

An Bord Pleanála  
64 Marlborough Street  
Dublin 1

30<sup>th</sup> September '05

**Re. Proposed alterations to St. Colman's Cathedral, Cobh, Co. Cork**  
**Ref. 05/52040**

This planning application proposes the extension of the sanctuary into the nave area of the cathedral, requiring the removal and partial relocation of the altar rails, the creation of a permanent altar on the extended sanctuary, the provision of a new cathedra facing the congregation and other works to the chancel, nave and transepts of St. Colman's Cathedral.

The Irish Georgian Society, Ireland's Architectural Heritage Society, wishes to appeal the decision by Cobh Town Council to grant permission for these works. We enclose notification of receipt of our letter of objection from the Town Council and a cheque for the sum of €210.

The Society has significant concerns about the impact of these proposed works on the character of the sanctuary area in particular, as well as its impact on the character of the church as a whole. For these reasons, we wish to address the following issues:

1. Impact of the proposed works
2. Liturgical necessity for the works

**Impact of proposed works**

The interior of St. Colman's Cathedral is handsomely finished with vaulted timber ceilings, decorative Bath stone cladding, mosaics on the aisles, transepts, chancel and side chapels, fine sculptures on the altars and stained glass windows throughout.

Of these works the architect and architectural historian, Jeremy Williams, says:

Cobh is the only Irish Catholic Victorian cathedral to remain unchanged by liturgical agitation of the last thirty years, so there is still hope that the interior may survive to be listed by Cork County Council.

Williams, Jeremy. *A Companion Guide to Architecture in Ireland, 1837-1921*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 1994

The chancel is an outstanding example of High Victorian ecclesiastic design by some of the leading liturgical suppliers of the time: its marble high altar was designed by Ashlin and executed by Early and Powell; the windows, illustrating the life of Christ, were made by Hardman, an ecclesiastical specialist, and also by Cox and Buckley; the richly carved oak screens were produced in the Gothic style by Beakey; the mosaics at the high altar were created by the Venetian craftsman Ludwig Oppenheimer who also laid down the mosaics on the floor of the chancel illustrating the monogram HIS with the symbolic beasts of the four evangelists surrounded by floral motifs; the altar rails are of white and red marble and were made by Pat John Scannell of Cork with the brass gates by Messrs. McGloughlin of Dublin. Oppenheimer also produced the mosaics at the communion railing.

St. Colman's cathedral, and specifically its chancel and sanctuary, are an intact masterwork of high Victorian Gothic revival design and craftsmanship. Only one other cathedral in the country can compare with Cobh for the inspiration of its design and quality of craftsmanship – St. Finbarr's Cathedral in Cork city.

It is a sad observation that, while an exhibition celebrating William Burges's work at St. Finbarr's is to be held in Cork in the month of October, the Diocese of Cloyne is proposing to obliterate the heart of the Victorian masterpiece of which it is custodian for present and future generations of worshippers.

### **Liturgical Requirements**

The Irish Georgian Society does not claim to be expert on liturgical requirements or, therefore, the justifications put forward to substantiate the proposed works to the interior of St. Colman's Cathedral.

However, we are aware that there is considerable debate about whether the proposed alterations are necessary under the provisions of the Second Vatican Council. As the re-ordering of the sanctuary would have considerable impact on the character and fabric of this important cathedral, we are of the opinion that it is essential that a compelling need to meet with liturgical requirements be demonstrated. The Society notes in particular the correspondence in October 1995 between Cardinal Ratzinger and Msgr. Laurence Ryan relating to proposed alterations to Carlow Cathedral. In this, Cardinal Ratzinger stated the following:

The fact that the postconciliar legislation of the Church does not impose architectural changes, while at the same time not excluding them, provides the diocesan bishop with the necessary latitude for making decisions in the light of the pastoral needs of his particular Church, taking into account also the situation in neighbouring diocese.

It is certainly true that a great number of churches since the Second Vatican Council have been re-arranged; such changes, while inspired by the liturgical reform, cannot however be said to have been required by the legislation of the Church. In conclusion, it is the right and duty of the local bishop to decide on

these questions and, having done so, to help the faithful come to an understanding of the reasons for his decision.

We also think that it would be pertinent to quote Cardinal Connell's response when asked if he would build a new cathedral in Dublin. To this question he responded:

None whatsoever. If I had the wealth of Croesus itself, I would not build a cathedral because liturgy and architecture at the moment are in such confusion that anything that would be built at this stage would be rejected in a very short time.  
Sunday Business Post, March 04, 2001

### **Conclusion**

Cobh Cathedral, and specifically its chancel and sanctuary, are an intact masterwork of high Victorian Gothic Revival design and craftsmanship.

We urge An Bord Pleanála to refuse permission for these alterations, in the interests of the Victorian architectural heritage of Ireland, in the interests of the town of Cobh, its citizens and worshippers, and in the interests of encouraging the responsible custodianship of Cobh Cathedral as one of Ireland's finest buildings.

Yours sincerely

Donough Cahill  
Planning Officer IGS