Contemporary religious graphic design

Vlasta Paul

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Title: Contemporary Religious Graphic Design

Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Fine and Applied Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology

Submitted by: Vlasta K. Paul Date: March 1, 1970

Advisor: Hans J. Barschel

Approved by Graduate Committee: Date: 3/13/70

Chairman: Hans J. Barschel
I Purpose of Thesis: The purpose of this thesis is to develop a new style in religious graphic design and to apply this religious style to different areas of ecclesiastical design— a series of religious instructional pamphlets, Christian symbols, a graphics system for a parish, and cover designs for a missal and songbook.

II Scope of Thesis: Research will include the gathering of information on Encyclicals issued during the past year by Pope Paul and on recent pertinent changes in the Church, especially in the new structure of the Mass and the new fast and abstinence regulations. The pastor of my parish and the RIT chaplain will be consulted. Visual references will include Christian symbols, existing pamphlets, medieval manuscript designs and stained glass. Book or pamphlet designs will be rendered in final "comp" form in actual size and physical structure. Other graphics will be rendered and then mounted on illustration board panels.

III Procedures: Researching the recent changes in observances and services is the first step. The research will also include sorting existing religious symbol designs and pamphlets and selecting those which are designed well and are the most meaningful to me. In particular, they must be not only symbolically representative of the Church and its beliefs but also
aesthetically pleasing. Then I can proceed to design what I feel combines the charm and antiquity of the Catholic Church with the contemporary Church as it functions in the 20th century. Once this is developed I can apply the religious design to different areas—a series of three pamphlets to be used as instruction pieces for Catholic families informing them of revisions in the Church, the development and application of a new graphic symbol for a parish church, and the cover designs for a missal and songbook.

IV Alternative Proposals:

A. Graphics system for a business. A graphic mark would be developed and applied to its stationery, boxes, labels, and delivery vehicles.

B. Religious communication panels. A series of three three-dimensional panels would be built and decorated with graphics to communicate:

1. the new structure of the Mass and its meaning,

2. the meanings of certain widely-used Christian symbols,

3. the reason and symbolic meaning in the physical alterations in the interior of St. John the Evangelist Church.
Contemporary Religious Graphic Design

by

Vlasta K. Paul

Candidate for the Master of Fine Arts
in the College of Fine and Applied Arts
of the Rochester Institute of Technology

Submitted: June 2, 1970
Advisor: Professor Hans J. Barschel
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To all my friends and advisors who, by their comments and encouragement, stimulated a great deal of thought, and especially to my parents without whose help I could have never gotten this far.
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Introduction
In spite of the great problems of the 1960's which have caused so much concern and anguish, I feel fortunate in having grown up during that time because I personally believe it will be remembered in the future for two reasons:

1) technological progress
2) intellectual progress.

The twentieth century has been in a state of revolution since its first decade, but in the 1960's man's change in attitudes and ways of living were much more evident. No small part of man's daily life was left untouched by some form of technological progress, and no part of man's existence has been left unquestioned. The search for truth is the second noteworthy feature of the 1960's and the one which is most important.

I personally feel that man is now in a second "renaissance". During the 1960's people, especially the young, seemed to be involved in a more intensive quest for truth than was evident before that time. They questioned the validity and morality of all things and, in spite of some of the violent methods which they did use, this search for truth was continued, sincerely for most, for the attainment of an inner peace, an appeasement of a painfully-
doubting, ever-questioning mind.

Along with this re-evaluation of life, the Catholic Church has begun to re-examine its traditions and attitudes and, where feasible, it has begun to change the changeable, update the old and re-emphasize the important. This is being done for the purpose of making the Church a meaningful and functional part of today's Christian world.

Now then is the time to make religious art and design a functioning limb of religion itself. It can and should reflect and be a reflection of the attitudes of the Church today. It is time for religious design to be such that it can help instruct man as well as be spiritually and aesthetically pleasing to him. More important than that, it must exist at a high level as a work of art. It is absolutely necessary for the work to be spiritually and culturally uplifting; therefore, it must begin to make people think on a more sophisticated level. Religious design should no longer be an insult to the public's intelligence because it is over-simplified or primitive in style as a great deal of design has been.

The goal of my thesis has been to develop a new sophisticated and instructional design style that
could be applied to different areas of need in the parish community—pamphlets, graphic symbols and book covers.
Considerations
In beginning a thesis of religious design an artist must consider a number of problems: tradition, direction, style and personal expression.

tradition

Pie- Raymond Régamey stated that because of the great changes during the twentieth century even the "most confirmed traditionalists are obliged to formulate artistic data in a way that is completely different from and at times even opposed to the formulations of the past."¹ From this statement one would assume that the author did not believe that tradition could be upheld in the arts at all, but further examination reveals that Régamey realizes only too well that it should be no more than a stimulating aid to creativity.²

Religious art cannot be isolated from the general contemporary tendencies of art, but if a work of modern art does not contain the traditional spirituality it needs to consider it religious there should be no attempt to classify it as such; it is this spirituality which gives it the essence of sacred art.

If an artist chooses to work with religion he has the particular responsibility to work with ideas familiar
to the public as well as with ideas contemporary with new art.

There are no rules for religious art that can be carried through the ages, nor should there be. It must change with the times and deal with the here and now. Tradition, however, cannot be ignored nor will it be forgotten. Artistic history is always studied to breed new artistic ideas, unlike certain basic religious traditions which, for the most part, must be retained.

"One must remember that tradition in sacred art can be found only when we translate into art the tradition of the Church, while accepting the fact that the first artistic consideration is creative liberty." 3 This is truly a dilemma for the artist. He must choose the degree to which he will pay attention to past art, decide how much religious tradition with which he needs to be familiar, and in what form his ideas will be presented.

I have studied art history and used it only as a source of inspiration; I have been brought up in the Catholic faith and have decided to use contemporary freedom in creativity in designing my thesis; therefore, I feel qualified in attempting the work on my proposal.
direction and style

Father Régamey also stated that the twentieth century changes explain "why the demands which the faith makes of art today- demands on the artist, the faithful, and the clergy- are caught up in a tangle of uncertainties." I hope that my work in this thesis, specifically the design style I have developed, would not allow for the uncertainty of where the Church is in relation to the modern world, and if it forces itself into areas where it really hasn't the right. Optimistically speaking, my design style has its place in the Catholic community and will not impose itself on any other. It can be adapted to other Christian beliefs because of the unity in essence of all Christian faiths.

I believe my design style allows for enough freedom to make it of value - freedom of interpretation on the part of the community, unlimited use and freedom of variation for the Church, and freedom of expression on the part of the artist. Since it is directed to all three with particular emphasis on the first, I feel I can justify its existence.

"There is no school where one learns Christian art. Christian art is defined by the one in whom it exists," but there is little evidence of this
individuality in existing art. So much of it looks the same. The style is simple and crude for easy interpretation, I imagine, but it lacks dignity and sophistication. Of course there is some religious design which can be considered good works of art but it is nearly impossible to find.

The average Catholic would not go too far out of his way to find printed material; he would look in church racks for pamphlets, books and bulletins. This is where I also searched since my work is directed to the Catholic parish family. The results were pathetic. Found designs were either completely lacking in design or using straight blocks of color, or using a stereotype style—simple and primitive-looking. While some were not badly designed they certainly did not provoke much interest or thought.

The main argument against complexity and sophistication in design is that it makes the art too difficult for the "average" man to understand, but this need not be so. A more visually complicated work can be just as easily interpreted, and even if it could not be, would it not benefit man by making him think more about his religion?

I intend my thesis to be a visual solution to the arguments. It will be complex, sophisticated and directed to the "average" Catholic.
The philosopher Maritain finds two extremes of art. The first is that which is "perfectly indeterminate, so neutral, so empty that we can look at them without seeing them, and thus project onto them our own sentiments..." The second type is those modern works, "and the most agitated and impassioned among them, which seek to impose on us by violence the individual emotions... of the artist himself." These classifications are, of course, incomplete but the fact that they exist presents a problem to the religious artist. How much of his inner being can he safely project into his work without over-doing it? And just how much can he leave to the interpretation of the public?

I don't agree with Maritain that it is unbearable torture to be subjected to an artist's feelings but rather that it is an interesting insight into a personality as well as a mind-broadening experience. Furthermore, I believe that a certain amount of personal expression is necessary to stimulate response.
Visual work
From a medieval art course I had taken, I became interested in illustrated manuscripts and in particular, the ornamentation of the Book of Kells which, abstract in design, seemed so modern for having been created in the ninth century. I particularly liked the incorporation of capital letters with different designs and the use of the whole page as one composition using text and illustration as a unit.

Influenced by this, I decided that any design would be created to work with the copy and that I would not simply place a symbol where it might be appropriate but would use it as an extension of the literary meaning of the text.

I also chose to try stained glass effects, for those windows can, in design, be symbolic of the Church's teachings, not only a part of its artistic history. They are brilliant and dramatic in their colors and spacial breakups, and they seem to represent a life force.

My research took me to several modern churches which were decorated with magnificent stained glass windows. In all of the buildings I became aware of the importance of the windows to the effect of the whole. In all, they were the factors which determined
the atmosphere within— for example, in one church
the stained glass was in large brilliant diamond
shapes, the window being one immense area of
light and color. This gave the feeling of lightness,
an identity with nature, the sun, and ultimately
God and His omnipresence. Another church had
windows in which the small pieces of glass were set
in large dark areas of cement giving a very dark
dramatic effect. Because I enjoyed the importance
of the windows on the psychological attitude of
the church-goer and also because I liked the brilli-
cy of the shapes of colors edged in black, I
decided that the idea would be used in my design
style.

My real starting point though, was the research
of Christian signs and symbols during the second
quarter of the school year. I discovered that when
I had a certain shape established as pertinent to
an idea, it was easier for me to begin the visual
work.

The first week of the third quarter was spent
organizing the literary content of my pamphlets.
Since the Church has recently changed some of its
ceremonies, I thought the parishioners should be
given instructions and explanations for these changes.
If these explanatory pamphlets were visually pleasing to them, the parishioners might be interested in reading more and paying more attention to the reasons for change. The first pamphlet explains the new Order of the Mass, the second explains the new baptismal ritual and the third instructs on the sacrament of Confirmation.

My first roughs were extremely crude and over-involved, for no particular reason, in ornamentation. I had thought that I wanted designs to decorate the page but then I realized my responsibility to do something more meaningful. The first ones were geometric ornaments running along the side of the page. The symbols within were used merely to build up the larger design.

It then occurred to me that this was much too stationary and was opposed to the ever-living structure of the Church as it is today. To determine a valid design style I selected the first page of the "Mass" pamphlet to work on. As I sketched with a looser technique and redid the designs, I became more convinced that I could not remain emotionally detached from the work but that I had to put more of myself into it. By the fourth week I had settled on the designs for my pamphlets. The final style was a natural evolution from the very first one.
greeting
pentential rite

PROUDY OF THE WORD
The cologne that

People collectively have this obsession with cologne. Just what makes them want to wear it? Scent is by far the most highly individual sensory experience. To some extent it is also the most subjective. A cologne can be in your face one moment and completely disappear the next. Nose-to-nose, you can easily tell how much of the cologne a person has on. Some people can be detected from 12 feet away. The cologne that will make you tingle all over.

PENETRANTS

She knows, for example, that while everybody else is introducing dozens of wild unpronounceable potions, Pond's little Skin Basic creams are as emotionally satisfying and completely effective as some of the trendy, artistic, exotic beauty stuff. Pond's Skin Treatment, in fact, is a super-benefiting cream that cleanses and heals my skin. (You can buy a fancier one, but not a better one.)

REFRESHANT

If you use the right cologne it's a world of difference in the way people react when you walk by. Until recently, only the French could boast that cologne was not only a luxury but a necessity. Now you can, too. OCEAN BREEZE brings you a subtle, clean, fresh, yet sensible, way to reach your targets. And don't be afraid to use it on your clothes. It'll make them smell better, too. Girls are immune to cologne. It's a boy thing. She's a younger, fresher, more sensible kind of girl when you wash her in pond's Skin Basic cologne.

 newsletter

Whenever you need

Write us for more information on these products and what they can do for your skin. We will be glad to send you our brochure and literature. We also offer to provide samples of Pond’s Skin Treatment for your use. Pond’s Skin Treatment now comes in a convenient squeeze bottle for easy application.

Any time you need
The first pamphlet to which I applied my newly developed style was one explaining the changes in the Mass. The Church is trying to stress the purpose of the whole ceremony— to relive the sacrifice of Christ and the miracle of salvation that came about because of His love for man. The new Order of the Mass, which was recently established, has brought order, clarity and active participation to the rites which prepare for the climax of the Mass— the Eucharist.

"In Holy Communion, the risen Christ shares His new life by giving His Body and Blood. Through Him we are reconciled with our Heavenly Father." An impression of this eucharistic celebration is represented on the cover. The design lends itself to a variety of interpretations, but what I meant to get across is an upward and downward movement to symbolize God coming down to man by His Divine love through the communion rite. At the same time man rises spiritually through the reception of communion to God. This is an impression of the reconciliation of man with God— both working at the same time and not independently of one another.

Red is the central color and shape to signify love— divine and human— as the center of all life.
Blue is for heaven and yellow for the glory of God and sacredness of the celebration. On the inside of the cover should be an explanation of the symbolism to encourage further interpretation of the other designs.

The first page contains purple for penance and book-like shapes for Scriptures.

The center spread was composed as though it were one full page. The design, which seems to move downward, encompasses the text which is the decree of faith on the left, and reaches toward the sign of peace and breaking of bread on the right. Since this prayer is the basis of the faith it seemed important to make the design more dynamic.

In the central portion of the design itself I have included the symbols for the Trinity- a representation of a hand coming down from the sky (God the Father), a fish-shape (God the Son) and the dove (the Holy Spirit). Running into the design is the first line of the creed- "We believe in one God"- because all three symbols are incorporated into one whole which is the Absolute-God.

Surrounding all is blue for heaven; at the lower left is green for life, earth, and humanity. This reaches upward to the Divine. The complexity of this illustration should point out the importance
of the prayer itself to the public.

"The sign of peace" and the "breaking of bread" are connected to emphasize the community, for in the first man makes peace with his fellow man and in the latter all men become one by partaking of one body. "Because the bread is one we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread." (1 Cor 10:17)

The last two pages are concerned with the Eucharist and therefore, include its symbols of wine, wheat and grapes. Red is placed next to yellow to symbolize Divine love and sacrifice. Green stands for the new life Christ gives to man as a result of His sacrifice. He shares His life with us in communion because of His great love for all men.
Baptism

The new baptismal ceremony recognizes that children cannot speak nor understand. Emphasis is placed on the role of the parents and the responsibility of the community of the Church toward the new Christians. It is recommended that the service be incorporated into the Sunday service of the Church. 

Reception of Children

The child is received into the Church. The parents bring the child to the pastor, and the pastor welcomes the child to the Church. The parents then pray with the pastor, and the child is presented to the congregation. The congregation prays for the child and the parents, and the pastor blesses the child. The child is then presented to the congregation, and the congregation prays for the child and the parents again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the child and the parents. The child is then presented to the congregation, and the congregation prays for the child and the parents again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the child and the parents. The child is then presented to the congregation, and the congregation prays for the child and the parents again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the child and the parents.

Word of God

The word of God is proclaimed to the congregation. The pastor reads from the Bible and prays for the congregation. The congregation prays for the pastor and the congregation. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again. The pastor then leads the congregation in prayer for the congregation and the congregation prays for the congregation again.

Let us pray for the child and the parents.
The second pamphlet explains the new ritual of "baptism for children". The cover is an abstraction of baptismal symbols. It represents new life in Christ— a shell with streams of water flowing from the center helps to form a cross. Green and blue is used for life and water, and once again all is edged in black.

"The reception of children" page shows an ark and water encircling the shape of a child. The impression is that of the waters of baptism gathering up the child (portrayed in black and white—humility and purity) and carrying him to his Heavenly Father, who reaches out to him on the opposite page.
For my last pamphlet I decided to do the sacrament of Confirmation. Since the first two deal with faith and new life, the idea for Confirmation was a logical selection. This sacrament is a verification of a person's faith, his enlightenment, and his initiation into the adult Christian community. This is all represented in the traditional idea of the Holy Spirit coming down upon the Apostles as "parted tongues of fire, which settled upon each one of them." (Acts 2:3) The cover shows an impression of this traditional idea.

After these designs were complete, I realized there was still something wrong about them. Since as artist has the duty to instruct, more expression in the work would be helpful; it would make the pamphlet more personal and probably more readily understood. I felt, then, that I could take my whole set designs and, by rendering them more loosely and with more feeling, I could illustrate them to be meaningful without destroying any sophistication. It was in this final step that I discovered the versatility of my basic ideas of a stained glass effect, a composition using the space of the whole, and a design composed of many smaller parts.

By the sixth week I had reworked all pamphlets
into dummies to be finalized.

The next part of the project was to design a symbol for St. John the Evangelist Church in Rochester. This problem is, of course, entirely different from that of a design style used for instructional purposes since there are now more limitations. Here, I am limited to one specific image which must encompass all the feeling and basic elements that my developed style had; yet, for a quick identification I must create a clear and concise design.

I decided to use the symbol of St. John, the eagle, along with the shape of a cross—integrating both of them into one unit. The final symbol makes use of smaller components—an extension of the idea I had used in my pamphlets.

The cross itself is symbolic of Christ, God the Son, and the eagle of St. John who knew" with loftily soaring mind and clearest sight the eternal power of his divinity and caused us to know also by his writings." 9

When applied to an envelope, in black, with the address, the symbol was much too heavy and awkward, but in shades of warm gray it had a more airy feeling.
To further display the versatility of my original ideas, I decided that my last pieces of work would be decorative, not that symbolic, and more refined in technique. The first, a missal cover, makes use of warm earthy colors again edged in black in the shape of a cross. The center oval is of more brilliant shades in Eucharistic symbols to represent the ceremony and drama of the climactic communion rite.

The last work is a songbook cover which makes use of the shapes of colors. They give the idea of a sun-like freedom in red-yellow emerging from a semi-darkness. Community singing is intended to make men emerge from within themselves, to reach out to others in the community.
Typography
For actual printing the pamphlets could be limited to a certain number of colors without too much loss of total effect.

They could be printed on a light weight paper such as Champion Papers Carnival Offset, Smooth Finish, in Caslon 540 type.

I used both Caslon 540 and Folio Medium extended to show the designs as they work with both modern and classical-looking type.

The cover and left-hand page of the center-spread of the "Eucharist" pamphlet were set by me on the Linotype in the Printing Department. The fact that the right-hand page of the centerspread was not set was simply because of my own negligence. When I realized that the printed and unprinted pages would face each other, I had run out of time to correct my error.

The copy on the "Baptism" cover was hand set in the multi-media center of the Art and Design School and all copy was printed on the letterpress in that same location.

Greeking was used to indicate all other areas of copy.
Conclusion
Although it was quite a struggle, I can honestly say I have been successful in working out my proposal. I have created a design style that can be applied to various areas of need in the religious community.

Although I do not consider myself a religious artist, I do feel that I became one during the quarter I spent on this thesis. As graphic design my work communicates ideas; as religious design it communicates spirituality and religious beliefs. If I had not become a religious artist to a certain degree, my designs would have nothing to distinguish it as religious.

I retained traditional ideas especially in the symbols and colors but I put all these together in a way which is unlike existing graphic design. The combination of old and new in idea and style works well. I think the work is sophisticated but can be easily interpreted by anyone who cares to do so; and I believe it is interesting enough to hold someone's attention long enough for him to think about it.

Many problems arose during the quarter—problems that could have been more easily resolved be someone with more experience, but con-
sidering the scope of my thesis, I feel that these problems became valid learning experiences. I do feel that their existence takes away from the value of the work. If I had more time to resolve some of them I naturally would be more satisfied.

The problems of paper warping under the watercolors, the "temporary quality of instant lettering and greeking, and the mismatching of texts on the centerspread—these were all eventually discovered but not completely resolved because of lack of time and professional experience.

There were times when I thought I had tried to tackle too much in one quarter. Perhaps I should have done only one pamphlet, one symbol, and one cover and make each of them more professional-looking. I did, however, feel that the larger quantity was a valid experiment in that it allowed me to use one basic idea in slightly different techniques within an area.

As previously stated, there are many factors as artist must consider:

a. the purpose of the work
b. to whom it is directed
c. his flexibility in attitude and talent to adjust to the requirements
of the first two.

The fact that I had thought about these considerations helped me in the actual work on my proposal, and because I have designed a style to be used by the Church, for the parishioners and showed that I could easily adjust this style to any need (instructional or ornamental) further proves that my thesis is a success.
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid., p.92.

3 Ibid., p.97.

4 Ibid., p.19.


6 Ibid., p.101.

7 Ibid., p.101.


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Newspapers: