

The healing project of modernity

N. Vande Keere



[1] The ruin of Cologne with the cathedral still standing, 1945.

The question to be asked here and now is where does architecture stand at the present time, what state is it in? Furthermore, what sort of image of mankind does it reflect? These are questions not to be taken lightly, and the following issues arising from them will be thoroughly examined: firstly, does any activity capable of being called ‘the art of building’ actually exist at all today; and is there an architecture of our times? It is conceivable that there might be not just one but several forms of architecture, all with different aims, and each of them having its own way of constructing buildings. Secondly, is there such a thing as the present day, or rather does the present day actually exist as a kind of community of all human beings who are alive now. Finally, if such a community does exist, is it of any relevance to the field of architecture?

Rudolf Schwarz, *Architecture of Our Times*, 1958¹

The second edition of this cahier is a reflection on *modernity*, taking as a starting-point the work of the students on the International Masters programme in Adaptive Reuse at Hasselt University during the academic year 2017–2018. In collaboration with students on the Master in Architecture course at the Bergische Universität of Wuppertal (DE) during the first semester of the academic year, they investigated ecclesiastical architecture built in the context of the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II (1962–1965). Framing the concept of modernity as a profound – social, cultural, political and economic – shift in the collective mind set of Western society in the 19th- and 20th-centuries,² we studied the history of the church in relation to modernity and the transformation of the meaning of modernity over time. While its original definition³ suggests a continuous movement away from tradition, and emphasises constant change or ‘progress’ as the driving force, we identify WWII as the specific cause of this transformation, with its profound impact on ecclesiastical architecture and society as a whole.

Post-war modernity

In 1945, at the end of WWII, Cologne was one of many German cities reduced to ruins as the result of massive bombing by the Allied forces. Surrounded by the rubble of war, the cathedral, almost miraculously, remained intact. The city was barely populated and many of its former inhabitants no longer had a roof over their heads. *Stunde Null* or ‘zero hour’ expressed the catastrophic situation and at the same time the need for a new beginning. Architects including Rudolf Schwarz (1897–1961), Emil Steffann (1899–1968) and Hans Döllgast (1891–1974) took up the task of the reconstruction and modernisation of the country. As German citizens who had made the choice to remain in the service

of their country during the war, they had been first-hand witnesses of many of the events that took place and would become leading architects in the effort to rebuild it.

By 1956, Cologne and other cities were already largely reconstructed. The speedy revival was remarkable, given the unprecedented degree of destruction.⁴ The Marshall plan, an American initiative to support Western Europe’s economic recovery, introduced in 1948, had already helped to efface many of the former differences with neighbouring countries, and created the new divisions of the Cold War. The recovery was quickly gaining pace and the European Economic Community, predecessor of the European Union, was being created. What may be called post-war modernity started in the Federal Republic of West Germany with the *Wirtschaftswunder* (‘economic miracle’), successfully transforming the war industry into a civilian one.

In 1958, Rudolf Schwarz opened his matriculation address to students at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with the words quoted above. Formulated as questions, the lecture started in a cautious tone but with a somewhat existential character, seeming to reflect the vulnerable post-war mood in a country still coming to terms with its recent history. In the same year, the city of Brussels hosted the world exposition, Expo 58. By that time, in Belgium and other countries, the sentiment of post-war reconstruction had already passed. The grim assessment of the war damage had given way to a more optimistic approach to reconstruction, not only in terms of building activity but also politically and economically. Confidence in the welfare state was restored and technological development was at the forefront of Expo 58, with pavilions including those of Le Corbusier and Iannis Xenakis for Philips and the Atomium. The Belgian architect, Roger Bastin

¹ Adam Caruso and Helen Thomas (eds.), *Rudolf Schwarz and the Monumental Order of Things* (Zürich: gta Verlag, 2016), 36.

² We consider here a broader context than the cultural one of *modernism*, prevalent in the fields of literature, philosophy, arts and architecture.

³ A possible origin of the term is to be found in 1864 in the text *The Painter of Modern Life* by poet Charles Baudelaire:

‘By “modernity”, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable...’ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and other essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 13. Approaching modernity as an artistic or philosophic concept through the lens of fashion and painting, Baudelaire uses it in an abstract but suggestive way.

His own eccentric and whimsical reputation added to it an artistic connotation to be appreciated only by a limited and like-minded audience. See Jeanne Willette, ‘Charles Baudelaire, Author of Modernism’, last modified August 20, 2010. <https://arthistoryunstudied.com/ baudelaire-modernism/>.

⁴ 70% of pre-war housing stock in Cologne was lost after the war. Noud de Vreeze,



[2] The Atomium under construction, Brussels Expo 58. © Dolf Kruger / Nederlands Fotomuseum



[3] Postcard *Civitas Dei*: church, electronic carillon and pavilions, the first presentation by the Vatican in a world exposition, 1958.

(1913–1986), having gained some experience in the design of ecclesiastical architecture, was commissioned together with Guy Van Oost (1930–2018) to design *Civitas Dei* or the ‘City of God’, the first time the Vatican had been represented in a world exposition. Like many others, the scheme is unequivocally modern and triumphant.⁵

Although the early post-war years can be perceived differently for Germany and Belgium, as the countries were on opposing sides during the war, nevertheless, influenced by geopolitics, they soon found

De Ziel van Duitse steden - het drama van verwoesting en wederopbouw (Amersfoort: Boiten, 2018), 274. Several authors point at an undercurrent of continuity in German city development, despite the war (and the National Socialist regime), as one of the causes for the revival. For more on the German reconstruction after WWII, see Werner Durth and Niels Gutschow, *Träume in Trümmern - Planungen zum*

Wiederaufbau zerstörter Städte im Westen Deutschlands (Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1988).

⁵ The project seemed however not fully satisfactory to Bastin and Van Oost, who were not in charge of its execution or the exhibition lay-out. André Lanotte, Roger Bastin Architecte 1913–1986 (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2001), 93.

⁶ Caruso and Thomas (eds.), *Rudolf Schwarz and the Monumental Order of Things*, 111.

⁷ Caruso and Thomas (eds.), *Rudolf Schwarz and the Monumental Order of Things*, 7–8.

⁸ See Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel, *TEAM 10. 1953–1981 In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2005).

themselves following the same course. The economic boom and the (re-) democratisation of the formerly warring countries, at least in the West, restored faith in public governance. More important here than the contextual comparison is the new meaning of modernity in comparison with its pre-war definition. The reality check of WWII made post-war modernity more tangible in everyday life and present in society, in contrast with its previous image as an ideological and abstract concept that was restricted to an urban, educated population. Stressing the painful character of the transition in Germany, Caruso and Thomas called it ‘a period of traumatic modernity’.⁶ The healing project of the first years after the war answers a desperate need for change:

Separating the pre- and post-war periods of confidence, however, was a hiatus – a period of destruction that brought into question all the conditions that sustained belief in the rational and the objective, such as the value of technology and its expression, the politics and mobilisation of social classes, and the social and economic meaning of the city and its relationship to agricultural and non-industrialised regions. Between the end of the war and the moment when the effects of the economic miracle started to be felt, there was a period of about ten years in which the shocked and divided nation slowly started to reconstruct itself.⁷

A similar transformation can be seen in the evolution of modernist urbanism and architecture. The CIAM (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) meetings from 1928 onwards gave birth to the new generation of Team X between 1953 and 1959 – the emphasis shifting from a view of the city as a functionalist mechanism to a more dynamic and social perspective, with a growing interest in the vernacular. CIAM rejected the historical city and reflected on the modernist city, starting from an abstract *tabula rasa*. The (re-)invention of the modern city remained on the agenda of Team X, but now based on the all-too-real *tabula rasa* as the consequence of war. The remaining historical tissue of existing cities and the human scale of architecture become sources of inspiration rather than obstacles to change.⁸

Adaptive reuse of modern churches

Developed in the context of Vatican II, the design of ecclesiastical architecture was inspired by the process of reform of the ‘liturgical movement’, instigated by figures such as the theologian Romano Guardini (1885–1968) in the 1930s, well before the council took place.⁹ In an effort to heal the wounds of

WWII, the Church authorities followed suit: Vatican II became the embodiment of modernity within the Catholic Church. Besides a theological reinterpretation, the reform defined the basis for a profound transformation of the liturgical space. A greater involvement of the faithful, and emphasis on the role of the community as a consequence of the democratisation of the liturgy, had a significant impact on the interior layout and typology of church buildings, both existing and new. Furthermore, renewed interest in the (layered) history of the liturgy and iconography led architects and artists to turn back to the early Christian tradition which inspired a fundamental change in the spatial concept of church buildings in the post-war era. This modernisation opened the way for architects and artists to apply a new formal language and created the freedom to approach spirituality on a more experimental and contemporary level.



[4] The abandoned mosque of Rajgan in Khanpur, Pakistan

In the first phase of the semester, students studied the spatial consequences of this reform. Various joint workshops and study visits to Belgium and the Rhineland in Germany were held by both universities during the first semester to investigate the post-war building campaign. The research focused on the historical perspective of modern churches and on how they were conceived in their context. The students of our faculty analysed examples in Belgium by architects including Roger Bastin, Jacques Dupuis (1914–1984), Marc Dessauvage (1931–1984), Jean Cosse (1931–2016) and visited churches in the Rhineland by Rudolf Schwarz and Gottfried Böhm (1920-). In addition, they made a study trip to Rome to gain a greater understanding of the history of ecclesiastical architecture and the origins of the Roman Catholic faith. By confronting different culture lines or ‘translations’ of Christian liturgy, the students gained insight into the complexity of the subject.

Inspired by these activities, a number of students also presented a short history and evolution of mosque architecture and found interesting parallels with early Christian churches.¹⁰ One student developed these ideas later in a Masters project on the adaptive reuse of the abandoned Rajgan Mosque in Khanpur, Pakistan. The mosque was built in a region well known for its Buddhist sites from the Gandharan period and other religious heritage. The site has tourist potential and has been under-used since the 1970s as a consequence of the construction of a dam and an artificial lake which covers the older settlement in the valley in front of the dam. The proposal is to transform the building and forecourt into a retreat that could attract tourists, students and researchers from nearby educational institutes. The project provides a platform for social,

cultural and religious exchange. Despite the differences, it was interesting to note the shared concerns and sensitivity around religious architecture. The (arguably) more contentious relationship of modernisation with traditional values in Pakistan helped rather than hindered the mutual understanding.

In the second phase, students focused on a studio assignment to design a spatial and programmatic transformation, applying the building’s intrinsic qualities and following the spirit of the *aggiornamento*, as Vatican II was also called.¹¹ Besides a stylistic retake on modernist traces, modernity after WWII also came to define the increased process of individualisation and secularisation in Western Europe. Ironically, with the *aggiornamento*, church attendance started to diminish and parish communities started to fall apart. In 1967, Geert Bekaert (1928–2016), Belgian architecture critic and Jesuit at the time, noted the increase of newly built churches after WWII, but at the same time questioned their future role and meaning in modern society.¹² The question asked by Rudolf Schwarz above in itself hints at the possible lack of ‘community’. The decline in numbers of both priests and churchgoers has led to a reduced (or changed) use of churches for religious service and questions the complex spiritual and social role they can still play in society. Taking this into account, the studio assignment was to investigate the possibility for (adaptive) reuse. The students from Hasselt worked with the church of St. Alena in Brussels by Roger Bastin and Jacques Dupuis, while the German students studied two examples by Rudolf Schwarz: the Heilige Familie church in Oberhausen and St. Maria Himmelfahrt in Wesel.

⁹ Frédéric Debuyst, *Le génie chrétien du lieu* (Paris: Les éditions du CERF, 1997).

¹⁰ For more information on the project, see Syed Hamid Akbar and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, ‘Mosque as “House of God” and as “House of Community”’. An inquiry into adaptive reuse of an abandoned mosque in Pakistan in A. Al Naim, M., in *Mosque Architecture Present Issues and Future Ideas*, eds. Hani M. Al Huneidi and Noor Hanita

Abdul Majid (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Institute of Translation & Books, 2019), 383–400. (This was presented at the 2nd International conference on Mosque Architecture (ICMA 2019), 25–27 November, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.) The above-mentioned students continue their studies at Hasselt University after the academic year 2017–2018 and are working on their PhD, with subjects based in

Pakistan. Syed Hamid Akbar is working on the re-vitalization of British colonial heritage with protected status, focusing on the case of Karachi. Naveed Iqbal is studying industrial heritage and its adaptive re-use potential for urban regeneration, using international precedents as references. ¹¹ Pope John XXIII, instigating Vatican II, coined the term *aggiornamento* – the Catholic term for modernity that can

[5] Poster of joint masterclasses, studying the post-war building campaign of churches in Belgium and Rhineland (DE).

Contributions

The contributions to this cahier reflect on modernity in different ways. Most are directly or indirectly linked to the collaborative research mentioned and reflect the students' work during the academic year. Others broaden the subject beyond church architecture. While most articles take a historical view as a starting point, they also question the concept of modernity in a contemporary way. *What remains, or is still relevant, of the urge to adapt to the present ('new') timeframe? What might its meaning be today?*¹³ The continuous but unavoidable struggle with modernity therefore forms the underlying theme of this cahier. The articles approach the theme critically but empathically. They try to portray modernity with an alternative tone, coming to terms with the past while reaching towards the future, perhaps with some hesitation, seeing modernity as a mediating concept for the transformation in time.

The first two essays are reflections on the design studio during the first semester. Prior to the design assignment, students investigated different church designs, the architects and their sources. In *'Contemplative freshness'*, Koenraad Van Cleempoel studies the symbiotic relationship between theologians and architects. In the first part he focuses on the exemplary roles of Romano Guardini and Rudolf Schwarz as instigators of liturgical reform during meetings of the Catholic youth movement Quickborn in Rothenfels castle, preceding Vatican II and WWII. Using Dom Frédéric Debuyst (1922–2017) as a guide, Van Cleempoel continues to examine the emergence of concepts such as the 'house-church', and the lesser known 'house-monastery', after Vatican II. Together with architect Jean Cosse, Debuyst entirely rethinks the liturgical space and the experience of the faithful by introducing aspects of domesticity in a liturgy that was perceived as static and out of touch with today's faithful.

Bie Plevoets, Linde Van Den Bosch and I present the key moments in the history of the church of St. Alena in Brussels by Roger Bastin and Jacques Dupuis¹⁴ and the outcome of the Hasselt University design studio project regarding the reuse of the surrounding spaces and the larger site of the church. The original project was formative in the careers of Bastin and Dupuis, since its construction spanned the years from 1940 to 1972, thus living through both WWII and Vatican II, during which period the design evolved from a decorated and more classic stylistic approach (building on the executed foundations of an earlier eclectic design) to more minimal versions, and finally became the modernist church at odds with the 19th-century bourgeois environment of St. Gillis in Brussels. The brief for the

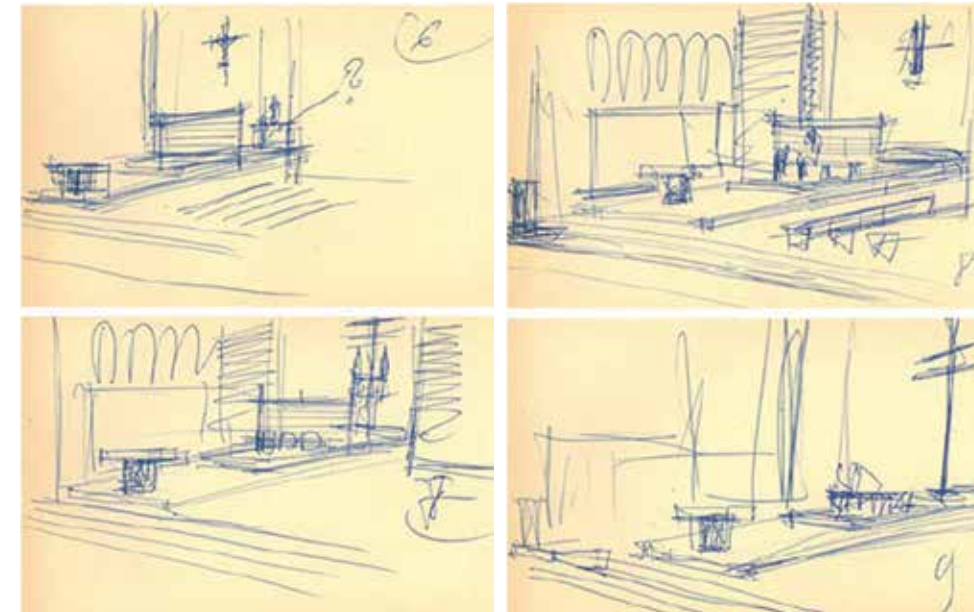
studio assignment was to (re-)integrate the church, and the migrant community that uses it, into the now hipster neighbourhood.

In *Re-reading the 'Corridor-School' of J.W.Hanrath*, Tijn Beelen and Saidja Heynickx elaborate on Beelen's Masters' project on the adaptive reuse of a 1920s primary school in Eindhoven (NL). Rather than simply redefining the programme, the concept develops a versatile strategy for multiple reuse (living, studying or working) based on the proto-modern DNA of the building. More specifically, the tectonic quality and recurring typological feature of the *corridor* in school buildings since the late 19th century can be recognised as a modern feature with inherent potential for transformation.

In *Reviving the modernist utopia*, Marie Moors compares the recent and successful architectural adaptation of three post-war modernist housing complexes. Rather than tackling modernist ideology, the differing approaches of the refurbishment architects are more pragmatic with a positive attitude towards the existing buildings. The contemporary needs for more densified living spaces and energy and cost saving construction are of renewed concern and create another perspective on the maligned ideology of modernist housing. Significantly, these projects show the potential for further work on modernist principles in a conceptual and spatial manner. The underlying shift in meaning may be connected with the generational change of its inhabitants: a housing scheme originally intended for working class families now accommodates middle-class first-time buyers,¹⁵ a dynamic target group likely to be more sympathetic to the original cause of modernism and its retro looks today.

Kris Pint examines, in *Modernism: glass, steel, concrete ... and books*, the cultural and inspirational contradiction between modernist architecture and literature and, specifically, how both deal with (the rupture with) the past. The emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis and interest in the human psyche at the end of the 19th century redefined art and literature, while architecture stressed technological renewal and the reinvention of the city. The author describes the domestic environment or 'home' as the place *par excellence* for this confrontation. Within the '*machine à habiter*' (Le Corbusier), the rational subject of architecture finds itself at odds with the inner insecurities and unconscious tendencies of its character, as explored in literature.¹⁶ Like Virginia Woolf, however, one could just accept this contradiction and consider it part of modern life. Humorously juxtaposing the heroes of each discipline, the author shows us the refreshing quality of being a modernist.

Finally, and to come full circle, in *Beyond the modern – Some observations on the work of Rudolf Schwarz*, Christoph Grafe (re-)addresses the oeuvre of the architect and the arguably isolated position it takes in the history of modern architecture. Schwarz was, nevertheless, admired by iconic figures including Mies van der Rohe, and has gained more attention as one of 'the other moderns' since the 1990s. Rather than idiosyncratic, his work could be described as the continuous search for a careful balance between past and present, a critical and personal approach to modernist ideas. In examining some of his writings and studying four church projects, we learn more about the conscientious designer and theorist. Schwarz's work is modern in the true sense because it is trying to be, to use the words of Romano Guardini, 'on the verge of a more essential reality'.



[6] Altar of St. Alena, sketches by Bastin, proposing adjustments in line with Vatican II liturgical reform, 1966.

be translated as *adaptation to today or bringing up-to-date*. The current pope, Francis, is recommending Vatican II as a source of inspiration for answers to many of today's questions in the Catholic church, see for example: John L. Allen Jr., 'Pope urges theologians to be "faithful, anchored" to Vatican II', last modified December 29, 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2017/12/pope-urges-theolo->

¹² For example: '... the church building doesn't belong anymore to the image of the modern city...' or '... is there in the existence of the consequently contemporary, secularised man still place for such an explicit religious practice?' Geert Bekaert, *In een of ander huis: kerkbouw op een keerpunt*, trans. by author (Tilt/Den Haag: Lannoo, 1967), 13–14, 26.

¹³ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term *modern* is etymologically derived from the late Latin *modernus*, in its turn from the Latin *modo*, meaning 'just now'.

¹⁴ The contribution of Jacques Dupuis to the design of St-Alena was growing in significance during the course of the project. Especially interesting here and in other projects of Dupuis is the quality and

meaning of decorative and Christian iconographic elements, (not further investigated in the context of this cahier).

¹⁵ A similar argument is made by Kenneth Frampton in a comparison between the proposal of the Smithsons for the Golden Lane Housing Competition in London (1952) and the Diagoon Experimental Housing by Herman Hertzberger in Delft (1967–1972). Risselada and van den Heuvel, *TEAM 10*, 290.

¹⁶ This struggle was mirrored in reality: see for instance the abandonment of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye For an extensive description on this, see Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 20–42.

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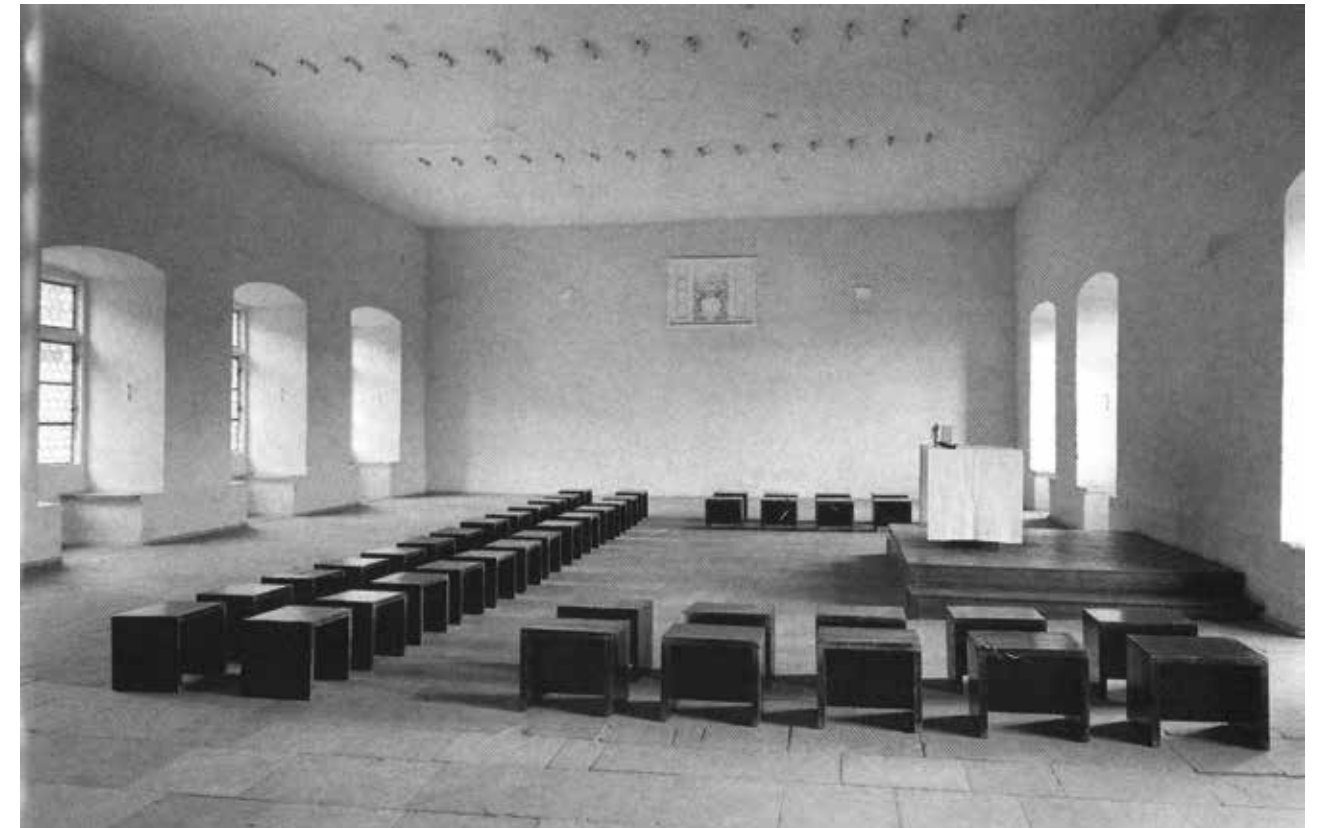
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'Contemplative freshness' : On the emerging typology of a house-monastery after Vatican II *K. Van Cleempoel*.



[1] The Knight's Hall in Rothenfels measures 19.2m by 11.45m, with white walls of great thickness visible through the recessed window frame, and with dark brown slabs on the floor. Arranged by Rudolf Schwarz, Heinrich Kahlefeld and Romano Guardini, around 1930 heralding the Liturgical Movement