Transcription of “Designing a Church for Saint John's in the Mid-20th Century: What the Architect and the Monks Had in Mind” Benedictine Institute Lectures - Lunch and Learn October 2, 2013

Mark Thamert:
My name is Father Mark Thamert and I work

0:00:07.190,0:00:12.680
with Chick Hardy in the Benedictine

0:00:09.380,0:00:14.389
Institute. I just wanted to update you

0:00:12.680,0:00:17.330
and a couple of things we're doing in

0:00:14.389,0:00:19.880
the Benedict and Institute. For students,

0:00:17.330,0:00:22.880
we are creating a Benedictine living

0:00:19.880,0:00:26.470
Floor, at the top floor of Virgil Michael.

0:00:22.880,0:00:28.340
It'll be between 12 and 22 students,

0:00:26.470,0:00:30.320
current freshmen who will become

0:00:28.340,0:00:33.559
Sophomores. They'll spend their

0:00:30.320,0:00:35.510
entire year living together, having a

0:00:33.559,0:00:37.640
whole series of talks and book

0:00:35.510,0:00:39.979
discussions and all sorts of things

0:00:37.640,0:00:41.809
along with a with a course that will go

0:00:39.979,0:00:44.839
along with it. We're very excited

0:00:41.809,0:00:48.170
about that. We're also going to be

0:00:44.839,0:00:50.809
conducting workshops for faculty to get
a Benedictine concept spread throughout the whole curriculum. For example, Rodger Narloch is teaching a course on happiness he would simply do a big chunk on Benedictine ways to a fulfilled life. So those are two wonderful initiatives. As you know the applications for the study tours this summer are due on the last Monday of October. So get yours in. You can send those to me. I just simply read Gloria Hardy’s, Chick Hardy’s, invitation to apply, and you can talk to many people who have already been on it. It's one of the most profound, probably the most profound, traveling experience I've ever had in my life. I did it this past summer for 12 days.
I've been to Europe a lot but nothing comes close to this experience with that group over there. *audience laughter* You can imagine, you can imagine. Okay, David Paul is giving his talk today, I'll let Chick introduce him.

The next talk on our series November eighteenth will be done by Father Columba Stewart “From the Dark Ages to the Cold War Europe, From Ethiopia to the Middle East and India, and on to Timbuktu, How Benedictines Can't Stop Preserving Endangered Manuscripts.”

It should be a wonderful, wonderful presentation by him. We have afternoon events now. It's called, instead of Lunch and Learn it's called Tea and Talk. And our first one is going to be Annette Atkins with her new book on
the sisters of St. Benedict Challenging

Women Since 1913. That one's

filled up by the way, but they're going
to be at least two-three more. One is

going to be on Pope Francis's recent
statement. Just a discussion group to get
together. We'll send out the statement to
you, you can choose what you want to
comment on. It'll be simply a discussion

about the future of the Catholic Church
and maybe how Benedictines relate to
that future. In March we will have the
Feast of St. Benedict. We have a speaker

Gerald Schlabach from University of St.
Thomas and he'll be talking about a
monastic topic. He's uh he's head of the
Mennonite dialogue between Catholics and
Mennonites and he is also an oblate of
St. John's Abbey, as a Benedictine Oblate. We have also a series of speakers starting one each semester for five semesters on the documents of the Vatican Council, on the 50-year date when each of them came out, and we have some wonderful speakers for that. And I told them I wouldn't disclose the names of the speakers yet, but I'm going to ask Chick Hardy to introduce our speaker. Let's give chick a hand for everything that she does for us. *audience applause*

Chick Hardy:

I just told him to go sit down. *audience laughter* Okay our speaker today Brother David Paul Lange. He joined the monastery in 1986 and, for those of you who are doing the math, it's...
27 years. So one note of distinction is

that he is the first son of a faculty member to join the monastery. And your father taught what?

Brother David Paul:
Math

Chick Hardy:
He did teach

Math. Okay.

Brother David Paul:
For 40 years. Which I can’t imagine. *audience laughter*

Chick Hardy:
He’s currently a member of the Art Department. He teaches sculpture and art history and drawing and design and he loves to sing.

If you’ve ever heard him sing, you’ll think you’ve been transported to Heaven.

He has a lovely voice. Not only does he teach sculpture, but he does sculpture.

You’ve noticed the new statue out
between the Quad and the Music Building

0:05:23.289,0:05:31.570
and that of course is a young version of

0:05:27.010,0:05:33.400
Benedict and this summer I was I was

0:05:31.570,0:05:36.430
outside, of course we have lots of visitors

0:05:33.400,0:05:39.010
in the summertime, and and there was a

0:05:36.430,0:05:42.720
family with a little girl. I'm

0:05:39.010,0:05:47.020
guessing she was about four or five. And

0:05:42.720,0:05:49.690
she was pulling at her mom's purse she

0:05:47.020,0:05:52.750
Said, “Let's go see the guy with the bird.

0:05:49.690,0:05:54.130
Let's go see the guy with the bird.” *audience laughter* And

0:05:52.750,0:05:57.669
of course, she didn't know what that

0:05:54.130,0:05:59.860
meant and so later I did see them over

0:05:57.669,0:06:02.110
by Benedict and the Raven and I think

0:05:59.860,0:06:05.229
she was more interested in the bird than

0:06:02.110,0:06:06.849
she was in the guy but but. Whenever I

0:06:05.229,0:06:11.200
walk by there now, it’s “Oh there's the

0:06:06.849,0:06:14.050
guy with the bird.” David Paul was also

0:06:11.200,0:06:16.570
pretty involved with the stick house

0:06:14.050,0:06:18.520
that was built last year. As you're

driving into campus on the left-hand

side. You can hardly miss it.

So he has his touches kind of all over

Campus. He was also appointed Sub-Prior

Recently, and for those of you who don't

know the hierarchy it's the Abbot, it's

the Prior, and it's the Sub-Prior. Kind of

like the President, the Vice President,

Speaker of the House so this is no small

event we have here *audience laughter* But along

with that new job he has he has

greater responsibilities and I'm sure

his time management skills have been

honored to a fine fervor.

Brother David Paul:

No not so much. *audience laughter*

Chick Hardy:

Not so much, but which I'm even more

grateful that he would take time for us
Today. So if you would please join me in giving him a warm welcome, Brother they David

Paul  *audience applause*

**Brother David Paul:**

thank you very much it pains me to close the blinds and turn off some lights on such a nice day but I think it'll be worth it. That's not a great bulb so the color resolution is not so great on what I'm about to show you but it's about the images. So what I'm going to do is try to condense what is usually about a 140 minutes’ worth of content into 40. So my intention is to whet your appetite, to get you interested and if you want to know more, there's More. And come and take a class, talk to
Father Hilary because I'd like to make

a plug right away for Father Hilary's

book Put it in the Light Here Marcel

Breuer in a committee of 12 plan a

Church. Father Hilary is the sole

remaining living member of the committee,

the Abbey committee, that helped Marcel

Breuer build the church. So he's our

living link to *audience applause*

And what you were watching while we were

eating is some footage that most of us

in the room have not even seen. It's

footage from the dedication day of the

new abbey church. It's from actual film

footage that Victoria Young, one of the

professors at the University of St.

Thomas, came across in her research on

the Abbey Church for a book that is much
anticipated and about to come out soon

which I think we all will want to read.

It's wonderful footage that she had

converted to a DVD which I think David

Klingeman, the Abbey Archivist got in the

mail yesterday, and distributed

immediately to some people who were

Interested. So I was watching it for the

first time as well. I love the clothing, *audience laughter*

How was the way, the way that ending it was

awesome. *audience laughter* So ok today my intention is to

talk about how we went from that *pointing to image* to this.

And, not to repeat anything that Hilary

or anyone else perhaps has presented in

a much more articulate way, I'm going to

give you some visual backstory and give

you some visual context for this. This is

a topic I'll talk about in my culture
classes, I'll talk about it in the modern contemporary art history class because it directly relates to the development of modernism in the middle, well throughout the 20th century, and into the our time now. But it's it's a topic that is near and dear to my heart and that touches everyone's lives who lives and works and studies here. Whether we like that structure or not personally, I say it's not, it doesn't matter to me, this is what I tell my students. I don't care if you love it or hate it, I just want you to understand a little bit about how it came to be. And invariably once people know something about it they hate it a little less and you know and, that's not so bad. So it's how
we got to this, this is the model for the Breuer church, how we got there from where we were, that is such an interesting story. A little back story here, here's the abbey church under construction way back in 1874. The monks wanted to build a bigger Church but couldn't afford to so they they built what they thought would be adequate for the vision that they had for the community. By the time the 1950s come around, it's woefully under sized but they did the best they could back in the 19th century. Here it is from prep school point together with the old stone House, which is still here. This is replaced by another house now which is the true house, the boathouse. Here's another
view from coming down the Prep School Hill. Off to our right would be the new science center, which isn't there of course yet. Shows you just how agrarian the community is. Still the stone house where they started and then finally over across the lake looking back. Isn't it amazing how many trees are not there yet *audience laughter* and how self-contained it is? St. John's was known as the place with the twin towers long before there was our pair in Manhattan. A very iconic image, it appears on the China that everyone's eating off of. In this time period the two towers, the two very tall spires that are not there anymore, their bases are there on top of the Great Hall, but the towers themselves aren't.
Knowing that the monks came from the southern Germany is helpful. If you've been on the Benedictine heritage tour, you know that in southern Germany there are two communities, which is where the monks and the nuns St. John's and St. Ben's, came from. They're not exactly four miles apart, but they are both within driving distance. What was startling to me was that neither one was a wealthy monastery, even back then. What impressed me deeply was that both of them gave up essentially a fifth of their members to go to the new world without expecting they would ever come back. This after Boniface Wimmer approached all the other larger houses with far more members and all of them said no.
That Eichstatt and Metten would say yes, even though they couldn't really afford to lose people. They weren't big monasteries. They took a risk and that risk-taking, that courage in the face of great uncertainty, I'm convinced it has something to do with how both communities one day would become the largest communities for men and women in the world for Benedictines. So that can-do spirit, if I can borrow that phrase, that was there from the beginning in the face of great odds. So if, sidebar we doubt what we can do in this day and age, let's doubt less because they managed to do amazing things with very little.

This is what the church looked like at Metten for the monks that left and came
Here. I'll say more about it later but I thought was what I'm looking at, I thought, "Wow those are that's pretty nice marble that's pretty expensive stuff. Huh, they must have been wealthy. All the pictures led me to believe that they were a wealthy community. Until I got to go visit in person. Here's my own photo a little closer to the sanctuary. Notice the abundance of natural light, there's not a single artificial light on in this space right now. It's, by the way, full of windows that have hexagons in them. Only throughout Europe there about that big *presenter showing hand-sized hexagon* as opposed to the American Breuer version where they're five feet tall. And here's our own church in 1888.
Whitewashed, a nice wooden alter high up in the apse, but not a whole lot else. By 1900, they've been busy, *audience laughter*

by 1911 even more. I wish this was in color. I would love to see what is happening I mean I can I can see all sorts of evidence of gold-leaf adjoining all sorts of elements in the Architecture. But there's basically not a surface that is not now covered with some design or picture or image or sculpture. By 1933, our Brother Clement Fischhof had been over to the monastery of *pause and audience member says “Beuron”* Beuron, thank you, to learn this style called Beuronese art, which I won't go into now but suffice it to say, it's a fascinating story. This new
style of art that a monk there by the name of Desiderius came up with literally because he wanted an art form that would seem to go with the music that they were using and singing every Day, Gregorian chant. Which, if you've heard some, you know it's not polyphonic it doesn't have harmony. It's a beautiful single song line. And why would the artwork, Desiderius thought, be so romantic and full of schtol and drong when the music we're singing is much more simple and stately and refined? So he comes up with an art form that marries Byzantine art with neoclassicism with Egyptian art. It's fascinating and what remains today is the apse of Christ the Good Shepherd. If we had time, we'd look
at the archives and see the other images

of Christ the King that apparently he

did cartoons for as well and somebody

must have decided, "No let's go with

Christ the Good Shepherd as opposed to

the man with the crown, the sash, the

royal reference." Let's go with the Good

Shepherd perhaps the Abbot decided. And

if I put the two images side-by-side, in

black and white to keep them fair, you

can see that the styles themselves are

different but the inclination to fill

the spaces, to adorn them with imagery

and ornamentation that befits a place of

worship of God, you can see that they're

similar

They're not going for

less is more here they're going for more


is more. *audience laughter* Let's fast-forward to 1953. You

all know a little bit of your American

history, right? So you know that after

World War II things have changed

radically in higher education as well as

monasteries and other walks of life. The

university is burgeoning at the seams

Literally. There's not enough space for

everybody to come together to pray. The

nave in the Great Hall could only hold

350, and the choir stalls far less, so the

community couldn't literally pray

together in one space at one time in

1953 and they needed space for basically

everything. Abbot Baldwin writes the most

amazing letter dated March 7, 1953 in

which even his first two sentences are

Telling. *presenter quoting the letter* “Dear sir, I'm writing to you to
ask whether you'd be interested in

preparing a comprehensive building plan,

a report, for St. John's Abbey. We must

build in the near future and we believe

that we shouldn't begin any construction

until the plan has been prepared that

will provide for our long-range needs so

that all of our buildings will form a

complete and unified whole." He's

borrowing language right from modernism

by the way. He knows what he's saying and

it's an astounding sentence. Mind you

that's not what we got. Our buildings

don't form aesthetically, much less

stylistically, a unified complete whole.

We have instead a postmodern sort of

eclectic mix of things, and that's good,

that's very good. But the intention right
off the bat was to design for long-range

needs on this plot of land so that all

of the buildings we're going to somehow

form a complete and unified whole. He

says if we are a new institution, easy, if

this plot were empty and we were to

start from scratch, no problem. However

we're three years away from celebrating

our centenary anniversary of our

founding, so we have buildings already

here. This to any designer is a challenge.

How do you

work with existing structures and forms

and somehow add to them with perhaps a

brand new aesthetic, something that isn't

there yet with materials that aren't

there yet? How do you do that? Is no easy

task. It's a challenge for any designer.
But a good one will love it. Huh, give me

limitations give me challenges. Let's see

if we can work with what your need is to

provide for it better. The letter goes on.

He describes who we are, college prep

school, seminary, foundations in the Bahamas,

Japan and so on and so forth. And then he

comes to the most interesting part of

the whole thing. Before I get to it

though I think I have included a few of

the names of people that he wrote to;

Walter Gropius, Belluschi, Saarinen. Here's

some examples. Gropius who was one of the

founding members of the Bauhaus School,

which I'll introduce you to in a moment,

is a very, very well-known architect.

Belluschi did the Juilliard School

ultimately in Manhattan. Saarinen you're
probably familiar with the Arch in St. Louis and the JFK Terminal. Beautiful,
elegant, sloping roofline. Amazing, just beautifully simple forms. Neutra was mostly known for his houses, as was by the way Breuer, at this time. Murphy very, very simple interiors for worship spaces. Murphy had actually designed some churches already, Breuer, mm-hmm. And then our man of the hour, Marcel Breuer Himself, who is far more known for his residential properties, as well as some larger communal structures, but more for residential. And he was Hungarian with Jewish ancestry. Very curious, very interesting. The letter, he identifies the needs. He says after all sitting all of these, we think the church is what we
want to go for first. We think that's
the most important thing that we need to
design. As a place for us to come
together as a whole community to pray
and worship. Although this present
Proposal, he says, concerns the
comprehensive plan, we’re most interested
in building
that church which will be truly an
architectural monument in the service of
God. It's not aiming low here. It’s aiming
for the sky. Sheer overcrowding is
forcing us to expand our facilities and
we don't want the mirror material
exigencies of the situation to determine
our architecture. Meaning, I break that
Apart, just because we need a church that
will see 2,000 people we don't want to
throw up a gymnasium, something looks

like crap, but seats 2,000 people. *audience laughter* So we

want to be mindful of the form of the

Thing, we don't want just the function to
dictate everything. And then it gets

really interesting and you probably

heard the next sentence before. The

Benedictine tradition, he says, at its

best challenges us to think boldly to

cast our ideals in forms which we valid

for centuries to come, shaping them with

all the genius of present-day materials

and techniques. It's an astounding

sentence, an astounding one for an abbot
to say to an architect. Think boldly,

think long term, because Benedictines do.

We’re not, at our best we shouldn't just

think about our present situation, but be


optimistic and hopeful and think of the future. Plan for what we, as best we can, think might be a hundred years from now. That's audacious, but the Benedictine tradition challenges us to do that. Let's not just put blinders on and only address the needs of the moment. And then, shaping them with all the genius of present-day materials and techniques. We are not Amish. Ah, and I mean that in no, no derogatory way but Benedictines have never been suspicious of technology. Have always embraced it. If it could make farming easier, then let's use this new tool, this new machine. Let's use it if it can make the life of the community better. I think that's Significant. Benedictines will embrace
new technologies when they're at their best to serve the community's needs both now and towards the future. We think, I'm sorry then he says, what for me at least as a designer and in my art classes is an even more interesting sentence, we feel that the modern architect with an orientation towards two things, functionalism which is not so hard to wrap our minds around I'll show you some examples, and then this honest use of materials, is uniquely qualified to produce a Catholic work. Notice he doesn't say you need to be Catholic. Thank you, if you can do the job, if you can listen to our needs and design it, we don't really care. The need is what's paramount here so
functionalism has to be one of the two
important characteristics of this
architect, an orientation towards that.
But then this honest use of materials is
uniquely qualified to do this for us. So
I always ask my students let's talk
about that and talk to me about that.
First of all, if we were to use a few
monikers from modernism that you've heard
them before, form follows function or
function dictates form, talks about that
intimate relationship between form and
Function. Neither should be more
important than the other. In modernism, in
the philosophy of the time, it is a
desire to try to unite the form with
what it does, and to not give too much to
the form, and certainly not to undermine
the form, so that it can meet the
function. But not more than that. Not go
Overboard. Can we live within our means,
from a design standpoint, is perhaps
another way to phrase it. Can we live
within our means? Can we can we design
our lives to fit the function of them
and let go of things that aren't so
necessary to the function? One of the
first truly modern houses, note the date
if you can see it. Corbusier, Villa Savoye,
outside of Paris, recognized as one of
the first truly modern
structures for a dwelling for all sorts
of reasons. Its geometry, it's pure white
color, the use of materials like glass
and concrete, the all-encompassing
built-in furniture, and furniture
designed by the guy who also built the

house and designed the house. By the way

that the garage was under the house and

the turning radius supposedly was

perfect for a 1928 Citroen *audience laughter* where you

could drive around and then the garage

that you park it at an angle. It had

three very curious ways of going from

one floor to the next that didn't

involve traditional stairs. And then it

had this very curious rooftop garden.

Again, all white, with a window that

framed the landscape beyond but didn't

have glass in it, and there's no roof

over it. Very curious, it got everyone's

attention in the architecture world. A

quote from him, we don't and we don't

want any more of that stuff. All the
stuff by the way, which for centuries  
0:27:11.109,0:27:15.159
designers love to add. It's like you know  
0:27:13.419,0:27:17.320
if you're a cake designer and you're  
0:27:15.159,0:27:20.109
doing wedding cakes. Don't you live for  
0:27:17.320,0:27:22.090
adding all the you know flowers and  
0:27:20.109,0:27:26.049
leaves an ornament? Isn't that the fun  
0:27:22.090,0:27:27.940
part? We don't want that. All the  
0:27:26.049,0:27:31.749
Crenellations, all the sculptural  
0:27:27.940,0:27:34.479
additions, it isn't necessary really to  
0:27:31.749,0:27:38.739
the function of the building. Can we do  
0:27:34.479,0:27:40.679
without them? A few more examples Mies  
0:27:38.739,0:27:44.519
van der Rohe did the Farnsworth House.  
0:27:40.679,0:27:48.190
Notice it's even raised off the ground,  
0:27:44.519,0:27:51.909
flat roof, floor-to-ceiling wall-to-wall  
0:27:48.190,0:27:56.499
glass panels. Here's the entrance to that  
0:27:51.909,0:27:59.440
House. He also did the Seagram Building  
0:27:56.499,0:28:03.009
in New York. The first skyscraper of its  
0:28:03.009,0:28:07.960
Kind. Doesn't look odd to us now. We all,
we take this form for granted, that it's steel and glass. Nothing at the top,
nothing at the bottom, nothing by way of extra ornament. This looks like so many buildings now. But can you look at it in context and see how startling that is for its time? Not least of which, the fact that he left the front part of the square footage empty. This is some of the priciest real estate on the planet, and he leaves it empty? His philosophy, you know making it really short and simple, this void, this negative, space was as is important to the experience of the building as the building itself. That you would one day, when it as the rest of this grew into a Canyon, be able to come into this open
square and breathe free, before going

into a building. That sense of openness

was as important to him as the physical

space that it took up. Which is an

interesting idea in itself. But you can

see these are contiguous buildings, built

near in time. And the Chrysler Building,

which we don't have time to go into, but

that's fascinating, the story of how that

spire got up there, the reticulation. Okay

I'll tell it really quick. *audience laughter* You know that

architects love to have the tallest

building. And that designer crunched the

reticulation inside, and didn't let on

that one day, very near the end of its

Completion, because there was another

bank building going up down the street

taller than this one, until a week before
finishing, ‘presenter makes building sound* it became the tallest building.

0:29:32.280,0:29:37.290
Sorry. It rests on a bed of lights

0:29:35.100,0:29:38.820
beautiful. And Phillip Johnson lived in

0:29:37.290,0:29:41.940
an actual glass house, in which you

0:29:38.820,0:29:45.140
shouldn't throw stones, but which shows

0:29:41.940,0:29:49.590
you everything that's made of; bricks,

0:29:45.140,0:29:51.930
steel girders, clear glass. It's showing

0:29:49.590,0:29:57.570
you everything and even how it’s put

0:29:51.930,0:29:59.400
together, quintessential modernism. Sorry,

0:29:57.570,0:30:01.050
I guess right here, also here's an example.

0:30:01.050,0:30:02.130
This is interesting. Don't have time to

0:30:02.130,0:30:06.450
go into it but the fact that you could

0:30:06.450,0:30:09.990
take away the corner of the building.

0:30:09.990,0:30:11.310
Cornerstones along and throughout

0:30:11.310,0:30:15.900
architecture history, cornerstones most important piece because it's it's the point off of which you measure all everything else and the corners usually
had to be solid because you want the walls to stay perpendicular to each other and not collapse in or out. So that the fact that now, you could join corners with glass, and effectively erase the Corner. It's like a paradigm shift in architecture. But back to the question, what's this honest use of material all about? And rather than doing Q&A, which I would do and it'd take awhile to try to flesh out what people are thinking, I'm going to fast forward. Let's just look at these two elements. There's no question that that's a steel girder. But what's this? What is that? What is that made of? If you think marble, the artist who trompe l'oeil painted that would say thank you. I'm so glad you know
those *audience laughter* because there's not a marble coin

for thousands of miles from here. You got
to go down to Tennessee or out to Vermont, but there's no marble quarry

here. But back home a church had marble pillars in it, and if you can't afford it
then you do what everybody does. You improvise and you make it look like
something that's not so that you can make it look better. I can't fault them. I think it's phenomenal. I absolutely
admire that that ability and that inclination and I discovered, back here at Metten, that in fact when you look a little closer, and you just poke around and, it's like no pay no attention to that man behind the curtain you see that that's actually crumbling plaster.
They've painted ninety percent of the stone in their church as well. So the monks that came here came from a tradition of making do, of improvising, of being creative to make it look better than it is so as to give glory to God. Now that works if you think that the only way to give glory to God is to use marble or something expensive. But if your philosophy changes, and you can see the inherent beauty in very ordinary materials, like clay, like ceramic, like concrete, then you have more options. And then suddenly you don't have to pretend. You don't have to make it look like something that's not, make it look better. But in fact you can use materials and not only use them for what they are but
even show you how they're made. You can reveal the process of the making.

Quintessential modernism. Last but not least, anybody be bold, what architecture style do you think that is? What would you name it? What would you call it?

If you were thinking Romanesque, ding ding. You get the products but look at the dates for Romanesque. Huh, here we are in 1955. Really, do we have to use a style that's a thousand years old? Can't we try something new, with genius of present-day materials and techniques? If I use a timeline and just show you about Roman

Romanesque Revival goes all the way back to Romanesque which goes all the way back to the Romans. It got its name because it was mimicking a Roman stuff.
You could arguably say, Romanesque. The Great Hall is actually designed in a style 2,000 years old. So a modern architect, to make a long story short, would probably propose that we try something a little more of our time, a little more of our place, especially if you want me to think boldly. Then let's design something brand-new. We're here on this timeline, 1955. Look at all the movements that have happened since then. Surely we can come up with something of our own time and place. A few more samples I would point out if I had time some of the similarities in with Maria Laach, just the architectural elements that appear in our own Great Hall that appear in their church. But to even throw in
another quick aside, if this is the floor

plan, the traditional T-form, you've all seen it before, it no longer follows

that, the abbey church. Right? And if I make the story of architecture itself even more simple, you could say that

architecture is all about designing a space so that it's protected from the elements. What you do in it, that can vary.

How you do that, that can vary. But it's a central purpose. There's some how protective space, to define this space, so that certain things can happen in it.

Back in the Romanesque period they had to really buttress the thick walls usually below ground, you don't see this stuff usually, but buttress them so the low walls don't collapse out with the weight, the
weight of that ceiling. That's always the big problem. How do you hold the ceiling up so that it doesn't collapse? How do you do that and then span a big area? And the Gothic period some genius, love to know who it is, but somebody figured out you know, thinking like a physicist, what if we transfer the weight further away to the really thick wall that can withstand pressure but push it away so that we can shrink those internal walls? Boy if you can shrink them, do you know what happens then? You can all of a sudden fill them with light in color and they don't have to be thick and heavy with small openings. The Gothic period is when stained glass just flourishes. It's astounding
how that happens. So long story short, a
modernist would say what's arguably
dishonest about this is that it doesn't
use materials and construction
techniques that are of its time. It
doesn't let them be what they are. And
can we do something else? The answer is
yes. Bauhaus 1919. Suffice it to say a new
class crop up after World War I in
Germany that has a whole different
philosophy about teaching architects. To
make that wonderful long story short,
their idea is that an architect should
first learn how to work with all sorts
of materials before designing a building.
You should ideally know how to design
your own furniture. How to design your
own textiles, your own typography, so that
your building one day could form a complete and unified whole. You designed all of what went into it, rather than delegating, you know so often is the case in a firm, you gotta delegate because you got to keep the project rolling, so you know you have a team that does lighting, you have a team that does typography, and so forth. No, the Bauhaus School thought the better way is to treat all the arts as equals. Nothing, nothing is dishonorable about being a furniture designer. In fact, Marcel Boyer ultimately becomes the head of the wood shop, the furniture design guy. He uses bed steel tubes and does amazing things. And there's a reason therefore, by the way, that the Abbey Church, with all of its
oak, is not splitting cracking warping or
doing anything that you don't want wood
to do. He understood the principles of
wood and what it can do for you and
designed accordingly. So their school is
amazing. You had all sorts of time spent
in various wood shops, or shops in
general, after studying building
techniques
all this sort of thing, and only then for
the last two years of the five and a
half year program did you start
designing buildings. That's that's the
world out of which Marcel Breuer comes.
Design it all. Design it so that it forms
a complete and unified whole. If we were
in his furniture design class, he'd say
so what's the essence of a chair? You sit
on you're sitting on one right now. What

is there what makes a chair a chair, not a bench, not a stool, not anything else? Well

it has a back, it has a seat for one, and then it's stable. That seat is at a certain height. They’re usually 17 to 19 inches maximum, somewhere in there.

So that it's stable. Does it need four legs to be stable though? If you're thinking outside the box and you're thinking like a modernist who says how can we meet the function with a form that doesn't dominate more than it has to? Does it need four legs? Could we maybe do three? Well no, thank you though *audience laughter* I'll James Croak that's too tippy. That's a sculpture. That's considered a sculpture because it's not functional.
Breuer says I think I can do with two.

How about a chair with two legs? And arguably one if you didn't pay attention to the seam there. One leg, how about one bent steel tube leg? How about that? Oh my gosh, strip away things that aren't important to the essence of the form and in a nutshell he designs all sorts of furniture in the same vein. As do all of the other modernist architects and designers. A Wassily chair, and Dr. Wassily Kandinsky, here it is at the gallery Museum of Modern Art in New York City among paintings, except for the Andy Warhol in the very back, by painters who are asking the very same question. What's the essence of a painting at the end of the day? Does really have to tell a story or is it just
rather pigment on a surface? Can we strip painting down to its essence? So are you getting the idea that the mind frame that all of this comes out of is a desire to get to the essence, to the core?

And can you also hear how that might be interesting to monks who are trying to do the same thing effectively spiritually? Can we trim our lives down so that we are living within our means? That we don't acquire everything we want but in fact, use what we need? And so on and so forth. That this style of design in the middle of the 20th century was immediately appealing to monks for what it was doing from a design standpoint and how that resonates with what we're trying to do in our living tradition of
monastic life, which is living in the moment. Okay I know we have a 1500 year tradition, but it's dead if it's not alive now. How do we live in the moment and how do we live our lives simply pared down with dignity but without all the extras? All the poofs of gold and so on, to borrow Courbet’s language. This, by the way, the interior of the glass house by Philip Johnson the furniture was meant to go with the building. That's quintessential modernism. By the way, leave out post modernism which love now to mix things. You might have a Louis XIV armoire with a you know a Shaker chair. In a modernist, you know, you can mix it up in this era. But in the middle of the 20th century it was
a desire to try to be purist about that.

Can we really get at the essence and let go of everything else? Here he is as a young man. Here he is near completion of the Abbey Church. Here he is presenting his designs to Abbot Baldwin and the community. He did that often. This wonderful book by Hilary well this is fantastic. If you have a day on long weekend to, you could devour this in a day. It's a page-turner. It's fascinating. But the dialoguing never ended. It was one of the reasons, by the way, they chose Marcel Breuer. If I'm if I'm quoting this correctly Hilary, because he was such a good listener among many other things. But he was a good listener. If he came up with an idea and then presented it and then the monks said, “Yeah
but what what about this? Well have you thought about that? What could do?” He didn't hesitate effectively to go back and try to do better. To change it to meet the function. The only way to arrive at that form function combination was to listen carefully to the function, especially if you're not a monk. So you gotta listen to what they were doing. Back to that aerial view. He gave them a master plan by the way. Here's the model for it.

Imagine everything like Tommy Hall. Everything in poured concrete. *audience laughter* Don't get me wrong I like Tommy Hall, some aspects of it. I love the wall-to-wall windows. The light in that building is crazy good. But I'm not so keen about a whole campus
that looked that way. He thought very carefully about zones of function and everything like that. He designed, as you know, the library with its two trees of knowledge and wisdom, another innovative way to hold that heavy roof up. All of this about how do you hold the roof up? In the Abbey Church he uses the folding technique which is phenomenal. It's genius to hold up all the weight like that without a single column. The runner down at the four way stop, the athlete. Have you seen that? Did you know that he went through many models of the original facade of the church? I'm glad it didn't stop there. That's a that's a little clunky. That's a little mmm. Eventually the honeycomb pattern comes
in. Only on a far larger scale and more dramatic shape than it would exist in any other window over in Europe. Amazing, just amazing. A great symbol too, beehive, worker bees, everybody working together.

It's a great symbol with such rich connotation. I'm going to go rather quickly because I want to at least show you a couple more things. They started with the monastery wing by the way, and I flashed this up you can see the association with the Farnsworth House right? White geometric flat. But it's this thing that I just want to pause on. The floor plan of the abbey church is an astounding thing if you think about it.

There is not a single column which prevents anyone from seeing what's going
on in the space. Through pure inventive genius alone he managed to hold up everything, including a cantilevered balcony with legs that are behind everyone. Not a single person has an obstructed view anywhere like in this room right now. It's like you know that was not supposed to happen. Let's include everyone in one room was the goal. Is that possible can you see 2,000 plus people in one room with not a single pillar? But more than that do you notice the shape? It's not the T anymore. Students say that looks like a lamp or Christmas tree you know all these various things, which it does. And it's also interesting that it's on a north-south axis instead of east-west.
Broke with that symbolism for a functional reason that I can't go into now. But more important and more interesting and more kind of curious to me, is that it looks and has almost the exact shape of a bell. He mentions a bell and in fact, the Walker Art Center with its wonderful article when the Abbey Church was dedicated, comes out mentions that it was it was in his thinking. But I don't know that anyone's pursued that or just even brought out some of the connotations of that. I'll just point out a couple. For one thing, without baptism which the monks had insisted go back to a more prominent place at the front of the church instead of being relegated to the side of the transom. You know so some
place of lesser importance. They went back to the older more ancient placement of it. At the front and not just at the front. Without a clapper, that little metal ball seemingly unimportant, you don't really see it even, all this is glorious but this doesn't make any noise without that. And you don't have a body without a church, without baptism. It's an interesting comparison to make. What else can I say?

This altar got pulled away from the back wall into a central location. If you caught it on the footage I showed you at the beginning, do you know that the bishop was facing the people from day one? Um that they could do that, that the monks could be circled around the altar
and function there daily but then also

include everyone in one room when it
called for it, when the Eucharist was the
whole community to celebrate. That is an
oak cross. This

is one of the other really, really
interesting elements to the church. This
isn't that. This doesn't do that. This is
an arrow. The steeples are arrows. They
you know, when they when you hear the
bell ring and you're looking across your
farm field is that yeah church time,
remember God. Well effectively that
doesn't do that, at all. Breuer admits

that one of the interesting things he
came across when traveling in Greece as
a young man were these freestanding
towers with a bell in them that you
could see swinging and a cross on it somewhere. A free-standing tower. And could he adapt that in this case? With a really bold shape that showed you the bells swinging rather than enclose them in the two towers where they were, the two twin towers. You heard but them you never saw them unless you were one of the lucky monks who got to swing on them. *audience laughter* But you never saw them ring. And you know and I know when they're all five ringing, which has been a little while, but you know they’re a stunning sight. They’re beautiful to watch even as they are to listen to. So that idea of making a structure that would do that ultimately draws attention to the land as opposed to the sky. You could make all sorts of
connections with the theology and the growing interest in connecting to the community of believers. Seeing God in the community around us and not just in some distance heaven physically rather here. And that flat roof, that flat top, arguably from a design standpoint I mean I'm painting this thing, imagine if this is a composition this is a painting, I see the parallels. I'm looking at the land not the sky. Just from a design standpoint, I'm looking at the land. I think it's brilliant. It's a brilliant stroke. Mind you it's not a dull building once you get under that bell banner especially it's pretty dynamic. And last but not least, I'm trying to stay very close to the 12:30 time, the materials
are pretty simple. He says good Lord

you're sitting on one of the world's

largest depositories of granite. We've got
to use some of it, somehow. But clay for
the floor, concrete, oak gosh you've got a
whole forest of it let's use it. It's a
beautiful material for furniture, let's
use it, glass and metal. This is what I
love. That concrete, I don't know if most
people appreciate it or see it very
often, that concrete shows you every
wooden form into which it had been cast.
The wood in spirit is still there. The
texture of all the wood is still there
in all the concrete. You can read it
today. That to me is astounding. Talk
about honesty of the making and
revealing the process. It's everywhere in
there. And especially at night when there's uplighting on the walls, it comes out even, it looks like fabric. The walls of the Abbey Church to look like fabric to me which is amazing. I don't need to remind you people what it's like to go into it. It's not like going into St. Peter's with big tall 12-15 foot bronze doors. They're seven feet tall. They're just oak. They're very humble.

Come in. This is not, you don't you know you don't have to be carried on a bier to get in here. I'm going to flash through these really quickly. The water has to be moving it says if it's supposed to be a symbol of life. You're gonna have stagnant scummy water. *audience laughter* There's the nod to
were in 1953, 55, 59. The doors changed to copper after baptism. I don’t know if you notice that. That's copper inside the doors that are between the baptism and the rest of the church.

Very selective use of precious metal like silver. Those are amazing forms. I want to jump forward to one last thing here, for actually two last things if I go really quick. Do you mind that I'm talking really fast? There's no Q&A time. *audience laughter*

I hope that's going to be okay. You all have to get back to work. But I do want to show you something that is always interesting to me and my students. I think you know by now that Josef Albers had a different design for that window. Color theory anyone? Warm colors right?
Red, orange, yellow these are warm colors on the spectrum. What we have, there's an awful lot of blue, purple, green, grey, some red but more predominantly the cold colors of the spectrum. If you've ever gone into the abbey church and shivered instead of felt warmth, by the way Breuer and Albers designed these that are up above the altar so they do this to the wall when sunlight hits it, if you shiver there's a reason for it from a design standpoint because all the light spilling into the lower part of the church comes through windows that color it blue. That is naturally a cold light. Versus if we had actually gone with Alber’s window, I can I don't know what exactly would look like, but it'd be
on the warm end of the spectrum for sure.

Oh, I love this. This is Hamsmith, this

telegram. When the committee that Hilary
can tell you about voted in favor of

that back window he sends this telegram.

Church votes back window should we go to

last-ditch action? I don't know what that

last exact last-ditch action is. What did

ey they do? I have no idea. Whatever it

didn't work. We didn't end up with that.

But oh well there it is. Last but not

least it's it's a splendid space when

it's filled. It does function. Fifty years

later it still functions for all sorts of

occasions, a concert, graduation, daily

prayer, mass. It still functions very well.

It's a challenge for us with fewer monks

to be heard with each other at office
but it still functions beautifully well.

Music still sounds glorious in that space. It was designed for a lot of singing monks. Chant and Anthony's group sounds splendid in there. The acoustics are perfect for Gregorian chant. Do you want to see those? So you know that the organ screen is quote/unquote temporary right? That's a red cloth that got put behind the screen right before the dedication because Breuer had imagined that there would be an enormous mosaic of Christ in Glory there. Kind of taking off from the apse in the Great Hall he thought that there would be an image of Christ in Glory that would be on that panel. So you moved from baptism through the death, well
life and then death and Passion of Christ to the Risen Life. So there was an axis right down the center of the church and you went in real-time and historical church time from back to front. So using Photoshop Elements we did some of this too.

Imagine a Chagall up there *audience laughter*

or a more traditional Byzantine. Do you notice what I notice and what a lot of my students then notice too? This church becomes a frame for that and that becomes a focal point. You know at the end of the day it may be is a really really awesome thing that they couldn't, Breuer, couldn't locate an artist or find an artist whose artwork would look great there. Because the simple panel of color is actually I would argue maybe
more conducive to praying there than

looking at something that would be dated

in time forever. Perhaps a Rothko

approach or Diebenkorn approach. I have no

idea but perhaps even a panel of light

that you could color nowadays with

technology. You could color that light.

Perhaps light could be the symbol of

Christ and Glory rather than physical

depiction, a representational depiction

of Christ's Glory. I don't know. I'm

speaking as a representational sculptor

here. I don't think that's the choice. I

don't think that's the solution. But well it

remains to be seen. As well at least that

wonderful model at this wonderful show

of Breuer which I wish we could get here

has those hexagons as clear glass. I'd
love to see the bells ringing from inside the church but unless a tornado comes and only hits out those windows and leaves everything else intact I want to leave what we got. But anyway. In brief a story of how we went from one to the other. Thank you for your time. *audience applause* Sorry if I kept you a little over time.

Chick Hardy:

Thank you David Paul. I'm ready for round two I don't know about anyone else. But let's thank him. *audience applause* Okay he's going to turn on the light so you don't fall on your way out. Again the next event we or Lunch and Learn we have is November eighteenth with Father Columba Stewart. And then watch for notices on our Tea and Talk. So with that get back to work.