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THE NEW CHURCH ON THE CURRAGH SPEAKS WELL FOR IRELAND-1959

The Nationalist and Leinster Times 14th November 1959

A KILDARE TRIUMPH FOR THE MODERN ARTISTS OF IRELAND

By Rev. P. J. BROPHY

The new church on the Curragh speaks well for Ireland-1959. Buildings tell us about the people who design and use them, especially churches. A French cathedral as that at Chartres speaks for the Christian builders of the thirteenth century who poured their heart and Faith into its making. St. Brigid's garrison church on the Curragh training camp is a building of genuine religious significance. It does credit to the talents of the Irish artists who have collaborated towards its harmonious completion. This is a frankly twentieth century church. It shows no ambition to imitate gothic or Romanesque models. Its sincerity and modernity command respect. Up-to-date materials and techniques unite to give us a house where worshippers of the 1960's will feel at home.

The site was so well chosen that a striking architectural landmark now dominates the Kildare plain. Your eyes fasten on the slender campanile which does not conflict but blends with the water tower close at hand. Red brick was the obvious material to harmonise with one architectural feature of the camp. The Marian close and the carefully preserved pines set off the new church admirably. It seems to belong here with its surroundings.



St. Brigid's Garrison Church Curragh Camp

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ST. BRIGID'S STATUE

Oisín Kelly's statue of St. Brigid dominates the façade. This larger-than-life-size figure in teak represents the patroness surrounded with children who are enfolded by her cloak. It was a happy thought to incorporate the St. Brigid cross so successfully into the main design.

The interior is spacious, lofty, well-lit. There is no doubt about the centre of interest, the lovely open high altar. The table and supports are of green marble. The altar stands at eye-level to the worshipper in the pews. The communion rails, also of marble, are at once seen to derive from the table of sacrifice. The chancel wall, richly panelled in mahogany, soars up above the nave as if to funnel up the prayers of the congregation heaven-wards.

Very pleasing is the baldachin suspended over the altar. It is surmounted by a painted crucifix. This reverent but unfamiliar work of Patrick Pye recalls illuminations from the Book of Kells and byzantine frescoes. Sanctuary lamp, crucifix and six candlesticks in copper for the high altar are notably successful. Altogether this sanctuary is a magnificent setting for the ceremonies for the liturgy. Space, decorum, quality characterise the final result. It is a worthy sounding-board to echo with the prayer of the church and the sonorous chants of the Mass.

There is comfortable seating for 1,500 people. Everybody has an uninterrupted view of the altar and the pulpit. The arrangement for heating, lighting, ventilation and sound diffusion are excellent.

Only five of the stations of the cross are yet in place. They are modern in an honest sense. Not content to say what has been too often repeated in a traditional way, they express deep emotion in modern idiom. One should reserve judgement until one had studied them humbly a few times. A real artist ponders long over his work. It is sheer impertinence on our part to dismiss the fruit of serious effort after a momentary glance.

DOZEN ARTISTS

A dozen Irish artists are represented in this church of our National Army. Good taste has prevailed in restricting the decorative features. The stained glass window which frames in the organ – an admirable instrument, I am informed – is a beautiful handling of the theme of Christ as the Alpha and the Omega. From God has come all, and to God all must return. The Twelve Tribes of Israel and the Twelve Apostles sent by Our Lord symbolises the channels through which God's loving mercy flows out to men.

The traditional cruciform shape has been retained externally with the sacristies and meeting rooms as arms. Baptistry and mortuary chapel are important parts of the church. Their treatment here shows careful consideration for their purpose. Through one we are brought into the Church, through the other we are carried out at life's end, fortified with the Church's prayer for the road ahead.

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The Curragh Camp now has a real house of God. It is as worthy as possible a place of prayer as the combined efforts of a group of sincere Irish artists could produce. There is no sham ornamentation here, no confusion of ideas. There is nothing to distract attention from the main thing - the altar and the tabernacle.

A report by Rev P.J. Brophy in the Nationalist and Leinster Times of November 1959 on the modern new St. Brigid's church on the Curragh training camp.

Posted by Mary O'Hara on September 17, 2009

