

TEMPLES, CHURCHES AND MOSQUES by J.G. Davies. *Basil Blackwell, Oxford.* 1983 p.262, Illustrations in text.

This book represents an ambitious attempt to trace patterns of meaning through a vast range of historical monuments, chronologically presented. The author is not concerned to produce yet another survey history of architecture, but rather to assist the visitor and student to enjoy buildings intelligently by understanding their basic liturgical function, and the aesthetic principles embodied in their construction and decoration. In short Davies aims 'to provide an introduction to the most rewarding way of looking at architectural masterpieces.' (p. ix).

With the exception of an arguably rather superfluous chapter on Mycenaean and Minoan palaces, all the monuments considered are religious buildings: we have the Pharaonic temples of Egypt, the sanctuaries of the Greco-Roman world (three chapters), Early Christian and Byzantine churches, and Islamic mosques and madrasas. The second half of the book works through the major styles of Western Christendom, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque.

As one would expect from a Professor of Theology who has specialised in worship, the linking of liturgy and architectural dispositions is well done, and serves as a corrective to those studies which present changes in design too exclusively in terms of stylistic development. What is equally striking is the amount of sheer formal analysis of structure and décor that Davies has managed to cram into a book of modest length. Each essay, in striving to characterise the essential nature of a given style or type of building, is illustrated by precise discussion of carefully chosen examples, each one of which has been examined by the author *in situ*. There are dozens of useful plans, diagrams and photographs incorporated into the body of the text; the plans are admirable, the black and white illustrations less so (often too small and with poor definition of detail). Each chapter is subdivided into such aspects as ground plan, spatial and surface qualities, proportion and rhythm. Davies also deals with different types of structural members (e.g., capitals and columns), and decorative vocabulary. The result of so much compacting of material is a rather dense and dry product which lacks lightness of touch. Technical and abstract notions abound, such as directionality, space-flow and dematerialisation; and despite the emphasis on delight and enjoyment in the preface, one wonders whether this book will convert or inspire the educated layman who does not already share the author's interests. On the other hand, it ought to offer some fresh approaches to the serious student.

To offer a detailed response to such a wide-ranging book in a short review is not feasible. Since each chapter is fairly self-contained, and evolutionary categories are avoided, I shall focus my critique on a sample chapter, 'Early Christian Architecture and the Byzantine Achievement.' (pp. 90–117).

In dealing with the early Christian Basilica, Davies rightly stresses the inversion of the priorities of the classical temple, with a new interest in interior, enclosed space as the context of worship, and an aesthetic devaluation of the exterior. But the expedient of closing an earlier temple, as at the cathedral of Syracuse, is rare; and no attempt is made to trace the connection between the Roman secular basilica and the new congregational church. Davies' treatment of interior wall-design is rather questionable: far from presenting an unbroken, almost closed surface, the nave-walls of e.g., S. Maria Maggiore offer a bold juxtaposition of masses and voids, punctuated by heavy columns, each bay below answering to alternating clerestory windows and blind panels above. When it was desired to shut off the nave from the aisles, curtains could be employed; but evidence for this practice is not mentioned here, albeit this would greatly modify the spatial quality of the basilica.

Davies brings out clearly the axial convergence of all lines of force on the altar, framed by its triumphal arch: the roof-ridge, the rhythmic nave-arcades, the floor patterns, all lead the eye to the apse. But do enough nave-programmes of the fourth to

sixth centuries survive to risk a generalisation concerning the contribution of figural art to this eastward movement? At S. Apollinare Nuovo, the processions of martyrs certainly perform this function, but hardly the encapsulated narrative scenes at S. Maria Maggiore, whose details are barely legible from the ground; and no other samples of survival come to mind, except the discrete panels at S. Sabina.

Davies' very short discussion of the theological and liturgical *raison d'être* for the altar/apse as architectural focus lacks substantiating references (the whole book is innocent of footnotes)—e.g. for patristic notions of Christ as altar, and the altar as expressing the specificity of the Incarnation. One is also surprised to find no references to liturgical processions, especially at the offertory and Gospel in relation to architectural planning. The examples of basilicas chosen are all drawn from Italy. How do these relate to the solemnities of the Roman rite, and how does this compare with the relation of liturgy and architecture in the contemporary Eastern Church, so ably discussed by Thomas Matthews? Davies' discussion seems very skimmed here, despite the fact that this is an area of his specialisation.

Another omission concerns apse programmes in mosaic, which present a theophany in the semi-dome over and behind the bishop's throne and the eucharistic table. The majestic apocalyptic Christ appearing on the clouds of heaven in the apse of SS. Cosmas and Damian comes to mind, or the triumphant *crux gemmata* of the transfigured Lord at S. Apollinare in Classe. Even when the historical transfiguration is shown (St. Catherine's, Sinai), the manifestation of glory is the basic theme, not biblical narration. This is a major and integral part of the symbolic function of the apse, and complements the focal centrality of the altar as a place of encounter with the Risen Christ.

Again more specificity is needed in the paragraph on transepts—no indication is given of their distinction or liturgical function, or where and at what time they came to be. The significant point about both examples cited (St. Peter's, Rome; Abu Mena) is surely that they are pilgrimage churches. The need to allow for a large circulation of pilgrims, and the existence of a second focus within the church (the saint's shrine) led to the development of transepts and other architectural features (the crypt, the *confessio*) not mentioned by Davies.

To claim that a 'decisive break was made with the basilican principle in the sixth century' is very debatable—domed basilicas seem to be the transitional stage at that time, and the classic Byzantine cross-in-square plan (in some ways, a synthesis of the palaeochristian basilica and the centralised *martyrion*) does not emerge till the ninth century. Even in the Byzantine Middle Ages, we find examples of domed basilicas (e.g., at Mystras). Davies fails to grasp how untypical was the design of St. Sophia, a great masterpiece without real stylistic successors. It is with this church that his discussion of Byzantine architecture effectively comes to an end, his discussion of plans, domes, capitals, church decoration concentrating almost entirely on works of the first (pre-iconoclastic) period. This is highly regrettable and shows a lack of art-historical balance. The author dwells on the aesthetics of sixth century martyria such as S. Vitale or SS. Sergius and Bacchus, without making it clear that such churches ceased to be built after c. 700. Centralised models were subsumed after iconoclasm into such magnificent monuments as the monastic church at Daphni or S. Sophia, Monemrasia, in which the multivalent opening up of space beneath the dome does not entirely negate the basilical movement from narthex to sanctuary.

However, it may be that it is unfair to concentrate criticism too narrowly. Davies' real achievement is to suggest a new approach to religious architecture, which while not always persuasive in detail, may stimulate the student to look for general aesthetic principles and relations of form and function behind an ever-increasing mass of art-historical data.

NICHOLAS GENDLE