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FRONTISPIECE

Dom Paul Bellot, OSB. Portrait 1941 by Père Marcel Plamondon, CSC, from *Chercher Dieu*, no.16 (Spring 1994), p.10

DOM PAUL BELLOT, OSB

A Study of *Propos d'un Bâtitseur du Bon Dieu* (1949)

PETER WILLIS

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts  
UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM Department of Theology 1994



20 JUN 1995

ABSTRACT

DOM PAUL BELLOT, OSB

A Study of *Propos d'un Bâtitseur du Bon Dieu* (1949)

by PETER WILLIS

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM Department of Theology 1994

PAUL BELLOT, OSB (1876-1944) was an architect and Benedictine monk whose contribution to 20th-century architecture has yet to be fully explored.

Trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, he designed monastic buildings in France, Holland, Belgium and England before moving to Canada in 1937 where he was trapped with the onset of the Second World War. In 1934 he had given a series of nine public lectures in Canada and in 1949, five years after he died, Editions Fides in Montreal published these as a book with the title *Propos d'un Bâtitseur du Bon Dieu*. It was illustrated by a portrait of Bellot and fifteen photographs of his buildings.

The *Propos* contains many references to other writers and it is Bellot's observations on three of these -- Viollet-le-Duc, Le Corbusier and Maritain-- which form the basis of this thesis.

Apart from published material, sources used include the Bellot archives at Quarr, at the abbeys of Solesmes and Wisques in France, and in Canada those at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac and at the Oratoire Saint-Joseph in Montreal.

The thesis comprises a volume of text and illustrations, and an appendix consisting of a boxed copy of the *Propos*.

## PREFACE

During the preparation of this thesis I have enjoyed the help of numerous people and I welcome the chance to acknowledge my debt to them here.

I have been fortunate enough to benefit from working under two distinguished scholars. First, the Rev Dr David Jasper, formerly Director of the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology at Durham, and currently Director of the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology at the University of Glasgow, who encouraged me from the moment I mentioned Dom Paul Bellot to him in a graduate seminar and who has since given constant and enthusiastic support; and second, Dr Sheridan Gilley, formerly Head of the Department of Theology at the University of Durham, who similarly has been generous with his time and advice and who supervised the thesis during the later stages of its preparation.

This study of Dom Bellot has afforded me the pleasure of visiting Benedictine communities in England, France and Canada, where I have met unfailing help and courtesy. Among monks whose assistance I gladly recall are Dom Aelred Sillem (the abbot) and Dom Charles Fitzsimons at Quarr, Dom Gerard Lafond (the abbot) and Dom Michel Hecquet at Wisques, Dom Louis Soltner at Solesmes, and Dom Jacques Garneau (the abbot), Dom Jean Rochon, and Dom Gaston Beaulieu at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. At the Oratoire Saint-Joseph in Montreal I was assisted by Fr Marcel Lalonde, CSC, and Fr Bernard LaFreniere, CSC. Dom Frans Huiting of Oosterhout advised me on Bellot's Dutch work.

Regrettably I failed to meet Dom Bellot's collaborator in Holland, the architect H C Van de Leur, who died in 1993; happily however Bellot's chief

French collaborator, M Joseph Philippe, is still active and lives at Tilques, close to Wisques, and I was able to discuss Bellot with him. Other friends whose kindness I recall include the late Peter Burton, Michael Barker, and Richard Padovan, whose book *Dom Hans Van Der Laan, Modern Primitive. A Critical Study of Dom Hans Van Der Laan* is due to be published in Amsterdam in 1995. Alison Thornton shared with me her knowledge of Quarr Abbey, Tim Benton provided insights on Le Corbusier, and David Stewart on Bataille's connections with Quarr Abbey.

Among librarians I thank Ruth Kamen and Julian Osley at the British Architectural Library in London, Janet Parks at the Avery Library at Columbia University in New York, Jan Van Der Wateren at the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the staff of the inter-library loan section at the Robinson Library at Newcastle University, and Renata Guttman, Michèle Picard and Robert Desaulniers at the Canadian Centre for Architecture at Montreal. Robin Gard, editor of *Catholic Archives*, made valuable suggestions for sources of material. In Paris I was aided by Susan Day in the library of the Institut d'Architecture Français, and by the staff in the Archives Nationaux, and the libraries of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Musée d'Orsay.

Since this thesis was begun in 1991 there has been a quickening of interest in Bellot, and in 1995 an exhibition entitled DOM BELLOT: MOINE-ARCHITECTE will be held in Paris, Brussels, Newcastle and elsewhere. This, and the accompanying book, have been supported financially by the EEC Kaleidoscope scheme. In the first instance the book itself, bearing the title *Dom Bellot: Moine-Architecte*, and edited by Maurice Culot, will be published in French by the Institut Français d'Architecture and Editions Norma early in 1995. My contribution to this consists of part-authorship of an article on

Quarr Abbey and Oosterhout, the bibliography, and an essay entitled '*Ecrits et conférences publiées de Dom Bellot*'. Members of the 'Groupe Dom Bellot', all of whom have willingly shared their enthusiasm with me, include Suze Bakker, Claude Bergeron, Maurice Culot, Christian Decotignie, Charlotte Ellis, Martin Meade, Nicole Tardif-Painchaud, and the photographer Dominique Delaunay. At the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal there has been warm support from the Director, Phyllis Lambert, and Nicholas Olsberg, the Chief Curator. Such activity amongst present-day *Bellotistes* means that this thesis is less a definitive statement and more a report on *recherches en cours*.

Generous financial assistance has been provided by several sources: my initial visit to Montreal and St Benoît-du-Lac was financed by a research grant from the University of Louisville during a period of teaching there in 1992. Subsequent funding came from Newcastle University, with the active support of John Wiltshire, and from the Canadian High Commission who granted me a Faculty Research Award in 1994 to return to Montreal and Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, and to visit the National Library and National Archives in Ottawa. The success of this visit owed much to the congenial assistance and hospitality of Claude and Sylvia Bergeron, Nicole Tardif-Painchaud, and Geoffrey Simmins.

My wife Jenny accompanied me on sorties to archives, monasteries and churches as we followed in the footsteps of Dom Bellot in England, France and Canada; in particular, our visits to his last resting place in the cemetery of the abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac will never be forgotten.

Peter Willis: September 1994

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## NOTES ON DOCUMENTATION

Throughout this thesis I have used the unpublished English version of Bellot's *Propos* prepared by Mrs Mary Jones in 1991, the title of which is *Comments by One of God's Builders. Dom Paul Bellot, OSB*. However references are given to the original French edition (eg *Propos* 123), a boxed copy of which is submitted as an appendix to the text of the thesis. A copy of Mrs Jones' translation (which she regards as a working rather than a finished version) has been deposited in the library at Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight.

Occasionally, for clarity, the punctuation and typography of the *Propos* have been amended.

## NOTES ON ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used when referring to collections of MSS:

Quarr Abbey, Isle of Wight	Quarr MSS
Abbey, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac	Saint-Benoît-du-Lac MSS
Oratoire Saint-Joseph, Montreal	Saint-Joseph MSS
Abbey, Saint-Pierre de Solesmes	Solesmes MSS
Abbey, Saint-Paul de Wisques	Wisques MSS

Of these, only the Wisques MSS have a published guide, namely Christian Decotignie, 'Les archives de Dom Bellot à Wisques', in Culot, ed, *Dom Bellot: Moine-Architecte* (forthcoming).

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

None of the material in this thesis has been submitted by the author for a degree in this or any other university.

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## INTRODUCTION

TUESDAY 5th July 1994 marked the 50th anniversary of the death of Dom Paul Bellot at the age of sixty-eight. He died in the Hôtel-Dieu, Montreal's oldest hospital, and the following Friday was buried in the monks' cemetery at the abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac which he had begun to build in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

Saint-Benoît-du-Lac is set in rolling Canadian countryside on the western shore of Lake Memphremagog, in the Province of Quebec (Plate 1), and its rural isolation is a far cry from the bustle of Paris where Dom Bellot was born. Trapped in Canada by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Dom Bellot was left to suffer at a distance, separated from '*sa patrie, la chère France martyre*'.<sup>2</sup>

In a more direct sense, Dom Bellot experienced the martyrdom of a committed artist whose very genius needs suffering if it is to flourish, as he was first driven from France by anti-clericalism, then isolated in Canada where he had to endure professional attack. Other sacrifices remain hidden, but few can doubt that the success of his buildings was bought at a great price, but that his belief in eternal values in architecture - which he saw as the servant of both God and Man - did not extort a heavy personal cost.

It is not without significance that the publication of Bellot's *Propos d'un bâtisseur du Bon Dieu* only took place after his death, for the lectures on which it was based were controversial. Any study of them must attempt to place them in the context of his training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, his architectural commissions, his relations with other artists, and his reception in Canada.

## BELLOT'S EARLY YEARS

Paul Louis Denis Bellot was born on 7 June 1876 at 21 rue du Cherche-Midi in Paris; his mother was Marie Antoinette Emilie Bellot, *née* Charlot, and his father Paul Eugène Bellot, described on Dom Bellot's birth certificate as '*vérificateur en bâtiment*' - that is, a form of surveyor, but later to be described as an architect by his son and others.<sup>3</sup> From 1894-1901 Dom Bellot studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and in 1902 entered the Benedictine community of Solesmes at Appuldurcombe on the Isle of Wight. He was clothed as a novice on 6 October that year, made his monastic profession on 29 May 1904 (the Day of the Holy Trinity) and was ordained priest on 10 June 1911.<sup>4</sup> Dom Paul Bellot's younger brother Dom Georges Bellot (1879-1963), an artist, was also a monk at Quarr.

At the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Dom Bellot entered the atelier of Marcel-Noel Lambert (1847-1928), professor of stereometry, whose surveys of the Athenian Acropolis were praised for their *vue d'ensemble*.<sup>5</sup> Bellot took his *diplôme d'architecture* under Lambert's direction in 1900, and in 1901 undertook three further projects, receiving a medal that year for a design for *Un conservatoire régional des arts et métiers*. Bellot's training at the Ecole would have followed a rigorous system with strict rules and set requirements, and have reflected a commitment to classicism.<sup>6</sup> This can be seen in Bellot's student drawings for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts now preserved at Wisques; however his design for a *Maison de famille et cercle français à Madrid*, his final diploma scheme which was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1901, displays a pronounced use of colour and a kind of Spanish Romanesque idiom (Plate 2).<sup>7</sup>

Bellot's *Feuille de valeurs* (or record of marks) documents his period of study at the Ecole, and to Professor Richard Chafee it shows that 'as a student Bellot was able and persevering but not outstanding'. Professor Chafee adds that 'it is a safe guess that he also worked part-time in an office'.<sup>8</sup> If this were so, it might have been in that of his father, and have covered the period between leaving the Ecole and moving to the Isle of Wight. On the other hand, Bellot may well have journeyed to Italy and Spain at this time, the watercolours he exhibited in the Salon of 1901 being based on these travels.

The teaching at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts has parallels with the Rule of St Benedict: both believed that the past can teach much that is relevant for the present, and that the freedom of the spirit must be restrained by discipline. Indeed the acceptance of discipline is itself a step towards freedom. Dom Bellot's belief in 'innovation in line with tradition' suggests both religious and architectural contexts. As he himself says in the *Propos*:

It is by studying and reflecting on the art of the great periods that we shall be equipped to take up the tradition of true beauty; then, as Saint Benedict, patriarch of Western monks, has said, 'God will be glorified in all things' (*Propos* 61).

In his biographical introduction to the *Propos*, the sculptor Henri Charlier (1883-1975) makes clear that Bellot was a committed Benedictine, noting St Benedict's observation in his Rule that 'a monk is never so much a monk as when he earns his living by the work of his hands'. In every way, Charlier continues,

Dom Bellot, monk, craftsman, missionary, is a worthy son of Saint Benedict, whose motto is summed up in these two words: ORA ET LABORA (*Propos* 25).

The rules of architecture and the Rule of St Benedict are perhaps not too far apart. Viollet-le-Duc, a fervent admirer of aspects of medieval architecture, and a great influence on Bellot, observed that 'regarded merely from the philosophical point of view, the Rule of St Benedict is perhaps the greatest historical fact of the middle ages'.<sup>9</sup>

## MONK AND ARCHITECT IN EUROPE

Driven from France in 1901 by the Law of Association, the members of the Solesmes community who fled to the Isle of Wight settled first at Appuldurcombe House, and then in 1907 they bought Quarr Abbey House, to which they transferred in 1908. The preceding year Dom Bellot, not expecting to practice again as an architect, was asked to design buildings for the Benedictine community from Wisques (also monks of Solesmes) who had escaped to Oosterhout, near Breda, in Holland. Bellot's many subsequent ecclesiastical buildings on the Continent were apparently undertaken from Quarr Abbey until about 1928-30 when the Solesmes community was allowed to return to France. At this juncture, Dom Bellot moved to Wisques, where he remained until he left for Canada in 1937.

Work on the abbey of Saint-Paul at Oosterhout was interrupted by Dom Bellot's call to return to the Isle of Wight for work on Quarr Abbey, but during the years leading up to his return to France he was constantly busy in Holland and Belgium, demonstrating his facility and imagination in brick construction. Luckily, Bellot's building activity was given an unofficial *imprimatur* in 1927 with the publication of the book entitled *Une oeuvre d'architecture moderne, par Dom Paul Bellot, OSB* or, to give it its English title, *A Modern Architectural Work, by Dom Paul Bellot, OSB* (Plate 3). This consisted of 92 black-and-white photographs, 8 colour plates, and 16 pages of plans, sections, and elevations. There was an introductory essay on Bellot's architecture by Henri Charlier and additional descriptive material by the architect Maurice Storez. Production (in English, French and Dutch editions) was by the abbey of Mont Vierge at Wépion in Belgium.



Not merely does *A Modern Architectural Work* offer enthusiastic statements by Charlier and Storez but - in the manner of Frank Lloyd Wright's Wasmuth portfolios of 1910-1911 - it also presents powerful images of the buildings themselves. There are seven of these, all taken from this first phase of Dom Bellot's practice: Saint-Paul's Abbey, Oosterhout; Quarr Abbey (Plate 7); the parish church, rectory and school at Noordhoek; the sisters' kindergarten and convent at Bavel; the college and chapel of the Augustinian Fathers at Eindhoven (Plate 8); the enlargement of the parish church at Heerle; and the cemetery chapel at Bloemendaal (Plate 9). The influence of the Dutch tradition is apparent in Bellot's powerful use of brickwork, and it is known that he visited Berlage in Amsterdam therefore would be familiar with the contemporary work of Cuypers and of such Dutch expressionists as Michel de Klerk. Moreover influence on Bellot must have come too from his travels in Spain, including the extraordinary creations of Gaudí; Bellot's exploration of the use of the parabolic arch has often been related to Gaudí's Collegio Teresiano in Barcelona (1891-1894), for example. And there are echoes of Butterfield and Street in Bellot's delight in polychromy (Plates 4, 5, 6).

A major factor in Bellot's life as an architect, and in encouraging his advanced views on liturgy, was his membership of the group of Catholic artists called *L'Arche*. This was founded in 1916-1917 and was directed by Maurice Storez whom we have already noticed as one of the contributors to *A Modern Architectural Work*. Moreover, as this book was being published, Storez and Bellot were acting as the two architects for the Church of Saint-Chrysole at Comines, on the Belgian-French border, to which various artists contributed. Other members of *L'Arche* included the architect Eugène Stassin, the sculptor Charlier, the liturgical designer Fernand Py, and Valentine Reyre the stained-glass artist.

In the establishment of their ideas, *L'Arche* was aided by Père Abel Fabre (1872-1929), the historian and art critic, and by the journal *L'artisan liturgique* which published two issues in 1929 and 1933 devoted exclusively to showing the range of activity (including embroidery and goldsmithing) of members of the group.<sup>10</sup> In the first of these issues, Maurice Storez explains that *L'Arche* is not committed to any preceding style, but rather seeks a new form of expression based on rational principles, embracing new materials and rejecting imitation. In order to achieve unity in design, architecture is seen as taking a superior role. As an anonymous writer put it in 1929:

*Il fallait aussi qu'ils reconnaissent la subordination de tous les arts à l'architecture; que dans tout travail d'ensemble l'architecte soit réelement maître d'oeuvre. Le maître d'oeuvre travaillera en collaboration avec les autres artistes, il sera le chef, il assignera à chaque partie de la décoration sa place dans l'oeuvre; dans la réalisation il laissera jouer la compétence technique spéciale de son collaborateur; et voilà la 'hiérarchie' requise elle aussi pour obtenir l'unité dans un ensemble ou un organisme . 11*

Dom Bellot's hopes of establishing a similar group to *L'Arche* in Canada were to be disappointed, though he was to find a group of architects there who were excited by his work.<sup>12</sup>

In Europe he had collaborated with several architects - notably Joseph Philippe in France, Eugène Stassin in Belgium, and H C Van De Leur in Holland - and in Canada it was Dom Claude-Marie Côté OSB (1909-1986) at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac who was to be Bellot's principal torch-bearer. Dom Côté had several advantages over his mentor, especially as he was fully qualified as an architect in Canada (which Bellot was not) and had graduated from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal.

#### CANADA AND THE PUBLICATION OF THE *PROPOS* (1949)

Just before the publication of *A Modern Architectural Work* in 1927 Dom Bellot had established connections with young architects in Canada, notably

Adrien Dufresne (1904-1982) and Edgar Courchesne (1903-1979). Both corresponded with Bellot and visited him in France. In due course Bellot was invited to Canada by the Institut Scientifique Franco-Canadien, and the subsequent lectures were presented first at the the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal between 19th February and 9th March 1934. Subsequently Bellot lectured in Quebec City and in Sherbrooke. The admission tickets for Montreal single out for mention the award to Bellot of the 'Grande médaille d'or de la Société Centrale des Architectes en 1932'. Presumably it is Dufresne who is described in the *Propos* (p.9) as '*un jeune architecte canadien-français*' and he and Courchesne were one of a group of French, Belgian, Dutch and Canadian architects who regarded themselves as disciples of Bellot.

Dom Bellot received an enthusiastic reception in Canada, and the press reported his lectures in detail; newspaper articles were illustrated with photographs of Bellot and his hosts, who included leading Canadian architects such as Courchesne, Dufresne, and Cormier, and Charles Maillard, Director of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal (Plate 10).<sup>13</sup>

The lectures would have been prepared at Wisques, and in the Wisques MSS there are typed copies of the texts, with annotations, together with duplicated copies of the lectures for distribution. Also at Wisques there is an extensive collection of glass black-and-white slides which must have been used to illustrate the lectures, and many are labelled 'Edgar Gariépy, Photographe/Projections,Cinéma/3635 Henri-Julien, Montréal'. The nine lectures were presented in two series under the title of '*L'Architecture Religieuse Moderne*', with the sub-title '*Innovent en architecture selon la juste tradition*'; the first series of four lectures was called '*Questions esthétiques*' and the second series of five lectures '*Questions de technique*'.<sup>14</sup>

Dom Bellot returned to Wisques after giving his lectures, but returned to Canada in 1937 when he was engaged to assist with the completion of the dome at the Oratoire Saint-Joseph and with designs for the new abbey at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. At the Oratoire, he took over the project begun in 1924 by the architects Dalbé Viau and Alphonse Venne, and collaborated with the Montreal architect Lucien Parent. Meantime Canadian friends such as Dufresne and Courchesne were working in a *Bellotiste* idiom and promoting Bellot's ideas and architecture in their writings. Moreover in 1935 the periodical *L'art sacré* was founded to promote the new 'modern' expression for religious art and architecture. But all was not sweetness and light, and resentment towards Bellot was felt strongly by the Quebec Chapter of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and by Catholic architects in Canada who felt saw Bellot as an intrusive favourite son of the Catholic hierarchy.<sup>15</sup>

It took five years after Bellot's death (and 15 years after they were originally given) for his Canadian lectures to be published as a book under the title *Propos d'un bâtisseur du Bon Dieu*, with its 128 pages of text, sixteen sepia illustrations, a Preface by Père Henri-Paul Bergeron, CSC, and a biographical introduction by Henri Charlier (Plate II).

Bergeron, who gave the volume his *Nihil obstat*, was a priest at the Oratoire Saint-Joseph and author of *Brother André, CSC. The wonder man of Mount Royal* (1938, etc), and of *L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, oeuvre de frère André* (1941, etc); he it was who wrote Bellot's obituary in the journal *Oratoire* in 1945.<sup>16</sup> In his Preface, Bergeron explains that it was only 'at the insistence of his friends' that Bellot agreed to have his lectures published: in the intervening years between 1934 and his death Bellot had published at least eight articles, several of which were based on his Canadian lectures.<sup>17</sup> The publishers, Editions Fides, were founded in Montreal in 1937 and have a close

association with the Congrégation de Saint Croix who provide the priests for the Oratoire Saint-Joseph. Bergeron notes in his Preface that the *Propos* was to be the first of three 'cahiers d'art ARCA' devoted to Bellot by Editions Fides: the second was to consist of the presentation of Bellot's main works, and the third would reveal his discoveries in the realm of architectural proportion, under the title *Le secret de l'harmonie dans l'art*. The *Propos* was Volume 4 in the 'cahiers d'art ARCA' series, the first three being Henri Charlier's *Peinture, sculpture, broderie et vitrail*, introduced by Maurice Brillant (1942), and the two volumes of Marius Bardeau's *Saintes artisanes* (1944, 1946).<sup>18</sup>

Charlier's introduction to the *Propos* combines biography with an enthusiastic appraisal of Bellot's work. Charlier was a close friend of the monk, a fellow-member of *L'Arche* and a frequent promoter in print of Bellot's architecture.<sup>19</sup> Charlier provided sculpture for several abbeys where Bellot worked, as well as the crucifixion, altar, twelve apostles and other figures for the Oratoire Saint-Joseph in Montreal. Although he visited Canada, Charlier kept his roots in France, where he was associated with the monastic community at Mesnil-Saint-Loup (Aube), between Sens and Troyes. As we have seen, in 1928, the year after Bellot's *A Modern Architectural Work* appeared, the same publishers brought out *Les tailles directes d'Henri Charlier, statuaire* (Wépion, 1928).<sup>20</sup>

The material presented in the *Propos* consists essentially of the nine lectures Bellot originally gave, presented in eight chapters. The fifteen photographs of buildings in the *Propos* are of nine projects with which Dom Bellot was associated: *four* of these (Oosterhout, Quarr, Bloemendaal, and Noordhoek) had already appeared in 1927 in the showcase of Bellot's work published that year, *A Modern Architectural Work*; the remaining *five* consist of Saint-

Benoît-du-Lac and the Oratoire Saint-Joseph in Canada, and in France the Church of the Immaculate Conception at Audincourt, Doubs (1931), the Church of Notre-Dame-Des-Trévois, Troyes (1933), and the monastery Les Tourelles, Montpellier (1934-35). These French buildings of course had been erected following Bellot's return to Wisques in 1928-30 and demonstrate his experimentation with reinforced concrete (see copy of *Propos*).

The publication of the *Propos* has to be seen in the context of the opposition which Bellot suffered in Canada. Bergeron and Charlier both point to this, Bergeron noting that some people 'wanted to have him expelled from Canada', and Charlier commenting:

He was a true Parisian and suffered greatly in exile; he also suffered, living with men who were totally unaware of the intellectual concerns of the artist (*Propos* 23).

Caught up in the debates in Canada both about architecture and religion, Bellot had to suffer too from the separation from his beloved France. But it must be added, as Geoffrey Simmins has emphasised, that

Bellot approached his sojourn in Quebec with missionary zeal. Like his somewhat younger contemporary, Père Marie-Alain Couturier, he believed that French Canada, the oldest and purest Catholic community in North America, represented a potentially fruitful proving ground for reformed religious architecture. 21

Couturier (1897-1954), himself an artist, devoted his life to the revival of sacred art in the French Catholic Church during the first half of the 20th century, and from 1937 was the editor of the journal *L'art sacré*. Couturier was, says Professor Simmins, 'perhaps the leading figure in a group of French Catholic intellectuals who argued from similar premises; others included Jacques Maritain and Père Pie-Raymond Régamey'.<sup>22</sup>

In welcoming the appearance of *A Modern Architectural Work* (in spite of the book's price of \$50.00) the journal *The Catholic World* expressed the

hope that 'Dom Bellot's efforts will influence future work of an ecclesiastical nature and free us from the shackles of sham archaeology', and observed that 'the times seem particularly opportune coinciding as they do with a revival of the real spirit of the liturgy, which revival is sponsored, in great measure, by the Benedictine Order'.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the extensive coverage of Dom Bellot's lectures in the Canadian press in 1934, it is difficult to assess the impact of the *Propos*; published in such a low-key manner, it has had little impact, it would seem. Professor Geoffrey Simmins, a French-Canadian art historian and an expert on Le Corbusier, is sceptical about the original reception of the lectures. It is a moot point, he writes,

whether the Quebec audiences really understood the subtlety of Bellot's arguments. Bellot's lectures are so quintessentially French that it is difficult to understand them without some knowledge of the rich body of intellectual traditions they refer to - traditions going back to the Middle Ages. Although these ideas might have been shared by advanced French religious and artistic reformers, they quite probably seemed exotic and abstruse to Canadian listeners and readers. <sup>24</sup>

If this were indeed so, such a response would give Dom Bellot yet further cause for hesitation if not dejection. Fortunately, as recent events indicate, his ideas and values are at last being celebrated fifty years after his death.

## NOTES: INTRODUCTION

- 1 Guy-Marie Oury, 'Le cinquantenaire de la mort de Dom Paul Bellot', *L'ami de Saint-Benoît-du-Lac*, no.84 (July 1994), pp.10-11; and Bruno Lafleur, 'Les adieux de Dom Bellot', *idem*, pp.11-12.
  
- 2 *Propos* 22.
  
- 3 These and other biographical details are from Bellot's folder for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the Archives Nationales, Paris, AJ/52/400.
  
- 4 The most valuable publications on Bellot's life are Nicole Tardif-Painchaud, *Dom Bellot et l'architecture religieuse au Québec* (Québec: Les Presses de l'université Laval, 1978), and Claude Bergeron, *L'architecture des églises du Québec, 1940-1985* (Québec: Les Presses de l'université Laval, 1987). More recently see Jean Rochon, 'L'esprit d'un moine bâtisseur. Dom Paul Bellot (1876-1944)', *Chercher Dieu*, no.16 (Spring 1994), pp.10-39.
  
- 5 For Lambert see *Paris-Rome-Athènes. Le voyage en Grèce des architectes français aux XIXe et XXe siècles*. Exhibition catalogue (Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1982), pp.252-257.
  
- 6 For general consideration of the Ecole see Arthur Drexler, editor, *The architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977); Donald Drew Egbert, edited by David Van Zanten, *The Beaux-Arts tradition in French architecture, illustrated by the Grands Prix de Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Robin D. Middleton, editor, *The Beaux-Arts and 19th-century French architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).



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7 Bellot's final diploma design was published in *L'architecture au salon 1901* (Paris: Armand Guérinet, 1901), plates 6,7,8. It is listed as no.3714 in *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au Grand Palais des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1901). Bellot's entry no.3715 is described as *La vieille cathédrale de Salamanque (Espagne)*. In the 1902 edition of the same catalogue Bellot's entry no.3061 is called a *Projet pour la reconstruction de l'église Saint-Germain, à Fleurs (Orne)*.

In the catalogue for the 1898 Salon, incidentally, there are two drawings by Bellot (nos 4264, 4265) entitled *Souvenir de Londres*.

8 Quotation from a letter from Richard Chafee to the late Peter Burton, transmitted to Alison Thornton, 29 September 1990. See Richard Chafee, 'The teaching of architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts' in Drexler, editor, *The architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, pp.61-109.

9 Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*, vol.I, p.242, cited by Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine monachism. Studies in Benedictine life and rule* (London: Longmans, 1919), p.v.

10 See *L'artisan liturgique*, nos 13 (April-June 1929) and 29 (April-June 1933). Fabre's major statement was *Pages d'art chrétien. Etudes d'architecture, de peinture, de sculpture et d'iconographie*, new edition (Paris: Bonne Presses, [1920]). There is a reference to an article by Fabre entitled 'L'Arche', *La vie et les arts liturgiques*, no.48 (December 1918), but I have not seen this.

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10 (continued) For admirable coverage of *L'Arche* and contemporary movements see recently *L'art sacré au XXe siècle en France*, Exhibition catalogue (Musée Municipal et Centre Culturel, Boulogne-Billancourt, 1993). I am grateful to Dr Patrick Elliott for alerting me to this.

11 'Un groupement de travail: L'Arche', *L'artisan liturgique*, no.13 (April-June 1929), p.242.

12 For Bellot in Canada see especially Tardif-Painchaud, *Dom Bellot*, pp. 47-64; Bergeron, *L'architecture des églises du Québec*, pp.35-61; and Claude Bergeron, *Architecture du XXe siècle au Québec, 1940-1985* (Montréal: Musée de la Civilisation de Québec/Editions Méridien, 1989), pp.117-126.

13 See Tardif-Painchaud, *Dom Bellot*, pp.51-52. A collection of press cuttings is in the Wisques MSS, AR.88.

14 See the lecture titles in the *Sommaire* in the *Propos*. The 8th and 9th lectures on *Oeuvre d'art et technique - La couleur* were elided to make the 8th chapter in the *Propos*.

15 I owe this point to Père Jean Rochon, OSB, at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac.

16 'Un grand maître est passé parmi nous', *Oratoire* (January 1945), pp.18-19. Bergeron apparently was a man of culture and sensitivity who played a major role in Bellot's work at the Oratoire. See Etienne Catta, *Le Frère André (1845-1937) et L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont Royal* (Montréal and Paris: Editions Fides, 1964).

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- 17 For a chronological list of these see Bibliography C to this thesis.
- 18 See Jean-Rémi Brault, *Bibliographie des Editions Fides, 1937-1987* (Montréal: Editions Fides, 1987), pp.269, 17, 29.
- 19 For instance 'The work of Dom Paul Bellot: novelty and tradition', *Liturgical arts*, vol.4 (1935), pp.134-147.
- 20 I am grateful to Père Marcel Lalonde, CSC, for showing me little-known sculpture by Charlier at the Oratoire Saint-Joseph.
- 21 Geoffrey Simmins, editor, *Documents in Canadian architecture* (Peterborough, Ontario, and Lewiston, NY: Broadview Press, 1992), pp.172-173. In a section entitled 'Reviving religious art in Canada', pp.177-182, Professor Simmins gives texts by Bellot and Coutourier, with editorial notes.
- 22 Simmins, *Documents in Canadian architecture*, p.181. For Coutourier see *Sacred art*, texts selected by Dominique de Menil and Pie Duployé, translated by Granger Ryan (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press in association with the Menil Foundation, 1989). All photographs in this book appeared in *L'art sacré*.
- 23 *Catholic World*, March 1928, pp.850-851.
- 24 Simmins, *Documents in Canadian architecture*, p.173.



## CHAPTER 1

Viollet-le-Duc. Portrait from Damisch, editor, *L'architecture raisonnée* (Paris, 1978), frontispiece

## CHAPTER 1:

## Eugène Emmanuel VIOLLET-LE-DUC

Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), the most frequently-quoted writer in the *Propos*, was a generation younger than Dom Bellot himself, Le Corbusier and Maritain; indeed, Bellot was only three years old when Viollet-le-Duc died.

It is hardly surprising that Viollet-le-Duc features so prominently in the *Propos*, for Dom Bellot often acknowledges his admiration for him elsewhere. Thus we find Bellot in 1931 writing as follows in his autobiography:

*Avec la formation architecturale donnée par mon père et augmentée de celle de l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, c'est VIOLLET LEDUC [sic] qui m'a le plus influencé. Il m'a fait comprendre la logique et la sincérité de cette architecture française du M[oyen] A[ge] improprement appelé gothique. Lorsque j'ai passé mon examen de diplôme, je connaissais sur le bout du doigt le dictionnaire du grand restaurateur de nos églises.*

Bellot then becomes more specific:

*Avec lui j'ai appris à méditer l'archéologie; et j'ai vu que faire de l'architecture romane ou gothique sans en avoir compris l'esprit et dégagé les principes, copier des ornements gothiques dans des conditions différentes de celles où se trouvaient les constructeurs du Moyen-Age ce n'est plus faire de l'architecture, mais un simple travail manuel.*

And he continues by linking his admiration for Viollet-le-Duc with that for François-Auguste Choisy (1841-1909), engineer, explorer, teacher, architectural historian and archaeologist. Choisy was author of a range of books on architectural history, notably his *Histoire d'architecture*, first published in 1899 and illustrated with more than 1700 engravings. As Bellot implies, Choisy too was influenced by Viollet-le-Duc:

*Avec VIOLLET-LE-DUC, Choisy dans son histoire de l'architecture et ses études sur les Egyptiens, Grecs, Romains, Byzantins, a été pour moi un libérateur.*

*Il met parfaitement en relief l'âme de toutes ces époques, montre l'habilité des constructeurs, et dégagé de toutes les compositions l'essentiel sans s'arrêter aux détails ou à l'accidentel.* 1

Bellot's enthusiasm for the teaching of Viollet-le-Duc (and to some extent Choisy) has been shared by many other architects of varied persuasions, and Sir John Summerson linked Viollet with Alberti as one of the two 'supremely eminent theorists in the history of European architecture'.<sup>2</sup>

Viollet-le-Duc was born into a wealthy, cultured, and progressive family, but instead of studying architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts he went on a tour of Italy in 1836-37.<sup>3</sup> Influenced by his meeting with Prosper Mérimée, author of *Carmen* and Inspector of the newly-founded Commission des Monuments Historiques, and inspired by the enthusiasm of Victor Hugo and the scholarship of Arcise de Caumont, Viollet-le-Duc soon established himself both as a scholar and restorer. Early in his career he was involved in the restoration of the Church of La Madeleine at Vézelay, and of the Sainte Chapelle (with Duban) and Notre Dame (with Lassus) in Paris. For the Commission and other bodies Viollet-le-Duc undertook a wide range of restorations. He did major work at Sens, Narbonne, Saint-Denis, Toulouse, Amiens, and Clermont-Ferrand; he rebuilt the fortifications at Carcassonne, and for Louis Napoleon he conceived the Gothic fantasia of Pierrefonds.

Throughout Viollet-le-Duc's life architectural practice and theory went hand-in-hand, and three publications in particular bear witness to his scholarship and ideas: the *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (10 volumes, Paris 1854-68), the *Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français de l'époque carolingienne à la renaissance* (6 volumes, Paris 1858-75), and his *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (2 volumes, Paris 1863, 1872). In his *Entretiens* he set out to show that his scientific analysis of

Gothic was equally valid in assessing Greek, Roman, or Byzantine buildings, indeed all good buildings'. Yet, as Robin Middleton explains,

he did not flinch in the second volume of the *Entretiens* from indicating how the rational principles he had derived from his study of historical buildings might find application using the materials and serving the needs of the 19th century. 4

Viollet-le-Duc's many designs in masonry and iron may be unequal in quality, but they are nonetheless 'vigorous and memorable'.

However it is not the *Entretiens* but the *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française* (Plate 12) which Bellot cites in the *Propos* when he turns to Viollet-le-Duc. In the various *Dictionnaires*, Professor Middleton points out, we have 'not mere repositories of fact but works of propaganda for an architecture of the 19th century based on a scientific analysis of the Gothic style'. He continues:

Viollet-le-Duc saw Gothic architecture primarily as a limited, functional art - as a solution to a problem in equilibrium. Every element, he believed, had a structural or functional purpose; even mouldings and ornaments were not merely decorative adjuncts but were designed to emphasise structural features, feats of ingenuity, and extraordinary skill. Nothing, he insisted, was superfluous; nothing, least of all, was done for picturesque effect.

Nor, one could add, was it done for religious effect; there was little if any concession to a Puginian view of Gothic as the Christian style. Viollet's thesis was not novel, adds Professor Middleton, for Delorme, de Cordemoy, Laugier, and Soufflot and his circle

had attempted to make a rational analysis of Gothic the basis of architectural reform; but Viollet-le-Duc's exposition was infinitely more thorough and determined. What he was ultimately striving to prove was that architecture is a precise, studied affair, whose every form and detail should be thought out in accord with a rational ideal.

The *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française* is arranged alphabetically and extends from small details (eg 'gousset') to broad conceptual topics (eg 'construction'). The relative significance of subjects is reflected in the length of entries, and the use of illustrations, and there is

no attempt to order architectural theory or practice by any system of categories or hierarchies.<sup>5</sup>

Dom Bellot quotes in his first, second and sixth lectures from three of the wider subjects covered by Viollet-le-Duc - namely taste, style, and proportion. Let us look at these more closely.<sup>6</sup>

## TASTE

Dom Bellot deals with TASTE in Lecture I on *Le renouveau de l'art et du goût* (*Propos* 27-44).<sup>7</sup> To Bellot there is good taste which discerns what is truly beautiful and there is bad taste which does not. But there is a deeper dimension, he says, for 'wrong taste is in short a spiritual defect' (*Propos* 38). La Bruyère in his *Caractères* expresses what Bellot has in mind:

In beauty there is a perfection point, as there is goodness or maturity in nature; he who senses it and loves what he senses has perfect taste; he who senses it and loves something else has defective taste (*Propos* 38).

Taste, indeed, La Bruyère sees as 'a habit of mind'.

Dom Bellot turns to Viollet-le-Duc for confirmation, and finds a moral tone arising:

Taste is the habit of beauty and goodness; in order to be a man of taste it is therefore essential to discern good from evil, beauty from ugliness. Taste... remains respect for what is true; we do not accept that one can be an artist with taste unless one is a man of taste, because taste is not a material asset like manual skill, but a rational development using the intellectual faculties (*Propos* 38).

Integrity is required of the architect:

We do not accept that an architect who pursues narrow interests and petty passions, who is neither respectable nor respected, can bring taste to his work (*Propos* 39).

Indeed, Viollet-le-Duc maintains, taste cannot be separated from truth and morality:



A man of taste does not lie to his conscience, his thinking makes its mark in very natural ways. Possessing taste in the arts is a matter of loving what is true; it is knowing how to express something simply, rejecting the ever perverting effects of exaggeration; it is exposing the moral side of man, with his reasoning, affections, sympathies and ultimate aim. If this moral side is weak, therefore, and the reasoning obscure, the affections base and the aim vulgar or obnoxious, it is difficult to satisfy the demands of taste.

Moreover, Viollet-le-Duc continues, 'good taste, like truth, cannot be imposed; it persuades' (*Propos* 39). In other words, decisions about matters of taste must be supported intellectually, and there must be a close harmony between 'principles and the form they adopt'. But this leads to a potential conflict between 'principles' and 'beauty', for 'if your principles are wrong, then however beautiful the form, there is a failure of taste. Let the form dictate the idea and you will be an artist of taste; after that you must have ideas, good ideas and express them well' (*Propos* 39).

One of the problems presented by Viollet-le-Duc's argument is (to quote T S Eliot) that of 'tradition and the individual talent'.<sup>8</sup> 'For a long time now', wrote Viollet-le-Duc,

it has been thought that to show good taste, one only had to follow certain patterns recognised as beautiful and never deviate from them. This approach, agreed by the Académie des Beaux-Arts as to architecture, led us to accept certain common clichés as the expression of good taste, at the exclusion of variety and invention, and to put completely beyond the pale of good taste all those artists who tried to express fresh needs through fresh forms - or rather forms subjected to fresh applications (*Propos* 39).

All too easily hypocrisy can set in, says Viollet:

But in the same way that religious hypocrisy - that is, the outward observation of forms without principles - leads to lack of belief and debauchery, so hypocrisy in taste leads to depravity' (*Propos* 40).

Thus 'the Académie des Beaux-Arts forces its own initiated to submit to formulae whose meaning is not even explained'. Architectural taste, 'instead of being a law which derives from a true and general principle, agreed by all and universally applicable', has degenerated into 'an exclusive

school' which is the prerogative of the Académie. Students in each new generation become architects with taste 'by going along an even deeper and narrower rut' (*Propos 41*).

The effect of this upon architects and architecture can be unfortunate, Viollet-le-Duc maintains:

Perhaps some architects find this an advantage, for there is nothing pleasanter nor easier in the world of art than to belong to a powerful clique; but we can be sure that art loses thereby ... Architecture has gradually gone into collapse, going from one fall to another, towards *anarchy, blind obedience, or revolt* (*Propos 41*).

'Good taste', however, is another matter:

But as for taste, good taste, that exact knowledge of the needs and genius of our civilisation, the true, measured expression of what it has a right to expect from us - that is something which takes a long time to find (*Propos 41*).

Viollet-le Duc then italicises a statement to which he wishes to give special emphasis:

*Toute forme d'architecture qui ne peut être donnée comme la conséquence d'une idée, d'un besoin, d'une nécessité, ne peut être regardée comme une oeuvre de goût* (*Propos 41*).

This is surely a cry for functionalism: a true architecture must emerge from functional requirements and demands. It seems but a short step to Sullivan's belief that 'form follows function', and to such irreverent challenges to orthodoxy as 'form follows culture' (Skolimowski) or 'form follows climate' (Willis).

Dom Bellot's two final paragraphs on TASTE from Viollet-le-Duc bring together his comments on its timelessness and its formation. First, its timelessness:

There are good times for art, when taste has no need of definition, when it exists by the very fact that the art is true, submitting to the lessons of reason, not denying its origins, only speaking out when there is something to say; in such times, no one troubles to give the rules of good taste, any more than honest folk trouble to discuss among themselves what is legal and what is not.

These happy times existed for the Greeks of Antiquity; they shone during the Middle Ages; they might yet be reborn, on condition we realise that taste consists in observing very simple principles and not in preferring one form to another.

Again, Viollet-le-Duc makes a veiled attack on the Académie des Beaux-Arts and its pretensions. 'When taste becomes the strict preserve of a clique', he writes,

... it is nothing but a deadly pretension from which everyone seeks release; for taste, *le bon goût*, possesses the privilege of being able to impose itself throughout the ages and despite prejudices, as the sum product of truth (*Propos* 41-42).

But the formation of taste is not easy:

Taste is not, as some think, a more or less happy whim or an instinctive reaction. No one is automatically born with taste. On the contrary, taste is simply the mark of good education, the fruit of patient toil and a reflection of one's social milieu. The way to develop one's taste is by surrounding oneself with beautiful things, feeding on them, comparing - and by comparing, making choices - guarding against ready-made judgements, trying to discern true from false, fleeing mediocrity, distrusting passing fashions; that is how taste is formed (*Propos* 42).

Viollet-le-Duc's writings deserve closer acquaintance, says Dom Bellot. At the end of the day, in his view, '*l'art vrai éduque le goût; la corruption de l'art entraîne celle du goût*' (*Propos* 42).

In the light of these opinions it is hardly surprising that Viollet-le-Duc rejected the chance of an education at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, nor that in retrospect Dom Bellot, having been a good student at the Ecole, should later turn against his architectural training there. Interestingly enough Bellot remains ambiguous about Viollet as a practising architect. Unfortunately, he writes, as Viollet-le-Duc 'had no example to offer in support of his words, they fell on poorly prepared soil and found little or no response' (*Propos* 42-43). The problem with Viollet was that he knew too well the 'qualities of the incomparable medieval French builders' so that 'he was unable to remain himself on account of having worked on the creation of others'. Evidence of

this, says Bellot, can be seen at the churches of Saint-Gimer at Carcassonne, Saint-Denis-de-l'Estrée, and Aillant-sur-Tholon (Plate 13).

Bellot continues in the *Propos* by explaining that his own education at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts had subjected him to 'the tyranny of too close a contact with classical architecture', and had taught him 'how to design good plans' but only 'to follow a sickening routine' so far as architectural form went. Since leaving the Ecole, however, Bellot had found architectural satisfaction within the Benedictine community. 'My apprenticeship in the monastic life', he wrote,

happily allows me to indulge in real reflection, to let go the fascination for ancient forms and to discover for myself the very heart of tradition and its living stream, where lie the eternal principles of art and taste (*Propos* 43).

Once more, Bellot reiterates the belief which he shares with Viollet-le-Duc that it is not 'forms' but 'the unchanging principles behind them' which need to be taught and fostered. Such statements again call to mind the principles pronounced by the group *L'Arche* as enunciated by Maurice Storez and Abel Fabre.

And yet, giving the original lectures in Canada, Dom Bellot clearly was presented with a dilemma and was forced to admit that 'it need hardly be said how much United States architecture owes to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts'. The 'sickening routine', it seems, had its advantages:

The great republic had the sense to go and look for men of talent where they were to be found. One must admire their vision, inspired as it was by enlightened patriotism. As a result, the planning of their cities, the construction of their great buildings and the teaching of architecture have largely been entrusted to former pupils of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and even at times to visiting masters from France (*Propos* 43-44).

When, indeed, L'Enfant (a 'visiting master from France') laid out Washington, DC, he was presenting the United States with its most

spectacular instance of the influence of the Ecole, and subsequently the relationship between the Ecole and the education of East Coast architects remained strong, whether personally (eg H H Richardson, R M Hunt, and Sullivan) or institutionally (eg the University of Pennsylvania).<sup>9</sup> And in Canada the historic ties with France ensured a special place for the traditions of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Schools of Architecture.<sup>10</sup>

## STYLE

Next, in Lecture 2 on *Les conditions d'un vrai style*, Dom Bellot draws out a distinction between 'styles' and 'style' from the entry on STYLE in Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*.<sup>11</sup>

'Styles', says Bellot, 'are particular types of forms. They are the characteristics which combine to distinguish different periods and schools from one another'. But these should not be confused with 'style' itself, a word used when one says of a work of art that 'this object has style' (*Propos* 46-47). Bellot expands on this:

*Style is the manner of being, let's say the form which is proper to any work of art, in as much as it is is a concept of the human mind. Art is in fact no more than the creative power inherent in man; the power which lets him influence the things in nature which are created by God (Propos 47).*

As a work of art is 'an idea born of intelligence', so 'style is simply what characterises it as an expression of intelligence'. To Viollet-le-Duc, says Bellot, 'style ... is the manifestation of an ideal established on a principle'. Understood in this way, 'style is what we call *absolute style*' (*Propos* 47-48).

This is to be contrasted with *relative style*: whereas *absolute style* 'is something common to every artistic concept', *relative style* 'varies according to subject, commended to intelligence by the work's intended use:

thus a style suitable for a church could not be suitable for a private dwelling'. Both kinds of style 'may take on secondary characteristics which attach their forms to a particular civilisation or period and constitute a style' (*Propos 48*).

In architecture, discipline is essential:

Since building, in the fullest sense, is putting spirit into matter, one must be able to submit in so doing to all kinds of disciplines, of the soul and intelligence especially and of course to those imposed by the materials we use (*Propos 52*).

Regrettably, 'most of our contemporaries want to be free of all constraints, for modern ideas have set us free'. But to Bellot freedom depends on rules:

It is these laws which free us, these constraints which guide us, these disciplines which liberate us and allow us to make the most of our talents. The day a really united group submits to such laws, we shall see the dawn of a new architecture and a new style, which will truly have *style* (*Propos 49*).

To his credit, Dom Bellot is not afraid to be specific.

As he goes on to explain, already in 1930-31 a start had been made at the monastery of Saint-Paul at Wisques 'bringing together a Dutchman, a Belgian and five or six Frenchmen'. Bellot describes it further:

We have shared methods, there is discipline, ideas are co-ordinated (resulting in mutual understanding) and each person works in his own way, succeeding almost without realising it in giving his work a family likeness to the works of other colleagues in our group; it has happened unintentionally simply by taking advantage of opportunities as they arose (*Propos 49*).

Surprisingly, Dom Bellot believes that this idealistic method of building can be adopted in Canada, and he tells his Canadian audience that their country is 'fertile soil' for such an approach. Moreover, presumably including both Canada and the United States in his sights, he adds that

America needs this French-Canadian contribution in order to emerge from the materialism into which it has sunk. Do not imagine that you will produce lasting architectural work simply by using some new material or other. That is not enough, for a style is the result of a common impulse, a spiritual harmony, a religious faith (*Propos 49*).

Such rhetoric! Bellot here seems almost Puginian in his implication that 'good men build good buildings' which is but a small step from '*only* good men build good buildings'. But of course Bellot never adopts the Puginian pose of saying that the best architecture was the product of the Middle Ages, and that Gothic is the true Christian style of building.

## PROPORTION

Bellot makes clear at the start of Lecture 6 on *Oeuvre d'art et technique - Les proportions* that proportion is a key feature of his architecture:

The technique which I personally have tried to adopt, since it not only fulfils the requirements of art in the right sense of the word, but even of Christian art, is the rational technique of making form the principle of all artistic creation ...: it is a technique which gives proportion a predominant role (*Propos* 101).

After expounding his reasons for this, he turns to Viollet-le-Duc for support, and quotes from the entry on PROPORTION in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*, lest it be thought that 'all this law and theory of proportion interferes with inspiration'.<sup>12</sup> As Viollet-le-Duc puts it:

A geometric and arithmetic system which can establish laws of proportion, far from being an obstacle, is an indispensable help, because we are forced to use T-square, set-square and compass to express our ideas. We cannot create a building by dint of vague, undefined empiricism. Let us say too that rules have never been an obstacle to the inventions of the human mind, except in the case of ignorant mediocrities; rules are an effective aid and stimulus to the best minds (*Propos* 105).

Music provides an example. 'Have the ever-so-strict rules of musical harmony stifled artistic inspiration?' Viollet-le-Duc asks. 'It is the same in building', he continues, particularly in the Middle Ages:

The great merit of builders in the Middle Ages was that they had clearly defined rules; and that they obeyed them and made use of them. One of the misfortunes that has befallen the arts today, and particularly architecture, is the belief that it is possible to create a work of quality inspired by pure fantasy; also that one can erect a building on the very vague basis of what is called 'good taste', as one might design a woman's gown. Our Medieval masters took things more seriously, and when they put their ruler and set-square to the block, they knew how they would proceed; they worked methodically,

without spending time in random drawing, awaiting the kind of vague inspiration so acclaimed by the lazy (*Propos* 105).

Despite this speculative view of medieval building, Viollet-le-Duc makes a valid observation here, and illustrates his points with diagrams (Plates 14, 15).

Bellot ends his section on Viollet-le-Duc's views on proportion with a peroration. 'You who are builders, and all of you serious people', he exhorts his audience,

must understand better than any the need for aesthetic discipline in your buildings; it is the real way to keep creating, to gladden the hearts of your fellow countrymen and to achieve lasting works of art to the glory of your nation and the increase of your civilising heritage (*Propos* 105).

Dom Bellot then moves on to an historical consideration of proportion in architecture from Pythagoras to Viollet-le-Duc and beyond.<sup>13</sup> Bellot admits that, although he had often read the passage on proportion in the *Dictionnaire*, Viollet-le-Duc's buildings 'had left [him] rather indifferent' (*Propos* 109). Inspiration was to hand when he heard of the German Benedictine abbey at Beuron, where the work of Dom Desiderius Lenz (1832-1918) excited him.<sup>14</sup> 'Shortly after that', writes Bellot, 'I was given a small manual dealing with his theories. It was a revelation' (*Propos* 109). Then suddenly at Quarr Abbey, he notes, there appeared a copy of Père Odilo Wolff's *Tempelmasze*, a book which was to influence him greatly and of which there is a draft French translation in the Bellot MSS at Wisques.<sup>15</sup> Abel Fabre had written about Beuron, and the integration of the arts in the abbey buildings there must have stimulated the *L'Arche* group.

A feature of Viollet-le-Duc's writings is the way in which they appear to have influenced 20th-century architects whose work seems radically different - such as Gaudí in Barcelona, Horta in Brussels, Behrens in Berlin, Berlage in Amsterdam, and de Baudot, Choisy, Guimard and Perret in Paris.



Thus Bellot was in good company. In the United States the list would include Sullivan, Furness, and Maybeck, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Professor M F Hearn points out that

Wright, who seems to have absorbed everything by Viollet-le-Duc that was available in English, gave a copy of the *Discourses* to his son John Lloyd, with the words: 'In these volumes you will find all the architectural schooling you will ever need. What you cannot learn from them, you can learn from me'.<sup>16</sup>

For an architect such as Wright, who so often promoted his own version of an 'organic' architecture, these are unexpected words.

If Viollet-le-Duc emerges as the hero of Bellot's *Propos*, Le Corbusier is the villain. Yet he too looked up to that theoretical magician Viollet-le-Duc, to whose writings he must have been introduced by his mentor Auguste Perret, the master of concrete, much as Dom Bellot must have been made aware of Viollet by his father. 'Viollet-le-Duc was my real master', Perret once told the historian and critic Pierre Vago. 'It was he who enabled me to resist the influence of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts'.<sup>17</sup> In 1908-1909 Le Corbusier was working in Perret's office in Paris, and in August 1908 he purchased a copy of Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*. His inscription in it noted that he was buying it 'in order to *learn*, for knowing I can *create*'.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES: CHAPTER 1: VIOLLET-LE-DUC

1 'Autobiographie de Dom Bellot', typescript, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac MSS, fol.3. It is dated 18th August 1931 and was written at 'ST.OMER' (ie Wisques).

2 John Summerson, 'Viollet-le-Duc and the rational point of view', in *Heavenly mansions* (London: Cresset Press, 1949), p.135.

3 For Viollet-le-Duc's life and work see the synopsis by Robin Middleton in the *Macmillan encyclopedia of architects*, editor-in-chief Adolf Placzek (New York and London, 1982), vol.4, pp.324-332.

4 This and subsequent quotations from Robin Middleton are from his biography of Viollet-le-Duc in the *Encyclopedia of world art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), vol.14, p.800.

5 For bibliographical background to Viollet-le-Duc's publications see *The Foundations of Architecture. Selections from the 'Dictionnaire raisonné'*, introduced by Barry Bergdoll, translated by Kenneth D Whitehead (New York: George Braziller, 1990), and M F Hearn, editor, *The architectural theory of Viollet-le-Duc. Readings and commentary* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1990). Disappointingly the second of these contains no new translations and is inadequately referenced.

Even today there is no complete English translation of the *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*; in 1875 Charles Wethered published a translation of the article on 'restoration' as a book entitled *On restoration*, and in 1895 George Martin Huss brought out the book *Rational building* based on a translation of 'construction'.

## NOTES: CHAPTER 1: VIOLLET-LE-DUC

6 Subsequent quotations from the *Dictionnaire* are from the edition of 1854-1868. I have used the copy in the library of the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at the University of York.

For a structuralist interpretation of the *Dictionnaire* see the introduction by Hubert Damisch to *Viollet-le-Duc. L'architecture raisonnée. Extraits du 'Dictionnaire de l'architecture française'* (Paris: Hermann, 1978), pp.7-29. Damisch wrote similarly in 'The space between', *Architectural Design*, nos 3/4 (1980), pp.84-89, in a special issue on Viollet-le-Duc.

7 For TASTE ('goût') see the *Dictionnaire*, tome 6 (1863), pp.31-34.

8 Eliot's essay of this title (see *Selected essays*, 3rd edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp.13-22) is of course primarily about poetry, though the transfer to other arts is readily made.

9 For the Ecole in the United States see (eg) Drexler, *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, especially pp.464-493.

10 For the Ecole in Canada see Kelly Crossman, *Architecture in transition: from art to practice, 1885-1906* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), especially pp.85-105.

11 Tome 8 (1866), pp.474-497. Bellot here seems to use Viollet-le-Duc freely, sometimes quoting directly and on other occasions paraphrasing and adding his own comments.

See the section on STYLE in Bergdoll and Whitehead, *The foundations of architecture*, pp.229-263.

## NOTES: CHAPTER 1: VIOLLET-LE-DUC

12 Tome 7 (1864), pp.532-561. The single, continuous passage from Viollet-le-Duc quoted by Bellot on p.105 of the *Propos* is on p.550 of the *Dictionnaire*.

13 Viollet-le-Duc's entry on PROPORTION in the *Dictionnaire* is historical in tone and includes 12 diagrams.

14 Beuron is considered by Abel Fabre in part 2 of *Pages d'art Chrétien*, entitled 'La Floraison gothique'. I have not yet identified the 'small manual' referred to by Bellot.

Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p.44, writes: 'There was a growing interest in arithmetical and geometrical principles of design during the later part of the nineteenth century. Art historians tried to discern the secrets of the proportions of Egyptian architecture, the classical Greek temple and the Gothic cathedral. In the monastery of Beuron, Desiderius Lenz, founder of the Beuron School of Art, derived basic numeral units for art from the proportion of the human body. His *Urmass* or 'primal measure' he related to the essence of the Godhead'.

15 Lenz and Wolff were brought together by Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Quarr and Bellot', *Architectural Review*, vol.141, no.842 (April 1967), p.309.

16 Hearn, *The architectural theory of Viollet-le-Duc*, p.14. Professor Hearn's sources here are John Lloyd Wright, *My father who is on earth* (New York, 1946), p.69, and Donald Hoffmann, 'Frank Lloyd Wright and

## NOTES: CHAPTER 1: VIOLLET-LE-DUC

17 Quoted by Peter Collins, *Concrete: the vision of a new architecture. A study of Auguste Perret and his precursors* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p.155.

18 Quoted by Paul Turner in 'The beginnings of Le Corbusier's education, 1902-1907', reprinted in Peter Serenyi, editor, *Le Corbusier in perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 24.



## CHAPTER 2

Le Corbusier. Portrait from exhibition catalogue, *Le Corbusier. Architect of the Century* (London, 1987), p.42

## CHAPTER 2:

## LE CORBUSIER

Although there are few direct references in the *Propos* to Le Corbusier by name, his spirit is frequently invoked by Bellot as representing the 'moral poverty of artists outside Catholicism' (*Propos* 23). Bellot presents Le Corbusier (1887-1965) in his Lecture 1 on *Le renouveau de l'art et du goût* as typifying the nihilism and aridity of some contemporary architects - a view which was endorsed by an exhibition 'd'art à l'avant-garde' which Bellot tells us he visited in Holland 'peu après la guerre de 1914' (*Propos* 28). This may well have been an early exhibition of the De Stijl movement which had been formed in Leiden in 1917. Bellot had little time for what he saw: 'Painters, sculptors and architects all exhibited nothing but objects to make you shudder: people's palaces, crematoriums, temples to humanity, necropoles, etc ... And all this was being put forward as *l'art vivant*' (*Propos* 24).

It is within this context that Bellot introduces Le Corbusier, but not before he has further denounced an art which had made 'a clean sweep with the past and was claiming the creation of a new man' (*Propos* 28). Yet Bellot does not believe that the artists themselves (which must include architects) are entirely to blame, as 'one can plead universal error on their behalf'. 'They are', continues Bellot,

distraught victims of their upbringing amid the disruption of human, intellectual and moral values. Pseudo 'living art' is therefore a condemnation of the society which gave it birth (*Propos* 29).

Lured by 'scientism and exaggeration of abstract ideas', artists 'have worn themselves out looking for sterile formulas, in semi-official chitchat, manifestoes and agendas; a ridiculous waste of time, talents and money'. As for architects, they 'have become embroiled in a world of dry, dismal

geometry with no other objective than to do the opposite of those before them' (*Propos* 29-30).

It is at this point in the *Propos* that Bellot turns to 'a Swiss, named Le Corbusier, [who] has set himself up as the great pundit of this conspiracy against tradition'. The book *Le cheval de Troie du Bolchevisme*, says Bellot, '*démasque énergiquement les tendances*' (*Propos* 30). The tone here implies more than just 'unveiling' or 'unmasking'. It is 'laying bare' or 'exposing', as Bellot's subsequent intemperate commentary makes clear.

The book itself had been published in Bienne in 1931. It need hardly be said that by this date Le Corbusier's career was well-established as an architect if not also as a painter and polemicist: apart from domestic work in his home town of La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland, he had completed the Citrohan houses, the Villa La Roche-Jeanneret, the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau at the Paris Exposition of 1925 (Plate 16), his two houses at the Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart, the Villa Cook, the Villa Savoye and the Villa at Garches; already his books included *Vers une architecture* (1923), *Urbanisme* (1925), *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925) and *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (1930); and from 1920-1925 Le Corbusier, Ozenfant and Dermée had edited the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* (Plate 17). Moreover in 1928 Le Corbusier and other leading architects had met at the Château de la Sarraz in Switzerland to form the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), whose first conference held at Frankfurt in 1929 had addressed the main concern of progressive architects: low-cost housing.

The Weissenhof Siedlung had attracted much attention (Le Corbusier had said that there is nothing to be ashamed of in having a house that is as



practical as a typewriter) but this led to the first significant newspaper campaign against progressive architecture.<sup>1</sup> It coincided with the furore over the competition for the Palace of the League of Nations in Geneva of 1927 onwards: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret had submitted a proposal consisting of austere slab blocks raised on *piloti* and set in a landscape park (Plate 18). The rejection of this scheme on a technicality - the drawings were executed with printers-ink not Chinese ink - hid the fact that there were not merely stylistic but deep-seated and sinister ideological objections to the design.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, as now, politics and architecture were inseparable, and there was a strong reaction against such avant-garde architects as Le Corbusier, Gropius and Leonidov, and such organisations as CIAM, Der Ring in Germany, and OSA (the Association of Modern Architects) in Russia: Le Corbusier, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and others, had ambiguous records during this period of the rise of anti-semitism, Nazism, Fascism, and Bolchevism. Specifically, in the newspaper *La Suisse Libérale*, published in Neuchâtel, Le Corbusier had to endure the attacks of the Swiss architect and critic Alexander von Senger (1880-1968), also known as Alexander de Senger, which took as the League of Nations project as their point of departure.<sup>3</sup>

These attacks - which were instrumental in ensuring the rejection of the Le Corbusier-Jeanneret scheme - were later brought together in the book *Le cheval de Troie du Bolchevisme* (Plate 21), and the Trojan horse in the title was none other than Le Corbusier himself.<sup>4</sup> As Le Corbusier explained, in 1928 Senger had already published one belligerent book in *Krisis der Architektur* (Plate 20), but now the critic was more specific. As Le Corbusier himself wrote in a telegraphese note:

The horse, that's me. Newspapers in Neuchâtel and La Chaux-de-Fonds, continuing to draw on this source of clear water, bring out decisive articles. 5

'Put together in book form', comments Le Corbusier in his *Oeuvre complète*, these articles were

published in all quietness, and without being brought to the market, [and] distributed gratis to municipalities, cantons and federal offices, to create hostility to our endeavours, and this exactly at the moment when the final decision was about to fall about the carrying out of the Palace of the League of Nations. 6

Such attacks, Le Corbusier reports, caused him much anguish and drove him to tears. And then in 1931 Senger published a further attack in *Die Brandfackel Moskaus* (Plate 22). His campaign had further success when the writer and critic Camille Mauclair published a series of articles in *Le Figaro* which had 'a sharpness bordering on the ridiculous', and followed this in 1933 with a book entitled *L'architecture va-t-elle mourir?* In Le Corbusier's eyes Mauclair deserved pity, not blame. 'Camille, you have lost your head, console yourself', he wrote. 'Architecture is far from dying, it enjoys the best of health. Architecture of the new age stays just at the beginning of life. It has a splendid future and from you it demands nothing but to be *left in peace*'. 7

As Charles Jencks puts it, the arguments used by Senger, Mauclair and the Nazis against Le Corbusier were fourfold: first, that 'architecture should be an embodiment of national glory, territoriality and such specific determinants as race, climate and local materials'; second, that 'flat roofs and ribbon windows were ugly and unpopular, being defended only by international Marxists and the bourgeois press'; third, that CIAM and the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* 'were pro-Bolshevik, Jewish conspiracies which were trying to convert people to a modern style in order to convert them to international Communism'; and finally, that Le Corbusier was promoting

'inhumanity' when he claimed that the house was a '*une machine à habiter*' and that 'man is a geometrical animal'.<sup>8</sup>

Le Corbusier countered these last remarks by saying that 'a machine is meant to aid not dominate us and that the work of man, his constructions and perceptions, are geometric'. These counter-attacks, and many others, are contained in Le Corbusier's own book *Croisade, ou le crépuscule des académies* (1933), which answered both Senger and Professor Gustave Umbdenstock of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts (a former pupil of de Guadet) who also had launched a campaign against Le Corbusier. Further prominence was given later to these vigorous arguments by Maximilian Gauthier in his biography *Le Corbusier, ou l'architecture au service de l'homme* (Paris, 1944), in which there is a chapter devoted to *Le cheval de Troie du Bolchevisme* (pp.175-198) and another entitled 'Umbdenstock, Mauclair et Cie' (pp.199-218).<sup>9</sup>

Such, then, is the context of Bellot's consideration in the *Propos* of the writings of Le Corbusier. Bellot begins by acknowledging that Le Corbusier 'is far from underestimating the educational value of art'. Indeed, Le Corbusier believes that art

is essentially hypnotic, and there is nothing with greater power to prepare for political and social revolutions or to serve philosophical theory by slowly but surely inculcating the masses (*Propos* 30).

That said, Bellot then outlines some of the features of '*la doctrine dont Le Corbusier est l'apôtre*' of which the leitmotif is '*mort à la tradition*' (*Propos* 30).

He opens with an expression of a belief in Man rather than God:

We have started from a world without mystery derived from an impersonal God. Let he who wishes or is able to do so believe man is God and man himself a geometric machine. Life only has meaning

in the present, which in turn is a forward march of progress (*Propos* 30).

This leads to a contrast between the values of past and present:

A rainbow, the firmament, living creatures are less beautiful than the most modest machine because they are not part of the unitary lines of geometry: the human animal, like the bee, is the builder of geometric cells. All cities should be built on the same plan: all men should live in the same kind of houses. Great men are superfluous: let us aim to educate the common man, and to do that let us seek to produce set emotions, create standard minds (*Propos* 30).

The history of the world may be divided into two periods, '*le pre-machinisme et le machinisme*' :

So let us be free of the confounded constraints of centuries, decaying old carcasses of the Romanesque, Gothic and other styles resulting from the poor taste of the great kings, let us be free of the asinine ways of our old cities with their cathedrals. We are at the dawn of mechanization, the hour of science has struck (*Propos* 31).

Finally, Bellot quotes a passage from *Le cheval de Troie du Bolchevisme* which begins with the all-too familiar Le Corbusian aphorism that *la maison est une machine à habiter* (*Propos* 31), and then continues by observing that the house

should no longer be a solid object defying the centuries, but a tool like a motor car; no longer will it be an archaic entity in which people's commitment to it is bound up in their cult of family and race; but it should help to liberate anarchistic instincts by the images it presents and the kind of life it means to shape (*Propos* 31).

Bellot urges that we put others 'on their guard against the unhealthy fascination which could affect our innermost souls, faced with the wild imaginings of such sectarians ' as Le Corbusier. 'The vision behind all great architecture inspires something like an inner radiance in cultured man and sharpens his taste for life', he adds. Here Le Corbusier fails:

The works of Le Corbusier arouse the opposite reaction: one shudders, one's vitality is sapped (one lady called one of these houses a 'suicide box'), one feels empty inside, filled with a kind of anguish, as if one were looking deep into an extinct moon crater (*Propos* 31).

As Le Corbusier maintains (and Bellot agrees with him) that 'style is state of mind' there is little difficulty in assessing 'this kind of style and the

thinking behind it'. The answer Bellot gives is political. 'It is the purest communism', he writes,

unfortunately given credence quite unconsciously by honest folk who, though often very intelligent, are quite undiscerning. It is all the more urgent to open people's eyes (*Propos* 31).

That said, there is national pride involved, too. For all these ideas, says Bellot, have been 'peddled by the international artistic review *L'Esprit Nouveau*' which he calls 'basically a nihilistic enterprise with vaguely international aims' and 'the majority of whose contributors do not have French names' (*Propos* 31).

*L'Esprit Nouveau* had been founded in 1920 by Le Corbusier, Ozenfant and Demée as an international review of aesthetics, following Le Corbusier and Ozenfant's joint exhibition of paintings in 1918 and their publication of the tract *Après le cubisme* with its promotion of the new art of 'purism'. Many of the ideas in Le Corbusier's early books were first put forward in articles for *L'Esprit Nouveau*. But Bellot has no time for it:

This French language cosmopolitan publication of the foreign colony in Paris covers every subject under the sun: aesthetics, politics, spiritualism, mechanics, negro dancing. French classical art is treated on the same level as negro art and the Church is treated as something which must be crushed (*Propos* 31-32).

This is the last we hear of Le Corbusier directly in the *Propos*, but Bellot at this juncture launches into a general attack on the 'false orientation' represented by *L'Esprit Nouveau*.<sup>10</sup>

In essence, whereas Dom Bellot regards it as 'too simplistic to attribute everything to subversive theories', he observes that 'the theories fit and that they make frantic use of certain ways of building which correspond with their outlook' (*Propos* 32). This means 'militant bolchevist architects' producing 'little box dwellings'. Industrialisation, including the use of reinforced concrete, has led to 'purely utilitarian buildings, constructed

entirely by engineers ... without passing through the hands of an artist' (*Propos 32*). Sun, air and hygiene are all important, it is true. But, says Bellot,

what about hygiene for the heart, the spirit, the soul? We stand against the false and sterile products of so-called modern art, which are devoid of all human and spiritual content' (*Propos 33*).

If the principles of economy, hygiene and town planning 'are applied without any spiritual criterion, [they] lead us to machine cities, whose inhabitants are articulated puppets, pieces of clockwork rather than men'.

To Bellot, the aspirations of the artist must lead to God:

Whether he be writer, musician, painter, sculptor or architect, unless he has no sense of vocation, an artist must address man's soul, leading him onto the peaks where God is to be found and keeping him there (*Propos 33*).

Such aspiration is fine in theory, but sometimes less impressive in practice.

Regrettably Bellot (or perhaps one should say Bellot's editors) gives not a single example of a building by Le Corbusier or any other architect to support these views. Of course it was only after Bellot's death, it could be argued, that Le Corbusier produced the building which most readily satisfied the monk's aspirations - namely the pilgrimage chapel of Notre Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp (1950-1954). It is tempting to think of Ronchamp when Bellot writes:

An architectural work must be able to inspire joy by means of light, meditation by means of shade, rest through silence; it is thus truly human. It achieves its goal by the interplay of volume, space and lines, by which, just as light invades the shade and vice-versa, our vision is extended and balanced at the same time (*Propos 34*).

Indeed - although Ronchamp was not completed until more than a decade after Bellot's death - it is noteworthy that Bellot adds that he regards the 'inspiration' he has described as 'a matter of prime importance ... in the design and construction of a church' (*Propos 34*). Interestingly enough Père Marie-Alain Coutourier, whom we have already met in Canada, was credited by Le Corbusier with a significant role at Ronchamp. 'Je puis le dire',

he commented. '*Sans le Père Coutourier, Ronchamp et le couvent de La Tourette n'existeraient pas. Le Père Coutourier avait su par son courage, sa loyauté et sa franchise balayer les faux et les faussaires*'.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, it was in *L'Esprit Nouveau* (and given wider circulation in *Vers une architecture* of 1923) that Le Corbusier gave his famous definition of architecture as 'the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light'.<sup>12</sup> Surely Bellot could not have found this alienating? Yet he moves on to condemn 'the glass-house and the cube-house' as 'ridiculous and badly suited to their uses' (*Propos* 34). The apartment block also comes in for negative criticism, particularly as it has replaced 'the family house, the hearth'. Bellot has no time for the surrounding space, parks, fresh air, the terraces and greenery enjoyed by the residents. All of Le Corbusier's 'five points' in fact. 'This architectural nudism is terrible and anti-human', Bellot writes. 'Once again, are we no more than abstract objects, numbers, sketches on a drawing board? Can feeling be banished from our lives? Can man accept being treated like something mass-produced?' (*Propos* 35).

Bellot then becomes Puginian when he equates a virtuous society with a virtuous architecture:

In the light ages, as opposed to the dark ages, when society lived in the bosom of the Church, architecture (on which we instinctively depend to honour and preserve what is worthy) produced incomparable masterpieces, examples of logic and humanity, genuine fruits of art, born of reason, faith and Christian sentiment (*Propos* 35).

Bellot does not propound a return to copying 'ad infinitum the Romanesque or Gothic forms, regardless of the inspiration which produced them'; but nor can he tolerate those who 'abdicate as artists and put their faith in the *ready-made*'. It is in the writing of Charles Péguy (1873-1914) that he sees 'valuable light' thrown on 'where we are meant to be going' (*Propos* 36).

It is clear that Bellot admired Péguy and that he found in this Catholic writer and poet a firm commitment to the individual against the majority. Bellot quotes with approval Péguy's observation that there are huge masses of people who have ready-made thoughts, ideas and desires, Christians mechanically repeating prayers, and painters drawing along ready-made lines. 'There are as few painters who look as there are philosophers who think', Péguy remarked (*Propos* 36).<sup>12</sup>

Bellot seems to have Le Corbusier's machine-aesthetic in mind when he quotes Péguy further:

A ready-made garment is always a second-hand garment; it is a new second-hand garment instead of an old second-hand garment (*Propos* 36).

As Bellot later quotes Péguy: 'A ready-made idea is manufactured ready-made ... it knows nothing of germination, fertility or conception'. Thirty-five years previously, says Bellot, when 'Péguy sounded the alarm, there were as few builder-architects as there were thinking philosophers. Artificiality had slipped into the place of art'. But are we sure now, Bellot asks,

that we do not still have architects making ready-made buildings, who are either accomplices or weak victims of short-sighted and tyrannical clients, and thus consent to the death of art and good taste? (*Propos* 36)

Bellot looks back with admiration on Péguy's stance:

How lucky we are to have heard the strong words of Péguy and to be living at a time when, despite terrible traumas, those principles [of good taste] are winning the day and seem to be falling into place for us in a way they never did for his contemporaries, for he was ahead of them (*Propos* 40).

But was he ahead of Le Corbusier?

Bellot's lecture on *Le renouveau de l'art et du goût* contains no further reference to Le Corbusier, nor does he appear elsewhere in the *Propos*; however the architect is mentioned in the coda to the text of Lecture 4 as published in the *Revue trimestrielle Canadienne* and *Liturgical Arts* in



French and English respectively.<sup>14</sup> Here, the 'formalists' are represented by Viollet-le-Duc who could not throw off the shackles of the Gothic and Romanesque styles: 'The more Gothic churches were built with iron and concrete', comments Bellot, 'the more it was evident that the true Gothic spirit was lacking; a spirit which is synonymous with reason, sincerity, truth and respect for materials'. The 'rationalists', on the other hand, 'considered only the useful; they had but one aim - to supply a need. They planned an edifice for its function; neglecting form, the laws of aesthetics, and the joys of contemplation'. Ironically, they too could turn to Viollet-le-Duc for theoretical support.

Dom Bellot himself promotes the *via media*:

Bare architecture results in geometrism, that is, it ceases to be art and loses itself in abstraction. No, what we need is plasticity. Let us have hope!

Bellot's word for this is *équilibre*. But it is essential to be on one's guard:

As long as the actions of a few powerful personalities exercise their influence on the direction of that trend, it will deflect into impassible or dangerous byways. Frank Lloyd Wright (as early as 1900), Le Corbusier, then others have provoked brief movements which might have imperiled the unity of the movement, might have turned effective forces of excellent quality away from the main body of the army.

The alliance between *l'esprit du gothique* and *la composition plastique de l'architecture grècque* should be a matter for rejoicing. Perhaps Bellot had Le Corbusier in mind when he ended his lecture:

Woe to the architecture that forgets its function as Mother of the Plastic Arts, and which prefers to this the egotistical attitude of the worshippers of their own sterility!

If so it hardly commends Bellot as an historian or a critic, for all told his criticism of Le Corbusier had hardly been fair. Indeed one of the ironies of Bellot's dismissal of his work and ideas was that Bellot found his architectural style alienating. Worst of all, Le Corbusier was not a committed

Catholic. He is put forward by Bellot not only as the Trojan horse for Bolchevism, but as the scapegoat for international modernism.

## NOTES: CHAPTER 2: LE CORBUSIER

1 This quotation from Le Corbusier, and related observations, appear in Maurice Besset, *Le Corbusier* (Geneva and London, 1987), p.91.

2 The extensive literature on the Palace of the League of Nations begins with the first volume (1910-1929) of Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre complète*. From numerous versions I have used the 4th edition of 1946, edited by Oscar Stonorov and Willy Boesiger (Zurich: 1946), pp.161-173.

3 See here and subsequently Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the tragic view of architecture*, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp.113, 126-129.

4 For Senger's comments see (eg) Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: elements of a synthesis* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1979), pp. 325n48, and 355n57.

Le Corbusier visited Russia in 1928, 1929 and 1930, and in 1931-32 entered the competition for the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow with Pierre Jeanneret. See Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the mystique of the USSR. Theories and projects for Moscow, 1928-1936* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). Senger is referred to in the text and a note on p.xi.

Senger's publications are difficult to track down, and I am grateful to the staff of the inter-library loan section at the Robinson Library, Newcastle University, for obtaining copies of the three books by Senger referred to from the Bibliothèque Nationale Suisse, Bern. None has illustrations.

5 Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même* (Geneva: Rousseau, 1970), p.74, under the year '1931'.

## NOTES: CHAPTER 2: LE CORBUSIER

6 *Oeuvre complète, 1929-1934*, 4th edition (1946), p.17.

7 *Ibid.*, p.17.

8 Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the tragic view of architecture*, p.128. See also William J R Curtis, *Le Corbusier: ideas and forms* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), pp.108, 128.

9 Jencks, *Le Corbusier*, pp.128-129. For Le Corbusier's answer to Senger see *Le Corbusier talks with students from the schools of architecture* (New York: Orion, 1961).

Umbdenstock (1866-1940) had been a student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Bellot, and later became a well-known *patron* and member of the Académie. See the references to Le Corbusier in Egbert, *The Beaux-Arts Tradition*, especially p.76.

10 For *L'Esprit Nouveau* see the entry in *Le Corbusier. Une encyclopédie* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987), pp.140-145.

11 *Le Corbusier. Une encyclopédie*, p.III, as an epigraph to the entry on Coutourier.

12 Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture*, translated by Frederick Etchells (London, 1927), reprint (London: Architectural Press, 1970), p.31.

## NOTES: CHAPTER 2: LE CORBUSIER

13 The material from Péguy quoted here and subsequently is from Mrs Jones' translation of the *Propos* (pp.36-37) in which it had been moved from the fourth to the first lecture. As already indicated, this was first published in French in 'L'idéal et l'ascèse de l'art chrétien. Formalisme et rationalisme architectural dans leur rapport avec la beauté', *Revue trimestrielle canadienne* (Montreal), no.77 (March 1934), pp.8-9, and in English translation in *Liturgical arts*, vol.4 (1935), pp.157-158. This article of course is the basis of the fourth lecture in the *Propos*.

14 *Revue trimestrielle canadienne* (Montreal), no.77 (March 1934), p.11, and *Liturgical arts*, vol.4 (1935), p.159.

Subsequent quotations by Bellot are taken from pp.157-159 of this issue of *Liturgical arts*.



### CHAPTER 3

Maritain. Portrait by Otto van Rees, from Raïssa Maritain, *Les grandes amitiés* (New York, 1944), vol.2, plate opposite p.48

## CHAPTER 3:

## Jacques MARITAIN

Jacques Maritain, like Péguy, makes fleeting appearances in the *Propos*, and it is not unlikely that the both knew Dom Bellot. Maritain (1882-1973) and his wife Raïssa (1883-1960) were married in 1904, and two years later were converted to Catholicism and baptised. The next year, when Maritain told him of this, Péguy exclaimed '*Moi aussi j'en suis là!*', and added, '*Le corps du Christ est plus étendu qu'on ne pense*'.<sup>1</sup> In August 1907 Maritain was despatched to the Isle of Wight to see Dom Louis Baillet (a mutual friend) to tell him of Péguy's return to Catholicism. As Yvonne Servais puts it in her biography of Péguy:

The exiled monk, who daily prayed for Péguy with the inward and tranquil certainty that such a rich soul could not escape from God, felt very little surprise; he was delighted, but as if at the receipt of long-expected news.<sup>2</sup>

The monks on the Isle of Wight were still in Appuldurcombe House and as Bellot had been called back from Oosterhout to work on designs for Quarr Abbey that year he may have met Maritain then, on the philosopher's subsequent visit in 1914, or on other occasions.<sup>3</sup>

From his early years Maritain had been the friend and confidant of artists, writers, poets and musicians, and is regarded by many as having perhaps the finest aesthetic sensibility among the major figures of 20th-century European philosophy. His long-standing reflection on almost every aspect of art began with his book *Art et scolastique* of 1920 and culminated with the publication in 1953 of *Creative intuition in art and poetry* (based on the A W Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts given at the National Gallery, Washington, DC) and in 1960 of *The responsibility of the artist*.

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In their edition of Maritain's selected readings on aesthetics, Joseph W Evans and Leo R Ward explain that Maritain

likes to say with Dante that human art is, as it were, the grandchild of God - it continues in its own way the labour of divine creation. But he keeps reminding the modern artist that human art cannot create out of nothing; it must first nourish itself on things, which it transforms in order to make a form grasped in them shine on a bit of matter. For Maritain, human art is in the last analysis doomed to sterility and failure if it cuts itself off from the existential world of nature and the universe of man.<sup>4</sup>

At first a disciple of Bergson, Maritain turned to Thomism at his conversion, and it is as a follower of St Thomas Aquinas that Bellot presents him in the *Propos*.<sup>5</sup>

Bellot's quotations from Maritain are all linked to the monk's consideration of aesthetics, in particular his attempt to define 'beauty'. The first and most extensive quotations appear in Lecture 3 on *Les conditions intemporelles du beau* in which Bellot places Maritain's writings in the context of Thomism, 'the atmosphere in which all spiritual values can exist and flourish'. Here, he continues,

is the climate of Christian philosophers par excellence, rich as they are from centuries gone by and able to assimilate and unify all elements of truth.

As the author of *Art et scolastique*, says Bellot, Maritain may be numbered among those 'young philosophers' who have 'set up a new aesthetics in which we may hope to see collaboration between philosophers and artists'; other recent publications which attempt to do this, adds Bellot, include *Le procès de l'art* by Stanislas Fumet, *Les nouvelles théories* by Maurice Denis, and articles by Henri Charlier. Before these writers, comments Bellot, 'not a single Catholic philosopher took on *ex professo* the gentle science of aesthetics, although St Thomas Aquinas and his disciples have provided 'firm creative principles on beauty in general' (*Propos* 58-59).<sup>6</sup>

Considering first St Thomas' interpretation of 'the nature of beauty', Bellot affirms St Thomas' two points which define the essence of beauty: it is the *object* of knowledge, and the object as it *delights knowledge*' (*Propos* 60). Or again, as St Thomas expresses it elsewhere, 'we call beautiful that whose aspect pleases us'. Hardly surprisingly, this is echoed by Maritain in his *Art et scolastique* :

If something exalts and delights the soul by the very fact of being given to the intuition, it is good to apprehend, it is beautiful (*Propos* 60).

Further support comes from Sertillanges, who observes that '*sense and intelligence* are made to judge order and reason in things; if this is so, it is because 'they are themselves *order and reason in their basic constitution*' (*Propos* 60). Bellot endorses this. '*Basically*', he concludes, 'a thing is beautiful *in as much* as it is *imbued with order and reason*. It thus has the same attractions as knowledge, and it is called *beautiful*' (*Propos* 61).

Bellot then analyses 'the foundation of beauty', and moves back to St Thomas again who (following Plato, Aristotle and St Augustine) explains that 'order is essential to beauty'. 'Beauty', says St Thomas, 'consists in a right proportion of things'. To Bellot, 'this short phrase says it all'. Expanded by St Thomas, it is expressed in his three conditions of beauty: (i) integrity of perfection, (ii) harmonious proportion, and (iii) clarity or brilliance (*Propos* 61-62). Let us look at these more fully.

So far as 'integrity' is concerned, Bellot acknowledges that 'the special perfection which is the foundation of beauty requires integrity', but adds that

there are in reality not one but a thousand ways of achieving integrity, perfection or accomplishment; the requirements of perfection and completeness are different for a natural body to those for a statue or picture. The absence of a head or arm, which is a pretty recognisable lack of integrity in a man, is much less so in a statue'.

Thus the statues of the Venus de Milo, Hermes by Praxiteles, and the Victory of Samothrace are not regarded as inferior aesthetically because they are incomplete or mutilated. However, this presents a problem for the contemporary artist, and Bellot calls upon Maritain to demonstrate it. If, says Maritain,

a futurist wants only to portray one eye or a quarter eye of the lady whose portrait he is doing, no-one will question his right; the only requirement - and there lies the whole problem - is that the quarter eye should be just right for that lady in the particular context.

'That', concludes Bellot, 'is integrity of perfection as foundation of beauty' (*Propos* 62-63).

Bellot next turns to 'clarity or brilliance' which he sees set within the 'fundamental condition' of 'right proportion'. 'This clarity and order emanate from form as it was understood by the ancients', writes Bellot,

in other words from the principle that determination and perfection are intrinsic in all that is; for instance, in our case, the soul being one element of the essence and attributes of human nature (*Propos* 63).

At this juncture Bellot returns to *Art et scolastique* in which Maritain writes that this form is itself a 'vestige or ray of creative intelligence' imprinted in the heart of the created being. 'All order and all proportion is the work of intelligence', notes Maritain elsewhere, and he continues:

And so, to agree with scholars that beauty is the *brilliance of form on the proportionate parts of matter is to say it is a flash of intelligence on intelligently arranged matter*. The intelligence enjoys what is beautiful ... because it feels at home there, recognises itself and comes into contact with its own light. This is so much the case that those like Francis of Assisi with the greatest awareness and appreciation of the beauty of things are those who know these are the product of an intelligence and who relate them to their author (*Propos* 63-64).

'What is more', adds Bellot, 'there is nothing to rule out in any way a multiplicity of parts. Consequently this basic definition of beauty is truly universal' (*Propos* 64).

'Integrity, clarity and proportion vary according to the different works and their purposes', explains Dom Bellot. Creative work should have 'the fullness and vigour required to be of real use to society'. Bellot continues:

With beauty, it is the very act of being, God's reflection that we attain; from this God who is naturally and supernaturally the end of our human life; and our aesthetics should inspire the technique which gives clear direction to our art (*Propos* 65).

Thus art which 'proceeds from out innermost spirits, already enlightened by true inspiration, becomes creative and alive. That is the secret of living art. the spring and regulator of progress in architecture'. Bellot cites architectural examples:

That is what sustained the builders of Notre Dame in Paris, Chartres, Rheims, Amiens, Beauvais, the Sainte Chapelle, Mont Saint Michel and so many other masterpieces which will for ever be admired by all men everywhere because they have attained a universal value of beauty (*Propos* 66).

But such 'notions of beauty' need a framework, and Maritain appears again when Bellot proceeds to provide this.

In Lecture 4 entitled *L'idéal et l'ascèse de l'art chrétien. Formalisme et rationalisme architectural dans leur rapport avec la beauté*. Bellot returns to *Art et scolastique* for Maritain's further comments in his chapter on 'Art and beauty'. Bellot has earlier observed that

the beautiful toward which architects strive, the beautiful which consists in correct proportion or harmonious disposition of useful parts, this beauty, like all beauty, is essentially an object of intelligence (*Propos* 73).

This is reinforced, though without the architectural dimension, by Maritain:

In man only knowledge derived through the senses possesses fully *the intuitivity necessary for the perception of the beautiful*. So also man can certainly enjoy purely intelligible beauty, but the beauty which is *connatural to man is that which comes to delight the mind through the senses and their intuition*. Such also is the peculiar beauty of our art, which works upon a sensible matter for the joy of the spirit ... It has the savour of the terrestrial paradise, because it restores for a brief moment the simultaneous peace and delight of the mind and the senses (*Propos* 74).

To Bellot, these principles have 'an incomparable value', but they have been abandoned with the inauguration of 'the reign of academism and formalism'. A 'true renaissance' is needed to replace this false one.

Bellot presumably saw this 'true renaissance' as reflecting the values found in the *Propos* - an architecture based on 'style' not 'styles' and (in ecclesiastical building at least) involving the integration of the arts as promoted by *L'Arche*. Maritain's Thomism has of course a Benedictine context, and Bellot would have studied the writings of St Thomas Aquinas when preparing for the priesthood.

But this may be taken a step further in Bellot's case, as the abbot under whom he studied at Quarr was Dom Paul Delatte, OSB (1848-1937). Dom Delatte held a Doctorate in Theology from the Institut Catholique de Lille, where he taught philosophy before becoming a monk.<sup>7</sup> As Père Jean Rochon, OSB, archivist at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, explains:

C'était l'époque du renouveau des études thomistes suscité par Léon XIII. C'était aussi l'époque où prenaient leur essor les mouvements liturgique et biblique qui trouveraient leur couronnement au concile Vatican II. Et le Père Abbé savait admirablement introduire ses jeunes auditeurs dans un patrimoine aussi riche, que les derniers siècles avaient un peu oublié, mais dont l'Eglise entrant dans le XXe siècle ressentait fortement le besoin.

Père Rochon becomes more specific, stressing the considerable value of a Thomist training to Dom Bellot:

On devine l'intérêt particulier que le frère Bellot, comme architecte, pouvait prendre à cet enseignement et les solides fondements qu'y trouverait bientôt son art. Alors que la pratique de la prière liturgique l'éclairait sur l'aménagement des lieux, la fréquentation de la Bible lui faisait comprendre leur profond symbolisme et la métaphysique thomiste l'initiat aux notions les plus hautes, en même temps que les plus fonctionnelles pour l'art et les plus satisfaisantes pour l'esprit, sur les aspects fondamentaux de l'être que sont le beau, le vrai et le bien. 8

Dom Delatte was abbot at Quarr from 1901-1921 and then returned to Solesmes where he died in 1937, the year of Bellot's departure for Canada. His successor as abbot was Dom Germain Cozien, OSB.

Throughout this period Jacques Maritain may have visited Quarr from time to time; the year before Dom Coziens' election in 1921 another prominent French literary figure was at the abbey. This was Georges Bataille (1897-1962), writer, philosopher and pornographer.<sup>9</sup> In 1922 Bataille graduated from the *Ecole des Chartes* as a medievalist and librarian, but two years earlier he had a profound mystical experience at Quarr. Although the monastic life was attractive enough to make him think of becoming a priest, at the end of his stay Bataille abandoned his faith and in 1924 took a post at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Thirty years later, in 1954, he published the book *L'expérience intérieure* (subsequently appearing in English as *Inner experience*) in which he describes what happened at Quarr on his visit in 1920.

'At nightfall, on the street', he wrote, 'suddenly I remembered, Quarr Abbey, a French monastery on the Isle of Wight, where in 1920 I spent two or three days'. He recalled it

as a house surrounded by pines, beneath a moonlit softness, at the seashore; the moonlight linked to the medieval beauty of the service - everything which made me hostile towards a monastic life disappeared - in this place I only experienced the exclusion of the rest of the world.

The monastic life appealed to him:

I imagined myself within the walls of the cloister, removed from agitation, for an instant imagining myself a monk and saved from jagged, discursive life: in the street itself, with the help of darkness, my heart streaming with blood became inflamed - I knew a sudden rapture. With the help as well of my indifference to logic, to the spirit of consequence.

He goes on:

Within the walls, the sky a ghostly gray, dusk, the damp uncertainty of space at that precise time; divinity had then a mad, deaf presence, illuminating up to intoxication. My body hadn't interrupted its rapid step, but ecstasy slightly wrenched its muscles. 10

Bellot was still at Quarr at this time - his major work completed - and so it is not impossible that he and Bataille met there.

As Leslie Anne Boldt explains, *Inner Experience* is 'the first of three volumes which appear together under the title *La Somme athéologique*'. Although the title also invokes the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas, *Inner experience* 'is a treatise which resonates with the absence of God'.<sup>11</sup> Thomism features in the writings of Bataille as it does in those of Bellot. But, unlike Bataille, Bellot interpreted St Thomas Aquinas in terms of the practice of architecture in which, at its best, Man builds to the glory of God.

## NOTES: CHAPTER 3: MARITAIN

1 Raïssa Maritain, *Les grandes amitiés* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1949), p.192 (paperback 1993).

2 Yvonne Servais, *Charles Péguy. The pursuit of salvation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1953), p.287.

For the Maritains' relationship with Péguy see Pierre L'Abbé, 'Jacques Maritain and Charles Péguy: a reassessment', in John F X Knasas, editor, *Jacques Maritain. The man and his metaphysics* (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 1988), pp.45-52, especially p.49.

3 Maritain's visit to Quarr on 14th August 1907 is noted in his *Carnet de notes* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1965), pp. 61-62 (paperback 1994). His visit in 1914 is recorded in Raïssa Maritain, *Les grandes amitiés*, pp.459-60.

4 Jacques Maritain, *Challenges and renewals*, selected readings edited by Joseph W Evans and Leo R Ward (Notre Dame, IN, and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966 ), p.239.

5 For Thomas Aquinas' writings see Brian Davies, *The thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) (paperback 1993).

6 For *Art et scolastique* see the text and notes in *Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1986), pp.615-788. A wider view is in Part 1: 'Art et Scolastique', in Bernard Hubert and Yves Floucat, editors, *Jacques Maritain et ses contemporains* (Paris: Desclée/Proost France, 1991), pp.23-155.



## NOTES: CHAPTER 3: MARITAIN

7 See Augustin Savaton, *Dom Paul Delatte, Abbé de Solesmes* (Solesmes: Editions de l'Abbaye, 1975), especially Chapter IX, 'Notre-Dame de Quarr', pp.245-283.

8 Jean Rochon, 'L'esprit d'un moine bâtisseur. Dom Paul Bellot (1876-1944)', *Chercher Dieu*, no.16 (Spring 1994), p.18.

9 See Denis Hollier, *Against architecture. The writings of Georges Bataille*, translated by Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1989), which includes references to (eg) Viollet-le-Duc and St Thomas Aquinas.

Bataille's connections with Quarr were kindly brought to my attention by Professor David Stewart of Tokyo Institute of Technology.

10 Georges Bataille, *Inner experience*, translated and with an introduction by Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), p.58. For the context of Bataille's visit to Quarr see recently Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille. La mort à l'oeuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p.615.

11 Translator's introduction to Bataille, *Inner experience*, p.ix.

## CONCLUSION

Dom Bellot's observations in the *Propos* on the writings of Viollet-le-Duc, Le Corbusier and Maritain are set in the context of the wide range of architectural matters covered by his lectures, and including colour, light, taste, form, beauty, and proportion. Despite his use of concrete construction, it is as a '*poète à brique*' that he is seen at his best, and it is hardly surprising to find that Charlier tells us that Bellot had a 'secret preference' for brick. 'He did for brick what our medieval architects did for stone', Charlier adds (*Propos* 17). The architecture which emerges rejects historical styles but espouses traditional values whilst exploring new possibilities - or *innover selon la tradition*, as Bellot put it (*Propos* 55).

Among other architects and writers whom Bellot brings into the *Propos* is Anatole de Baudot (1834-1915), a pupil of Henri Labrouste and a prominent disciple of Viollet-le-Duc, whose rationalised Gothic point of view he promoted. After Viollet's death in 1879, de Baudot became increasingly adventurous as he experimented with brickwork and concrete. This culminated in his church of Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre in Paris (1894-1904), which represents the union of the old and new advocated by Viollet-le-Duc in his *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (Plate 23). Here, as Peter Collins makes clear, de Baudot used the Cottancin system of construction in which 'the compression members are of reinforced brickwork (ie pierced bricks threaded with steel rods), whilst the tension members are not of true concrete but reinforced cement (ie rods embedded in a mixture of sand and cement, without any stone aggregate)'.<sup>1</sup> In 1905 de Baudot formalised his ideas in the book *L'architecture et le béton armé*, and the year after his death there appeared his *L'architecture, le passé, le présent* (1916).

Understandably, Dom Bellot found de Baudot's architecture appealing. After a section in the *Propos* in which he considers archaeology and the need for architects to break free of it, he turns to followers of Viollet who attempted something new:

They realised that to play the barrel organ, in other words to repeat the same things over and over again, was not worthy of their role as artists. It was time to play the real piano (*Propos* 52).

Then there came along 'an original innovator bent on presenting an art formula which owed nothing to the past'. This, of course, was de Baudot.

Bellot goes on to explain that reinforced concrete (*béton armé*) had just been developed, with its combination of iron (strong in tension) and concrete (strong in compression). Reinforced concrete made various economies possible, says Bellot:

For small spans, concrete is dearer than ordinary masonry: for large spans on the other hand it is very economical. That is what led to the adoption of concrete for the church of Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre. The architect at once gave up any idea of imitation and tried to find an original formula with the materials at his disposal.

The result was not to everyone's taste:

It was a difficult problem and the public gave [de Baudot's] work a pretty cool reception - it was actually quite hostile. It was in 1900 and I can still remember it. People's eyes were used to the thick stone forms and were disoriented by the dry, slender lines of this construction. Many architects said: 'He is courageous, but he has not got it'. And, in fact, it was true.

But Dom Bellot is firmly on de Baudot's side:

Yet let us give him the credit for having experimented, when so many others were making bad copies; and let us be grateful to him for his boldness in breaking the windows of the old cliché-factories in which we were suffocating (*Propos* 53-54).

As Bellot goes on to affirm, he supports architects such as de Baudot who make 'attempts at renewal' and demonstrate 'some signs of liberation from servile copying' ('*une libération de la copie servile*'). But it is not certain from his description that Bellot grasped the details of the structural system used by de Baudot, and considering Bellot's attachment to brickwork it is odd

that he makes no mention of its use at Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre. Did Bellot ever *reinforce* his brickwork, following de Baudot, one wonders?

If the essential lesson to be drawn from Bellot's support for de Baudot is in the area of *construction* and *materials*, with Père Odile Wolff it is in *proportion* and *geometry*.<sup>2</sup> We have already noted that Viollet-le-Duc advocated the use of rules, propounding that 'a geometric and arithmetic system which can establish laws of proportion, far from being an obstacle, is an indispensable help' (*Propos* 105). In Lecture 6 entitled *Technique and the work of art - proportion*, from which Viollet's quotation is taken, Bellot then considers various aspects of geometry in architecture and introduces Wolff in an autobiographical way.

Dom Bellot begins by recommending a system of proportions which is 'uniquely flexible' and offers more possible combinations than any other he has come across. That does not mean to say that it can be understood in a few months:

It takes years of reflection and research. It takes patience to gain control of one's soul and one's art. I must first say that great comfort is not the monks' privilege. For twenty-six years I lived as a hermit, without seeing a single printed word. So do not believe one has to travel the world and visit a whole quantity of clever folk in order to make progress (*Propos* 109).

'So, as I had few means at my disposal', Bellot comments later, 'I reflected on what I could do to make my work worthwhile'.

One day he was sent pictures of Beuron, the Benedictine abbey in Germany where Père Desiderius Lenz was working, and shortly afterwards - as has been noted in our earlier discussion of Viollet-le-Duc - Bellot was given a small manual dealing with Lenz's theories. 'It was a revelation', Bellot exclaims. 'Compared with Viollet-le-Duc's ideas on proportions, those of Lenz seemed exciting.' News had also reached him of 'a certain mysterious golden

section, a magic wand which could transform commonplace art into a masterpiece'.

Then suddenly, reports Bellot, there appeared at Quarr Abbey a copy of Père Odilo Wolff's book *Tempelmasze. Das Gesetz der Proportion in Den Antiken und Altchristlichen Sakralbauten ein Beitrag zur Kunstwissenschaft und Aesthetik* which had been published in Vienna in 1911 (Plate 24). According to Wolff, the hexagon and 60-degree triangle had governed the whole of ancient art, and he provides analytical diagrams to prove this (Plates 25, 26). As Bellot was at this time designing Quarr, he built it

entirely with the 60-degree triangle, which [he] submitted to acrobatic gymnastics in order to work out the various proportions on that great church, the first I had built (*Propos*, 109-110).

Significantly, the *parti* of his last building, the abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, is in the form of a hexagon.

There is little doubt that Bellot was committed practically to the use of the golden section also. Indeed he had a set-square made which would provide him with the proportions of the golden section:

Those who know how to use it are unanimous on the point: it is staggering, intoxicating! But, in order to master the technique of this instrument, which can create all kinds of marmonius results, one has to understand it and also be a little accustomed to it (*Propos* 110).

But of course there is nothing novel in employing the golden section in architectural design, and elsewhere Bellot deals with the sacredness of numbers, and seems to have been influenced by reading Matila Ghyka's *Le nombre d'or* (*Propos* 106). Le Corbusier, whose '*tracés régulateurs*' or 'regulating lines' (Plate 19) reflect just one aspect of his interest in numbers and proportional systems (expressed most prominently in his *Modulor*) was also fascinated by the golden section and by Ghyka's writings on it.<sup>3</sup> Sketches by Bellot preserved at Wisques showing the construction of a

parabolic arch and the golden section (Plates 27 and 28) demonstrate how he used these geometric principles at the drawing board. Bellot's subsequent expression of his hopes to write more extensively on proportions chimes in with Père Bergeron's remark in his Preface to the *Propos* that a projected volume by Dom Bellot in the Cahiers d'Art ARCA series was to be entitled *Le secret de l'harmonie dans l'art* (*Propos* 10).

Another 20th-century architect influenced extensively by numerical systems is Hans Van Der Laan (1904-1991). But he enters here for another reason, for he studied architecture at the Technische Hogeschool in Delft, and in 1926 joined the Benedictine community of Solesmes at Oosterhout. He was ordained priest in 1934.<sup>4</sup>

Dom Bellot was still working at Oosterhout (which was, it will be recalled, his first building) and Van Der Laan met him there, noting that 'he enjoyed a certain reputation'. He goes on:

The secret of his art lay in the Golden Section, and he had long ago had a set-square made in this proportion, which he used in all his designs instead of the normal 60 degree one. His elevations in particular were based on super-subtle diagrams derived from it. When he tried to convince me of the supreme value of the Golden Section, I failed to see what it had to do with architecture and it seemed to me just another arbitrary mathematical formula like so many others

Van Der Laan adds that he was 'still unclear' as to 'what the appropriate proportion for architecture might be'.<sup>5</sup>

Since then Dom Van Der Laan has spent much of his life at the abbey of Vaals in Holland, and has written extensively about architecture and its spiritual dimension: the major publication in English is *Architectonic Space: Fifteen lessons on the disposition of the human habitat* (1983), translated by Richard Padovan, his major interpreter. Suffice to say that Van Der Laan's architecture, though emanating as Bellot's from the

radically different: in place of the parabolic arch, polychromatic brickwork and an almost gothic emphasis on structure, Van Der Laan presents rectilinear brick buildings which depend for their power on their almost monumental simplicity (Plates 31, 31). It seems after all that one can be a committed Benedictine monk and a holder of at least some of the tenets of Le Corbusier.

The architecture of Le Corbusier had at least one aspect which Bellot would have done well to admire: its commitment to housing the community. Catholic or not, this is surely an admirable virtue. Indeed Le Corbusier, inspiringly, raises it to unexpected heights. 'For Le Corbusier ... the image of the ideal communal life is embodied in monasticism, in which individual will and general will are in complete accord with one another', writes Peter Serenyi. Le Corbusier even urged a group of architectural students that

devoting yourself to architecture is like entering a religious order. You must consecrate yourself, have faith and give. As a just reward, architecture will bring a special happiness to those who have given her their whole being. This happiness is a sort of trance that comes with radiant birth after the agonies of labor.<sup>6</sup>

So here we have Le Corbusier presenting architecture in as spiritual a light as Dom Bellot - except of course that there is no mention of the Divine.

In 1945 Peter Anson published an article on Bellot in the English magazine *Liturgical arts* which was followed by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's essay on Quarr Abbey in the *Architectural Review* in 1967.<sup>7</sup> The revival of interest in Dom Bellot's life and work since then reflects a reappraisal of the values he espoused. At the abbey of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, the most visible evidence of his work to the visitor is the cloister (Plate 32) and the tower and guest-house completed after Bellot's death by his disciple Dom Claude-Marie Côté (Plate 33). All testify to the lasting influence of Dom Bellot and *Bellotisme*. Père Henri-Claude Bergeron, in his obituary to Dom Bellot, cited Saint-

Benoît-du-Lac as his most inspiring building: *'A deux pas de ce monastère, dans l'humble cimetière des Bénédictins, reposent les restes mortels du célèbre architecte'.<sup>10</sup>*



## NOTES: CONCLUSION

- 1 Peter Collins, *Concrete: the vision of a new architecture. A study of Auguste Perret and his precursors* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p.116.
- 2 See above p.41 and p.45 note 15.
- 3 See Roger Herz-Fischler, 'Le Corbusier's 'regulating lines' for the Villa at Garches (1927) and other early works', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol.43, no.1 (March 1984), pp.53-59. The author here argues for the significance of Ghyka's *Esthétique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts* (Paris, 1927).
- 4 The extensive work on Van Der Laan by Richard Padovan will be brought to a head with the the publication shortly of his book *Dom Hans Van Der Laan. Modern Primitive. A critical study of Dom Hans Van Der Laan* (Amsterdam: Architectura and Natura). Four key articles by Richard Padovan are listed in Bibliography C of the thesis, p.104.
- 5 Letter from Van Der Laan to Richard Padovan, 29 May 1984, quoted in 'Theory and Practice', *RIBA Journal (The Architect)*, vol.93 (June 1986), p.54.
- 6 Peter Serenyi, *Le Corbusier in perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p.104.
- 7 Peter F Anson, 'Dom Paul Bellot, OSB', *Liturgical arts* , vol.13 (May 1945), pp.50-52, reprinted from *Pax* (Autumn 1944), pp.110-116; Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Quarr and Bellot'. *Architectural Review*, vol.141, no.842 (April 1967), pp.307-310.

## NOTES: CONCLUSION

7 (continued)

Anson. (1879-1975), a Catholic convert, published extensively on architecture and the religious life. For an admirable synopsis of his work see Tudor Edwards' obituary in *The Times*, 19 July 1975, p.14.

8 Henri-Paul Bergeron, 'Un grand maître est passé parmi nous', *L'Oratoire* (January 1945), p.19.

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PLATES

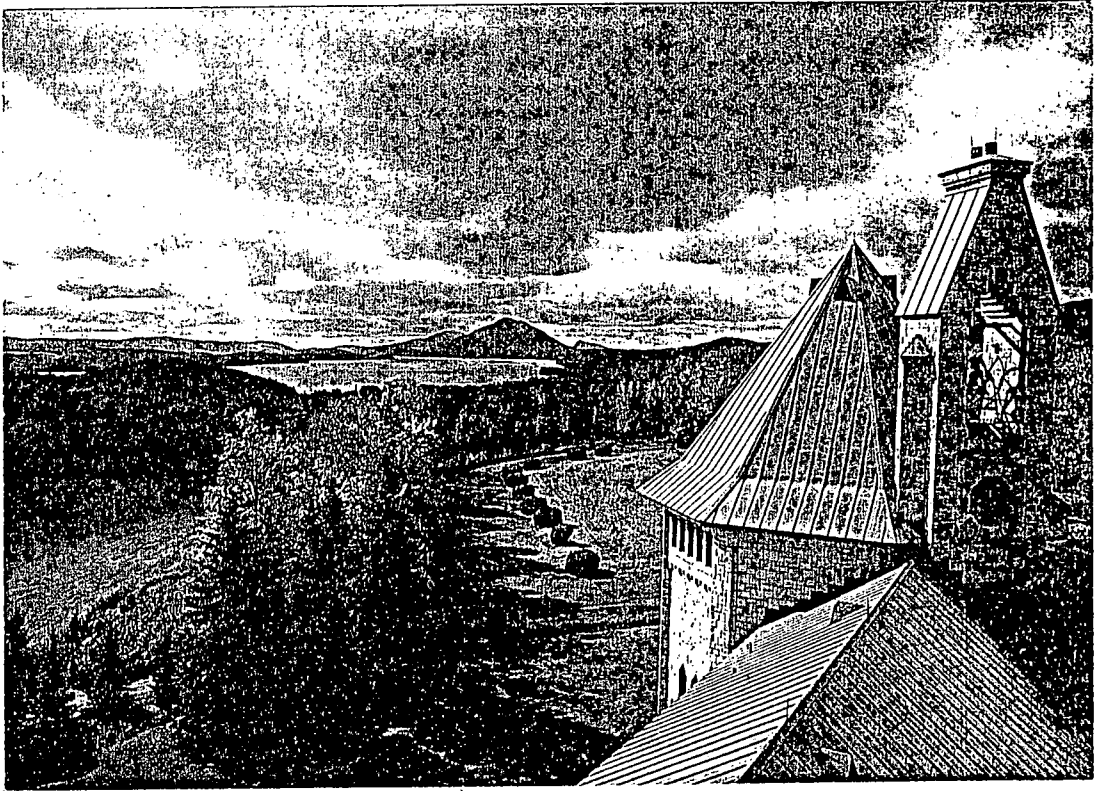


PLATE 1

Abbey of Saint-Benoit-du-Lac, Quebec. Lake Memphremagog and Owl's Head Mountain from the chapter house by Bellot (1939-41). Postcard

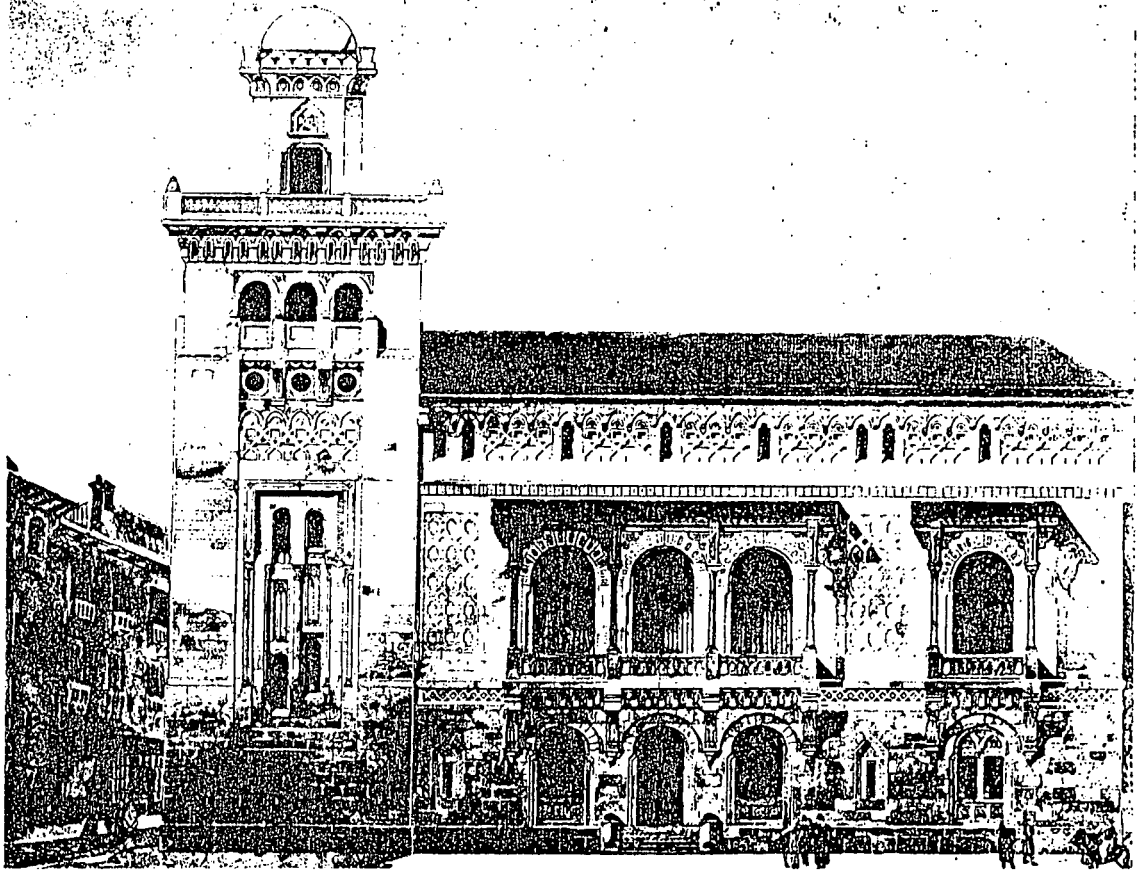


PLATE 2

Design by Bellot for *Maison de famille et cercle français à Madrid*. Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1900. Published version (1901) based on original drawings in Wisques MSS, Ecole des Beaux-Arts folders

A  
MODERN  
ARCHITECTURAL  
WORK

BY  
DOM·PAVL·BELLOT  
O·S·B



FOR V·S·A  
MARSHALL·IONES·COMPANY  
BOSTON  
MCMXXVII

PLATE 3

Titlepage, *A Modern Architectural Work*, by Dom Paul Bellot, OSB (1927)



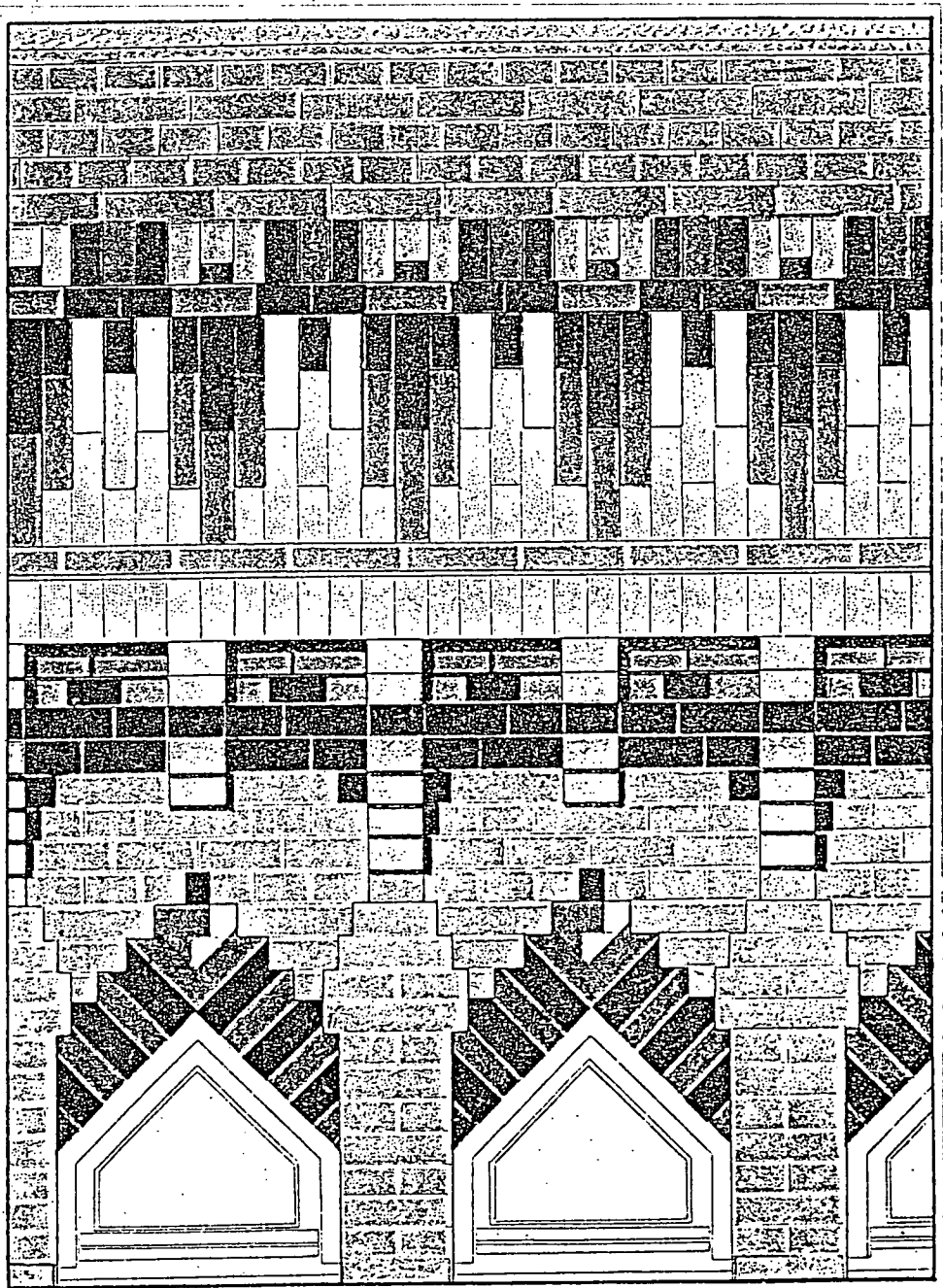


PLATE 4

Brickwork details from *A Modern Architectural Work*, by Dom Bellot, OSB (1927), plate 94

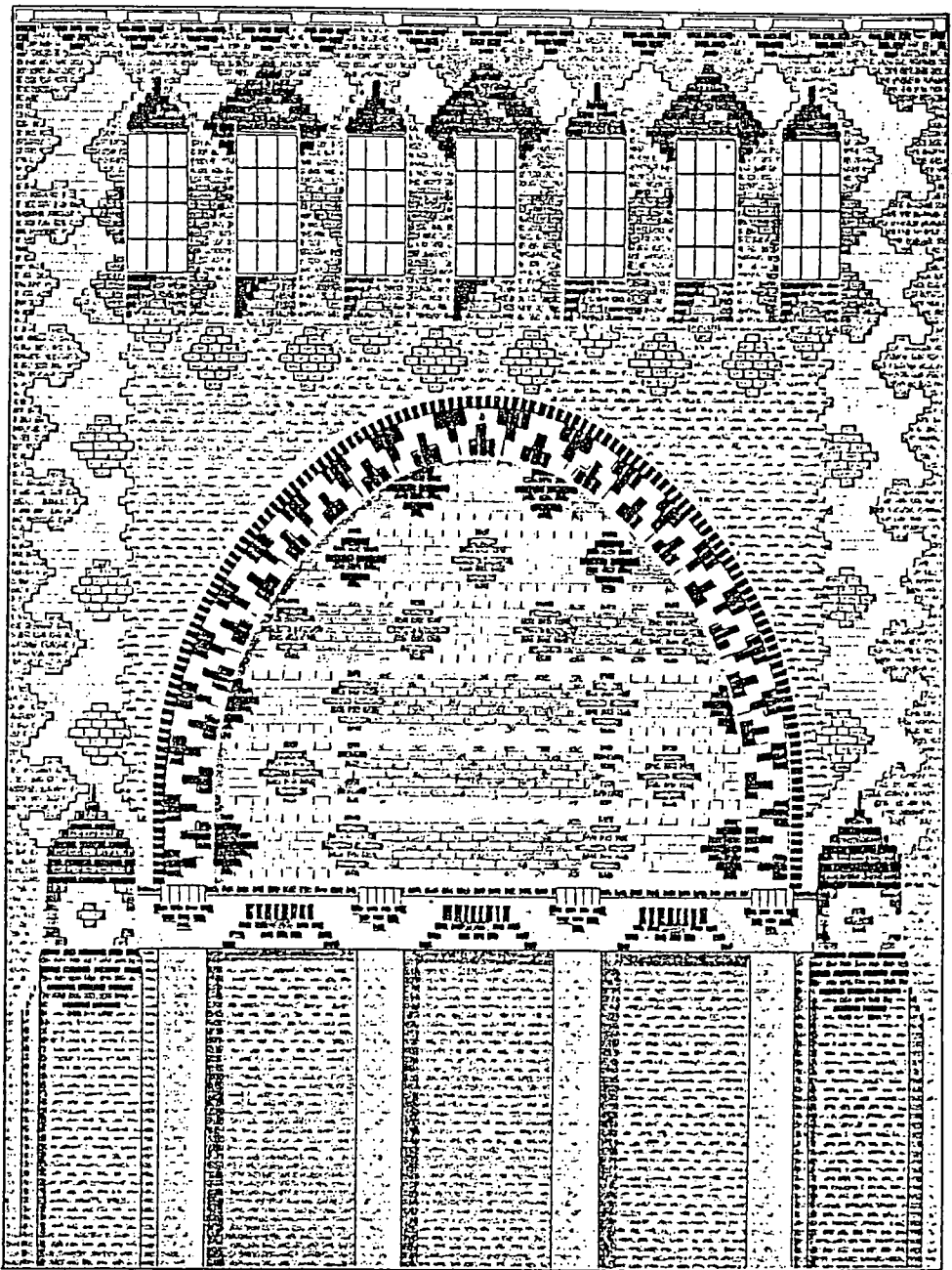


PLATE 5

Brickwork details from *A Modern Architectural Work*, by Dom Paul Bellot, OSB (1927), plate 95

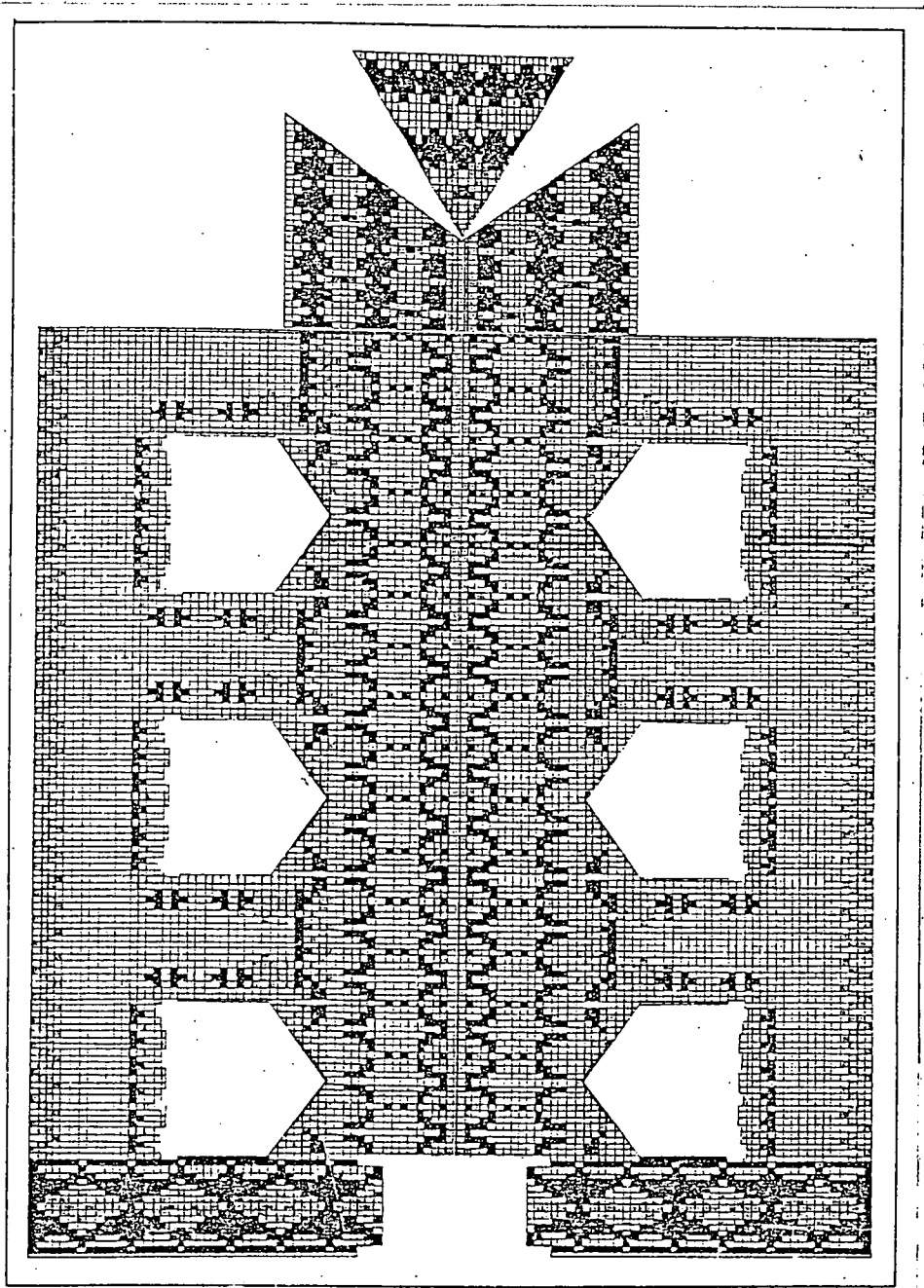
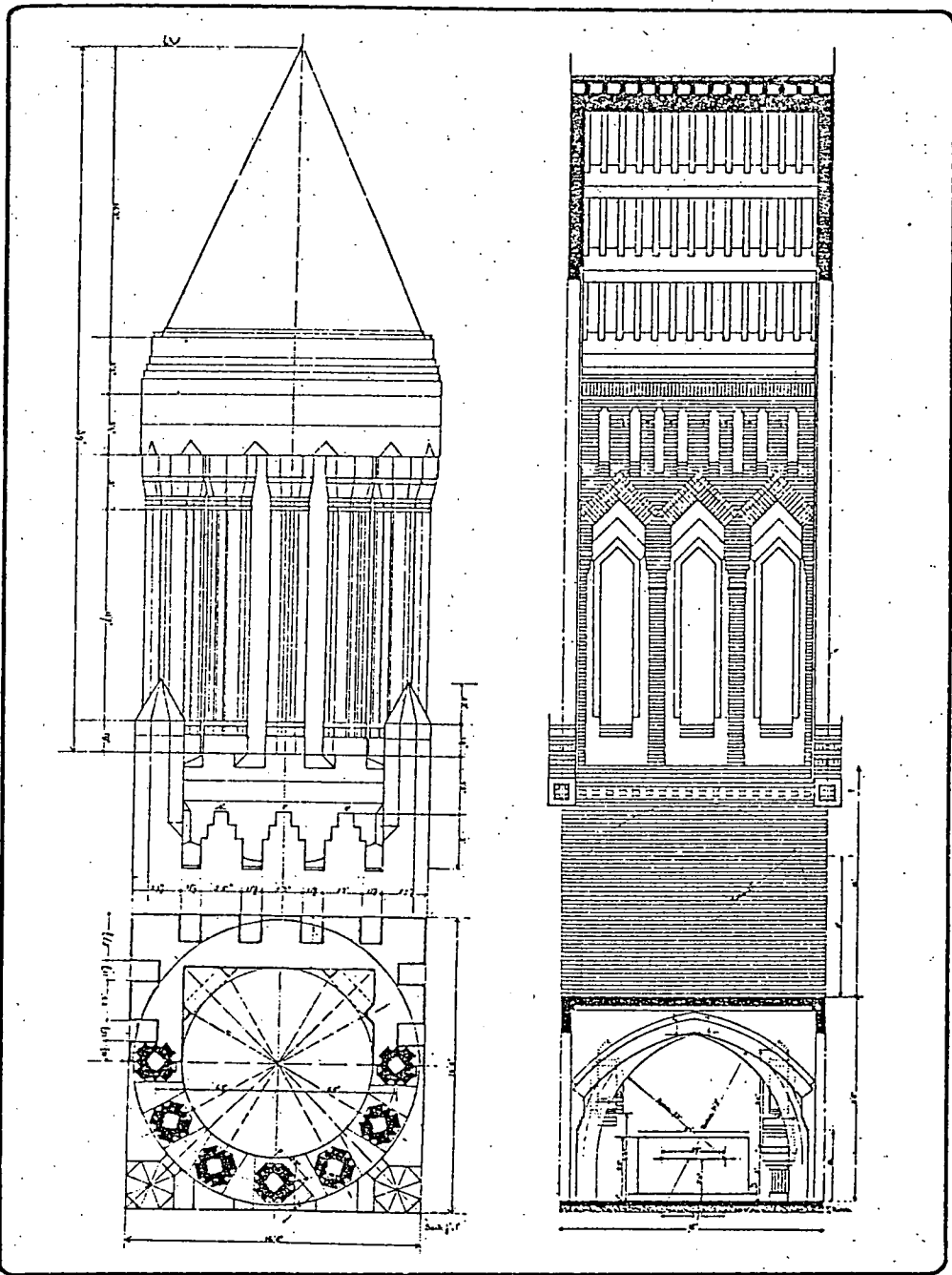


PLATE 6

Brickwork details from *A Modern Architectural Work*, by Dom Paul Bellot, OSB (1927), plate 96



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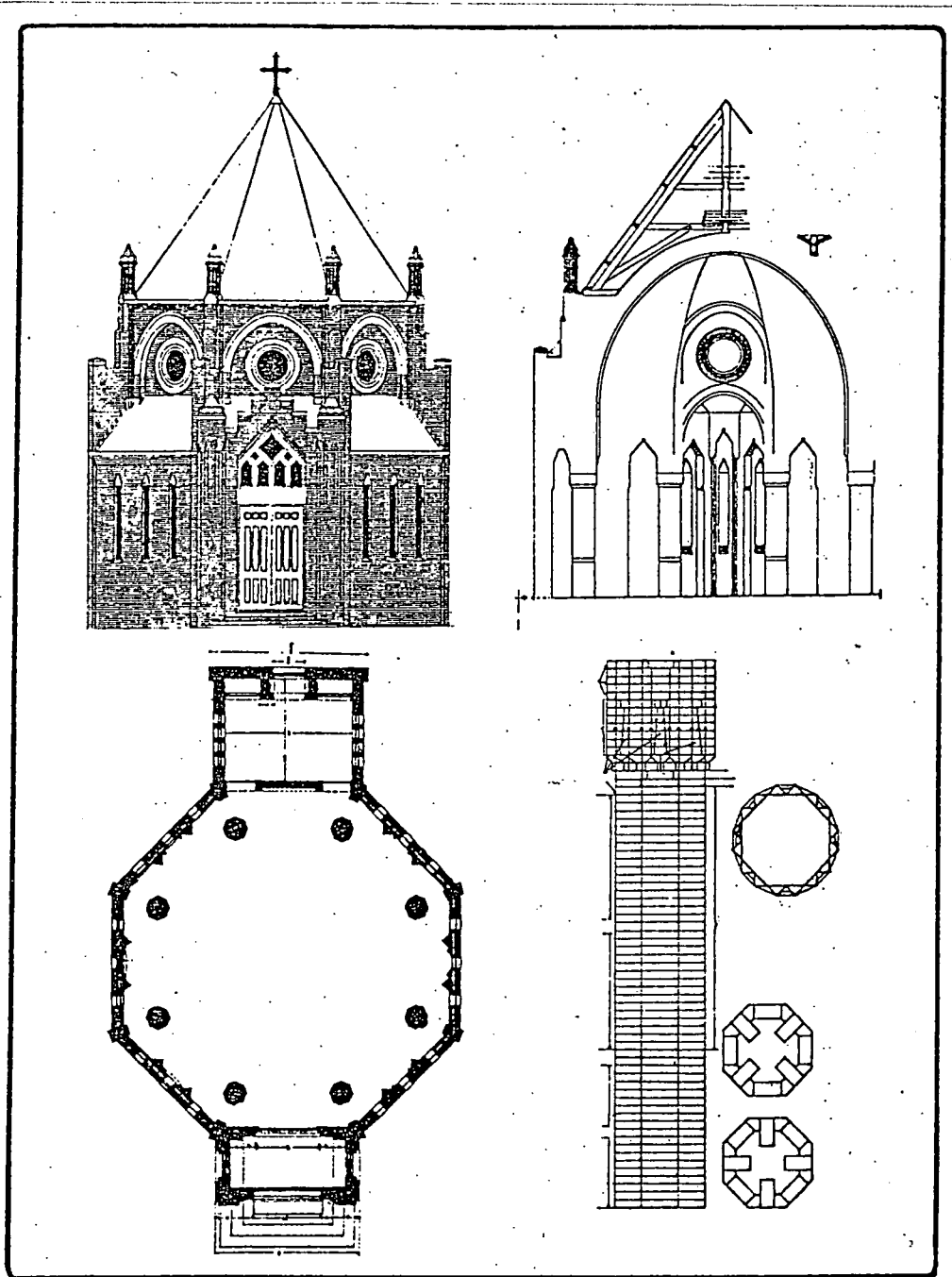
104 - QUARR ABBEY (ENGLAND)

DOM PAUL BELLOT

PLATE 7

Quarr Abbey, from *A Modern Architectural Work*, by Dom Paul Bellot, OSB (1927), plate 104





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116 - BLOEMENDAAL (HOLLAND)

DOM PAUL BELLOT

PLATE 9

Cemetery chapel, Bloemendaal, from *A Modern Architectural Work*, by Dom Paul Bellot, OSB (1927), plate 116

AR88

MONTREAL

12 fev. 34

# LA PRESSE

LES EDITIONS PRINCIPALES ONT LE PLUS FORT TIRAGE MOYEN DE TOUS LES QUOTIDIENS

*Un éminent moine-architecte parmi nous.*

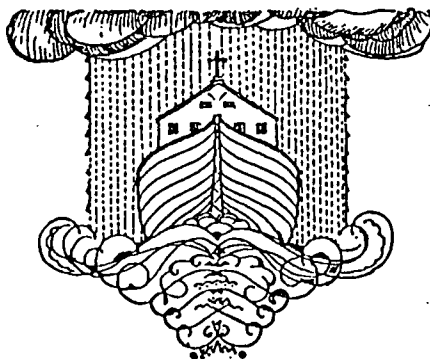


DOM PAUL BELLOT, bénédictin français, célèbre bâtisseur d'édifices religieux, photographié ce matin en la compagnie de M. CHARLES MAILLARD, directeur de l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, où il donnera dès à partir de la semaine prochaine, une série de conférences sur la nouvelle architecture religieuse. En arrière, M. EDGAR COURCHESNE, jeune architecte de Montréal, qui eut le rare privilège d'être pendant quelque temps en Europe l'élève de Dom Bellot. (Cliché la "Presse").

## PLATE 10

Bellot with Charles Maillard, Director of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal, and the architect Edgar Courchesne, during Bellot's visit to Canada in 1934. *La Presse*, Montreal, 12 February 1934. Wisques MSS, AR 88

CAHIERS D'ART  
ARCA



IV

PROPOS D'UN BÂTISSSEUR  
DU BON DIEU

DOM PAUL BELLOT, o.s.b.

ÉDITIONS FIDES — MONTRÉAL

PLATE 11

Titlepage, *Propos d'un bâtisseur du Bon Dieu* (1949)



DICTIONNAIRE RAISONNÉ  
DE  
**L'ARCHITECTURE**

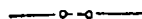
FRANÇAISE

DU XI<sup>e</sup> AU XVI<sup>e</sup> SIÈCLE

PAR

**M. VIOLLET-LE-DUC**

ARCHITECTE DU GOUVERNEMENT  
INSPECTEUR GÉNÉRAL DES ÉDIFICES DIOCÉSAINS



TOME HUITIÈME



PARIS

A. MOREL, ÉDITEUR

RUE BONAPARTE, 13.

MDCCCLXVI

PLATE 12

Titlepage, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, tome 8 (1866), by Viollet-le-Duc

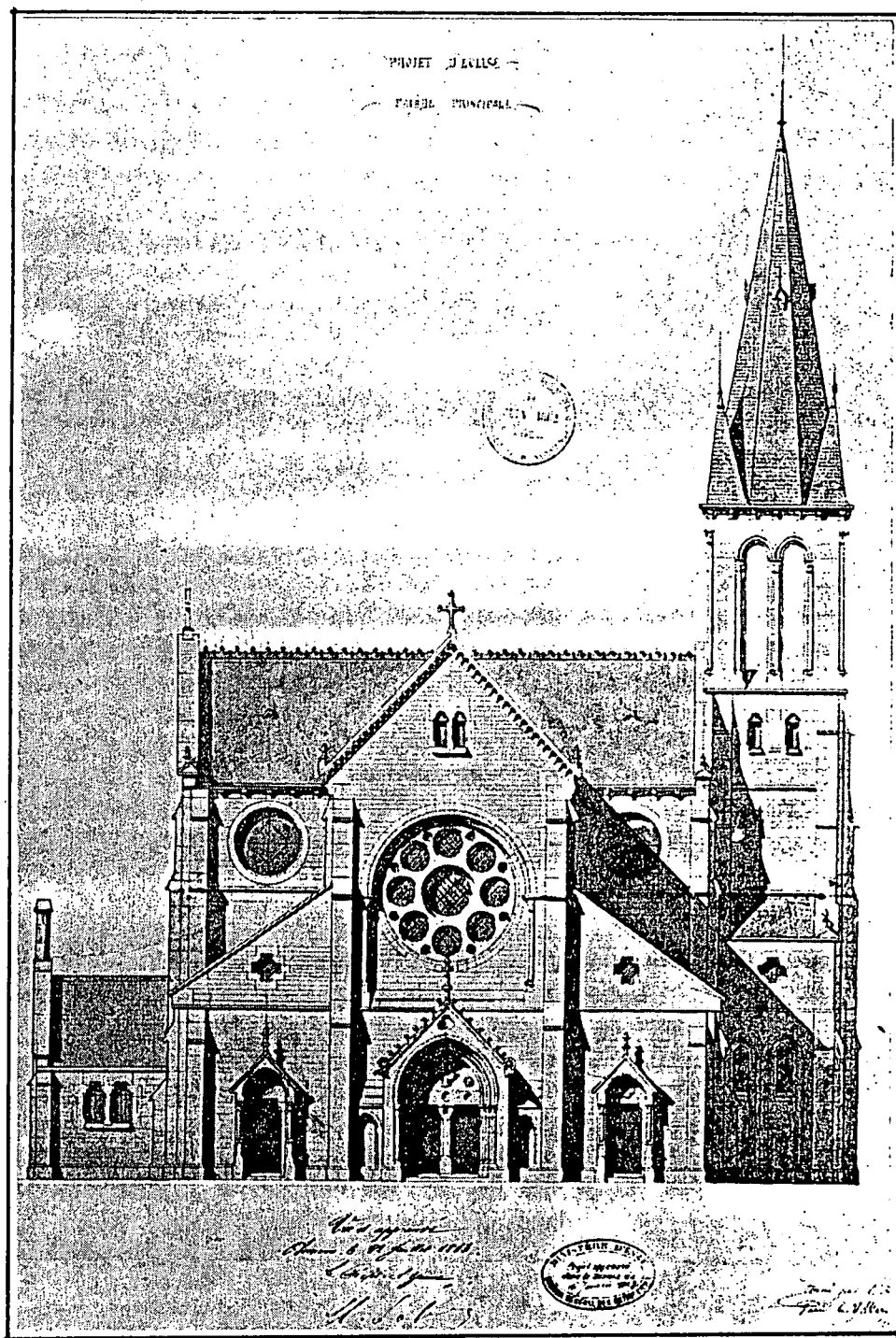


PLATE 13

Church, Aillant-sur-Tholon (Yonne). Pen, wash and water-colour drawing (1863) by Viollet-le-Duc of main façade, from *Viollet-le-Duc*, exhibition catalogue (Paris, 1980), catalogue no.294

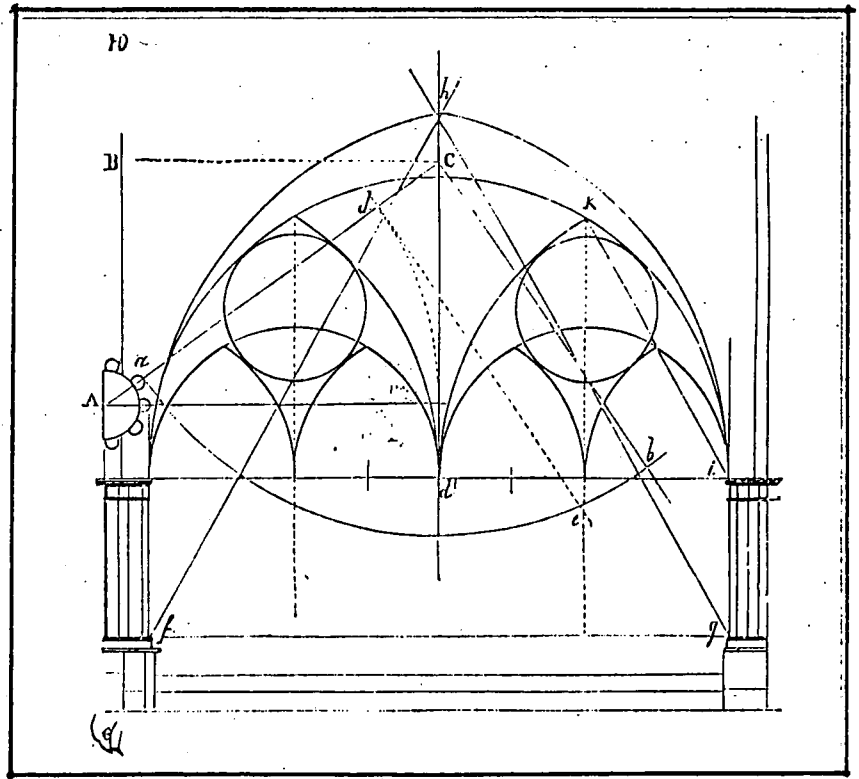


PLATE 14

Diagram from 'PROPORTION' in Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, tome 7 (1864), p.555

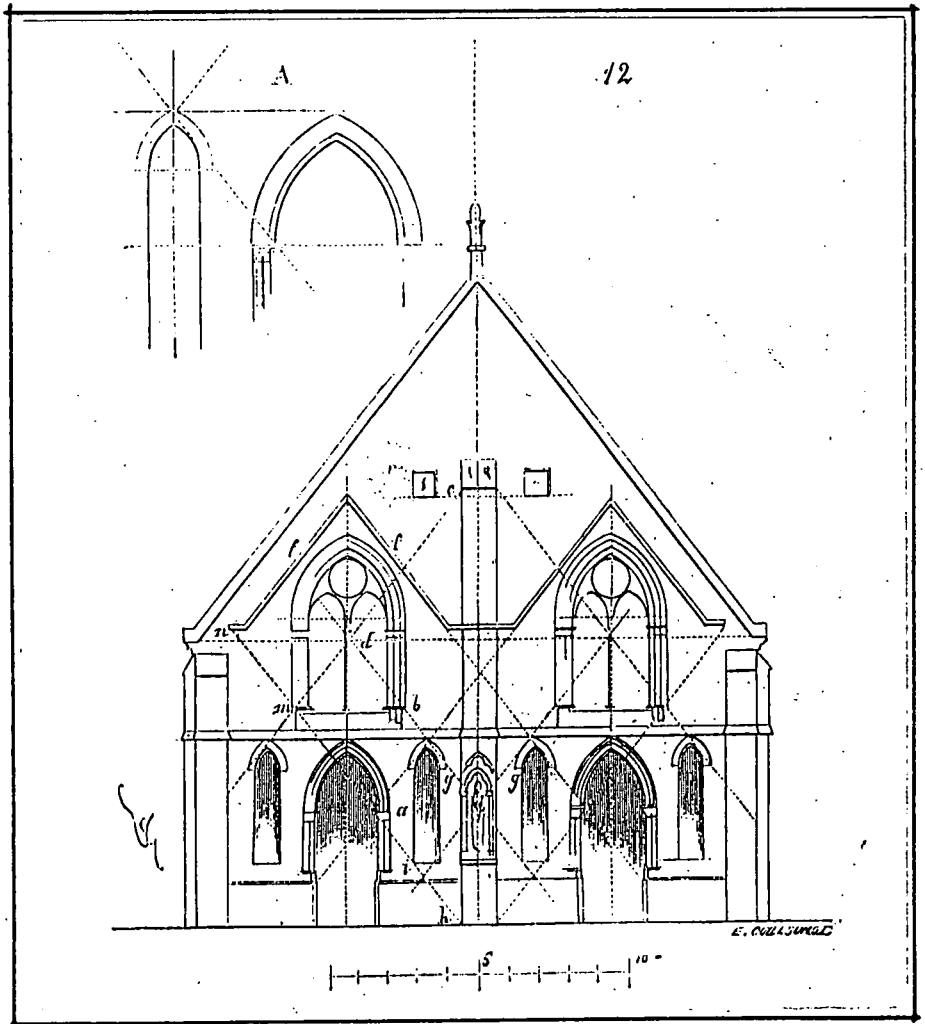


PLATE 15

Diagram from 'PROPORTION' in Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, tome 7 (1864), p.559

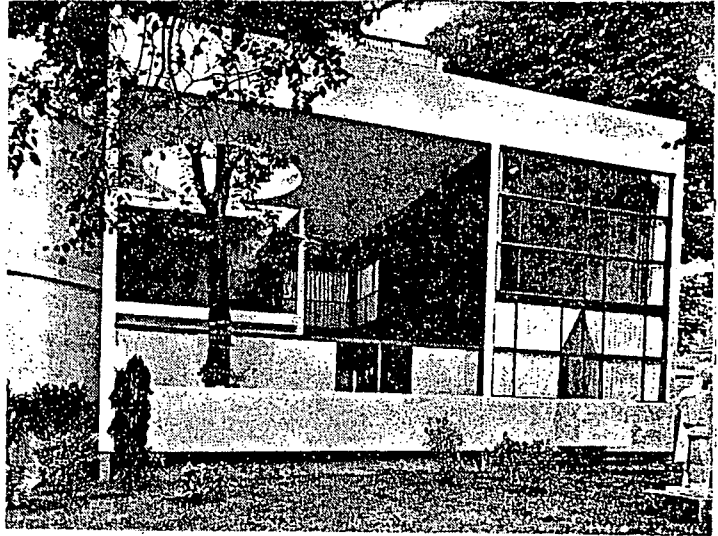


PLATE 16

Le Corbusier, Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, Paris' Exposition 1925, from exhibition catalogue, *Le Corbusier. Architect of the Century* (London, 1987), p.212



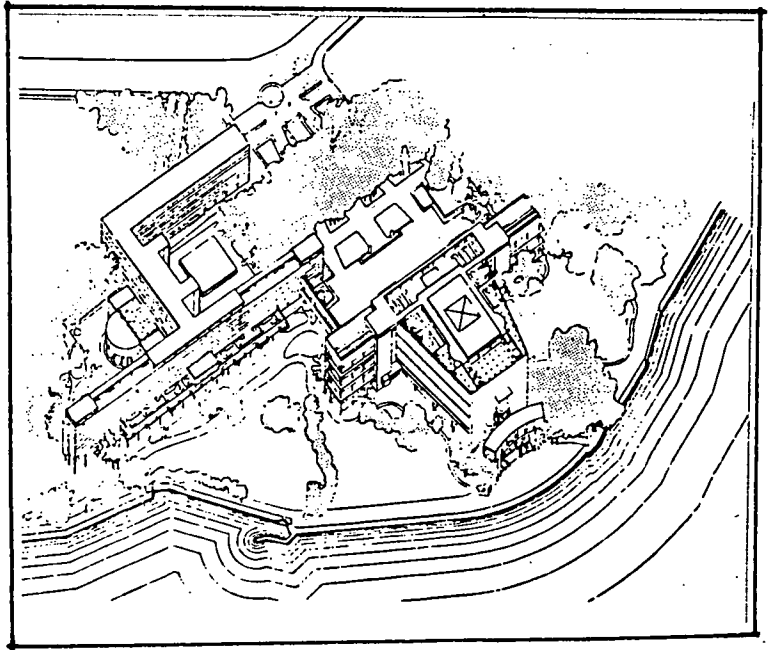
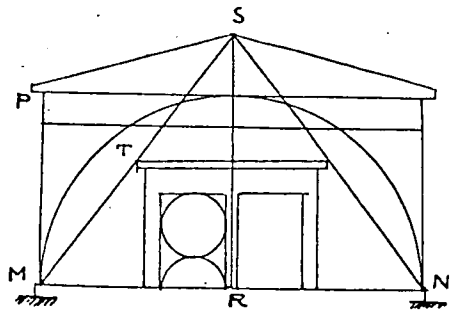


PLATE 18

Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, League of Nations Building, Geneva, competition design (1926-1927), from exhibition catalogue, *Le Corbusier. Architect of the Century* (London, 1987), p.165

FROM THE MARBLE SLAB FOUND IN 1882:



FAÇADE OF THE ARSENAL OF THE PIRÆUS

REGULATING LINES

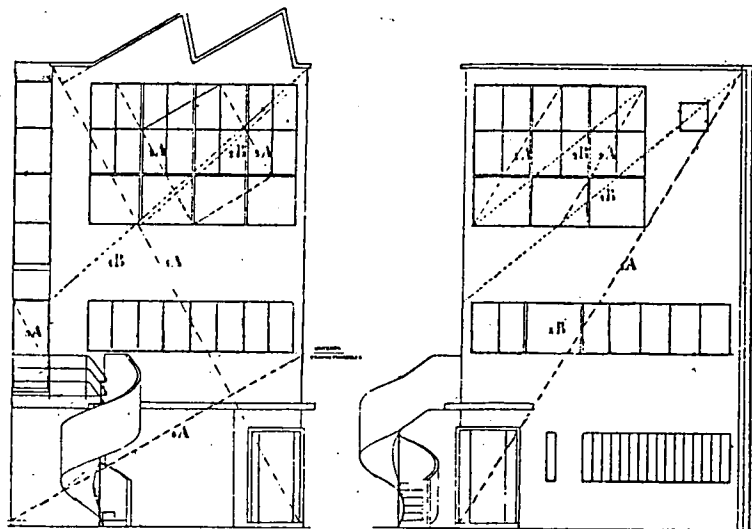


PLATE 19

'Regulating lines' ('tracés régulateurs') from Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture*, translated by Etchells (1927), reprint (London 1970), pp.71, 77



KRISIS  
DER ARCHITEKTUR

VON ALEXANDER v. SENGER



M CM XXVIII

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RASCHER & CIE. A.-G., VERLAG, ZÜRICH  
LEIPZIG UND STUTT GART

PLATE 20

Titlepage, *Krisis der Architektur*, by Alexander von Senger (1928)

ALEXANDRE DE SENGER

LE CHEVAL DE TROIE  
DU  
BOLCHÉVISME



1931

LES ÉDITIONS DU CHANDELIER  
109 b, rue Dufour, Bienne (Suisse)

PLATE 21

Titlepage, *Le cheval de Troie du Bolchevisme*, by Alexander de Senger (1931)

DIE  
BRANDFACKEL  
MOSKAUS

VON  
ALEXANDER v. SENGER



MCMXXXI  
VERLAG KAUFHAUS ZURZACH-SCHWEIZ

PLATE 22

Titlepage, *Die Brandfackel Moskaus*, by Alexander de Senger (1931)

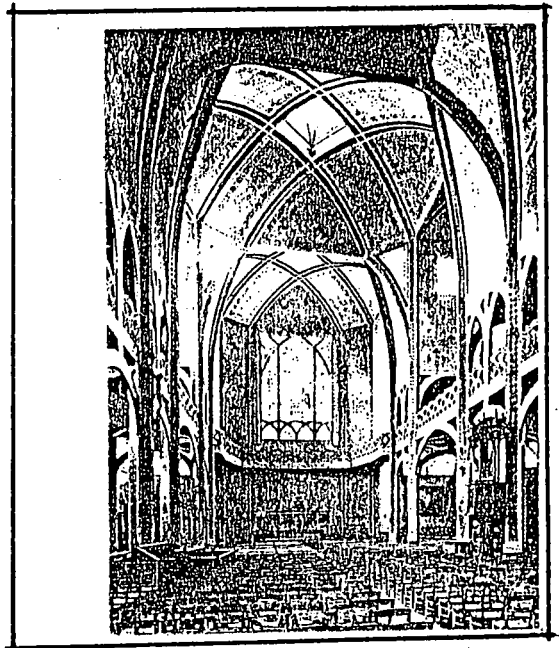
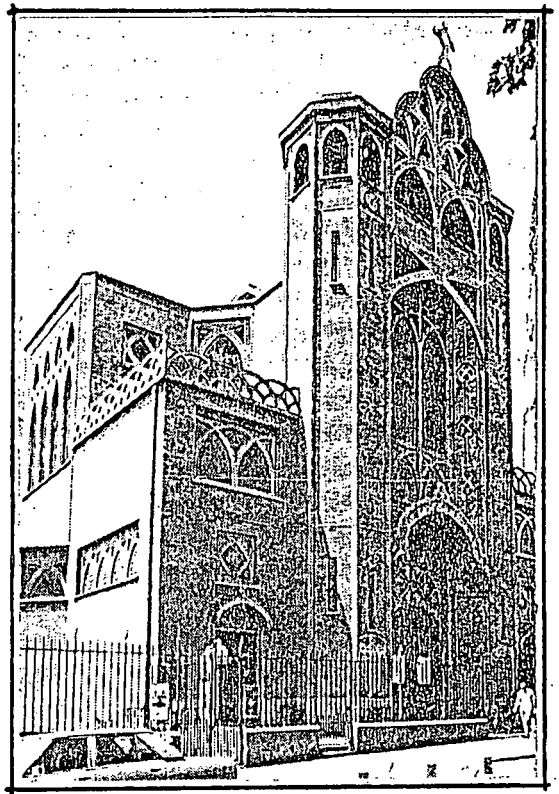


PLATE 23

Anatole de Baudot, church of Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre, Paris (1894-1904), exterior (from Martin, *Guide to modern architecture in Paris*, 2nd edition (1991), p.242) and interior (from Lampugnani, *The Thames and Hudson encyclopedia of 20th-century architecture*, 2nd edition (1988), p.34)

# TEMPELMASZE

DAS GESETZ DER PROPORTION IN DEN  
ANTIKEN UND ALTCHRISTLICHEN SAKRALBAUTEN

EIN BEITRAG ZUR KUNSTWISSENSCHAFT UND ÄSTHETIK

VON

ODILO WOLFF  
BENEDIKTINER VON EMAUS-PRAG

„Die höchste Regel der Kunst heißt Maß.“  
v. Kepler.

ZWEITE UNVERÄNDERTE AUFLAGE

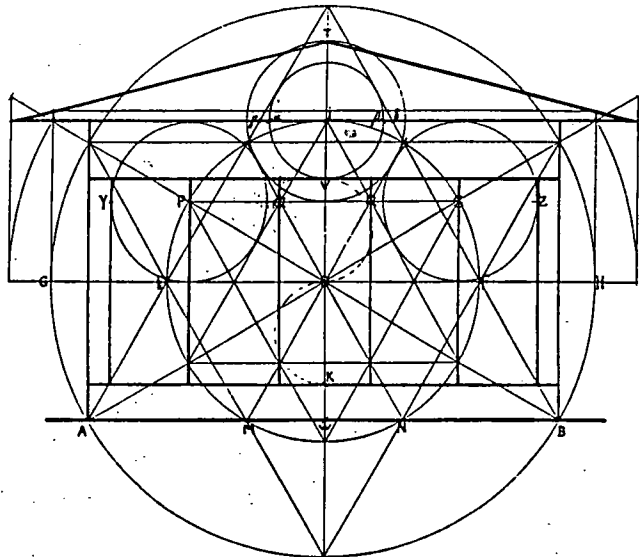
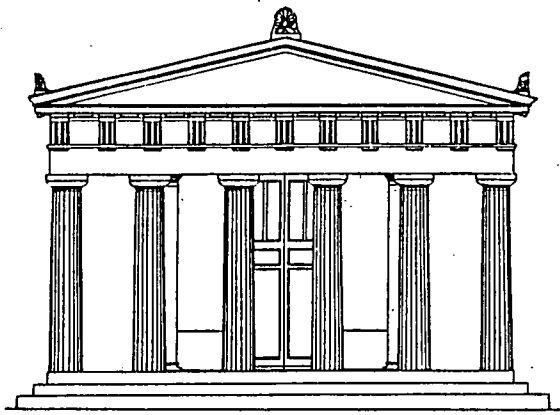


19 32

VERLAG VON ANTON SCHROLL & CO. IN WIEN

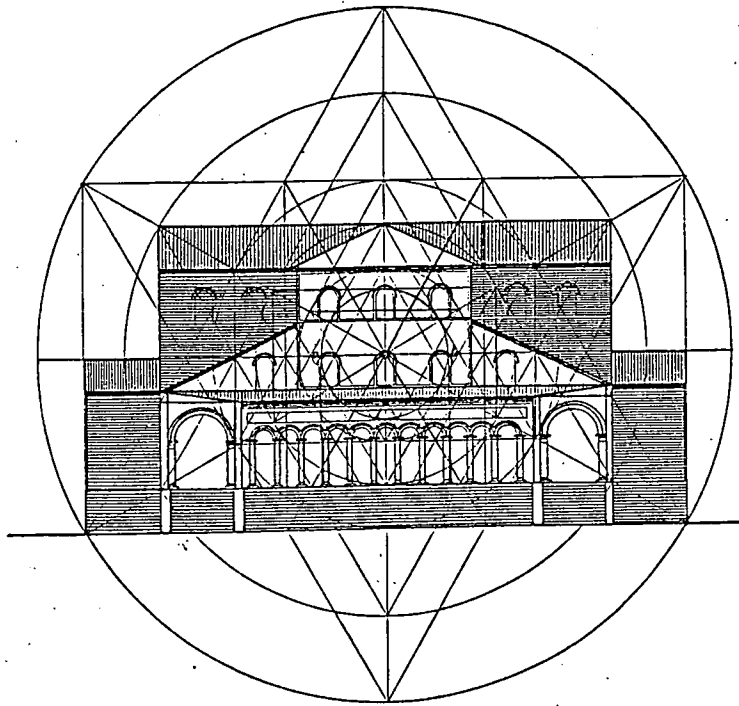
PLATE 24

Titlepage. *Tempelmasze ....* by Odilo Wolff, 2nd edition (1932)



Der Theseus-Hephaistos-Tempel zu Athen.

Verlag von Anton Schroll & Co., Wien.



Die alte Basilika von St. Peter im Vatikan.

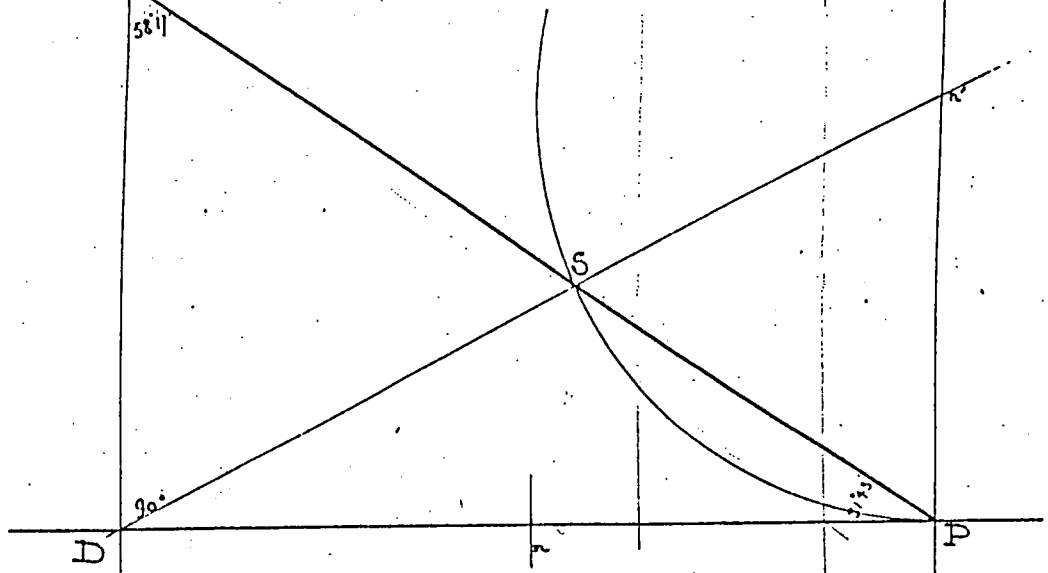
PLATE 26

Basilica, Old Saint Peter's, Vatican, from Wolff, *Tempelmaße*, 2nd edition (1932), plate 64





Prendre la droite DP, la diviser en deux parties égales Dn et nP, puis au point P élever une perpendiculaire à DP et y placer le point n' à une distance de P égale à nP. Joindre ensuite ce point n' à D, et la... prenant comme centre décrire un arc de cercle de rayon n'P, qui coupe Dn' en S. ce point S joint à P, donne la pente cherchée PF.



COMMENT TRACER LE TRIANGLE.

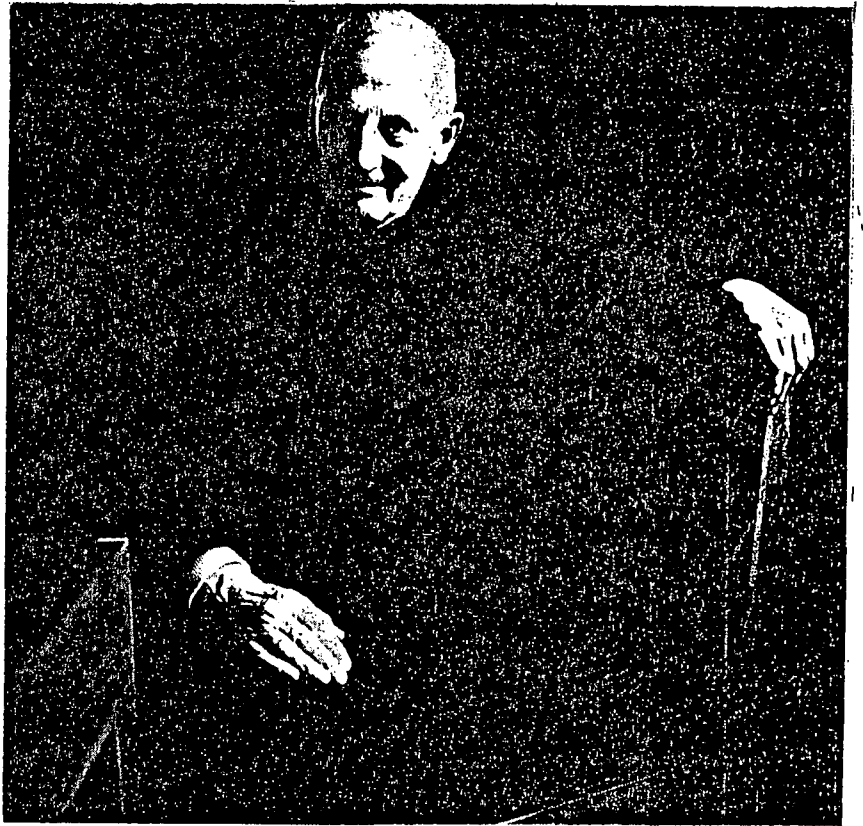


PLATE 29

Hans Van Der Laan. Portrait from *RIBA Journal*, vol.93 (January 1986), p.28

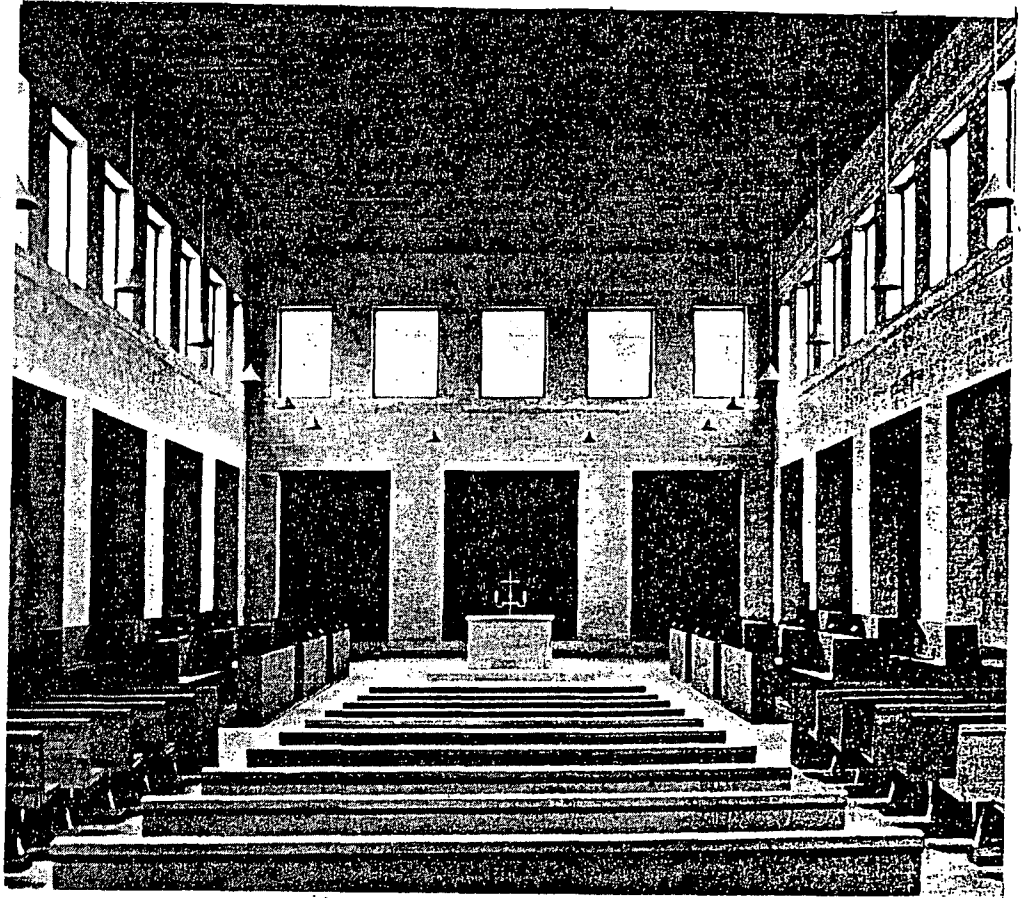


PLATE 30

Abbey, Vaals, by Van Der Laan. Upper Church. *RIBA Journal*, vol.93 (January 1986), p.30

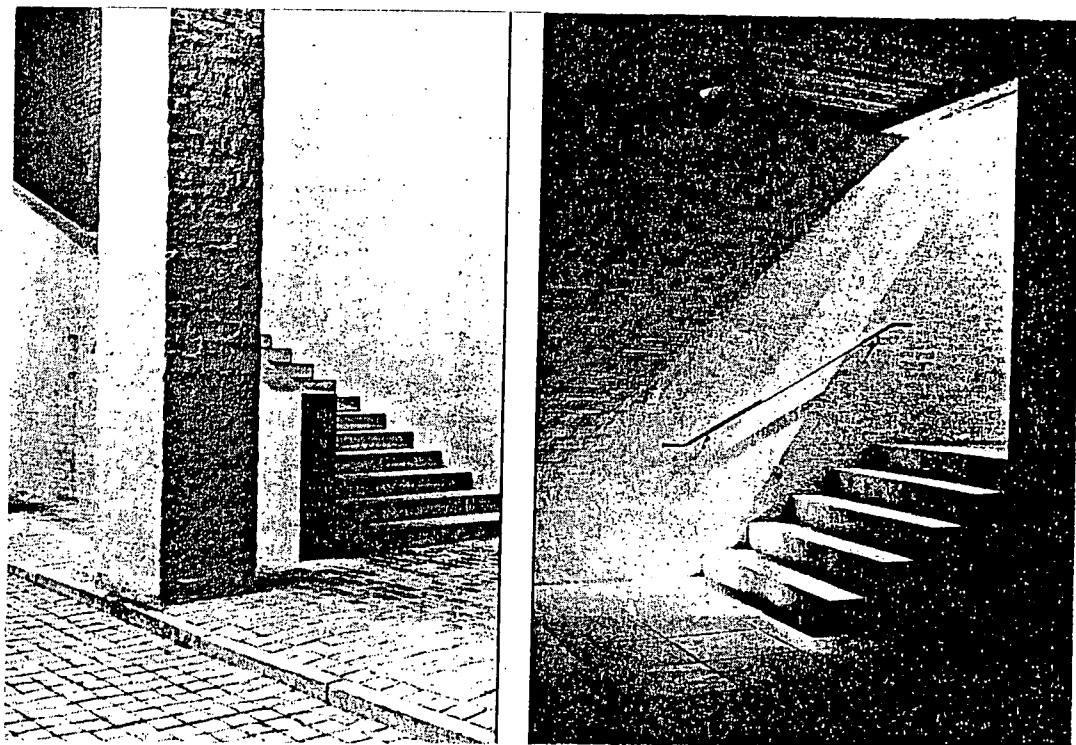


PLATE 31

Abbey, Vaals, by Van Der Laan. Interiors. *RIBA Journal*, vol.93 (January 1986), p.31

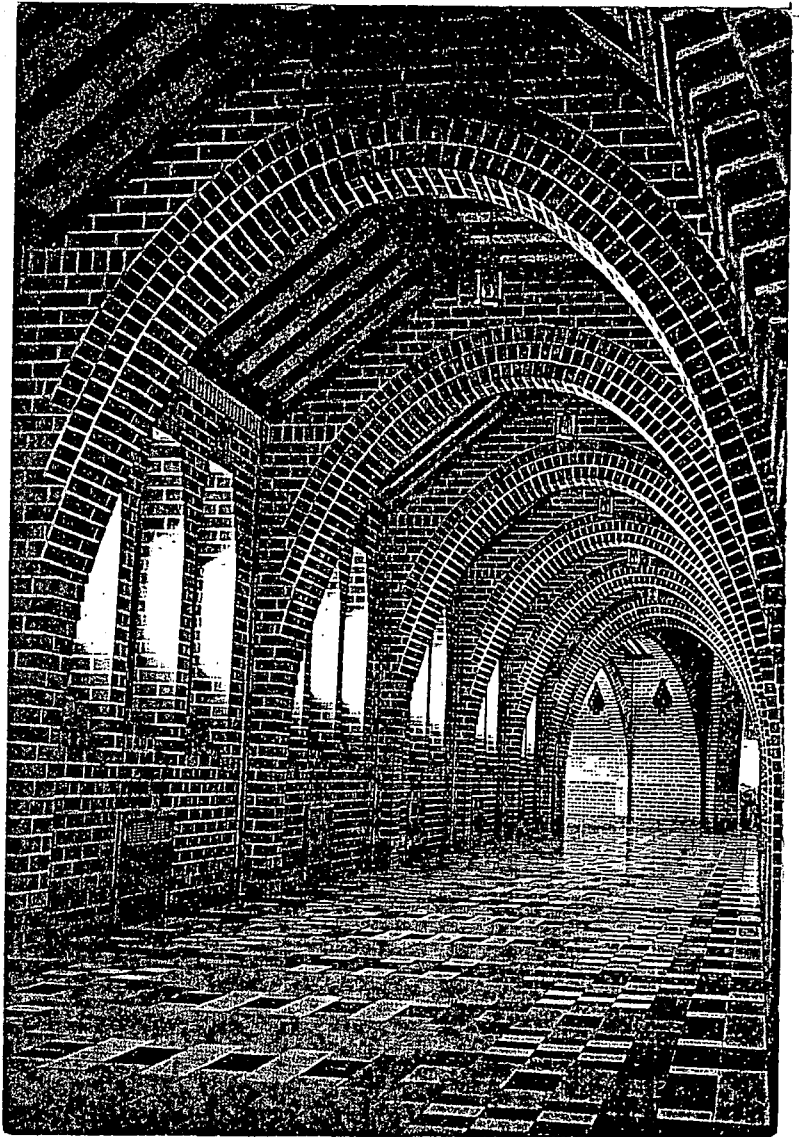


PLATE 32.

Abbey, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. Cloister by Bellot. Postcard

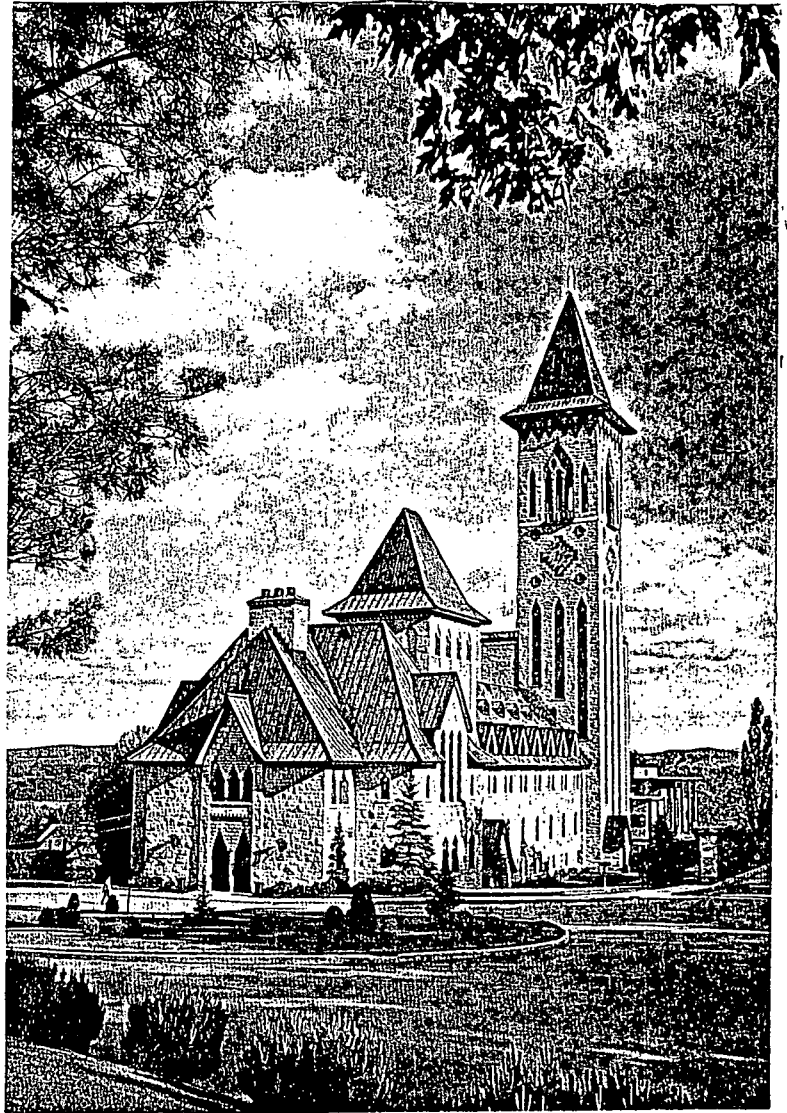


PLATE 33

Abbey, Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. Tower and guest house by Dom Côté. Postcard.

