

CHURCH OF MARY

1825

Mother of God

1990

BENEATH the boggy scalp of bare Ben Bulben's head lies the stony remains of an ancient village. Recent excavations there have uncovered the clear outline of a human habitation, said to be five thousand years old. Archaeologists are confident that further study of the site will yield new insights into the people who inhabited these buildings, their way of life, their civilisation, their customs and beliefs.

There has always been a very close relationship between buildings and the people who plan, build, occupy and use them. Purpose built, they reflect the spirit of man. This is especially true of Churches. Church architecture has always sought to express man's desire for communion with God. Two primary ideas have inspired the architects of Christian Churches, (i) that the building itself (as sign) be a creative force in the life it serves and (ii) that it provide an interior space conducive to the worthy celebration of the whole range of liturgical worship.

When the Second Vatican's Council in its constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, promulgated in 1963, called for the restoration and promotion of sacred Liturgy the aim was to help people "take part in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. The Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand the texts and rites with ease and take part in them fully, actively and as is proper to a community".

In the past twenty-seven years great strides have been made to promote this renewal. The main thrust of post-Vatican II liturgy concentrates on the assembly — the people coming together to worship.

The new emphasis was to be on people rather than objects. Liturgical celebration was to be a corporate experience expressed with simplicity and flexibility. This was to have obvious implications for the architecture of Churches, especially the organisation of interior space. It is not enough for a building to look like a Church. It must work as a place for liturgy. Our pictures show views of the recently renovated Church of Mary Mother of God, Newtownmanor. It is an interesting example of the effect the liturgical renewal movement is having on modern Church design and more importantly the effect which modern Church design can have on liturgical renewal.

Fr. Patsy Young.

ON THE feast of Corpus Christi I spent all of the evening and some of the night around here. I spent quite a while in the Church and around it examining every aspect of the place. I drove around the roads, down by Shriff, where Fr. Matt O'Carroll lived, round by Lough Gill to Parkes Castle — which was officially opened the next day — up Carrickanarrow, past Lough Doon and up Banagher to watch the sun go down over Lough Gill. As it went down it filled the world with golden light. Everything was bathed in it. It was hard for me

to imagine that anywhere could be more beautiful than the Manor with its Church, Castle, and people.

The sun dipped lower and lower in the western sky. The shadows lengthened. The dusk and gloom of the summer twilight enveloped all things. As the sun retreated, one by one the colours and all the lights were extinguished. Darkness devoured them without a trace. It was hard to imagine that it was the same world I was looking at.

I came back to the Church. There was a light on inside this place and I found my eyes drawn to the stained-glass window. Against the background of darkness it glowed with a beauty that was simply stunning. And the outlines of the figure on the window stood out clearly. The light inside was shining not so much on the window, as through it. I had to wait till the sun went down and darkness set in to appreciate its beauty. This beauty was revealed only because there was a light inside.

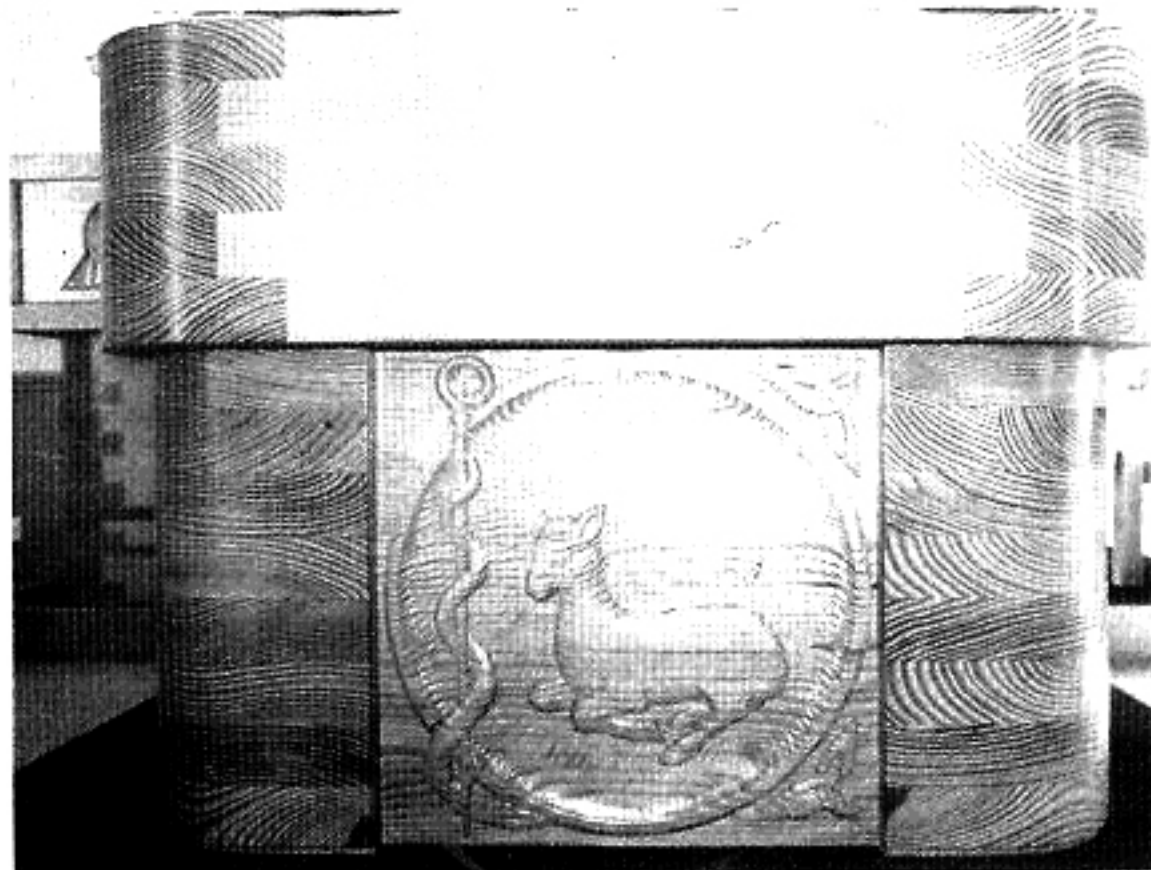
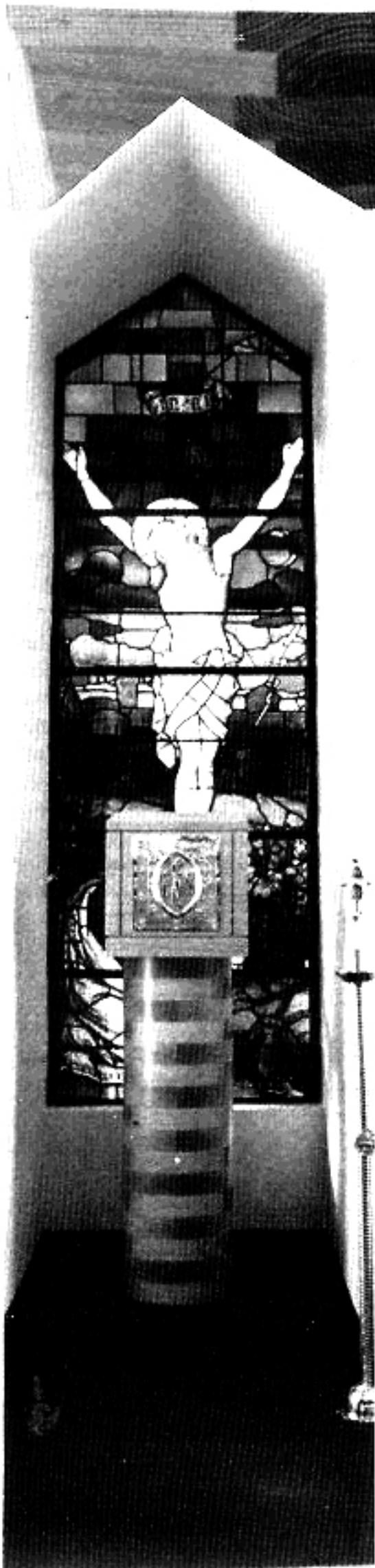
Unlike us, Mary was never subject to the Prince of Darkness — not even for a moment. From the very first moment of her existence she belonged to the Kingdom of Light, that is the Kingdom of God. The light of God's grace illuminated her from within, so that no matter how deep was the darkness that surrounded her, she was still in the light. Far from extinguishing her light, the darkness merely served to show it up. Our ancestors knew that it was through the humble Mary that Christ's powerful light shone into their world of darkness and shadows. They were very much aware that the incredible had occurred nineteen centuries earlier; the final breakthrough in human history happened, for in an obscure village, an obscure woman of faith and prayer said yes to the gracious request of the Almighty God to become the Mother of His Son. By courtesy of Mary, God broke through to Man in Jesus Christ and man broke through to God. By courtesy of Mary we also are called and are sons and daughters of the Father. With unspeakable joy in the depths of our hearts we give this — the best house is the parish — to God in honour of Mary His Mother. In dedicating the Church to Mary, Mother of God, we are remembering her first title — Her most recent title is Mother of the Church. We are confident that she will look down on, protect and listen to all who assemble here in faith, hope and love with a mother's attentive love.' — Fr. Gerry Comiskey, speaking on the day of dedication, 24 June 1990.



Above: The beautiful window in honour of the Mother of God.

Below: The Ambo — the world, the Cross, the Word of God.





*Top: Most Reverend Dr. Francis MacKiernan, Bishop of Kilmore, Very Rev. Fr Patsy Young, P.P., and Fr Gerry Comiskey, with some of the clergy celebrating dedication day. The three magnificent stained-glass windows were a gift from the **Sisters of Mercy, Sligo**. They refract light, a symbol of the contrast of our lives: light-darkness; life-death; knowledge-ignorance; faith-doubt.*

Right (top): The altar is the common table of the Assembly on which sacrifice and thanksgiving are offered and from which nourishment is received.

Left: The Tabernacle, where the Eucharist is reserved for Adoration and so that Communion may be brought to the sick.

Right (bottom): The interior of the Church. All of the furniture was made in Leitrim by Messrs Duignan & Co., Drumsna, who specialize in Church furniture.