Reviews

CARDROSS SEMINARY: GILLESPIE, KIDD & COIA AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF POSTWAR CATHOLICISM. *The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland* **Edinburgh l997. 92pp + 98 figures. £9.95.**

This is a fair-minded, scholarly and readable account of one of Scotland's most controversial postwar buildings, written by Diane Watters and edited by Miles Glendinning

The firm of GKC received most of the Archdiocese of Glasgow's design commissions in the '50s and '60s. During that time it introduced into Scotland a sculptural, fluid Modernism that was a break with the arid, rectilinear rigidities of the '20s and '30s. The influence of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp (l955) and Dominican 'monastery' at La Tourette (1957-60) was strong. But so was a more local influence—that of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, with his asymmetrical compositions, plain, curved, walls, and harled finishes. Collaboration developed with modern artists and craftspersons, and, notably, the sculptor Benno Schotz. GKC won numerous national and international architectural prizes and its work was widely featured and acclaimed in the professional press. The most prestigious commission arrived in 1953 for the design of the new St Peter's Seminary at Cardross on the Clyde estuary, to be attached to the existing Kilmahew House.

This book explores the complex relationships between the Archdiocese, the architects, and the seminary staff, and the way a series of designs developed. It was not until 1959 that the second design, according to which the building was executed, evolved. It was based on a main block with a covered cloister at basement level, a chapel and refectory joined by a stairwell at ground level, and three floors of student 'cells' for 100 persons which stepped inwards to the centre, two of the cell row floors opening onto open access galleries which looked into the open space of the chapel and the refectory. Linking the main block with Kilmahew House was a kitchen block, and beyond the House was a new convent for six nuns. Attached to the other end of the main building was the classroom block containing the common room, lecture rooms and the library.

Construction started in 1960 and was not completed till 1968.

The project was fraught with difficulties from the start. First, there was always a shortage of funds, and this was one reason for a number of changes, simplifications and size reductions, which caused serious programming difficulties for the contractor. Scarce Scottish resources were divided between this western seminary and the less ambitious eastern one

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at Drygrange. Even the west of Scotland was divided in its financial support, to the extent that the Diocese of Motherwell in 1975 decided to send its students to the eastern seminary. Secondly the construction technology was not only complex itself but parts of the site, especially that on which the classroom block was to be built, presented extremely difficult ground conditions for foundations. Thirdly, technical difficulties of water penetration, heating, structural cracks (in 1974 the roof over the classroom block stairway actually collapsed) and timber deterioration were serious and growing. Fourthly, the number of students entering the college never reached the planned-for 100; it was 56 at its maximum, and thus there was a large amount of redundant space—not only to be paid for, but to be heated, maintained and repaired.

Fifthly, and this was perhaps the most damaging problem, the College was conceived and designed in a pre-Conciliar mode; by the time it opened, in 1966, Vatican 2 had been closed for eight months. Its new perspective on priestly training, the liturgical reforms, the decentralisation from Rome, the use of the vernacular and ecumenical objectives all had profound implications for the College's curriculum, lifestyle and government and, in turn, its architecture. The staff were split in their reaction, and stern measures had to be taken by Archbishop Scanlan to end the factionalism. Numbers continued to drop, and the combination of solitude and highly formalised communal life—the liturgy, in classes and in dining—was no longer attractive being out of tune with the spirit of the times. Concelebration made the numerous side chapels of the sanctuary obsolete.

In the end the obstacles proved to be insurmountable and in 1979, only thirteen years after opening, the decision was taken to close St Peter's, and the last students and staff left early in 1980. Proposals for conversion into a conference centre and an hotel fell by the wayside. For four years the buildings were used as a drug rehabilitation centre; finally it was abandoned in 1987. The buildings fell into increasingly ruinous state, and Kilmahew House burnt down in 1995 and was demolished. St Peter's is now listed as a Category A building, with all the consequent legal requirements placed on the owners for upkeep, and at present there is an approved proposal to retain the consolidated, but ruined, main block as a 'historical monument'!

Controversy over listing, conservation and re-use has highlighted quite fundamental issues about the nature of architecture. Twenty one of GKC's churches are now listed, several not without their problems of technology and use. One of the firm's churches, St Benedict's in the peripheral estate of Drumchapel in Glasgow, was hastily demolished in 1991 when it became known that a proposal for listing was imminent. St Benedict's too had suffered from the day it was opened from water penetration, structural defects and unheatability (a number of older or frailer parishioners having abandoned it for more tolerable neighbouring churches). The Archdiocese was fearful of a permanent drain on its, and the poor parish's, scarce resources which had already been spent in unsuccessful attempts to

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repair, maintain and heat it.

So the question is, if a building from the start, or soon after, fails both technically and in function, and becomes a financial burden on its owners, remaining as a large piece of public sculpture, by what criteria is it judged to be 'architecture', not to mention outstanding architecture, such as justifies its permanent retention at a cost both the owners and the public purse? This question is touched upon but hardly discussed in this book—unsurprisingly, perhaps, from a body whose existence and very title depends on a definition of architecture as an object of artistic monumentality. Yet this question lies at the core of a rational conservation policy. It is useless to argue, as defenders of the present system sometimes do, that application of rigorous criteria of use and technical performance would have condemned medieval cathedrals, Georgian terraces and Victorian railway stations to demolition. The historical record shows all these to have been usable (and many are still in use) without disastrous expenditure. Beautiful as they may be, they also perform and performed, both socially and technically. St Peter's is a stern reminder of how far we need to go to arrive, or arrive again out of Postmodernist chaos, at a culturally authentic and socially just definition of architecture.

THOMAS A. MARKUS

THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN: The Aristotelian Revolution (750 BC — AD 1250) by Prudence Allen RSM, Grand Rapids, *Wm B Eerdmans* (*distributed by Alban Books, 79 Park Street, Bristol BS1 5PF*)**, 1997, xiv + 583 pp., £22.99 paperback.**

Sister Prudence Allen, professor of philosophy at Concordia University, Montreal, has published several important articles over the years. In particular, she has developed what she calls a philosophy of integral sex complementarity. In patristic and medieval times, her story goes, the great concern was to establish Christianity as a monotheism over against various tempting pagan polytheisms, so that Augustine and Thomas Aquinas emphasized the singleness of God and saw the image of this one God reflected in man, the individual male human being. By herself a woman could not reflect the image of God, while a man could, so Augustine thought. Thomas modified this: a woman by herself could reflect the image of God, but she did so less perfectly. The return to the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity in recent times opens the way to refiguring the image of God so as to respect the difference between man and woman and also take seriously the equality, on analogy with the divine Persons who are absolutely different and yet radically equal. This is a polemical intervention in a culture which is tempted to go either for androgyny (no difference between men and women) or for Mary Daly style gyn/ecology (nothing but difference). In this welcome second edition of the encyclopedic study that she brought out in 1985, Allen shows that, far from being ignored, as many suppose, consideration of the nature of woman has been a central aspect of philosophy since it began in Greece in the

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