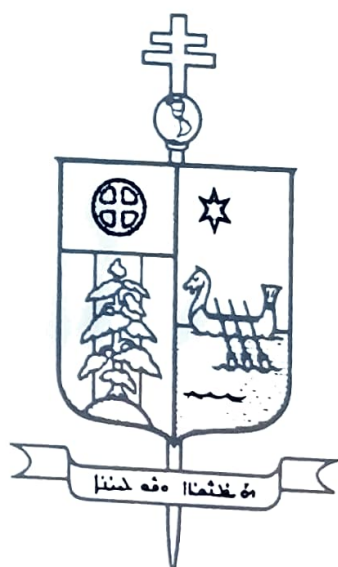


# WORD, MYSTERIES and KINGDOM

Guidelines for the Building and Renovation  
of Antiochene Syriac-Maronite  
Churches in the USA

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Diocese of St. Maron, USA

March 1985

Second Printing

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Jesus Christ, through the power of the Living Spirit, entrusted his Church with a mission to preach the good news to the peoples of all the nations. This mission, handed down by the Apostles, serves and is served by culture and tradition. The faith and life of the Church therefore, are embodied in history, handed on by catechesis, expressed through liturgy and memorialized in architecture.

The European cathedrals of the middle ages were not only the gathering places for liturgical celebrations but also the "classrooms" and subject matter for catechesis. The buildings of Gothic and Roman design served to teach, to transform and to inspire the faithful by their sizes, shapes and symbols. The traditions of this historical era inherited a legacy from the ancient Antiochene Church.

The Christians of Antioch-Edessa, the Maronites among them, built magnificent basilicas in Syria which expressed and concretized their theology, spirituality and liturgy. This Antiochene tradition set the stage and shaped the future for the liturgical and architectural developments in other churches.

While all the traditions (rites) of the Catholic Church profess Jesus Christ as the central mystery of the faith, each tradition develops and enfleshes this mystery in its own unique way. The Maronite Church focuses attention on *the awaited Second Coming of Jesus the Anointed One*.

"Blessed is He Who has come and will come in the name of the Lord."

It unfolds this central theme in its liturgy and architecture by calling the attention of the worshipping community to the altar, the East wall.

At the *Bema* Christ by the good news calls sinners to repentance and purity (in the *Hoosoyo* prayer) and reminds them that He is the Judge who comes to render justice. A throne (*Bema*) is constructed to enthrone the Scriptures (symbolic presence of the Word of God – Rom. 14,10).

From the *Bema* the assembly proceeds to the altar where the Lord who has forgiven his people now spares them by his Blood and nourishes them with his Paschal Lamb. Thus the Pilgrim Church sustained with the True Manna through the desert of this life, stands ready and waiting for its final journey to the Promised Land as it chants "*Marana Tha*" (Ex. 12).

From the altar the people, holding lighted lamps and facing into the East, wait in hope and expectation to go out and greet the King of Glory who comes seated upon his throne (*Bema*) (Ezek. 10,19; 11,1; 42,9; 44,1).

Keep silence before me, draw near; let us come together for judgement. For He who has called forth the generations since the beginning has stirred up from the East the Champion of Justice and summoned him to be his attendant; to him He delivers the nations and subdues kings.

Is. 42, 1-2

While this pristine Maronite heritage has provided so vital a framework for the other traditions of the Church, over the years it has become distorted and obscured due to circumstances of persecution and latinization.

In the Diocese of Saint Maron we have attempted and are still striving to restore our ancestral liturgical traditions and customs. This liturgical restoration will necessitate a revival of our ancient church architecture. While it may not be feasible



nor practical for us to totally reconstruct our past and to build churches like our old basilicas of Syria, we must strive, as much as possible, to adapt and to restore our church buildings and furnishings to the authentic, monastic spirit of simplicity and beauty which characterize our Maronite heritage.

In this booklet we try to recapture the originality of our Maronite ancestry. Moreover, we wish to make available our ancient yet modern heritage (with flexibility) to the contemporary Church. I hope this information will offer insights and guidelines for all who intend to build or renovate our church buildings. For even the architecture of our Church must be faithful to our history and glorious traditions. Thereby we shall keep alive and memorialize our distinct and unique personality within the Catholic Church.

History is not a dead letter nor a dead past but a teacher of life and an incentive for renewal.

+Francis M. Zayek  
Bishop of St. Maron



## PROLOGUE

That God may be accessible to earth-dwellers he has built himself a house among those with bodies.

He has established altars like mangers where the Church may feed on life.

Make no mistake, the King is here; let us enter the sanctuary and see him.

Here where sickness finds access the Physician is standing, waiting for it...

The place is adorned, crowned with glory, for this is the festal day of the wedding (*mestuta*); new is the bride-chamber, Christ is the Bridegroom, the 'Watchers' are exulting, men are giving thanks.

The altar is established, robed in truth; the priest is standing, he kindles the fire.

He takes the bread and gives the Body, he receives wine and distributes the Blood.

The altar of stones supports (our) hope and the pure priest calls on the Spirit.

The gathered people cries out 'Holy!', the King hears and makes mercy flow.

Three gathered in thy name are (already) a church; protect the thousands in thy house! for they have toiled on the 'church of the heart' and brought it to the holy temple, built in thy name.

May the church that is inward be as fair as the Church that is outward is splendid!

May thou dwell in the inner and keep the outer. For (both) heart and Church are sealed with thy name! (1)

1. "Hymn of Chor-Bishop Balai." *Symbols of Church and Kingdom. A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*. R. Murray, Cambridge University Press, London, 1975, p. 18.

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly seventeen years ago the Council Fathers challenged the Church to interiorize its faith and to renew its public worship in a "charter of reform" called the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. (2) The document, drawing its inspiration from the Church's understanding of itself as the sign of union with the Lord and of unity with mankind, emphasized that the liturgy builds up the people into the Lord's temple by expressing and celebrating the Mystery of Christ. (3)

While this document did not specifically address itself to the Eastern Churches, it did urge them to initiate a process of renewal in keeping with the spirit of the directives set down for the Roman Liturgy.

The Church wishes to foster all lawfully acknowledged rites. She desires, where necessary, that they be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times. (4)

In light of these Counciliar wishes, Bishop Francis M. Zayek has launched the Diocese of St. Maron on a journey of spiritual rejuvenation and liturgical renewal. Within the last decade, several significant steps have been taken to revise and restore the liturgy, the spirituality and the architecture according to their more ancient Maronite ways. (5)

2. "Liturgical Renewal in the Antiochene Maronite Church," The Liturgy Newsletter, NCCB.
3. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Art. 2.
4. *Ibid.*, Art. 4.
5. "A Church on the Move," Ronald N. Beshara

the years the Maronite Church, wishing to manifest its unwavering fidelity to the Church of Rome, readily accepted Roman adaptations and latinizations. As a result, the Maronite Church has fallen away from its original traditions. For reasons such as these, the Council Fathers encouraged the Eastern Churches to retrieve their rich heritages.

Easterners themselves should honor their rites and way of life with the greatest fidelity. They should acquire an even greater knowledge and a more exact use of them. If they have improperly fallen away from them because of circumstances or personage, let them take pains to return to their ancestral ways. (6)

While at times it may be difficult and even painful for the Maronite Church to return to its ancestral ways, it is of absolute necessity for the good of the Maronite Church and the entire Catholic Church. Fr. Louis Bouyer in his book, *Liturgy and Architecture*, offers a word of caution on this point.

Authentic Christianity lives only by tradition, not a tradition of dead formulae or mechanical practices, but a tradition of life, a life that is to grow organically, in and through some embodiment. In the continuity of its body, as well as in its ever renewed aspects, both permanence and the ever creative power of the same Spirit have to be constantly manifested and exercised. It needs to be fully recognized as such in the documents of the past, in order to remain ever fruitful, active and creative in the present and for the future. (7)

6. *Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches*, Art. 6.

7. *Liturgy and Architecture*, Louis Bouyer, p. 3.



The deep thirst to rediscover the original Maronite traditions, to revive them for the Diocese of St. Maron and to offer them as a viable model for the contemporary times offered the occasion for this presentation on Maronite Church architecture. This study is written with the hope of providing yet another step for the Diocese of St. Maron to realign itself with its ancestral ways of the Church of Antioch and Edessa and to implement architectural guidelines in accordance with the conditions of our times.

## ORIGINS

The origins of the Maronite Church harken back to a fourth-century visionary priest named Maron, who lived an austere monastic life on Mt. Taurus near Antioch, Syria (a country of pluralistic cultures). The followers of this monk lived near this influential center of hellenism but identified with the semitic and Syrian culture of Edessa. As a result, the Maronite Church expressed its faith and worship in biblical thought patterns rather than Greek philosophical thought patterns. It can be said, therefore, that Maronite Christianity is a synthesis of the teaching and life-styles of the Fathers of Jerusalem, Antioch and Edessa. In addition, Maron's monastic way of life has become the enduring characteristic for the theology, spirituality, liturgy and architecture of the Maronite Church. (8)

### THE SYNAGOGUE AND ITS WORSHIP

In order to understand the structure of worship and the style of architecture for the early Christians it is essential to consider their proximity to, resemblance of, and evolution from the Jewish synagogue.

In the life of the Jewish people, the synagogue played a central role. It was looked upon as the symbol of God's presence among his people (Is. 6,1) and as a house of prayer for the assembly of worship (Is. 56,7). (9) Even the pos-

8. Cf. Antiochene Maronite Church, Diocese of St. Maron pamphlet; "A Brief History and Commentary of the Divine Liturgy of the Maronite Antiochene Church," S. Beggiani; *History of the Maronite Church*, P. Dib.
9. Cf. *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Temple," McKenzie, the Bruce Publishing Co. & NCE, McGraw-Hill Book Co., N.Y.

ition of the temple was of great importance and for this reason all synagogues built outside of Jerusalem faced toward Jerusalem, the place par excellence for worship to which every believing Jew was expected to make a pilgrimage.

The synagogal liturgy served to gather, to build-up and to transform the people into the Lord's chosen ones. It consisted of a series of readings from the Old Testament and prayers and hymns. This service revolved around two symbolic points: the seat of Moses and the ark of the tabernacle. Both of these were looked upon as sacred objects which provided a localized and tangible presence of God in the temple.

The seat of Moses was a ceremonial seat for the rabbi which was accompanied by benches for the elders. (10) Around these seats the faithful gathered to hear the word of God proclaimed.

## THE BEMA

The Bema was a raised dais or elevated platform from which the word of God was read and the hymns and prayers were chanted. It supported a lecturn (ambo). The idea of ascending to a higher place for the proclamation of the word of God is symbolic in the Old Testament. In Isaiah we read: "Go up to the mountain and preach to Sion and let your voice be strong."

In a similar way God gives the Commandments to Moses on the Mountain. Thus, the bema was looked upon as a sacred

10. There were twelve benches to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.



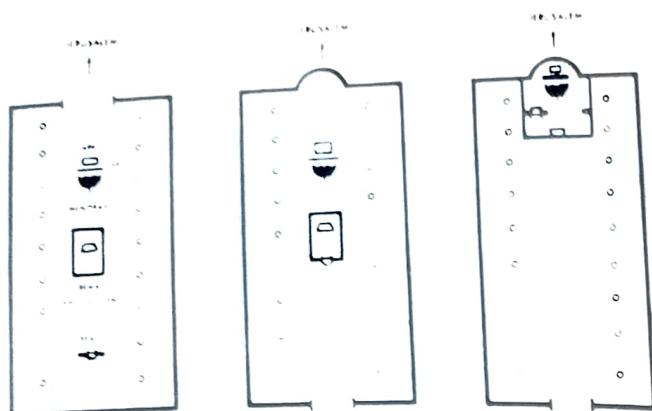
## THE ARK OF THE TABERNACLE

The Ark of the Tabernacle was a wooden casket used as a repository for the holy things (Tablets of the Law). It was considered the throne or dwelling place for the Lord. The Ark was the symbol of God's personal presence, the place where the divine communication was granted and where the atonement was received. (12) The Ark in the Holy of Holies was protected and concealed by a veil to emphasize the "shekinah" or glory of God under His tent. A seven-branched candlestick (*menorah*) was placed in front of the veil. *Menorah* meant "sacred candelabrum." It was one of the chief appointments of the temple (4 Kgs. 4, 10 - Ex. 25, 31). The lampstand had a central shaft with three arms reaching out on each side. On each of the six branches there was a bowl of olive oil and a wick (Lv. 24, 2). It was looked upon as a mystic symbol of light and life for God's manifestation in the world. (13)

Some looked upon the seven lamps as symbolic of the seven planets; others saw it portrayed as the tree of life, and still others saw it portrayed as symbolic of the creation of the universe in six days and the center light as representing the Sabbath.

11. Cf. "Bema," Pierre Daou, *The History of the Maronites*, Vol. II.
12. Op. Cit., McKenzie, "Ark of the Tabernacle," p. 55.
13. Cf. *NCE* "Menorah".

Fig. 1. The Synagogue



One will note that the seat of Moses, the bema and the ark were gradually drawn closer to each other until they were all located in the Holy of Holies. In any event, regardless of the various floor plans, the three focal points around which the assembly gathered for worship in the synagogue were the seat of Moses with the ambo on the bema; the ark of the tabernacle with the veil and menorah; the Holy of Holies pointing toward Jerusalem.

## THE ALTAR

Although the altar was not used in the synagogue during the word service, it symbolized the place where a person had a meeting with God and often was marked by a stone (Gen. 38, 10 - 22). Altar comes from the Hebrew word *Mizbeah* (to slaughter) and was looked upon as the place where the victim was slaughtered as an offering to God (Lv. 9, 13). McKenzie says: "All dynamics of human life find their center in the image of the altar." It was a constant reminder and symbol of God's presence (Gen. 13, 18; 35, 7). Upon it communion was achieved with God as the offering was removed from the human to the divine sphere and blessings were received in return from God. There were two types of altars: 1] the altar of holocaust (3 Kgs. 2, 28) and 2] the altar of incense (Ex. 30, 1 - 5). (14)

The horns on the altar of sacrifice were a special sign of God's protective presence and thus the sanctuary was a "refuge."

### CHRISTIAN TEMPLE (HOUSE OF THE CHURCH)

The synagogue and its symbols of reverence and worship

14. Cf. *NCE*, "Altar" and *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Altar", McKenzie.



were no less revered by the early Christians. Ancient manuscripts reveal that the Christian communities gathered with the Jews at the synagogue for the service of the scriptures, and at a different time of day they reassembled to celebrate the breaking of the bread. (15) After some time, the service of the Word and the service of the Eucharist were joined together and observed at one principle celebration.

However, it is significant to note the development in the Christian understanding of the temple which was identified with the Body of Christ. The Church was not merely the symbolic but the real presence of God. This new temple was made up of the apostles and prophets who were the foundations of the temple. Christ was its cornerstone and principle of cohesion (unity) and each Christian was a living stone set on the foundation by the Holy Spirit. Together with Christ, the community of believers made up His dwelling place. (I Cor. 3, 9; 2 Cor. 6, 16; Ephs. 2, 19 - 22). This earthly temple was a forshadowing of the heavenly temple (Apoc. 3, 12; 7, 15). (16)

It is this understanding, handed on by the early Church, which formed the attitudes for Christian worship and formulated the guidelines for Church architecture in the Syro-Antiochene Church, the oldest tradition in the Catholic Church.

15. Cf. *The Early Liturgy*, Joseph Jungman, Notre Dame, Indiana; *The Mass*, Collegeville, Minn.
16. Op. cit., McKenzie, "Temple."

Fr. Bouyer notes that in this Church:

We have the remnants of a primitive Christianity, which even when it had ceased to be purely Jewish, remained for a time purely Semitic.....It is not surprising that the old Syrian Church appears as a Christianized version of a Jewish synagogue. (17)

The Christian liturgy, like that of the synagogue, served to gather, to build-up and to transform the community into the Lord's people (and, one might add, into the Lord's temple).

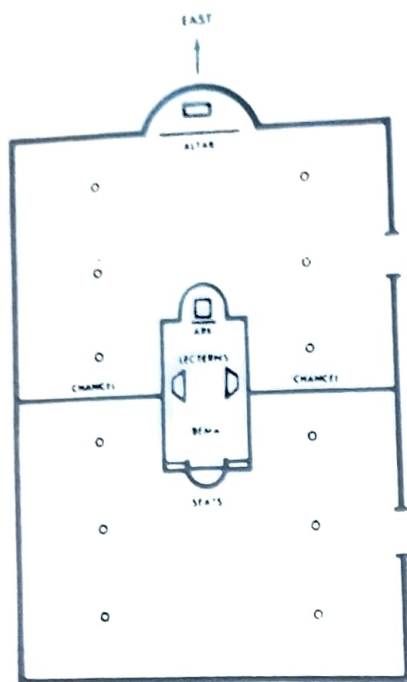
In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, Minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle.....We eagerly await the Savior, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory.(18)

The Service of the Word like that of the Jewish synagogue revolved around two key elements: the seat of the bishop and the ark of the Gospels. The community gathered around the U-shaped bema which was located in the center of the nave of the church. (19)

17. Op. cit., Bouyer, p. 25.

18. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Art. 8.

19. Cf. "Some Notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Traditions," Robert Taft.



**Fig. 2. Location of the altar in the early Syrian church pointing to the east, for these Christians not to Jerusalem but to the rising sun, the Sun of Justice.**

On it were placed the seat of the bishop and the benches for the priests and other ministers (west end), the ambo (used for the proclamation of the scriptures), the ark of the Gospels with the veil (in the east end) and a large candle replacing the menorah.

Fr. P. Daou speaks of the bema as a peculiarity of the Nestorian and Maronite Churches. Several Maronite manuscripts and prayers reveal the prominence of the bema for liturgical and didactic purposes.



"May your mystery intercede for us on the day of judgement before your awesome and powerful throne (bema)."

"I have entered your house, O God, and before your judgement seat (throne-bema) I bow down..."

"May the sacrifice which I have offered upon you (altar) prepare me to stand blameless before the throne (bema) of Christ."

Like its use in the synagogue, the bema was used to teach, to pray and to distribute the mysteries (sacraments). Fr. Daou says, "The throne of Stone (seat of Moses) on the bema with the Gospels was to signify the throne of Christ who will come to judge the world according to His Word and the twelve chairs were to signify the twelve Apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (20)

Two churches in the Patriarchal Sees of Yanouh and Eleage still have the bema adjacency to the west wall. It should be noted that Fr. Daou stresses the fact that the bema was outside the sanctuary because in the Kingdom there will be no further teaching of the symbols of Faith.

The Service of the Eucharist introduced two notable changes in the Temple. The altar and the east apse, pointing to the glorious second coming of Christ. The temple, or the "house of the Church" (as it was called in the early Church) now included an added feature -- a "C" shaped altar located in the apse away from the east wall. (21) It was concealed

20. Cf. "Bema," Newsletter June, 1974, Bishop Zayek.

21. The "C" shaped altar most likely was designed to conform to the shape of the semi-circular apse of the sanctuary (temple).

by a second veil which marked the Holy of Holies. Moreover, the temple was no longer facing toward Jerusalem but toward the East which was looked upon as the symbolic place for the second coming of the Lord.

## WORSHIP SERVICE: SERVICE OF THE WORD

Before the Word Service, the bishop with the presbyters and deacons entered the "house of the Church" and received the gifts presented by the faithful for celebration. The ministers prepared the gifts for the service of the Eucharist. The faithful gathered around the bema where the bishop and presbyters presided from the chair and the 12 benches (in the west end). The Gospel Book was enthroned in the ark (at the east end) which was concealed by a veil. There were two lecturns on the bema: the one (on the south side) for the reading of the Gospel, and the other (on the north side) for the other readings.

## SERVICE OF THE ANAPHORA

After the Word Service, the clergy and the faithful processed Eastward with the gifts into the Holy of Holies where the curtain was drawn back and they assembled around the altar. (Note well: the dynamic element of christian celebration was expressed in the procession of all the assembly.) (22)

The whole assembly, far from being a static mass of spectators, remained an organic gathering of worshippers, first centered on

22. Op. Cit., Bouyer, p. 88.

the Ark, for hearing and meditating upon the scriptures, and finally going toward the east all together, for the Eucharistic prayer and the final communion. (23)

In this Syrian tradition, the clergy were present among the people as in the worship of the synagogue. This highlighted the fact that although the clergy exercised a role of leadership, the action remains a collective action in which all take part together. The presiding minister was the center of the whole body assembled around him either at the bema or the altar. In this tradition, the celebrant does not refer the attention of the community to himself but to Christ in the scriptures (at the bema), Christ in the Eucharist (at the altar), and Christ at His second coming (in the East Wall or apse).

In light of these observations, which provide some insightful background on the architectural style of the Syrian Aramaic Church and the position of its liturgical appointments, we hope to offer some general guidelines to assist in the construction of new churches and the renovation of existing churches for the Diocese of Saint Maron. While the process of returning to our original architectural style may at times be difficult or painful, it is essential that the churches of the Diocese begin to reflect the dignity, beauty and uniqueness which are characteristically ours, as heirs of the Syro-Antiochene tradition.

These guidelines briefly state and explain the basic liturgical principles affecting the design of a church. The practical application of these principles may vary with every church that

23. Op. Cit., Bouyer, p. 35.



is built or renovated according to the needs and conditions of the Parish Community.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH BUILDING

The temple, first and foremost, serves as a gathering place or a meeting house for God's people. The interior design and arrangement, therefore, should aim at making the assembly a dynamic, active and joyful community of worship.

The space must be serviceable, generous, functional, flexible. Yet it should maintain a sense of dignity and transcendence which render testimony to the "sacred space." It should allow the community to experience its unity in faith and worship and should provide space for private prayer.

Given the ancient monastic character of the Maronite Church (branch of the Syro-Aramaic), the emphasis should be on simplicity, austerity and on a modest use of materials. This should lend itself to less expensive construction costs. Moreover, it should enable a parish to identify with and to witness to a spirit of authentic Christian poverty and simplicity in its relationship with God and each other as members of the same family of worship.

## SERVICE OF THE WORD

The People of God come together to listen to His Word proclaimed and explained. This Word transforms the community and evokes from them a response of prayer, commitment and sacrifice. The place for the celebration of this service is the lecturn (ambo) on the elevated platform (bema -- Mt. 19,

## BEMA

The bema, a raised dais used to stand on and to read, with the ambo is the first of three focal points in the Holy Mysteries. It should be simple in design and visually related to the altar and the congregation.

While the full restoration of the bema to the center of the nave may be difficult, several important points should be made. First, the bema should be placed *outside* the sanctuary in order to emphasize the Service of the Word as distinct from the Service of the Eucharist. Second, the bema should be large enough to include space for the lecturn (ambo), the chair (of the celebrant), and the celebrant.

## USE OF THE BEMA

Since the bema is the place from which the Service of the Word is proclaimed, the lector and priest should use it only for prayer and scripture readings. Any other functions and ministries should not be performed from there (ex.: cantor).

## AMBO

The lecturn is used to rest the Book of the Scriptures. It should be simple in design but important in appearance, practical for reading, uncluttered, properly lighted and equipped with a microphone. Though two ambos are tra-

ditional, it is in fact better to have only one, in order to emphasize the intimate unity of the Scripture readings with each other and the homily. This lecturn on the bema should be located in a place of honor and good visibility for the assembly. The ideal place is the center of the main aisle (in the nave) and, if this is not possible, then to the right of the altar (as the celebrant faces the people) but outside of the Holy of Holies.

Two large candles, one at each side, are to be placed at the ambo.

## CHAIR

The chair of the celebrant is a symbol of the priest's authority to preside and to teach. The design should be strong, yet simple, and modest, without making the priest appear as judge or ruler. The chair should be placed on the west end of the bema, with the ambo at the east end and *not* in the apse behind the altar. If it cannot be placed on the bema, then it should be placed in the nave *near* the bema and outside of the sanctuary. Finally, if either of these places is not possible, then and only then should the chair be placed in the sanctuary, but *not* in the apse (since this place is reserved *only* for the bishop). The servers' benches should be located at some other location than the bema and the chair of the presiding celebrant.

## NICHE (ARK OF THE SCRIPTURES)

A niche should be provided for the reservation of the Book of Gospels. This niche may be located in the wall of the



nave or of the sanctuary. This holy space for the Holy Scriptures should be visible, uncluttered and reserved only for the Scriptures. (Booklets, prayer texts, etc..., should not be placed in this niche.) The niche should be veiled by a precious cloth (or curtain) and should have a sanctuary lamp burning before it to symbolize the presence of the Lord Jesus in His Word. The Book of the Gospels should be large and beautiful. (A menorah may be used here.)

## INCENSE STAND

The incense stand (used during the *Hoosoyo* of the Word Service) should be near the ambo to the right of the bema.

## LIGHTING

The lighting should make reading effortless and at the same time should highlight the focal points without detracting from them.

## MATERIALS

The bema, the ambo, the chair, the incense stand and the niche may be made of wood or any other material which suggests strength and permanence. It is recommended that these liturgical appointments be portable so that they can be removed if necessary and thereby offer flexibility in the temple.

In churches with "traditional side altars," it is recommended that one of the side altars be used as the niche to reserve the

## SERVICE OF THE MYSTERIES

### SANCTUARY

The sanctuary, or the Holy of Holies wherein the Service of the Eucharist is celebrated, is the second focal point. During this service the Lord Jesus stands in the midst of His people, as their priest and brother. For this reason, the sanctuary must not appear withdrawn from the assembly. Only objects which are needed for community worship belong in the sanctuary. Such objects should never draw attention from the celebrant who presides. The ministers of worship, therefore, should not be overwhelmed by excessive dimensions of these objects. Clutter should be avoided; kneelers, unnecessary chairs, tables, etc..., should not occupy the space.

### CURTAIN

Since the curtain was traditional for the Syrian Aramaic Church, it is recommended that where possible it be restored. The curtain may conceal the entire sanctuary or just the altar--and only for the Word Service. However, when the liturgical action moves to the altar, then the curtain should be drawn back so as not to obscure the Service of the Holy Mysteries.

The altar is the table of the Lord and the place of sacrifice. The essential reason for building a temple is that Christians may assemble in a place for the celebration of the Eucharist. It follows that the altar must be the central feature of every church building.

It should be simple, free-standing, strong in design and table-like in appearance. Its size and shape should be determined by the practical consideration of use and its relationship to the size of the overall structure (traditionally, the altar--i.e. the *mensa* or table top--was "C" shaped).

The altar should be permanent and be placed close to the people so that the community may sense their unity with the celebrant. There should be *only* one altar in the body of the temple, for the altar is the symbol of the one Christ and of the unity He gives to His people. St. Ignatius of Antioch stressed the rule of the one altar to a church. This has always remained the general practice of the Eastern Churches and is one which the Western Church is striving to restore.

The one altar gives symbolic expression to the oneness of the Church and her worship with Christ, Who is the priest and the victim.

St. Ephrem himself speaks of the *one Spirit* overshadowing the *one altar* of the temple. If necessary it may be raised from the sanctuary floor but only for the purpose of making the altar and the celebrant more visible to the people.

Embellishments such as figures, mottoes, emblems and decorations should be at a very minimum, for the altar is sign



and symbol of itself. The altar may be made of stone, wood or any other solid materials.

## CROSS

The cross may be located in the sanctuary in a variety of ways. Good liturgical design allows going beyond the conventional symmetrical arrangement of objects in the sanctuary. A processional cross can be used so that it effectively proclaims to the people the passion of the Lord and His victory over death. In no circumstances should the cross obstruct the assembly's view, either of the celebrant or of the cup and plate on the altar. Whenever it is placed in the sanctuary, the cross is of lesser significance than the altar for attention. If the celebrant uses a handcross for liturgy, there is no need for an additional cross on the altar. (24)

## CANDLESTICKS

The candlesticks may be placed on the altar or preferably on the floor adjacent to it. They may vary in number according to the solemnity of the celebration (for example: 4 candles for pontifical celebrations). As with the cross, they should not diminish the importance of the altar. The cross and the candles are not decorations of the altar, but function as symbols in the act of public worship.

## TABLE OF PREPARATION

The table for the preparation of the Holy Mysteries should be simple. It should not resemble nor compete with the altar.

24. "The Cross," Newsletter, Ronald N. Beshara

It may be located in the sanctuary. However, the nave of the temple is preferred since the preparation rite originally took place outside the sanctuary and before the Service of the Word. It should be large enough to hold several cups and plates. Candles and a cross are not required on this table.

## RESERVATION OF THE EUCHARIST

Jesus Christ is present in His Church in many ways. First, Christ is seen to be present among His people gathered in His name; then in His Word, as the Scriptures are read and explained; in the person of the ministers; in the symbol of the altar and in a unique way, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the Eucharist.

The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in a temple for the communion of the sick, to encourage devotion to Jesus, the Bread of Life, to affirm his eternal presence among us in the Sacrament of Love, and to facilitate distribution of communion at the Holy Mysteries. The place of reservation for the Eucharist should be truly prominent. In the past the Eucharist was reserved in a tabernacle shaped in the form of a dove to emphasize the dynamic role of the Spirit. It should be close to the altar to allow the celebrant easy access. It may be reserved only in one place in the temple.

The tabernacle should be simple, fixed and safe. A niche in the wall of the sanctuary, opposite the niche for the scriptures, is the ideal place for the tabernacle of reservation. The niche for reservation should never be a full altar. A tabernacle veil is recommended as with the ark of the Gospels (since it is in keeping with the tradition of veils in the Syrian Church). A lamp should burn continually near the tabernacle as a sign of honor and a symbol of the presence of the Lord.



Note: In churches where there are side altars, the sacrament may be reserved on one set aside for this purpose. This setting brings the sacrament closer to the people for private devotion. Special lighting and decoration should be employed to make evident the purpose. Eucharistic themes can appear throughout the immediate area (peacocks, fish, loaves of bread, grapes and wheat, cup and plate). While mosaics and other art forms, in keeping with the Eastern traditions, may be employed, statues, crosses, etc..., should never be placed above or adjacent to the shrine of reservation. There should be no other tabernacles in the temple.

### BAPTISMAL FONT

The font relates to the altar as Baptism-Chrisamation relate to the Eucharist. A font within the body of the temple can be a powerful symbol to the assembly of their identity as God's sons and daughters. By its location, design and size, the font should be one of the prominent articles in the temple. It is a mistake to separate the font from the temple proper as a distinct and secluded baptistry. In the early Syrian churches the Word Service of the Initiation Mysteries was celebrated at the bema.

The font should be located in a space which will make possible the celebration with either a relatively small group or with the entire congregation.

The font should be large and even provide for the immersion of infants.



# THE TEMPLE OF THE CHURCH

## TEMPLE

The temple is the visible sign of the invisible communion which exists between the Lord and His people. By its very structure and style, it must affirm the living and abiding presence of God with humankind. It must always welcome the stranger and lead the faithful on its pilgrimage to the Kingdom. The building itself must always reflect the simplicity and austerity of its Founder, Saint Maron. While it should provide a haven for rest, reflection and prayer, it should never separate the assembly from the brotherhood of mankind and its needs.

## NAVE

The nave or church proper should provide some free space for the people to move easily toward the sanctuary for the Eucharist. Special liturgical celebrations (funeral and wedding) and processions must also be considered when planning this space.

## SEATING

The seating should not immobilize the community. It should be comfortable and designed in such a way so as to allow the people to see each other while they look toward the celebrant during the focal points of the liturgy. Mobile and portable seating is preferred in keeping with the dynamic aspects of worship which are highlighted in the Maronite liturgy.

(Note: The custom was for the community [excluding elderly and the sick] to stand and relax on the T-bar). If heavy, fixed pews are to be used, they should be kept to a minimum and be as simple as possible. (Fr. M. Hayek points out that pews were not used in Maronite churches until after 1689.) At no time should there be kneelers. (The body position of kneeling is not characteristic of Sunday worship which is a commemoration of the resurrection of the Lord. Kneeling is meant to manifest a sign of repentance or sorrow and not adoration which is expressed by a profound bow or metany.)

## RAILS

Since the community was never separated by barriers from the clergy and the focal points (i.e., bema, altar), communion rails should not be used to define the sanctuary. Moreover, the custom of kneeling for communion is not only foreign to our tradition but also is no longer used in the Western tradition.

## ACOUSTICS

Acoustics are very important. In a temple where the Word cannot be heard or is muffled by echoes, the community is discouraged from good worship. Good acoustics for the spoken word and for community prayer and music are essential to the purpose and function of a church. The liturgical celebration necessitates that the readings and singing be heard distinctly by all. Therefore, where necessary, electronic sound systems should be used.

## LIGHTS

Special care must be given to the lighting in the temple. Both natural and electric lighting should illumine the assembly and the focal points of the temple and make reading as easy as possible. Since our tradition places great emphasis on light, it is recommended that steps be taken to permit as much natural light as possible to infuse the temple through skylites and by windows in the four walls of the temple. Window design should be arched to depict the dynamic aspect of the faith (namely, that life come from God and returns to God). The lighting fixtures should never be regarded as pieces of ornamentation, and therefore should not be used to detract from the primary function of the space.

## EAST

The position of the temple on the land is of great importance for the Antiochene tradition because it is the third focal point of worship. The apse or Holy of Holies should be directed into the East so that the faithful may focus attention on the awaited second coming of the Lord Jesus. At the same time this strategic position of the temple permits maximum use of light from the rising sun into the sanctuary.

## ENTRY

The main entrance is traditionally located in the south wall of the temple. If this is not practical then the west wall is recommended. The entrance from the West underscores the movement of the people from the region of darkness and sin into the region of light and life (East - Jesus, the Rising Sun -



Source of Light and Life). The entire area should be generously proportioned so that it can be a friendly meeting place for people, and designed so that people may more easily make the transition required for worship in the temple. Since the entrance way can be used for liturgical celebrations (processions, etc...) it should be large enough. Handicapped and aged persons must be considered when designing the steps and entrances.

## IMAGES

The east wall of the sanctuary should always be reserved for the image of Christ Incarnate. It should call to mind the mystery of Christ's suffering and glorification, and the journey of the Church toward the Kingdom.

By image is meant any paintings, fresco, banner, mosaic or stained glass window which fosters remembrance of this central mystery of Christian Faith, namely the death and resurrection of Christ.

The image should be strong in color and line but not too large so as to detract from the other focal points: the bema and the altar. The medium of the image should be in keeping with the style of Eastern Church iconography, particularly that of the Rabboula Tradition.

The use of statues, stations and other forms of sculpture though very beautiful are not the tradition of the Maronite Church. Although they have been in use for several hundred years, it is important to note that the Western Church, from which this tradition was adopted, has begun to use Eastern art forms (icons, mosaics, tapestry, frescoes).

## CHOIR

The choir is a very important ministry for good worship. (In the Maronite Church this importance is noted by the role of the cantor.) The location should enable them to be heard and to be seen by the assembly, to encourage participation of the assembly and to unite them with the assembly.

Musical instruments should be characteristic of the Maronite traditions.

## OTHER SPATIAL NEEDS

Communities must move about easily and in orderly fashion during the Holy Mysteries, the celebration of the sacraments, and other special services which are a part of the yearly liturgical cycle. The temple should be designed to facilitate such congregational movement, and seating should always be arranged to encourage the same. Generally speaking, the sanctuary, nave and sacristy should always be uncluttered. Nothing but the minimum required furnishings should be permitted.

## CELEBRANT

A last point must be underlined. The presence of the clergy among the faithful, in the primitive churches as in the synagogues, emphasizes the fact that, in spite of its role of leadership, the "action" remains a collective action in which all take part together. There is not a worship of the clergy performed for the passive attendance of the congregation, but a congregational worship in which all pray together in the

meditation of the word communicated by the ministers, and participate with them in a common Eucharist, by the offering, their responses to the consecration prayer and their communion. The presiding bishop or priest acts always as the center of the whole body assembled around him, either at the bema or at the altar: never as a single performer before an audience having only to look at him! Also, if he is at the center of the gathering, he is always referring it, and himself, not to himself, but to a transcendent focus: the Word of the Gospel, the table of the Word made flesh and our food, and finally the eternal advent of the Lord of whom he is only the minister. Such a worship is certainly hierarchical, but in the sense of being an organic worship where every member has his own role to play at his own place, while nobody remains passive, the whole body acting together in unity. (25)

25. Cf. Bouyer.



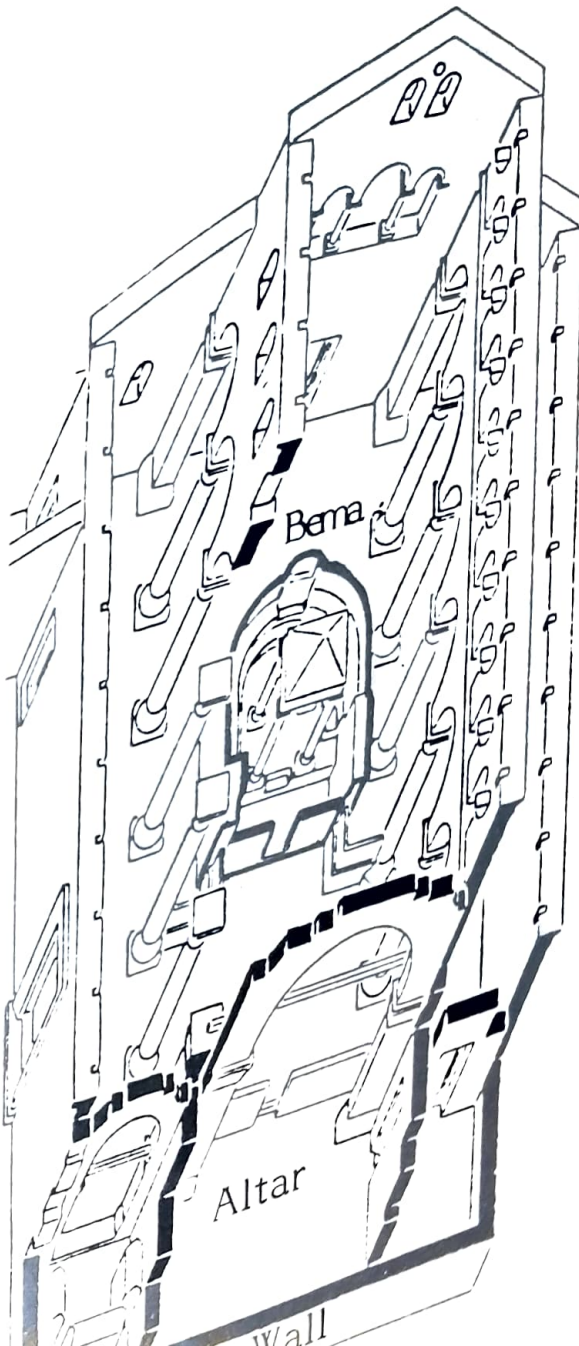
## Appendix

This temple floor plan clearly highlights the importance of the 3 focal points:

\***BEMA** - the elevated platform (horseshoe) for the readings of Scripture.

\***ALTAR** -located in the sanctuary at which the Eucharist is celebrated. The Holy of Holies is defined by an arch with an access to the sacristy.

\***EAST WALL** -reminding the community of the Kingdom and the Lord of glory and light.



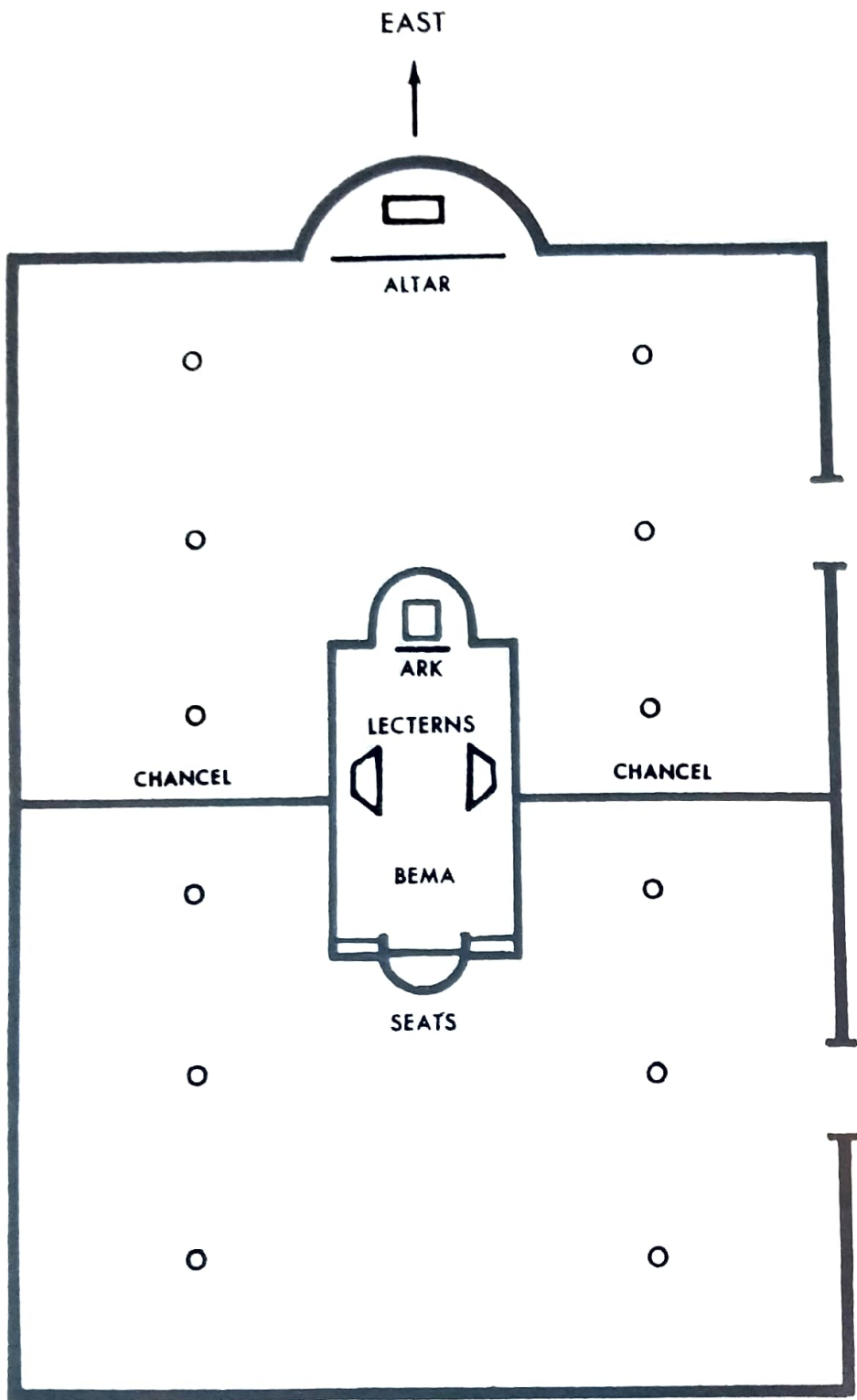


Fig. 1 Location of the altar in the early Syrian church pointing to the east, for these Christians not to Jerusalem but to the rising sun, the Sun of Justice.



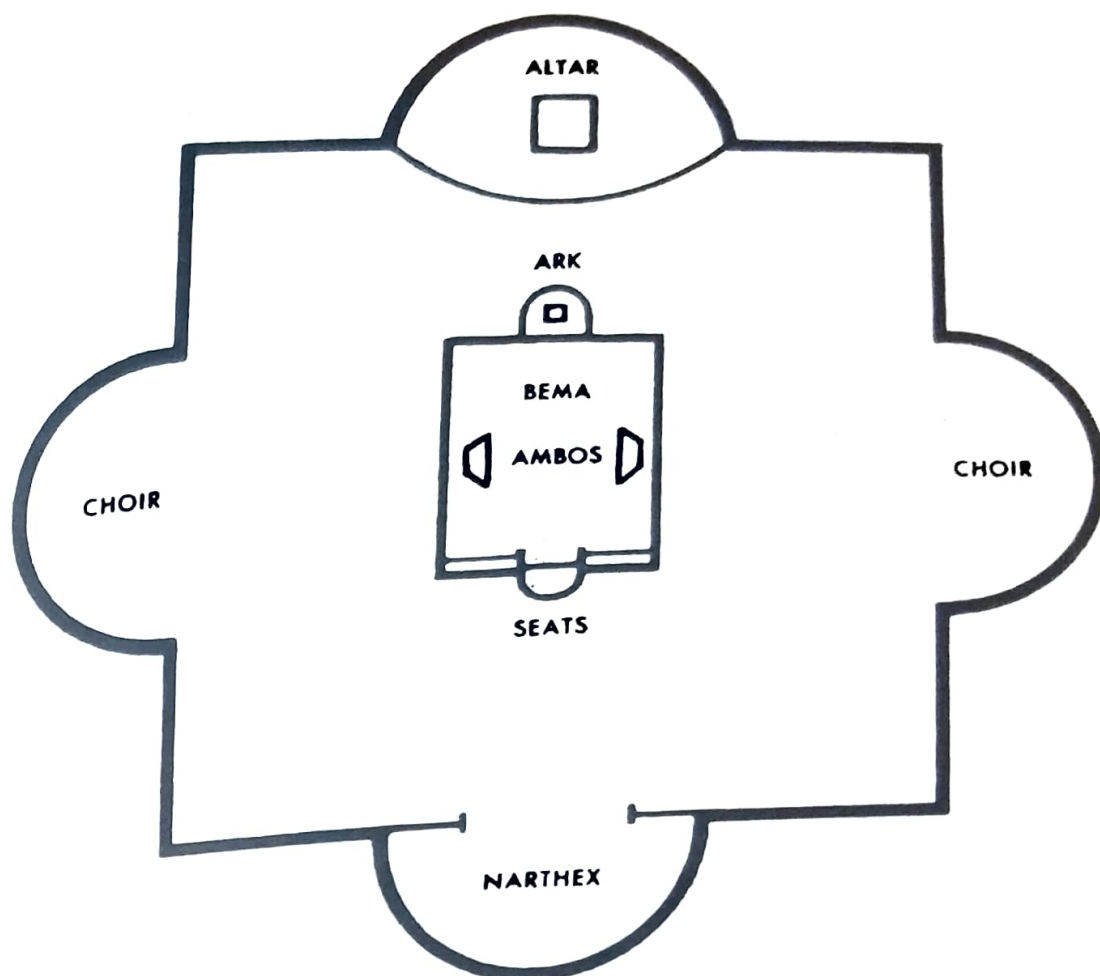


Fig. 2 Location of the altar in the early Byzantine church, ideally arranged for the assembly grouped around the bishop and readers to proceed with the offertory and later gather around the altar. Today there is a single lectern (rather than ambo) in the center of the *bema* (facing the altar). This may have existed even before the Ark disappeared.

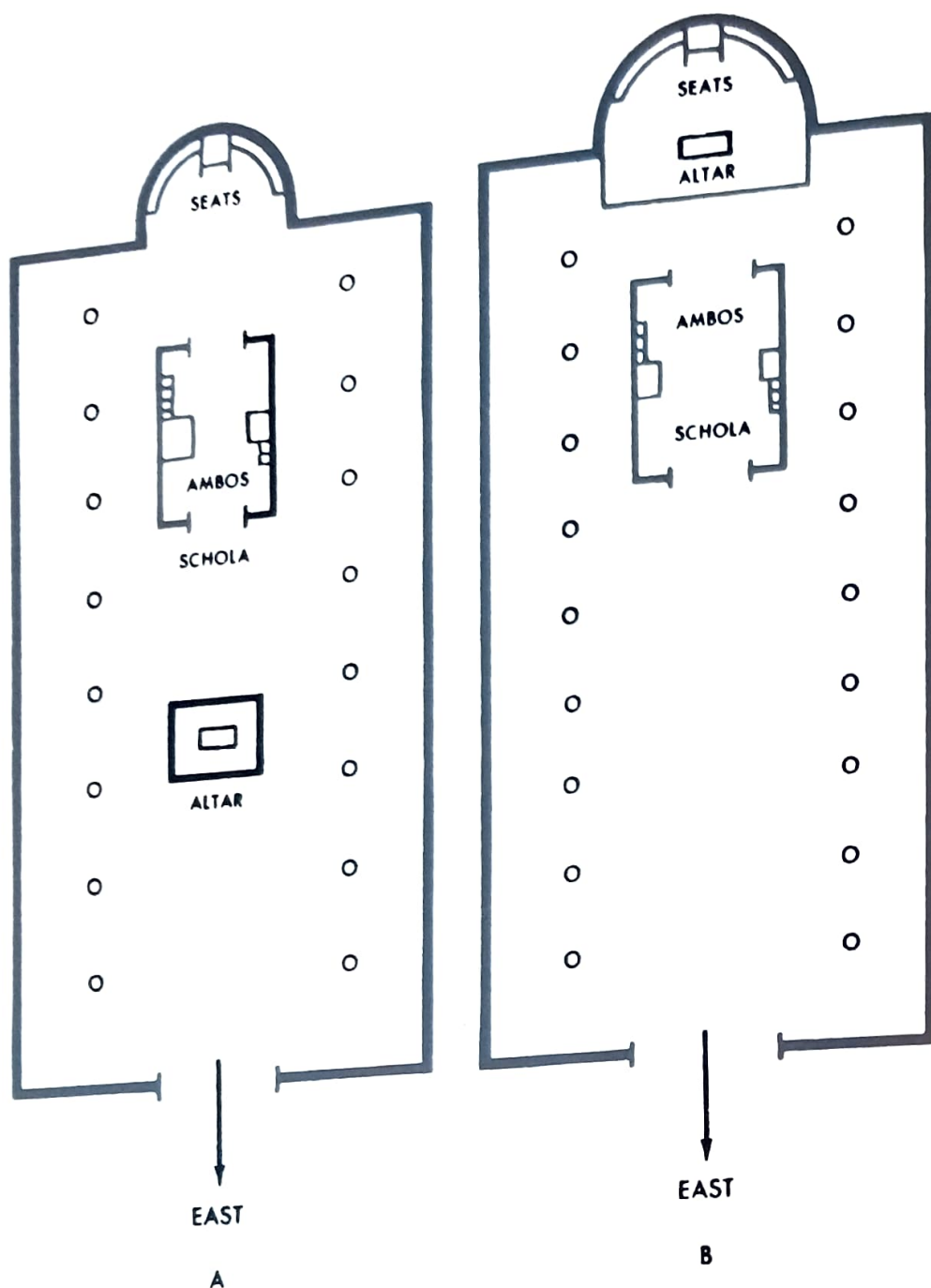


Fig. 3 Location of the altar in the Roman basilica-type church, in which *bema* and Ark were modified and later replaced by the *schola*, an oblong enclosure, open at both ends, where ministers, readers, and singers stood together.

# WORD, MYSTERIES and KINGDOM

