

*The High Altar and Triptych  
of  
The Church of the Holy Cross  
Kingston, New York*



The Church of The Holy Cross  
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The Altar of the Church of Holy Cross (front cover), which was consecrated on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925, by the Right Reverend Arthur Selden Lloyd, D.D. Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of New York, is destined to take its place among the most beautiful and artistic altars in the world. The design for this masterpiece was conceived by Mr. Angelo Lualdi of the Angelo Lualdi, Inc. Studios in Cambridge, Mass., under the advice of the Reverend Father F. C. Powell, S.S.J.E. The great bas-relief panels in the Triptych, the figures, the Tabernacle door, and the Memorial panel under the altar were carved by Mr. Lualdi himself, who is declared to be, by high authority, the greatest of the wood-carvers of the last hundred years and a worthy successor to Grinling Gibbons. The rest of the carving was done in the studios of Mr. Lualdi. The painting of the panels and figures and the polychroming of the rest of the work was done by Cosini.

The subject of the whole work was inspired by the Feast of the Title of the Parish, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This Feast is rich in teaching of the power of the Holy Cross in the lives of men through the Redemption wrought on it; and it is productive of much edifying symbolism which beautifully emphasize the Sacrifice of the Mass as a continuation of the Sacrifice on the Cross. It impresses profoundly the fact that a Christian altar is the Christian's Calvary.



The Altar and Triptych are of unusual but very impressive and dignified dimensions, the proportions being admirably conceived and eminently suitable to the large sanctuary in which they are placed. The Table of the

Altar is of rubrical height and 14 feet long. The gradines, back of the Altar, rise 2 ½ feet, while the depth of this portion of the Altar is 2 ½ feet, making the Altar a total height of 23 feet and width of 5 ½ feet. The Triptych is 17 feet 6 inches in height, surmounted by a Baldachino which extends over the entire Altar.

The Baldachino is in panels, which are painted a Venetian red, while the cresting and the depending elaborate carvings, of a lace-like texture, are in gold.



The great central panel (above) of the Triptych is carved in bas-relief, as are the two smaller side panels. This panel depicts our Lord, gloriously reigning from the Cross as our King and Great High-Priest. The figure is appropriately vested in the vestments of the Priest, wearing the alb, amice and cincture, the vestments of the deacon and the sub-deacon, the stole, maniple and chasuble of the priest. It is crowned, denoting His Kingship. Attention is especially called to Mr. Lualdi's splendid conception of our Lord's Face. The Figure rests against a bordered drapery of Pampelian red. The Cross, from which He reigns, is elaborately carved and is in gold; the dove,

symbolizing the Holy Spirit, rests over the Head of the Christ, while the halo radiates from behind. To gain some adequate appreciation of the proportions of the Altar, it is helpful to know that this central Figure is alone 8 feet in height. At the foot of the Cross, on either side, are two decorative adoring angels (pictured below), each holding symbols of the passion: one, the three nails (your right), the other, the Crown of Thorns (your left).



The panel to the right of the central Figure (to your left - below) very naturally holds our Lord's Blessed Mother. Mr. Luaidi has portrayed her here as a woman of approximately sixty-four years of age, therefore, it being, according to the legend, sixteen years after the Crucifixion and just before her own Assumption. Her face displays all of the sacrifices and suffering which are characteristic of the Mother at the Cross, but here she has, too, perfect understanding of what it all means, peace, and complete confidence in the future. The conception could be appropriately termed Our Lady of Hope. The observer's attention is particularly called to the exquisite hands the artist has wrought in this figure.



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To the left of the central Figure (to your right - above) stands Saint John. The Beloved Disciple, who was a mere youth at the time of our Lord's Crucifixion, is here portrayed as a man of about thirty-five, just budding into the great philosopher, who was to give Mankind his Gospel, which contains the philosophic study of our Lord. He holds the quill and scroll of the writer. His habit is of green, symbolizing the Gospel of Everlasting Life which he preached and wrote. Mr. Luaidi has held to the tradition that Saint John was a monk and has therefore given the figure a tonsure. The artist has indulged in some interesting symbolism which may escape the observer unless his attention is called to it. On the border of the right sleeve is embroidered in Latin, "Jesus", while on the left sleeve is the Latin for "John".

The Subject of the triptych being the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, it was thought an excellent opportunity to give the work added reality and to bring it closer to our times, by commemorating certain great movements in the Anglican Communion since the Reformation - movements, which have, through tremendous sacrifices of life, lives and property, brought the Anglican Communion a long way back toward the realization and appreciation of its Catholic heritage and mission. Each movement here commemorated is represented by the figure of one of its leaders. Thus in the middle niche on the left, we find the figure of Saint Charles, King and

Martyr, (below left) who sacrificed his crown, his line and his life for the preservation of the Catholic Episcopate. Without such a sacrifice on his part, the Anglican Church would have lost its valid Orders. He was but one of thousands who either gave their lives or lost their property at the hands of Cromwell for the Catholic Religion in England.



To the right, in the upper niche, is a statue of the Right Reverend Samuel Seabury (above right), who was chosen by the clergy of the church in Connecticut as their Bishop and was sent to England to obtain Consecration. This event being immediately after the Revolutionary War, Dr. Seabury was not hospitably received by either the ecclesiastical or civil authorities. In fact, procrastination was so thoroughly practiced toward him that he finally became aware that the moribund Church in England had no intention of granting Episcopal Orders to the weak and struggling Church in America. After great privation and expenditure of his own private fortune, he finally despaired of his mission in England and sought consecration at the hands of the non-juring bishops of the historical Church of Scotland. On returning to America, he thus became the first Bishop of our Church and the progenitor of our national Episcopate. He formed a Concordat with the Scottish Bishops, in which he agreed to the Canon of Consecration, and certain other elements, contained in our Prayer Book, which has given us a Liturgy even superior to the English. If there be any doubt as to the intention of Bishop Seabury to establish a Catholic church in America, or of the Scottish Bishops to consecrate a Catholic Bishop, one has but to refer to the Concordat entered into by the first Bishop of the Church of America and the Church in

Scotland. It will be noticed that the statue is crowned with a mitre. Bishop Seabury's own mitre is preserved at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.



The mitre on the figure is copied from it.

In the middle niche on the right (above) is the figure of the Blessed Edward Bouverie Pusey, Doctor and Confessor. He represents what is commonly known as the Oxford Movement. Through the Hanoverian Georges' reigns, the Church in England became a desolation. Services were a formality, priests became parsons, bishops rarely visited their dioceses, Confirmation was in abeyance, the Sacrament of Penance was forgotten, the dying were without Unction, and but rarely did a priest celebrate the Divine Mysteries and offer the Bread of Life to the laity, a mere handful taking advantage of receiving at the rare celebration of Holy Communion. Morals, of course, were at the lowest ebb and Christian Charity was drawing its last breath. This is the terrible but true picture of life and Religion in England, when a gallant coterie of Oxford scholars began the Tractarian Movement, which revived the Anglican Communion. There were many strong and noble leaders in the movement, the fruits of which we are enjoying today, but the Blessed Pusey is chosen to represent this movement, because he

assumed the leadership of it at its most difficult period, and suffered more humiliation. Dr. Pusey was one of the great scholars of all time of Holy Scripture; therefore, he is represented with the Bible in his hand. It is of interest that his own red cope, loaned by the Church of Saint John the Evangelist in Boston, Mass., could be had to copy from.

We know a tree by its fruit, and we can judge a church by its Religious. Since the devastation, and indeed annihilation, of the religious foundations in England by the wicked Henry VIII, with one single, but unsuccessful attempt, the religious life had disappeared from the Anglican Communion until the Oxford Movement. This Movement produced a priest of such deep spirituality, scholarship and missionary zeal, that he will ever be numbered among the great founders of Religious Orders and all that that means. This man was Richard Meux Benson, Father Founder of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, commonly known as "Cowley". Besides establishing a great missionary preaching Order, on whose work the sun never sets, he has been the strongest reformer of the lives of the Anglican clergy since the Reformation. For a period of sixty years Father Benson influenced the clergy throughout our Communion. If we were canonizing saints, the name of Father Benson would be among the first. In the statue he is clothed in the habit which he gave to his followers; and he is represented as giving a rule of life by the book held in the hands. This statue is in the topmost niche on the



left (next page left).





In the lowest left niche is a statue (above right) of the Reverend Mother Harriet, Foundress of the Community of Saint Mary. It was esteemed appropriate to include Mother Harriet, because she established the religious life among women in America, and because she led in founding hospitals and asylums for incurables and outcasts. The average Episcopalian has little or no knowledge of the tremendous work, or its extent, established by this great servant of God and as carried on by the scores of devoted nuns who wear the Annunciation Lily.



In olden times, it was customary to include among the figures in an altar-piece representations of the donor, or his family, or the person in whose memory it was given. Future generations will be greatly inspired by the statue of Edith Ellison Van Wagenen, in whose memory this work is offered to Almighty God. The statue is in the lowest right niches (pictured above). Mrs. Van Wagenen's deep spirituality, splendid charity, burning missionary zeal, sacrifices for God, and faithfulness in her devotion to the Church, make it proper that she should be numbered among those who have exalted the Cross in their lives.



**The massive door of the Triptych, which are to be closed during Advent and Lent, are richly carved and colored in symbols of the passion. The grapevine and the Passion Flower are profusely used, while four angels on each door bear symbols of the Passion. These symbols are, reading from left to right: The Flagel, The Seamless Coat, The Pillar with Cord, The Spear, the Reed and Sponge, Saint Veronica's Veil, The Ladder, and The Hammer. The doors are supported by massive, hand-wrought iron hinges.**

**The heavy base of the Triptych contains traceried panels and is bordered with an elaborately carved design in grapes (below).**



In the gradines of the Altar (above & below), the motif of angels, bearing symbols of the Passion is repeated. The symbols are, reading from left to right: The Passion Flower, The Sacred Wounds, The Ear of Wheat, The Three nails, The Cock, The I.H.S., The Pierced Heart, The Drops of Blood, the I.N.R.I., The Dice, The Crown of Thorns, The Bunch of Grapes, The Pincers,



and The Delitra.



**The Tabernacle is guarded on either side by splendid studies of Saint Michael the Archangel and Saint Gabriel the Archangel (above). On the Tabernacle door are carved angels supporting the Chalice and Host; and the Latin inscription: "Ecce Agnus Dei ecce qui tollit peccata mundi" - "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the World."**



The actual Altar is supported by six carved columns. Beneath the Altar is a large central panel (above), carved with angels in armour, who hold the scroll, bearing this memorial:

"Of your charity, pray for the repose of the soul of Edith Ellison Van Wagenen, natus 1874, obit 1923: 'So will I sing praise unto Thy name forever, that I may daily perform my vow' - Ps. 61:8." The scroll to the left contains our Lord's Word: "I, if I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me," which are prophetic of the Sacrifice of Himself on the Cross and in the Mass. The scroll to the right contains his invitation, "Come unto Me all ye - and I will refresh you," which teaches of the redemptive power of the Cross and of the Communion aspect of the Mass.





The Altar Crucifix (above) and six office light (not shown) are also designs by Mr. Lualdi, beautifully carved and polychromed, harmonizing in scale and plan with the Altar. They are memorials to:

John Vreeland Schoonmaker and Emma Frances Sehler Schoonmaker  
George Valentin Burgevin  
Martin Vanderburgh Burgevin  
Mary Jane Du Bois  
Emma Wenderbaun Schrieber  
Harriet Theresa Van Duzen Vosburgh  
George W. Jarvis

The Altar rails, too, are from the Lualdi Studios; while the Hanging Rood (below) are original studies, and treated originally, being surmounted by

a carved canopy from which depends gold curtains, thus forming a background for the Calvary Group. The Figure of the Christ is life-size and a representation of the Suffering Saviour which will bear the keenest artistic criticism. The student of art will be particularly interested in the different ways in which the artist has treated the Blessed Mother and Saint John from the conceptions of those figures in the Triptych. It should be remembered that at the time of the Crucifixion, Saint John was the merest youth and that to have given him maturity would have been an error; so it is to the face, that one must look in this figure to find the meaning in Mr. Luaidi's conception.



The Church of the Holy Cross, in Kingston, New York, was founded in 1891 as a mission to the poor and working class people of the area. Significant renovations to the interior of the church were made in the 1920s.

These included addition of a small chapel (currently Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe), a rood, Lady and Sacred Heart side altars (pictured below), and the magnificent High Altar with the Triptych described herein, depicting the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and including statues of key figures from the Oxford and other Catholic Movements in the Anglican Church.



This text of this booklet, reproduced in its original language, is taken from a copy of an undated, anonymous pamphlet found in archived documents of the church. It is republished, with photos, in commemoration of Holy Cross Day, September 14, 2013.

For information about our current outreach programs and our Hispanic parochial mission, *Iglesia de Santa Cruz*, Sunday School and Youth Group, we can be visited online as well: [www.holycrosskingston.org](http://www.holycrosskingston.org)

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