Sacred space: Symbols and celebrations

Katherine Nicosia

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SACRED SPACE:  SYMBOLS AND CELEBRATIONS

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IN THE SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
OF THE ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

NOVEMBER, 1980

Professor Owen Butler - Advisor
Sacred Space: Symbols and Celebrations

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

MFA Photography Program

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

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DEDICATION

To my mother and father –

the two most creative people I know
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INTRODUCTION

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all. Natura naturans.

There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fountain of action and of joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being...

Thomas Merton, Hagia Sophia

The experience of creating as an artist is for me an expression of my relationship with God. To deny this or talk about it on other terms would take away from the integrity, the mysterious Unity and the Wisdom which Merton writes about in the above statement. I feel it is important to state this now because I do not presuppose people know this about my work.

As in any relationship, solitude is important. And for me, time alone to pray is essential. Prayer is the centering, the retreating to the interior sacred space within me. There I ask, praise, and wonder where the Spirit will lead me. Prayer is the fountain of creativity from which I receive the grace to act.

Another essential part of the creative process is silence. Time and space apart in solitude. Space to listen to the fountain, and time to follow the waters of creativity.

An intriguing question was asked of me in my class on spirituality. Someone wanted to know what love and obedience had to do with sacred space. I have thought about this question for many months and I have come to believe more and more that love must exist before anything can be recognized as sacred.
Otherwise things are never really cherished. Love makes life sacred, as it should. Loving to create as an artist is essential to creating a work of art. Else, why bother?

For me, God's love is the catalyst for creating. It opens me to the presence of the Divine in the world and a generosity of heart, grace, moves me to act creatively. This creative action produces the work of art.

Obedience, the other part of the question, to me is simply being free enough to pursue, take risk and create good art. Christ, when he walked the earth, was always obedient to the Love of God and as a result acted creatively.
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THESIS PROPOSAL

Thesis Title  Sacred Space
Submitted by  Katherine Nicosia
Purpose  To use photographs to depict what I consider the sacred in nature

Background

As I began to think about my thesis proposal I remembered how I rather stumbled into my first photography class three summers ago while beginning studies in theology at Notre Dame University. However strange the combination seemed at the time, it has resulted in a very enjoyable and creative union for me. Since then I have discovered that other photographers, such as Minor White, have used photography to express their own theology and spirituality. I have also discovered in my studies of theology and spirituality, Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk who wrote many books on contemplation and spirituality and who also began making photographic images to express his ideas visually.

I have found that my approach to making photographs is an expression of my own spiritual and personal growth. My images consist of trying to depict the sacredness that I believe exists in the world of nature. I use the term sacred and define it as meaning a unity and value all things possess that are created by God. I define space as the openness within nature to receive and reflect the sacred. Sacred space therefore would incorporate all things in nature, and my task will be to try to capture this special quality I call sacred in photographic images.
Procedure

I intend to keep a journal as part of my thesis. This journal will deal with my thoughts and ideas concerning sacred space. I intend to base these reflections on readings from the Old and New Testament, the writings of Thomas Merton and of other spiritual writers. Also included will be writings from photographers that deal with the spiritual, such as Minor White. These reflections will accompany some of my images in the thesis show. I shall include any technical observations concerning film and format when it is appropriate, using a 35mm camera for black and white images and the SX70 for color, photographing in Texas and New York from December, 1979 to April, 1980. I hope to have the photography completed by May, 1980.

Thesis Board

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Sister Kristin Malone, S.S.J.
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Rochester, New York
Sacred Space
inside, always a place
to face the Face.
How kind the reflection,
For there are no objections
All is good.
Being is good
EXISTING in PRAISE.
Living in thanksgiving.
Life is mystery.
Life is sacred.

August, 1980
January 7, 1980

Well, at last I finally am settling down to begin my thesis. It is really hard to believe that I'm actually at that point, but I am and I am looking forward to it. I think one reason I have put off writing anything is that I am a little scared at the prospect of really committing myself to this sacred space topic. Funny but sometimes I feel afraid to begin a project in art. I usually get over that feeling quickly; however, it is interesting to me that I should feel so apprehensive about photographing, which I love to do, yet I wonder whether it is the possibility of failing to convey what I see, or failing myself in some way that makes me fearful.

In The Courage to Create, Rollo May says, "Creative courage is the discovering of new forms, new symbols, new patterns on which a new society can be built. Every profession can and does require some creative courage."¹ I really had never considered being creative or creating anything as courageous, or as a courageous gesture, but maybe there is something to that. If I feel fearful, then overcome that fear because of the possibility of discovering Beauty, a reflection of the Truth, then I am lured out of my fear to something beyond myself because I love it and I dare to take the risk to have courage. Interesting... One of the things I do like about being an artist is that you have to deal with things outside of yourself, and it is such a gift to be able to create a thing of beauty that is a part of you yet can belong to everyone in the sense that each can appreciate the beauty you create (hopefully!).

When I was in Texas last week I began photographing for my thesis and I began in my favorite place—the beach. There is something about water and sand that always attracts me. As I walked the beach, I began to think of my thesis and the whole idea of sacred space, and how do I begin. As I was trying to get a handle on that, the word Genesis sprang into my mind, and as I walked on the beach I recalled the first few words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..."¹ and as I continued walking nearer to the water I turned around so I could see what was behind me and decided to explore the sand dunes. The images that came from that day remind me of many different things—the moon surface, canyons, sculptured pieces created by the wind. One of my favorites is the image of the sand that looks like a wave, then again looks like a backbone—Mother Earth's backbone—the Giving Earth. The sand seems very mysterious. Sometimes it looks like sand, sometimes like snow, and then like solid stone. Yet to touch it, it all falls apart. The seemingly solid appearance is so fragile in reality.

Now I guess I should ask myself, is this sacred space? I think the sand is a good example of symbolizing this presence of the sacred because the sacred is so creative. The wind molds the sand and blows it and the sun dries it and the water washes it, and the sand is always true to itself, as we should be. An interesting thing about the so fragile sand is that when it is melted it becomes glass, clear, inflexible. It then keeps out the wind, the water, and the sun shines through it. Yet by nature the glass is still fragile, and so beautiful in this other state, a different beauty from the sand. By coloring the glass and putting it in a window it transforms the room into a sacred space. The glass walls of the Gothic churches are witness

to our longing to be within a space that says to us that this place is holy, is different, is special! It really is incredible when you think about it, all those individual tiny grains of sand forming such beauty in such distinctive ways. As the walk continued, I carried on with the Genesis theme. I was in a sail boat when I took the "light graffitti" and I left open the camera shutter to see what would happen. "God divided light from darkness." \(^1\) I especially like the one with the red in the lower right hand corner. It looks like an artist's signature!

January 21, 1980

Time has really gotten away from me. Back in Rochester, I've been so busy since Christmas trying to get my thesis proposal written and approved that I have scarcely photographed. I am beginning to see the problem with using the word sacred. It really evokes different responses from people. I realize that what I want to do is different; however, I don't see it as impossible. I guess the word is so general that I have to be careful, but I really would not want to change it. The word space is general also. However, it seems to me that my definitions are clear enough.

January 22, 1980

I had some positive feedback about my thesis. It was good to hear. I'm still looking for a place to photograph, somewhere quiet...maybe Mt. Savior.

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\(^1\) The Jerusalem Bible op. cit., p. 15.
January 23, 1980

It seems that the problem with my thesis proposal is using the word "sacred", It is strange to me that it is immediately associated with a harsh, unforgiving God. It really is not at all what I want to convey. A harsh God is not the God of Creation... The Prime Artist.

January 25, 1980

A friend talked about my thesis with me today. He said he felt the word sacred was antagonistic to many people. I wonder if it is because life has gotten so fast and fragmented that we are so out of touch with what is real, good and loving. That word could lose so much meaning--and out of our poverty it becomes fearful!

I really do want to use the word sacred; it brings to mind many things that this thesis represents, most of all, a personal conviction that life is sacred, and for me the tool for recording it is the camera, and I just know it can be done.

I guess we will see how it goes on Tuesday. Maybe I'm on the wrong track. Time will tell.

January 26, 1980

Eva Rubenstein spoke to our graduate seminar on the ethics of photography and her own photos. She is a very sensitive person. She seemed to have suffered much in her life. She says the most important thing she does is to teach. Interesting comment. Interesting topics. Suffering, ethics, photographing and teaching... Somehow there is a connection. Maybe it is
compassion. Love. Somewhere Minor White says photography is a healing art. Maybe because he was compassionate and loving, giving—"The magnitude love achieves is measured by its strength of giving, perception of understanding faith and purpose through the passage of time—Walter Render."¹

January 28, 1980

Today I photographed the women at the women's ordination office here in Rochester. I was telling them about my thesis proposal and the hassles with the name. 'R' said she considered sacred space the area two people shared who love each other, or when people touch in a lover's way. I hadn't thought about it like that.

January 29, 1980

My thesis proposal passed today! I got a note at work; someone called and said it was approved. I was so excited, when all of a sudden I began to feel my heart sink and I wondered—how am I going to do it? I hope the feeling is temporary.

I wish I had been able to go to the meeting, but I had a workshop to give at Nazareth.

February 28, 1980

This week I finish all my course work at R. I. T. So good to be done! Now to spend time writing. And photographing. A lot has happened since I

wrote anything in this journal. I quit my job and moved out to the seminary. I have permission to have the show here and I am really happy about that. All I have to do now is produce all these wonderful photographs I already have in my mind.

March 1, 1980

Yesterday I finally had time to photograph and the day was so beautiful! I spent a couple of hours wandering around the woods and walking along the Genesee river bank. The light shining across the water, ice and snow was really pretty. And the sacredness of the images nature created was all there. As I walked alone I was, of course, searching for some of those special pictures; however I found myself thinking of this woman we visited in the hospital on Sunday. She was 92 and dying. She started to cry as we were standing there. 'B' was really kind to her, took her hand and tried to reassure her. She told us she was "deteriorating". I never know what to say to people when they know the truth about their illness. I feel so helpless. I know presence is important but I still want to do something and as we were talking to her I thought to myself she is so sick, and here I am healthy, walking around doing something I really enjoy. Sacred space didn't seem so relevant anymore.

I told someone later how I was feeling about that visit and the person said that people have to reach out and remind one another that the space has been made sacred by Christ. He just accepted people where they were and then ministered to them.
March 6, 1980

I think when the weather is dreary, as it is today, I find sacred space very elusive. I guess I could have done some portraits but I was just too tired. I think the last few months are catching up with me and I feel very weary all of a sudden. I really don't feel like pushing so hard. Those photos are going to have to find me at this rate.

March 7, 1980

This morning was so beautiful. Last night it snowed a few inches and this morning everything was lightly covered with snow and the wind wasn't blowing and the stillness and silence was incredible. It really did feel sacred to me. I photographed that statue of Mary with her "snow shawl" around her and then I proceeded up the walk and noticed several mandala type arrangements in the snow. A couple were manhole covers, and a couple were tree stumps: It's interesting to me how all the symbols of the sacred are so prevalent in nature. I'll be interested in seeing the contact sheets of the last couple of weeks. Next week I'm going to begin doing people. I am looking forward to that.

March 10, 1980

Yesterday I met with a friend to discuss some things. She has been thinking about sacred space. She had some books to give me with different passages marked. They were so curious to me. One was a book of Celtic Meditations by Edward Farrell, and she had marked Charles de Foucauld's personalized translation of the Our Father. It is called *Prayer of Abandonment*.
Father,
I abandon myself into your hands; 
Do with me what you will. 
Whatever you may do, I thank you: 
I am ready for all, I accept all. 
Let only your will be done in me, 
And in all your creatures-- 
I wish no more than this, O Lord. 
Into your hands I commend my soul; 
I offer it to you with all the love 
Of my heart, for I love you, Lord, 
And so need to give myself, to 
Surrender myself into your hands, 
Without reserve, 
And with boundless confidence, 
For You are My Father.\(^1\)

The other book is called *Poverty of Spirit* by Johannes B. Metz. In this she marked the following quote: "In the final analysis man has one of two choices: obediently to accept his innate poverty or to become the slave of anxiety."\(^2\)

These two quotes presented a challenge to me as to what they have to do with sacred space. It is interesting to me that she would pick these particular passages because at first I didn't quite get the connection between these and taking pictures. However, as we discussed them, I began to see what I think she had in mind. She looked at some of my pictures and said she liked them, but that she felt if I was really going to photograph sacred space, I had to photograph people. It's one area I really don't feel very secure in. I don't like the confrontation. She suggested doing little children first. I do enjoy photographing them. They are always themselves.

Regarding the readings, I suppose being poor in spirit and emptying oneself makes one more receptive to God's word. I guess I have not thought of it in relationship to my photography.


All of my preconceived thoughts on sacred space seem to hinder me from seeing things in a new way. I really hadn't considered people as part of that.

I was reading Photographers on Photography and I came across this passage by Minor White—he discusses the idea of photographing in a "sensitized" state of mind. He says: "Perhaps the blank state of mind can be likened to a pot of water almost at the boiling point. A little more heat, an image seen—and the surface breaks into turbulence."\(^1\) Possibly the creative work of the photographer consists in part of putting himself into this state of mind.

Making ourselves more sensitive is hard because it involves risk. The artist takes risks, we have to, to be true, to move forward beyond the self, the secure self.

The other day I began photographing without any set plan and it interested me that after about an hour I had mainly photographed patterns of light coming through different windows that formed crosses across the surface of an assortment of objects.

It seems that the paradox of "letting go" in order to find can also be applied to art as well as to the religious experience in following Christ. Both are a mystery to me. I know the times I've come across a scene that just jumps out at me—it touches a chord deep within that words could never describe adequately. I guess it's such an intimate part of me it is unexplainable—it's sacred in a way that maybe it's touching that part of the gift God gives and it makes the moment very precious. Even though I have a picture I really like, it always falls a little short of the experience.

March 15, 1980

It was such a beautiful day to photograph. Beautiful blue shadows falling across the snow, outlining in perfect detail the object it comes from. Merton's right--nature is always doing the will of God. It is being exactly what it was created to be--dies in winter, blooms in spring, bears fruit in summer and is harvested in the fall. The cycle goes on: maybe that's why I'm so interested in mandalas. Somebody said to me as I left the dining room: "Too bad you only have around here to photograph." I thought it was too bad they don't see beauty right under their noses! Just watching the wind blow the snow into drifts, it's wonderful! You can't tell whether it's snow or smoke in the air.

I walked around the pond in back looking at the ice on the surface of the water. It looks so strong and is so fragile. I flattened myself on the ground to focus in closer and I was fascinated at the water running under the ice. It looked like big cells just squeezing under the ice, then rushing on into larger areas. It reminded me of blood cells running in larger arteries, rushing life throughout the body. It was beautiful to watch; however, I was freezing and when I got up I was covered with grass burrs on my coat and scarf. The things I do for art!

March 16, 1980

I saw a couple of the scenes I could not photograph--one was a little boy receiving communion and the other was a child waving her hand through the incense smoke during the consecration. It was beautiful symbolism.

I really wish it would start to get warm. I think I have exhausted sacred snow and ice. It would be so nice to go to Texas this month and see
the bluebonnets and backpack up the cypress creek area. Those huge cypresses that look like God, melted across those big boulders.

March 17, 1980

I have to do a slide presentation of Catherine of Siena and so met today with J. H. who will do the music. It's really fascinating to me to talk with another artist. There is a common ground you can meet on that I really think all of us possess but somehow things get all crossed up. Among artists it is instinctive; like among children--they communicate wonderfully. I wonder what happens between child and adult that destroys that?

March 18, 1980

Last night I got all my negatives developed. I think I took a few good ones. Those of the dance group are nice. I so enjoyed photographing them. They were dancing-praying for the liturgy yesterday. They move so as to uplift the spirit. They weave the fragments of time back together and remind me of the Reality in Worship.

March 19, 1980

How am I going to do all this?

March 20, 1980

Tonight, Liturgy was really special. Two musicians from the Eastman School of Music played, a harpist and a violinist. It was so beautiful. Somebody said their presence made the space sacred. The bread, the wine,
the people and the music seemed to be so much a part of one another. For a few moments...

March 21, 1980

Walked around today taking some pictures. It was so warm outside I couldn't believe it. As I was walking up the path I came to the wooden cross at the other end of the property and I thought to myself how strange this looks here, with the smoke stacks of Kodak in the background and traffic whizzing by on Lake Avenue. The symbol seemed out of context. I wonder how many people ever see the cross here. I wonder what difference would it make when you think of what Christ did, it's always out of context with society. He preached love, and He was killed for it.

March 22, 1980

Snowed again. Ugh! I can't believe it's March and more snow. Well, I went out to get the last of the winter photographs. I was encouraged by a green bud on a tree. Maybe it knows something I don't.

March 28, 1980

Yesterday was my birthday and I really didn't take the time to write down anything. However, I did walk around with my camera reflecting on sacred space and thinking that I was very grateful to have this space to be in. I think that's what makes a place sacred, being grateful for the space, the time, the people I enjoy being with; otherwise, the space is impersonal and has no meaning for me.
Reflection, light, and water—I seem to gravitate toward that combination. I photographed the pond down by the Genesee River. The image reminded me of a water color painting. I thought of mother then. She still doesn't understand why I photograph when I could paint. Maybe that's why I like water so much; it reminds me of a safe, secure time in the womb, being nurtured in that sacred space.

March 29, 1980

I hope to do some more photographing when I go to New York in April. I hope to have finished here in Rochester by May.

I certainly have been involved with a lot of different people in the last few days. It is always a source of wonderment to me as to why I encounter the people I do. There always seems to be something to be learned from sharing with others.

One photograph that comes to mind concerning sacred space between people is an image I saw in Eugene Smith's photo essay on Minimata. It was of a Japanese woman bathing her disfigured child in a large bathtub. The child had been disfigured during pregnancy by the fish the mother had eaten. The fish had been caught in a lake that contained mercury waste from a nearby factory. The photograph really is a modern day Pieta.

April 1, 1980

Yesterday my class in Spirituality read my Journal. It was really strange listening to people discuss all the things I have been thinking about. I felt very uneasy about that; however as the time went on it wasn't too bad. They gave some good criticism and they asked some questions that I hadn't
really thought about. One idea someone offered was that I presupposed people know I am taking sacred space in the light of my own faith experience, and that I shouldn't do that. Other questions were: What relationship does prayer have to sacred space? How essential is silence? What do love and obedience have to do with sacred space? What again is sacred space?

I feel that I have just begun to scratch the surface with my ideas of sacred space and I find that very exciting.

April 4, 1980, Good Friday

Today I went down to St. Joseph's House of Hospitality and took part in walking the stations of the cross to different places in the city. We began at Clinton Avenue at the Association for the Blind Office Building, and then continued on to different spots where people have been abused by institutions of society. As we made the rounds of the different places, I began photographing, trying to find sacred space in an ugly part of the city. There wasn't anything but concrete and brick, which to me fragmented the space. What I found myself doing was photographing people. They softened the space and reminded me that the space was indeed sacred by their presence. One man had been carrying his little girl for a while and another man offered to carry her. She went to him and kept looking up into his face for the longest time, then she rubbed his face and looked at her hand, then smiled at him. I took the picture and the expression on their faces is really touching. Another man was having trouble walking, and a woman reached out and took his hand and helped him walk. A woman couldn't see very well and someone offered her help and they walked together. Hands healing and weaving the space back together!
Christ, two thousand years ago, hung on a cross, sanctifying the space for us, mending the fragments back into a whole.

How strange the processional cross looked against the modern skyline! It made me realize that Christ is Love and Obedience in sacred space, that nature, as beautiful as it is, as willing as it is, can never love, can never freely choose obedience. Jesus did both. The space is indeed sanctified and made sacred by that act.

Today, sacred space was being a part of ancient history; time and space are joined by Christ's love and obedience to make our lives and our world sacred forever.

Last night some of us visited St. Bridget's Church, after we had been to several others on our Holy Thursday visits. We were all struck with the poverty of the space. Paint was peeling off the walls and off everything else that was painted.

I wanted to photograph but I didn't know what image to make and I also didn't feel it would be appropriate. I felt a real poverty of creativeness. I just didn't see anything I could make a picture of, yet I knew something was there. The space had been fragmented and it is in desperate need of healing. I wanted to fix things up, make the church look better in appearance so the people would have beauty to worship in. But that's how I would approach it. I wonder whether they would think that was very superficial. These people had suffered so much in their lives, more so than any of us ever will.

Easter Week: April 7-13, 1980

I spent this week in New York City. It was good to get away and have a chance to photograph and see some of the art shows. The transit strike was on, so we really had to do a lot of walking, which was good because I
really had a variety of things to photograph on sacred space. Well, I really found myself out of my element. The sidewalks of New York are a far cry from St. Bernard's and the Genesee River, or the beaches of Texas. I found New York so hard. Wall to wall concrete! The beautiful sand I saw in Texas had been transformed into hard ugly concrete and brick, no longer fragile, but molded into unyielding static blocks. They will never be able to change. I thought to myself, that, if I see the world as sacred space, surely that would have to apply to cities, but I found the city so un-sacred. There doesn't seem to be any peace in it. The noise alone invades my senses to a distracting measure. The city is so busy; people walk in a hurry with very serious looks on their faces; all have walls of defenses up to protect themselves.

I really felt frustrated while I was there. I didn't take a lot of pictures. As we walked down Broadway one evening I especially noticed the marquees and advertisements. How much they say about the condition of our society! Everything that was lit up seemed to be exploiting people, socially, sexually, and economically. The atmosphere seemed as hard as the concrete. I could not get a sense of sacred space.

We went up to the top of the Empire State Building and the view was magnificent. There were millions of colored lights below that covered up all I saw the day before. The space was easier to look at, even beautiful, so I photographed it and left the shutter open. This blurred the images but the colors were very vivid.

One day we walked through Chinatown and Little Italy. I still wasn't comfortable with my sense of what was sacred space. I found myself looking for familiar symbols—I finally saw a cross on a church steeple. I thought I would go on to see what it was like, but the church was locked.
I felt like an outsider there. I would like to spend some time getting to know the people then, and maybe I would develop a sense of what was sacred to them.

We sat down on a park bench for a while and watched children play ball on the concrete playground. I had never seen that before. It is no wonder some grow up to be tough. They can't even fall down on soft grass when they play!

As I looked around I still wasn't moved to photograph although people had put flowers outside their window sills and the flowers stood out as signs of softness against the concrete and iron of the fire escapes.

Maybe some day I can go back and spend time in Chinatown and Little Italy and learn to see more. I feel the poverty of not being able to recognize the sacredness of some places. Do I just think sacred space is only "the pretty"? O God, that sounds so superficial!

I double-exposed a role of slide film that evening when we were walking down Broadway. I was hoping by doing that I would produce some interesting images. I questioned too, if I did it because I was trying to find something worthwhile to photograph or simply because by using tricks I would create something interesting--maybe sacred, something I couldn't see before...

I think what I see is how the sacred space has been profaned, covered over and painted to look appealing, yet some of those places are deceitful. I suppose I'll just have to think harder about this not seeing the sacred in everything. Surely it's not just beauty that I see as sacred.

April 15, 1980

I am still struggling with this business about the sacred being only pretty. I really haven't had any more insights into that problem.
A friend just called and I was telling him about my problem with sacred space. He said that he thought beauty was never superficial and that, when a person is photographing, the camera can only do so much, as any art can do just so much. Maybe it's at this point that a photograph becomes a symbol and the viewer's imagination takes over.

I feel so limited by the camera; photography really only says a little about how I feel. Maybe that's where theology plays a part—maybe that's why prayer is so important. Prayer creates an openness in me to God, people, artistic expression and spiritual awareness. I photograph out of liking what I see—sometimes loving. I obey my artistic sense and try to create beautiful images.

April 29, 1980

Time has really gotten away from me. I haven't been photographing much. I have decided to wait for greater signs of spring.

May 6, 1980

I photographed earlier this week and as I walked along my well worn path around St. Bernard's I was delighted to find spring actually showing itself. I can't believe anything can survive the snow and ice around here. Everything kept saying, "There are signs of the Promise."

I've been experimenting with a new technique in using SX70 polaroid film. By pushing the emulsion around under the plastic covering with a blunt instrument the result makes the picture look like a small impressionistic painting. I like that idea of just the "impression" of the image. In terms of using it with the sacred space theme, I see it as more meaningful because it is mysterious and beautiful—a different reality introduced into
the image by a personal touch.

One of the reasons I haven't been writing much is that I've been struggling with the idea of sacred space in light of my New York experience. I got the slides back and I was fascinated with the results, the colors and designs that speak of such slick aspects of life. The space is still sacred but it has been fragmented. On the surface it looks attractive but it is not really attractive, especially when I looked again the next day. The light of day exposes it all for what it is. No bright lights can challenge the sun.

One slide has the word "fascination" in large letters across it. The lights make it so slick. Another slide has a "Big Apple" poster in it, superimposed over a Broadway marquee with the word "Penitentiary" in large letters. Another image shows a man holding a sign stating he is on strike, with the Broadway lights shining across it. Does anyone care he is hurting? One picture is especially interesting, in a sad sort of way. It is an image of a huge billboard with a forty-foot tall painted model advertising a pair of designer jeans...

City space
is hard space.
Walls everywhere.
Hard walls,
so to fall, hurts
most of all.
Here there is
no soft, sacred, space.
Just a place that
lights color at night.
Slicked over abuses.
Billboards advertising
things not needed.
Yet heeded.
Always at night they are
bright.
Yet the light shows
painted paper as lifeless
images and out-of-proportion models
with smiles too big, teeth too perfect
—and no compassion.
June 3, 1980

Too many days have passed since I have written. I have been preoccupied with job hunting and graduation. Sacred space photos have come to a halt. I am going to do some paintings for my show in September. My advisor thought it would be a good idea to combine them with my photographs. I liked the idea very much.

The day I graduated I was with some friends and one of their children asked me to take a picture of her. So we went for a walk and she went over and sat down in a field of dandelions and waited for me to photograph her. It was very ironic that she chose dandelions to sit down in. It caused me to recall what someone told me two years ago about my photography. She said it was like puff balls, dandelions, that are blown about in the wind. What good is it, or are they? Well, at the time I really didn't have much of an answer. However, I related that story to another friend, and she said: "Dandelions are made up of thousand of seeds and when the wind blows, the seeds are scattered all over and new life begins." I had my answer.
MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

As far as using any exotic techniques or new developers or film, I did not venture into any unknown areas.

Using the Polaroid SX-70 film and camera was interesting for several reasons. The color it creates appeals to me. My previous background in art was watercolor and I think that explains why I find the pastel colors it renders appealing.

The instant process is certainly intriguing to create with. To think that all the developing goes on under the plastic coating right in your hand is incredible. To me, the idea of all that energy from the sun recording a reality on film is something worth thinking about. I find in looking at a Polaroid SX-70 image that I have to hold it closer by virtue of its smallness, and it creates a more intimate quality in the viewing.

In using the SX-70 I found that although it is limited more than most cameras, I could also be very creative with it.

I found that I couldn't vary too far past the normal mark on either side of the dial; however, this really is adequate for most of the work I do.

The film works best in warm weather. If it is below 38°F you have to wait for the picture to develop in a warmer atmosphere. The other alternative is to put the image next to your skin under your clothes. In Rochester this could be a problem; you are risking frostbite to get through the layers.

In low light you can do fun things (with the camera), however, you can't get very much detail without a flash.
Sometimes I would use a stylus on the surface of the film, after I had taken a picture, to manipulate the image. The result is an impressionistic image. When I did this varied from time to time. I am not really sure why I would use this technique at times but one thing I noticed is that I liked distorting the image and then using a personal touch in working with the print.

I suppose there are all kinds of philosophy discussions that could take place on creating photographs that look like paintings; however that was not my purpose here. I simply enjoyed the results.

The other camera I used was a 35 mm. Cannon F-1 with a normal lens and TRI-X, ASA-400 film. I printed on Kodak Polycontrast paper with a N surface.

The paintings were done with a mixture of gesso and acrylic paints, with a water color wash over the finished painting.
CONCLUSION

In the process of photographing for my thesis I think the one thing that I have tried to do is to explore the idea of sacred space as thoroughly as I could. I have photographed in color and in black and white, and I have "painted" with the SX-70 and a paintbrush. In all, I feel that I expressed myself the best I could right now as an artist.

What I have learned is that I have many things to learn, not only about art, but about myself. I can honestly say it has been a challenge, and I have enjoyed the process. It seems the deeper I looked into the project the more I discovered about myself and how I express myself as an artist.

There are many facets to being a creative person and it is a lifetime process of becoming a person and an artist. Paul Strand comments:

If you have something to say about life, you must also find a way of saying it clearly. And if you achieve that clarity of both perception and the ability to record it, you will have created your own composition, your own kind of design, personal to you, related to other people's yet your own. The point I want to make is that there is no such thing as THE way; there is only for each individual, his or her way, which in the last analysis, each one must find for himself in photography and in living. As a matter of fact, your photography is a record of your living, for anyone who really sees.  

I think the challenge ahead is striving for clarity in really seeing and really living, to take the risk of creating and never losing your courage.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


