church and must reflect these realities. (xi)

Throughout the book, Vosko honours these principles. His design ideas are consistent with these principles; they are given priority over architectural and aesthetic concerns. In fact, theological, conciliar and ecclesial necessities drive the architectural and design ideas, not vice versa. "We are not free to disregard Vatican II" (47), argues Vosko, in reference to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy's call to "full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations, which is demanded by the very nature of liturgy" (para. 14).

Vosko also argues that the design and construction of church buildings happens within a changing world and must be undertaken with a cognizance of the current of events within the church and the world. To this end he identifies four concerns: the growing awareness of the fragility of the planet, the changing dynamics of United States culture at the beginning of a new millennium, "restlessness in religion" both within Christianity and beyond and the state of the Catholic Church itself. This final concern is considered particularly in light of the scandals that have plagued the hierarchy and laity in America. For this reviewer, these concerns were less frequently addressed in the body of the text than the explicitly theological and ecclesiological concerns. Nevertheless, an awareness of these concerns was sometimes explicit and oftentimes implicit.

Australian readers of this journal may ask if this work has application for them. It is possible that this book will only receive limited readership in Australia. That would be a pity. This reviewer is certain that many Catholic churches and parishes in Australia could make good use of this book. At the very least, it offers ideas for low-cost and manageable modification to worship spaces that will promote full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy. Certainly, this book will be valuable for diocesan liturgical commissions and larger-scale building and renovation programs.

Vosko's work serves not only as a guide to matters related to the design and use of worship spaces, it also serves to educate the reader about the People of God, the Church itself. It is both a practical guide and a work of ecclesiology. The reader of this book will engage not only with the liturgy space and architecture but also with scripture, the documents of Vatican II, liturgical reforms and with theology in general. Readers of this book will, upon turning the final page, understand that "the church is more like a meeting place that houses the work of the people (liturgy) rather than a shrine that focuses on the deity only"(23). The reader of *God's House is Our House* can expect a theological education.

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