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NEGOTIATING TRADITION AND TECHNOLOGY:
BENZIGER BROTHERS' TRADE CATALOGUES OF CHURCH GOODS,
1879-1937

by

Rachel Coffey

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

Spring 2001

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PREFACE

In the spring of 1999 I became intrigued by Benziger Brothers’ trade catalogues during Gretchen Buggeln’s course, “Artifact and Belief.” My continuing interest in Benziger Brothers stems from a certain discomfort I felt upon viewing their advertising for the first time. In the pages of their catalogues, articles that were unique, pure, and sacred from my point of view became commercial and debased in their multiplicity. I must admit that, despite a Catholic upbringing, I was not familiar with these objects handled by the priest and housed in the sanctuary: they were things to be seen from a distance and certainly not to be touched. The display of these mysterious objects in such a straight-forward, almost naked manner astounded me. The principal difference between the items advertised on the page and those seen in a church was that those in the church were sacred. Once purchased, many would be consecrated or blessed. Although this action would not alter the physical dimension of the object, it would change its character, dedicating it to a sacred purpose and thereby erasing its status as a commodity. Yet the forms on Benziger Brothers’ pages looked sacred to me, even if by the Church’s standards they were not. This unexpected intersection of the holy and the profane drew me into this subject.

The catalogues also suggested to me for the first time that church interiors change as a result of conscious choice. I had always viewed churches and their decorations as static and stable, beyond the reach of fickle times and styles. Either that, or they grew old
and musty and fell into disuse. I imagined that changes in church interiors, in the form of remodeling or replacing old furnishings, could be somewhat traumatic. I became interested in exploring this element of change, particularly modernization, in the context of Benziger Brothers’ goods.

An extensive search in the collections of public archives has yielded thirteen Benziger Brothers catalogues of church goods, which date from 1879 to 1937. They are the focus of this study. Although incomplete in range, these catalogues might be considered representative of Benziger Brothers and its manufacture during, what appears to be, the height of its success. The absence of company records, and the fact that manufactured church objects were rarely, if ever, marked, contribute to the challenges of studying this type of material.

There are many people who helped make this work possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my insightful advisor, Neville Thompson, who guided this project with a unique blend of patience and scrutiny. I am also indebted to her for turning Winterthur Library into Benziger Brothers Central—through her agency photocopies of many of the catalogues I reference were acquired for my use and that of future researchers. Shawn Weldon, of the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center, shared his knowledge with me and led me to key sources, and for his contribution I am very appreciative. The staff of the Library of Congress, New York Public Library, Smithsonian Library at Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Avery Architecture and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, Special Collections at the University of
Delaware, and Hagley Library also came to my aid. Thanks also go to members of the Winterthur Library staff, who were excellent to me, as always.

I am grateful to Saul Zalesch for early tips and his encouragement to pursue further research on this topic. The enthusiasm and guidance of my professors in the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture spurred and sustained my efforts at various points—to Gretchen Buggeln and Bernie Herman, I am thankful. The support of my classmates has eased this process in ways too numerous to mention, yet I would like to thank Emily Zaiden in particular for reading and commenting upon a draft of this paper. I alone am responsible for any shortcomings.

Special thanks go to my family and friends, and my husband, Jamie, in particular—for seeing me through the past two years and the years before that.

I dedicate this labor to my mother.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to a small, but growing, body of scholarly work on the material culture of American Catholicism. It assumes the central importance of the trade catalogue as a layered cultural object.

Benziger Brothers was a New York firm defined by the material needs of Catholic churches and parishioners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1873 it began publishing illustrated catalogues of its church ornaments. An extensive search of public archives has yielded thirteen such catalogues, which date from 1879 to 1937. These objects serve as the basis of an investigation into the contest between tradition and technology. Specific attention is drawn to lighting and the impact of modern systems upon the conservative Church and its suppliers. This thesis finds that the catalogues, within the context of American Catholic practice, afford a microcosmic view of the give and take that occurs when any culture modernizes.
Introduction

In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church struggled to find its place in the modern world. Historian Jay Dolan states:

The influence of modernity, with its new sciences and technology, redefined the universe, making it less mysterious and less dependent upon religion to solve its riddles. New philosophies and new theologies transformed the meaning of God and ultimately the meaning of religion. A modern schism, as historian Martin Marty put it, was taking place during the nineteenth century, and religion was being relocated to the periphery of society. Though the schism ushered in by these forces of modernity affected all religions, Roman Catholicism was especially threatened, and its reaction at times became extreme. The church’s authority, now that it was being challenged, was reasserted with excessive vigor.

A new piety arose out of the Church’s response to the challenge of modernity. Devotional Catholicism was designed to reclaim the authority of the Church and in the process unify Catholic practice. Benziger Brothers assumed a complex role in this contest between tradition and modernity as one of the manufacturers of religious goods required by newly revived devotions. Its machines and factory were emblematic of modernity, yet Benziger Brothers was accommodated and even rewarded by the Church authority it threatened. This tension forms the backdrop of the following essay.
Chapter 1

CONTEXT

Devotional Catholicism

Benziger Brothers’ relationship to a period of transition that took place in
American Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century is a direct one. Begun in the 1840s,
taking hold in the 1860s, and continuing into the first few decades of the twentieth
century, devotional Catholicism defined the faith of Catholics and the product line of
Benziger Brothers. Performing a devotion was an exercise of piety. By reciting
prescribed prayers to Jesus, Mary, or a particular saint, either privately or communally
under the guidance of a priest, individuals fed spiritual needs that could not be met by the
sacraments or Mass alone. Rituals and processions centered around the Eucharist, the
rosary, and relics became the norm. Despite a kinship with folk religion, these devotional
exercises were indulgenced by the papacy and encouraged by Church councils. They
were personal, emotional, and demonstrative in character, yet determined and controlled
by the clergy.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Catholic Church turned to devotional
Catholicism and a more dictatorial style as a means to reverse what it feared was a
fragmentation among its members. The unity of the American Catholic community was
threatened throughout the century as newly arriving Catholic immigrants of differing
ethnic and economic backgrounds redefined what had previously been a rather homogenous group. All the rules and regulations that characterized devotional Catholicism were a means to standardize and unify Catholic practice. One reason for its popularity in the United States was due to its appeal to immigrants in a foreign land. Devotional Catholicism satisfied a need for ritual and structure; nurtured a sense of community through activities conducted in the vernacular, rather than the Latin of Mass; addressed temporal concerns, such as health and wealth; and created a culture of authority that allowed immigrant Catholics to feel secure in what could be a hostile new world.

Prior to the onset of devotional Catholicism and the controls that came with it, American Catholic parishes took their cues from neighboring Protestant churches. Like them, they were often congregationalist and simply decorated. The movement toward devotional Catholicism in the mid-nineteenth century was a radical break from the previously “plain, undemonstrative style of religion, with its emphasis on a personal union with Christ through the mediation of the Bible and other books,” that had characterized American Catholic experience up until that point. This shift in piety had serious implications for the material setting of devotion in American Catholic churches.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century European missionaries, who were ultimately responsible for the spread of devotional Catholicism, were shocked by the absence of church decoration they encountered in America. They could find nowhere to purchase what they considered necessary liturgical objects among American Catholics, who apparently had been practicing their religion without need of such items. The
situation was dismal from the missionaries' point of view. In 1821 Father Stephen Badin, who was stationed in Kentucky, wrote that people needed devotional books and rosaries and that: “... chalices, ciboriums, crucifixes, vestments and church ornaments, altar pictures—in fact, everything relating to divine service” was lacking. He encouraged the next generation of missionaries to bring these items with them.3 By mid-century importers and manufacturers, such as Benziger Brothers, emerged to supply this growing demand in America. Large, expensive churches with decorated interiors that “visually instructed the people in the basics of devotional Catholicism” emerged, taking precedence over the small, spartan churches of the previous generation.4

All of Benziger Brothers’ products reveal the material needs of this reform, including their printed materials: prayer books, devotional guides, moral fiction, and magazine;5 their devotional materials: rosaries, scapulars, medals, and confraternity banners; and their church goods: statues, stations of the cross, altar paintings, processional crosses, and thrones for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, etc. Even the “New Confessional Register” takes on meaning in this context. This item that allowed priests to register up to nine hundred ninety-nine confessions was sold from 1882 through the 1920s. This object makes sense when one realizes that crowds of Catholics would stand in line for hours the day before Mass so that they could rid themselves of sin before coming into the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In order to understand Benziger Brothers one has to recognize the effect that popular devotions had on its business—they created and sustained Benziger Brothers.6
The Family Business

Benziger Brothers was not the only player on the New York stage with regard to the manufacture and marketing of church goods in the late nineteenth century—although it did have a head start. J. N. Adelrich Benziger, who founded the American company in 1853, and his cousins Adelrich and Louis Benziger, who immigrated to New York in 1860 to develop the American house, had been groomed in the publishing business their family had cultivated in Eisiedeln, Switzerland. Eisiedeln had been a site of pilgrimage ever since the eremitic Saint Meinrad gained fame in the ninth century. Inhabitants of this town, including the Benzigers, traditionally earned their income by providing services and goods to pilgrims. In addition, generations of the family worked at the printing presses operated by the Benedictine monastery in Eisiedeln. The Benziger family had a history linking it to the religious goods market before any one of its members set foot on American soil.

It is reputed that Karl Benziger became the first layperson to operate a religious shop in Eisiedeln in 1716, when he rented one from Benedictine monks. He also traveled throughout France, Germany, Austria, and Italy selling religious items, such as rosaries and statuary. His enterprise was so successful that by 1760 he had four buildings dedicated to this enterprise. Sales Benziger, a relative of Karl, bought two of the monastery’s presses when the monks were hiding in exile during the wars associated with the French Revolution. He installed them in one of Karl’s religious shops around the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus were intimately joined the work of the publisher and the retailer of religious items under the guidance of the Benziger family for the first time.7
The Catholic Encyclopedia merits Joseph Charles Benziger, rather than Karl or Sales Benziger, as the founder of the company in 1792. At this time he sold “religious articles.” The French Revolution interrupted his business, which he rebuilt as a bookselling enterprise after 1800. In 1835 under the management of his sons, Charles and Nicholas Benziger, the company included the printing of religious pictures as well as books. It is clear that Benziger Brothers was a commercial force in the mid-nineteenth century. The 1907 edition of the Encyclopedia tells that the company had already “built up a business in Catholic books and prints that was known the world over” when the house was opened in New York in 1853.

Publishing was the primary vocation of Benziger Brothers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite my present focus on church goods, the fact that Benziger Brothers was a highly successful Catholic publishing house is relevant. Adelrich Benziger’s credo: “Advertising, sales promotion, and still more advertising, . . . no book or holy picture ever sold itself, no matter how outstanding its craftsmanship and artistry,” most likely held true for church goods as well. Benziger Brothers probably knew from experience that illustrated books captured the imagination and ultimately sold better. This principle, combined with the capabilities of printing technologies, most likely motivated Benziger Brothers to illustrate its catalogues as well as its books. By 1894 the American branch of the company was considered to be the “leading Catholic publishing house in the country.”

An indication of Benziger Brothers’ success is the standard of living held by its stakeholders. Nicholas C. Benziger immigrated to the United States in 1880, at the age of
twenty-one, to join his uncle Louis in the partnership of the company. By 1890 Nicholas was able to pay $32,000 for a lot on Edgecomb Avenue on the northern tip of Manhattan. The price for land in this Washington Heights neighborhood had risen substantially as a result of the new viaduct that would expand views over the Bronx and Harlem plains. Apparently Nicholas Benziger was willing to pay almost ten times the average price for one of these lots in order to have a spectacular view. "Unlike central Harlem, it [Washington Heights] had the character of a remote country village, popular with downtowners for its 'bracing air and picturesque scenery,' . . . '[its] chief charm [was] its well-bred seclusion.' "12 The "first class dwelling," noted for its eclectic style, was built by William Schickel in 1890 and 1891. The mansion itself, and the fact that it required four servants to manage it in 1905, are sure signs of Benziger Brothers' wealth. When housing developments in the area threatened their quiet lifestyle in 1914, Nicholas Benziger and family moved to New Jersey.13

The relationship between the German architect William Schickel and the Benziger family reveals something of the social network upon which business depended. Fifteen years prior to his work for Nicholas Benziger, Schickel was commissioned to build the Staten Island home of his uncle, Louis Benziger. Yet Schickel's real specialty was ecclesiastical projects. In the 1880s and 1890s he was commissioned by many Catholic institutions in New York, and in 1889 he used F. X. Zettler stained glass for one of his jobs, a product that was carried exclusively by Benziger Brothers. It is likely that his association with the Benziger family was not coincidental. He was a member of the élite Catholic Club in New York, as were Louis and Nicholas Benziger. The fact that
Nicholas Benziger joined in 1880, the year of his arrival in New York, might attest to the perceived importance of the club with regard to professional networking.14

Louis Benziger was involved in other social organizations, aside from the Catholic Club, that might also have nurtured business relationships. He was second vice president of the directorate of the St. Raphaelsverein. His position in this charitable society, which helped immigrants in their transition from point of departure, through New York, and onto final destination, is a sign that he was associated with German Catholic leadership in the United States. Benziger Brothers donated $250 to the organization in 1885. One of its business rivals, Pustet Company, made a donation of $100. These contributions in the name of companies indicate that conspicuous membership in Catholic organizations was not wholly charitable, but a vital part of good business sense.15

Despite the strength of Benziger Brothers, it folded in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. By 1966 the church goods stores were closed, and in 1969 the publishing firm was sold to Macmillan.16 In a 1991 Publishers Weekly column, William Griffin assessed:

American Catholic publishing . . . had never been so low as in 1969, the year that Macmillan acquired three old-line firms—P. J. Kennedy & Sons, Benziger Brothers and Bruce—only to discover that their backlists had, figuratively, turned to dust. In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, which began in 1965, Christology, ecclesiology and a college of other -ologies—the stuff that backlists were made of—seemingly had to be rewritten from scratch.17

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Although the family no longer owns the enterprise, the company that bears the name Benziger continues to publish books for Catholics as a subsidiary of the McGraw-Hill companies.

New York

From its catalogues it is known that Benziger Brothers had American houses in New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago, established in 1853, 1860, and 1887, respectively. There had also been a house in St. Louis, which was established in 1875 and had dissolved sometime between 1885 and 1887. Yet emphasis was placed on the company’s New York history, and factory in particular:

It was in 1864 that we took charge of a small silversmiths’ shop on one floor of a building in Fulton Street, New York, and began on our own account the manufacture of Church goods, for these goods had been made for us in this country as far back as 1853.

Ours was not a very extensive establishment in those days, being confined to the manufacture of gold and silver goods on a small scale, but it was the nucleus of our present factory.

The new branch gave fresh impetus to our business, and we applied ourselves to it with all our energy, and when, in 1871, we found it had grown too large for its quarters we rented the buildings 43 and 45 Dey Street. Twenty years later we still further enlarged the business by beginning the manufacture of candlesticks, candelabra, and similar metal goods, and as this required a foundry, we were again obliged to move. Even then, in 1891, we had fully made up our minds to erect a suitable building for our work, but as that could not be done in a day, we hired, for the time, the additional premises 38 Dey Street, where we occupied all the lofts.

In March, 1894, our new factory, De Kalb Avenue and Rockwell Place, Brooklyn, was finished . . . (Figures 1, 2).
Since 1864 Benziger Brothers had been manufacturing church ornaments, but it was not until 1879 that Wilson’s Business Directory of New York City indicated this aspect of the company. For years it was listed in the directories as a publisher and bookseller, and only twice under silversmith. The idea of a one-stop shop for church goods was seemingly new. Categories such as “Church Articles” or “Church Furniture and Decoration” did not appear in the directories until the mid-1860s, and even then it was on one year and off the next, with only one or another random vendor listed. Joseph Robillard was the only listed proprietor of a “Church Articles” shop in 1866, which he operated out of 8 Dey Street. Benziger Brothers was located at 9 Dey Street at the time. Perhaps the company took a cue from its neighbor, who most likely was doing good business during this, the epoch of the “brick and mortar priest.”

The Catholic population was exploding and so was the construction rate of new churches. Jay Dolan notes New York as a good example of the growing immigrant church: In 1810 ten thousand Catholics were served by one parish; by 1860 there were four hundred thousand Catholics and thirty-two city Catholic churches. The pace apparently did not decline in the following decades. In 1899 an observer of the Catholic situation noted that: “The building of churches proceeds with us at a rate absolutely unknown in any other part of the world . . . The work of decoration, the erection of altars and statues, etc., the purchase of vestments and sacred vessels, etc., proceed without interruption, and everywhere.” In nineteenth-century America church goods were in demand.
The number of companies specializing in church goods to meet this demand grew. In 1879 Benziger Brothers was the only vendor listed under “Church Ornaments.” Eight names were listed under “Church Furniture.” Included was J. and R. Lamb, a business that had advertised itself as “Ecclesiastical Interior Decorators” as early as 1865, and in 1868 had made a catalogue available. In the business directories of the 1880s and 1890s the listings under ever-expanding categories grew: “Church Architects,” “Church Articles,” “Church Cushions,” “Church Furniture,” “Church Ornaments and Statuary,” “Church Ornaments and Trimmings,” “Church Lights,” “Church Stationer,” and “Church Vestments.” The defining characteristics that separated these categories had a high degree of nuance. For example, in the 1880s Benziger Brothers sold altars and other furniture, while J. and R. Lamb sold altar vessels and other objects, yet they remained in their separate categories of “articles” and “furniture” respectively.

While these stores could have supplied both Catholics and Protestants with basic goods, it is most likely that dealers of “Church Articles,” or “Church Ornaments” served a Catholic clientele specifically, since many of them were concentrated on typically Catholic Barclay Street. In 1891 four of the twenty-seven vendors listed under “Church Articles” were on Barclay Street, including Benziger Brothers. Throughout the decade the number of vendors remained fairly constant, yet the percentage of those located on Barclay Street rose from fifteen to forty percent. By 1905 twenty-three of the fifty-seven “Church Articles” vendors were located there. Benziger Brothers was just one of many such retailers on this street that must have been known as the place to go for church goods.
Colleen McDannell relates that the Barclay Street cluster of importers and manufacturers of Catholic devotional goods began in 1865 "when a branch of the largest German religious publishing house, F. Pustet & Co., settled there. Other firms quickly followed and the term 'Barclay Street art,' . . . became a derogatory term for books and objects that were cheap, vulgar, and pretentiously pious." The similarities of Pustet and Benziger Brothers go to show that these companies were by no means unique. Yet Benziger Brothers did not exactly "follow" its competitor—it had been in Manhattan since 1853 and did not move to Barclay Street until 1884 or 1885. It also seems that Pustet dealt primarily in statuary—in the business directories of the early 1880s it is listed under "Church Ornaments. Statuary." It is possible that other companies that moved to Barclay Street were not following Pustet, but were drawn by the business that could be done in the shadow of St. Peter's Church, the oldest Catholic parish in Manhattan situated on Barclay at Church Street. It is also unclear at what point and for whom "Barclay Street art" became a derogatory term. It seems unlikely that the negative response was immediate and widespread—otherwise companies would not have continued to move there throughout the 1890s and into the twentieth century.

Perhaps these Barclay Street vendors self-consciously embraced the cheapness that their critics derided. Benziger Brothers boasted about the low cost of its wares, calling them "cheap" in an exultant way. It clearly offered a range of options that enabled the consumer to have a beautiful, artful object at an affordable price. It produced items in a range of materials, sizes, and degrees of decoration. According to the 1888 catalogue, a standard chalice and paten could have cost from $23 to $875 depending on
these factors. This type of enterprise was not something to be denigrated, but emulated in some minds. In 1874 Benziger Brothers issued a warning that its 1873 catalogue had been “closely copied by another house.” And advertising in the back of the *Official Catholic Directory* shows that other companies, such as the M. H. Wiltzius Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, produced identical wares and advertised them in an identical format during this time. Yet as we shall see later, all of these “cheap” manufacturers had their origin elsewhere—despite Benziger Brothers’ claim to singular creative legitimacy.

*Catholic Production and “Catholic” Style*

Both Benziger Brothers and W. J. Feeley Company, a firm headquartered in Providence, Rhode Island, and later New York, produced altar vessels and other objects for Catholics. Yet Feeley Company clearly did not share an appreciation for the cheap. An 1896 catalogue of this firm indicates that, to the contrary, it prided itself on producing expensive wares. An ostensorium it was commissioned to execute in 1896 was the “most magnificent . . . and the second costliest in the world” it proclaimed. It advertised its silver wares in sterling only, while Benziger Brothers offered “solid silver” and silverplate. Both companies did repairs, but they differed in the amount of emphasis they placed on this service. A comment of Feeley Company illustrates the low quality of the average Catholic church item and might explain why these church items might not have been often repaired. “Sacristans . . . very often consider [old altar vessels and ornaments] of no particular value since there is a doubt as to whether they are worth repairing or replating.” This company claimed that it could take oxidized and worn objects and make
them as “good as new.”

Perhaps Benziger Brothers deemed it better sense to market new cheap objects, rather than spend time repairing old cheap objects. Despite these differences in attitude, these two companies shared much of the same product line, even the novel combined crucifix, holy water font, and candelabrum (Figure 3).

A distinction must be made between objects made for Catholics and those made for Protestants who esteemed a “Catholic” style. In the mid-nineteenth century the ecclesiological movement in England and the United States endeavored to imbue the Episcopal Church with a more “Catholic” expression. The allure of Catholic art and ritual to American Protestants is discussed in depth in Jackson Lears’ No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920. Interest in the “primitive” and “authentic” experience, as exemplified in medieval forms, extended to admiration for the Catholic Church and its objects in the nineteenth century. Based in a longing for an imagined past, this respect did not extend to the contemporary Church. Although envious of Catholics’ emotional piety and aesthetic heritage, Roman Catholicism was still viewed as a corrupt institution and a socially unacceptable option for upper-class Protestant Americans. Ralph Adams Cram, a prominent architect and Unitarian convert to the Anglican Church, maintained that his faith was a “branch of the Catholic Church.” Despite this perceived commonality between Anglo and Roman Catholicism, the two traditions had very different attitudes toward the production of liturgical objects.

Like Benziger Brothers, the New York Ecclesiological Society praised the “beauty and cheapness” of its own silver, yet it would not allow silverplate, “a miserable
and hypocritical substitute for genuine silver” in its Episcopal churches. Ecclesiologists also showed a concern for the treatment of precious metals that were intended for church use. The type of care required is illustrated by Gorham’s 1925 catalogue. As proof of the company’s worthiness, the catalogue states: “As a manifestation of the high regard in which the art of The Gorham Company is held, Episcopal Authorization to handle Sacred Vessels was granted November, 1913.” One of the primary concerns for nineteenth-century Episcopalians was the mixing of consecrated and non-consecrated silver. Benziger Brothers, on the other hand, was not interested in “honesty” in design. It commonly made objects that appeared to be of a richer material than they were; silverplating and gilding were only a couple of examples of its “hypocrisy.” It also had no qualms about telling its customers of the extent of its economy, which dictated that “every tiny scraping [of precious metal] is saved—even the sweepings of the floor, mixed though they are with dirt—and by refining brought back to its former, pure state.”

It is not surprising that many of the objects produced by the New York Ecclesiological Society and Benziger Brothers have visual similarities—they both had “ancient” models. Yet for Catholics there was more than the one “true ecclesiastical style” of Gothic inspiration. Benziger Brothers’ liturgical objects were available in Byzantine, Modern Byzantine, Byzantine-Gothic, Byzantine-Roman, Romani, Renaissance, Rococo, French, German, and Etruscan styles, as well as the Gothic style (Figure 4). In a journal geared toward Catholic clergy the opinion was expressed that “there is in reality no such thing as a style of architecture distinctly ecclesiastical. What goes by that name is simply ordinary secular architecture applied to ecclesiastical...
purposes.” In his study of the Catholic churches of architect Edwin Forrest Durang, Gregory Oliveri found that: “For Roman Catholics style appears to have been simply an option in a system that was strictly governed by a set of liturgical and devotional requirements . . . The emphasis here was given to a coherent expression of any style as long as it remained true to its own logic.” This conclusion holds true for church ornaments as well.

In this context of Protestant admiration for the Catholic, or more accurately Gothic, form, it is interesting to note the recognition of Benziger Brothers and its “adherence . . . to the true ecclesiastical style” at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. A large Gothic style ostensorium was the centerpiece of the winning exhibit. (Figure 5) As a distinctly Catholic form designed to hold and display the Eucharist, the ostensorium most likely represented the height of Catholic ritual. More evidence that mainstream American Protestants were enthralled by medieval Catholic forms is the fact that the most popular painting at the World’s Fair depicted a group of fifteenth-century Spanish flagellants. While the Gothic symbolized a revival of the pre-Reformation Church for Protestant Americans in the nineteenth century, it represented the continuation of tradition for Catholics. While the material cultures of Protestants and Catholics intersect and share stylistic similarities, for the purposes of this study it is best not to confuse their divergent attitudes.
Chapter 2
THE CATALOGUES SPEAK

Description

The Benziger Brothers catalogues display the most obvious indication of the company’s denominational slant by using Papal insignia and titles on their covers. In 1867 Benziger Brothers became the “Printer to the Holy Apostolic See,” and in 1887 was given a gold medal and diploma of honor in front of the “whole world of Church manufacturers” at the Vatican Exposition. The title “Pontifical Institute of Christian Art” and official permission to use the papal arms were also granted at that 1887 exposition. The Pope’s endorsement became a powerful advertising tool in the hands of Benziger Brothers. The First Vatican Council, held in 1869 and 1870, declared Papal infallibility. Despite the fact that other advertising agencies used the figure of His Holiness to market products such as Bovril extracts of meat and Mariani wine, these papal titles added a great degree of legitimacy to the Benziger name.

The line of goods advertised also made it clear to those seeking to outfit their Catholic churches that they would have to go no further (Figure 6). Ostensoria, ciboria, and chalices, etc., sacred vessels that ritually held the body and blood of Christ, were manufactured by the firm and were given precedence in the sequence of wares. Benziger Brothers imported items that it did not have the capacity to manufacture itself, such as statuary and textiles from Paris and Lyons, stained glass from Munich, and marble from
Italy. Over the years various specialized departments emerged and expanded, and the line between domestic and imported became evermore blurred.\textsuperscript{45} Candlesticks, stations of the cross, holy water fonts and sprinklers, artificial flowers, votive stands, tabernacle safes—Benziger Brothers had it all. In 1917 the company claimed, “We have the largest assortment of church goods in America.”\textsuperscript{46} Given the volume of these catalogues, which exceeded 350 pages in 1905, one might be convinced that it was telling the truth.

As a general rule, trade catalogues were designed to be circulated widely and thrown away. The low quality paper and flimsy construction that allowed for inexpensive production helped guarantee a limited life span for these objects. The survival of Benziger Brothers trade catalogues is rare. The company had at least five catalogues in addition to the one dedicated to church ornaments: \textit{Benziger Brothers Statuary; Benziger Brothers: Agents for the Royal Bavarian Art Institute; Benziger Brothers Catalogue of Vestments, Banners and Regalia; Church Furniture; and Wholesale Catalogue of Religious Articles.} Many of these catalogues advertised the existence of the others. Portions from specific catalogues or circulars were reprinted in the larger catalogue that dealt in general church goods, accounting for the repetition of certain items and the discontinuity of border designs throughout the whole.\textsuperscript{47}

The church goods catalogues are much like the average illustrated trade catalogue of the period. Their pages display illustrations of products underscored by short descriptions and sometimes prices. They include the usual propaganda: testimonials of their products, boastings of their factory and products in word and image, and histories establishing the worthiness of the manufacturer. They address the consumer with an
introductory letter and indicate which items have a patent application outstanding. The contents of most are arranged in chapters and cover art is emphasized. The fact that Benziger Brothers had the capacity to publish its own catalogues and hence control every aspect of design might account for the kinship between its catalogues and books.

Classification

A formal study of these catalogues reveals certain patterns in marketing strategy. The design of many of the goods themselves remained fairly constant—the chalice of 1937 looks much like the chalice of 1879 (Figures 7, 8). Yet the design of the catalogues in which these objects were advertised changes noticeably. Their individualized covers might be seen simply as a tactic for combating what has recently been described as the “tendency for the reader’s eyes to glaze over when confronting a mass of competing appeals for increasingly standardized products,” yet they reveal much about the company and society that produced them.48 Using cover art as the basic criterion, for it was the most obvious factor to past consumers as it is to present day observers, the catalogues at hand divide themselves into four epochs: the prototypical, 1879 to 1883; the authoritative, 1885-1890; the artful, 1900-1905; and the no-nonsense, 1917 to 1937.

Three catalogues fall within the category of the prototypical: 1879, 1882, and 1883. The term “prototypical” is appropriate because these catalogues visually show an awareness of the older, European church good manufacturers; they become the basis for Benziger Brothers’ later catalogues; and American competitors could have used them as their models, as the company once charged.49 These early catalogues, with essentially
identical covers, follow European precedents and illustrate Benziger Brothers’ first efforts at building its advertising in the United States (Figure 9). The central, gilded image on the cover displays the company’s products in a way that seems to mimic engravings of Hardman’s work after Pugin’s designs.50 Given the abundance of manufacture and styles in the late nineteenth century it is impossible to locate the exact origin of design, yet logic and evidence point to European models. After all, Benziger Brothers was a Swiss company until 1896, when Louis C. Benziger died.51 Ideas continued to flow from Europe to New York with the emigration of family members.52

On the covers of the “prototypical” catalogues Benziger Brothers shows its honorable participation in the Expositions—in Rome, 1870 and Vienna, 1873. At these events Benziger Brothers was able to view and assess European manufacturers of church ornaments and witness the papal accolades and titles accorded to them. Numerous French companies selling “ornements d’église” used devices similar to Benziger Brothers’ on their stationery and advertising materials. Illustrating medals won at international expositions seems to have been quite common during this time.53 The relationship of these early Benziger Brother catalogues to French precedent is particularly strong given that the merchandise it advertised was similar, if not identical to, “l’art Saint-Sulpice,”—the manufactured church art that was born in Paris in the 1840s, which defined Catholic church decoration on an international scale by the end of the nineteenth century.54 It is fair, if not necessary, to say that Benziger Brothers took its lead from these French manufacturers and supported them through its importation of their products.55
While all of the catalogues are clearly organized, the “prototypical” group is the most book-like in its presentation. The 1879 catalogue is representative of this category, for it is the basis of the 1882 and 1883 catalogues. It has a table of contents with parts or chapters listed, as well as an alphabetical list of contents. A letter “to our patrons” acts as a foreword and draws attention to particular items and, in this case, cheap prices (Figure 10). It states that the 1879 issue is double the size of their 1873 catalogue, “the first attempt in this country at a complete descriptive and illustrated Catalogue of Church Goods,” and that the present catalogue is “THE MOST COMPLETE EVER ISSUED IN THIS COUNTRY.”\textsuperscript{56} The catalogue is designed so that the customer, most likely a member of the clergy, might easily turn to the pages that illustrate the goods he desires using the index, or go through the catalogue from cover to cover. Each part or chapter is prefaced with a nearly blank page announcing its title in a stylized font (Figure 11). This chapter page is followed by a page of remarks that acquaints the customer with the products in the section.

In the page of remarks prefacing the first chapter of the catalogue, that of church ornaments made by Benziger Brothers, the customer is assured that: “These goods, of elaborate finish and more than usual perfection, are really WORKS OF ART,” and that they are “GREATLY SUPERIOR TO IMPORTED GOODS.”\textsuperscript{57} The term “church ornaments” does not seem to aptly describe the silver and gold objects illustrated in this thirty-eight page chapter. Clearly, the ritual purposes of chalices, ciboria, ostensoria, and reliquaries indicate that they were not mere decorations or accessories, but were critical to the expression and profession of Catholic faith. As a result, one must not let the use of

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the words “church ornaments” in the titles of the catalogues color or belittle the objects advertised by Benziger Brothers.

The “authoritative” category is so named because two of the three catalogues in question, 1888 and 1890, prominently display papal insignia (Figure 12). The style of the cover of the 1885 catalogue, which is similar to the others and might be interpreted as offering an authoritative front in itself, allows it to be classed in this category (Figure 13). While the covers of the prototypical catalogues referenced the fact that Benziger Brothers was Printer to the Holy Apostolic See, they did so very unobtrusively. The Vatican Exposition of 1887 added to the papal honors noticeably: here Benziger Brothers received the highest award given, the diploma of honor, and the title “Pontifical Institute of Christian Art,” which carried the right to display the papal arms. Not only did the company gain the authority that came with the Pope’s endorsement, but also that of being associated with the art world.

Within the prologues of the 1888 and 1890 catalogues there is a new expression of the artful production of Benziger Brothers’ wares. It goes a step beyond the “prototypical” explanation that the objects are “CHASED BY HAND, not merely stamped by machinery, as is the case with most foreign articles,” to add mention of the supervision by an artistic foreman over “a force of skilled gold and silversmiths.” A “glance” at Benziger Brothers’ workshops proves the artistry of their manufacture. Brief descriptions of the spinning and hammering, chasing and engraving, plating and gilding, polishing and burnishing, reinforce the notion that these fine presentation goods of gold and silver were crafted carefully and individually under an efficient, yet discriminating,
Although in preceding catalogues the company made it known that it was capable of special orders, the full-page photographic spread of presentation goods made to order in the 1890 catalogue underscores Benziger Brothers readiness to create works of art for the consumer with singular taste. The 1890 catalogue also devotes a whole page to the illustration of an article displayed at the Vatican Exposition, reinforcing the value of the product as an object worthy of one’s admiring gaze.

The other authoritative feature of these three catalogues relates to their assumed association with illuminated manuscripts. The cover use of a calligraphic font, rubricated initial lettering, color, and gilding indicate that Benziger Brothers sought identification of its product with medieval art forms. The Gothic Revival in the mid-nineteenth century had cemented the notion that American churches found their best and truest expression in medieval precedents. By adopting a “medieval” cover, Benziger Brothers allowed the public to bring its positive associations with medieval art to bear on the products advertised behind it. The lily on the cover of the 1885 catalogue, a Christian symbol of purity, also tapped into this mythology of authority.

The backs of the 1888 and 1890 covers illustrate emblems that contrasted with the front covers, but would have attracted attention also. Here the Brooklyn Bridge, a modern miracle of engineering completed in 1883, appealed to the consumer’s interest in current feats of science (Figure 14). All three back covers illustrate street views of the showrooms, underscoring the importance of display and the store window, and the factory on Dey Street in New York. By the combined view of factory, showrooms and
the New York skyline featuring the Brooklyn Bridge, the company might have been hinting at the advanced technological setting of its manufacture.

Once the new factory in Brooklyn was complete in 1894 the company began to perfect the balance of traditional artisanry and cutting-edge technology in its advertising. It had just received an award at the 1893 Columbian World’s Fair for its “High Class Workmanship in the Production of Gold and Silver, and Plated Church Ware, and in the Adherence in their Production to the True Ecclesiastical Style,” only to follow it up with boasting that “Cheap Silver Brings Down Prices. Improved Machinery and Increased Facilities Mean Low Prices.” A promotional book published by the company in 1894 illustrates how well Benziger Brothers managed to manipulate this tension between craft and technology to its own ends. The strategies developed in this complimentary, hardbound publication reappear in later catalogues, and make its description here relevant.

_Silversmith’s Art and Ecclesiastical Metal Work at its Home/Benziger Brothers’ Factory,_ published in 1894, celebrated the company’s new factory in Brooklyn and all of the artful machinations that took place within its walls. After being briefed on the history of the company, the reader was welcomed on a voyeuristic journey through the facility’s three departments, Gold and Silversmiths, Ecclesiastical Metalwork, and Medals, and was invited to peek in on all the artists—from designer to burnisher. The plant had the newest technologies and many humming machines, yet the company also attempted to impress upon the reader its knowledge of materials and the work of its craftsmen. To reinforce this goal, the likeness between ancient models, Renaissance masters, and
Benziger Brothers was drawn “to show the artistic standing of our art.” Here Benziger Brothers postured itself as the resurrecting agent of the tradition of “the art” that was damaged when France’s armies plundered and destroyed the treasures of churches in southern Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although machines facilitated a large portion of the work, the role of the artist and the tradition of metalworking were maintained within the setting of the new factory. The message of this publication, which informed the catalogues to follow, was that Benziger Brothers had the best of both worlds: tradition and technology.

The cover of the first of the “artful” catalogues, that of 1900, could be read as a comment on Arts and Crafts ideology and the tension inherent in the production and marketing of manufactured art objects. The front cover shows a solitary craftsman working on a paten, surrounded by church ornaments in a medieval setting. The scene is labeled “Ye Olden Time,” in contrast to “The Present Day” illustration of Benziger Brothers’ Brooklyn factory on the back cover (Figures 15, 16). An illustrated “visit” to the factory, reminiscent of Silversmith’s Art occupies ten pages at the beginning of the catalogue (Figure 17). Given this description, one can almost imagine that the factory was the site of a modern guild, where traditional craftsmen continued their work disconnected from the mechanized production surrounding them. The demands of the market required improved modern methods, yet the company did not want to be viewed as a machine of mass production. It maintained that unique works of art were a large part of its business: “Apart from the constant production of new designs for our regular stock goods, which is necessary if we would keep abreast with the times, much of the work on
which our artists are engaged is for special orders.” Another statement within the
description of operations comes to bear on the message of the covers, justifying this new
mode of production: “As in most of the arts and trades, modern methods are great
improvements on the old way of doing things . . . .” Awareness of and commentary on
the state of Benziger Brothers’ enterprise in the context of the modern world is a
characteristic of all three “artful” catalogues.

The 1903 and 1905 catalogue covers indicate that the company took interest in the
“art nouveau” that emerged at the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris (Figures 18, 19). The
design of the 1903 catalogue cover involves an abstract display of geometric roses on a
thorny bush. Voids in the tangle of vegetation allow for the title, company name, and
addresses. The 1905 cover shows a woman in draped apparel holding a statue and resting
her other hand upon a tablet containing the company’s information. The tablet supports a
symbol of Christ and a Roman lamp. These colorful covers with stylized fonts have the
air of poster art. Perhaps they were more than artful, but could have been considered
works of art in themselves. Jackson Lears writes that in the early twentieth century:

The idea that advertising art, if it was technically proficient, might adorn
the homes of the people, just as chromos had done in the nineteenth
century, seemed natural to industry spokesmen . . . . Even outside the
business world there was talk that national advertising might become a
source of fine art for the people. 67

This use of artful advertising, abstracted natural forms, and the sinuous lines of page
borders associate these catalogues with Art Nouveau (Figures 20, 21), the first self-
consciously modern style which was, like Benziger Brothers, “simultaneously vulgar and
élite.” 68 Despite the adherence to this new style to frame its products, Benziger Brothers’
goods do not reflect a similar change. The only exception is a small stylish candelabra with a “New Art Gold Finish” (Figure 22).69

The company developed its “art point of view” in other ways during these first years of the twentieth century.70 The catalogues indicate that it cooperated with architects, as well as clergy, and offered its own designers for consultation. The company claimed that it was well aware of styles of architecture and knew how to find appropriate ecclesiastical solutions to decorating problems. The 1905 catalogue offered “novel suggestions” to customers and proof of Benziger Brothers’ competency in interior design by including photographic views of many commissioned works in situ. Color plates of some select wares were also included in this catalogue. It is most likely that it was to these plates that the pointed copyright notice referred when it stated: “This new style of illustrations in this Catalogue have been made at a great expense and we shall protect ourselves against anyone who reproduces or copies them.” (Figure 23) Benziger Brothers copyrighted all of its catalogues, yet the defensive stance assumed here indicates the high value the company placed on this au courant catalogue.

The “no-nonsense” catalogues date from 1917, 1927, 1928, and 1937. The characteristic that draws them into one category is the fact that they are the only other catalogues encountered in the course of research. Some generalizations can be made despite the years that separate them from each other and the earlier catalogues. They are simpler and generic, and more often photographic, as is often the case with trade catalogues of this period.71 The emphasis on cover art seems to have dissolved (Figure 24). The exception is the 1928 catalogue. Its front and back covers are photographic,
illustrating marble altars installed in churches under the Benziger Brothers name (Figure 25). In contrast, one must search for the identity of the manufacturer in the 1927 and 1937 catalogues in the attached price booklet or under the copyright notice. It also might be said that these later catalogues display, to a greater extent than their predecessors, an "economy of symbolism"—that they "surround the product with condensed clusters of words and images that [give] it symbolic as well as utilitarian value . . . restoring an aura of uniqueness to products that had become standardized into banality."72 (Figure 7). The catalogues also become increasingly instructive. By the late 1920s items were advertised in sets and there was more emphasis on objects being rubrically correct, or in keeping with the requirements of the Church, and short explanations were given on the symbolism and history of certain items, such as the sanctuary lamp and altar.73 By 1937 a Liturgical Art Department existed to advise customers on the appropriate selection and placement of objects in the church.

All of these catalogues arose out of the needs and traditions of the American Catholic Church. Yet visual references to the Brooklyn Bridge, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Art Nouveau also relate the catalogues to cultural forces that had an impact on society as a whole. Without the technology that made mass production possible, these catalogues and the goods they advertised would not have existed as such. While maintaining the traditional merchandise required by the Church, Benziger Brothers and its catalogues fully participated in the modern world. Like Benziger Brothers, the Church would also be motivated to make choices concerning its use of modern
technology. The shift that takes place within Benziger Brothers’ trade catalogues regarding lighting indicates some of the tensions experienced within Church.

*Modern Light, Traditional Space*

“Part II” of the 1879 catalogue shows that the company imported candlesticks, candelabra, hanging lamps, standing lamps, and bracket lamps from Europe (Figures 26–29). Although subsequent catalogues blur the line between its own and imported manufactures, Benziger Brothers did not have the capacity to produce these items, which were executed in bronze and brass, until the 1890s. The company history in *Silversmith’s Art* states:

> Twenty years later [1891] we still further enlarged the business by beginning the manufacture of candlesticks, candelabra, and similar metal goods, and as this required a foundry, we were again obliged to move.\(^\text{74}\)

If this statement is an indication, the impetus behind the construction of the factory in Brooklyn, which began operations in 1894, was the manufacture of lighting implements.

Another indication of Benziger Brothers’ interest in lighting equipment is shown in its patent history. From 1893 until 1910 the company received six patents on candelabra, two patents related to securing candles in candlesticks, and one patent on a counterbalance for lamps (Figure 30). Eight out of a total of twelve patents received during this time were related to lighting. The fact that Benziger Brothers wanted to protect its property in this way indicates that it anticipated infringement by other manufacturers, who most likely would not have been interested in borrowing Benziger Brothers’ ideas were it not for consumer demand.
In the catalogues that postdate the establishment of the Brooklyn factory, a distinction is drawn between the aforementioned bronze and brass objects, which were used for devotional purposes and came under the department heading “Ecclesiastical Metalwork” or “Art Work in Bronze and Brass,” and the practical and ornamental fixtures that the company began carrying. By the 1900 catalogue the seed of the Lighting Department had already been planted.\textsuperscript{75} The catalogue makes special mention of Benziger Brothers’ Gas and Electric Light Fixtures, although it is not until the 1905 catalogue that this “youngest branch” gets its own department.\textsuperscript{76}

The establishment of a foundry, the interest in patenting lighting devices, and the development of a lighting department show the expansion of Benziger Brothers. Yet this growth would not have taken place if there had not been a demand for it. The continuation of the material demands associated with devotional Catholicism, particularly those surrounding candles, and the call of electric lighting provided the conditions of this changing market.

The growing use of the church at night was one major reason to improve lighting during the era of devotional Catholicism. Benediction, Holy Hour, Lenten Services, Forty Hours’ Devotion, and Missions all had a component that involved evening prayer and worship. The improved vision that electric lighting afforded might also have been desired by the faithful, who wanted to see the divine. The average Catholic was also the average consumer, who perhaps became accustomed to the view of these objects as they appeared in shop displays. Feeley Company advertised its “dazzling” showroom, highlighting the effect of the “glittering” and “sparkling” products under electric light.\textsuperscript{77}
Once seen in this way, it might have been difficult for the public to accept anything less, especially since the magnificence of the object presumably should have increased once the object was put to its true purpose inside the church (Figures 31, 32).

These turn-of-the-century fixtures themselves display a mixture of the modern and the traditional (Figures 33–35). Many of them are combination fixtures, for the client who wanted to go electric but was not quite convinced he wanted to give up the stability of an already-proven system. The transition from gaslight to electric light was not technically difficult, since the arrangement and design of the fixtures could remain unchanged; yet these combination fixtures indicate the general anxiety over this progression in lighting. The catalogues of the early twentieth century illustrate modernized traditional forms, such as brackets, hanging lanterns, chandeliers, and standing candelabra; and novel arrangements of light bulbs to form decorations, such as a radiant star, a crowned archway, and an illuminating vine to wrap around columns. Many of these fixtures seem to celebrate technology by boldly displaying downward-facing bare bulbs, while others might operate by gas or electricity, but still retain a traditional look by retaining upright “candles.”

The task of maintaining the religious atmosphere of a church during this age of technological experimentation was met with varying degrees of success. Photographs in the 1905 catalogue illustrate the use of Benziger Brothers’ fixtures in churches (Figures 43–45). In some cases the effect is readily apparent, and in others it is more subtle. How these new electric fixtures altered general lighting practices in Catholic churches is difficult to tell. They seem to have been concentrated in the sanctuary of the church, but
they also outlined architectural details, were attached to the ceiling and columns of the nave, and were positioned in front of stations of the cross.\textsuperscript{78} Lighting a large space such as a church demanded particular consideration, yet some of these Benziger Brothers fixtures do not necessarily differ from their domestic counterparts in style and manufacture, even if they did in scale. Lighting cut to the heart of the question of what a church should look like.

The uneasy transition to electric lighting was met with much discussion. This tension plays out directly in the pages of the catalogues, specifically their division of lighting devices into two departments—ecclesiastical lighting, associated with tradition, and practical lighting, with its roots in modern technology. This division mirrors the conflict within the Church. Electric lighting was not a problem in the opinion of the Church, as long as it was used for decorative, rather than devotional purposes. Trouble arose only when the modern lighting systems had the potential to detract from the more subtle effect and meaning of the traditional lights. In some ways the change in technology effected a struggle between the sanctuary and nave of the church, a symbolic conflict between authority and populace.\textsuperscript{79}

In order to understand the role of light in Catholic churches and the emerging conflict over its uses one needs to review some history. It is most likely that early Christians employed Roman customs, such as the maintenance of a perpetually burning lamp in front of a shrine as an act of veneration. Perhaps more significant for theological purposes, evidence of God’s will concerning the use of lamps is illustrated in the Old Testament: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Command the children of Israel that
they bring unto thee the finest and clearest oil of olives, to furnish the lamp continually, without the veil of the testimony in the tabernacle of the covenant."80 The use of an olive-oil burning perpetual lamp before the altar, or sanctuary lamp, dates back to at least the fifth century in Christian practice.

Light defined the space of the divine. It guided one's attention and focused one's devotions. Light also served a practical purpose: the visibility it provided safeguarded against accidental desecration and allowed the clergy to read and say the Mass. Although practical reasons may have initiated some lighting practices, mystical meanings and accrued liturgical functions sometimes obscured or took preeminence over this possible interpretation. For example, the 1890 *American Ecclesiastical Review* article “Liturgical Lights” quotes St. Jerome as having stated that “when the gospel is read during Mass at daylight, lights are lit, certainly not for the purpose of dispelling darkness, but as a sign of joy.”81

The ecclesiastical legislation surrounding the candle in liturgy illustrates the importance and layered meanings of liturgical lighting.82 The Church has mandated the use of beeswax for centuries. Historically, there were practical reasons to prefer the beeswax candle over its cheaper alternatives: it was cleaner, longer-burning, and smelled better. Yet beeswax had symbolic value as well. The “virginal” queen bee and the pure wax she produced were likened to the Virgin Mary and her son, Jesus. The wax represented His flesh, the wick represented His soul, and the flame represented this union and the “light” Jesus Christ brought forth.83 That the candle burns as it gives light takes on relevance in the following interpretation: “The candle being consumed whilst
spreading its light, symbolically indicates our Lord's sacrificial death that brought salvation to the world."84 One can see how the substitution of an electric "candle," which is not made of beeswax and does not burn, could be a problem for the Catholic Church. This shift toward convenient electric appliances contrasted dramatically with the Church's prescriptions. For example, in the late nineteenth century the role of candles in liturgy was so specific and integral to the celebration of Mass that if altar candles were accidentally extinguished and there were no replacements, the priest would have to leave the altar unless he had already begun the Canon or Consecration.85 Of course, the degree to which clergy were aware of and followed these liturgical laws is up for debate.86

The Sacred Congregation of Rites (S.C.R.) decreed that electric lights were not permitted on the altar on June 4, 1895.87 In November 1895, February 1899, and August 1902 the Catholic journal for clergy, *American Ecclesiastical Review*, printed and reprinted a description of the ruling as a response to the perennial question of lights on the altar. The distinction between "lights for the purpose of worship" and "lights for decoration or ornament" was made:

> At first sight the distinction . . . may not be very apparent, since all decoration in the church and around the altar has for its purpose to express our worship. What is really meant by the decree is that the splendor of the decoration should not lead us to identify it with the *object* of our adoration . . . . 88

Here the arrangement of artificial lights on the altar was seen to have the potential to distract laypeople from the "humble presence of the Host," and to lure them into idolatry and superstition were they mistakenly led to believe that the light emanated from God rather than man. The distraction due to the "glare" of the calculated "theatrical
arrangements” was decried. In the 1902 version it was repeated that: “there is no objection to their [electric lights’] use for lighting dark churches, or for ornament,” but a caveat was immediately added with the air of official authority “—provided this be done in a becoming way, and so as to exclude anything like imitation of spectacular or theatrical show.” Phrased in this way by the editor, the Church’s recommendation to avoid “glare” in the decoration of churches appeared as a mandate.89 The 1902 description of the decree also corrected a misconception that apparently had evolved. It clarified: “We do not, indeed, wish to make the impression that electric lights are out of place round about the altar or in the sanctuary.”90

Commentaries next to illustrated lighting fixtures in the Benziger Brothers’ 1927 catalogue also show that the Church’s decrees did not necessarily translate into practice. On page ninety-five “New Electric Candelabra for the Altar” are illustrated, “All wired and ready for use” with flame-shaped bulbs.91 Yet it is difficult to know whether the electric candelabra mentioned above were used on the altar or around it. On June 24, 1914 the S.C.R. decreed that electricity could not be used in sanctuary lamps.92 Again, the same catalogue illustrates an electric Sanctuary Bracket Lamp “Used in some churches instead of a Sanctuary Lamp.”93 Whether the function of this electric lamp was to illuminate the sanctuary or to venerate the Eucharistic Christ in the tabernacle is difficult to discern. Yet technically, a sanctuary lamp has the latter, liturgical purpose. Benziger Brothers straddled a fine line serving the Church and her parishes. While the company indicates its knowledge and implementation of the “rubrically correct” in many of its products, it also served the wants of its paying customers.
Electric fixtures were clearly thought to be useful agents in effectively highlighting the altar, but there were practical and aesthetic motivations as well as these devotional ones in the introduction of electric lighting. In 1893, two years prior to the decree of the S.C.R., the editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review* wrote a laudatory article about the use of electricity in Catholic churches, and pointed to the example of St. Francis Xavier’s Church in New York, “the first induced to make use of electricity.” The Jesuit Fathers decided to implement electric lighting due to the ventilation problems they experienced as a result of gas lighting. The author of the article, John W. Fox, enthusiastically noted the superior illumination, economy, and convenience of electric lighting, as well as its hygienic benefits. One wonders though, if the decorating schemes of a church such as St. Francis Xavier’s stirred the objections to “theatrical glare” that later appeared. The effect is described in a contemporary account beginning: “On entering by the principal door beneath the great organ, the eye is confronted by a blaze of light from the high altar, and the alcove in which it is set.” Over 2,000 lights, or light bulbs, were used—to showcase the tabernacle on the altar, “flood” the preacher on his pulpit, form “a cross of incandescent lights,” crown saints with bright halos, and illuminate “all the obscure corners of the structure.”

The words “glare” and “blaze” often came into these discussions of church lighting—one person’s glare might have been another’s blaze. Attention was given to avoiding glare, even by the churches that might have been accused of theatrical lighting such as St. Francis Xavier’s Church. Concealing or frosting bulbs was advised for the “lights in the face of the people” to prevent glare. Yet the distinction between a
heavenly light and a blinding light was not always clear. Presumably, all Catholic
churches sought to dignify the altar by bringing the sanctuary into prominence. This
portion of the church represented the spiritual and celestial realm in which Jesus Christ
and the clergy dwelt. The nave was the temporal and earthly dimension of this united but
separated system. Thus the laity positioned in the nave oriented toward the sanctuary
were “souls . . . on the shores of eternity.” The appearance of the sanctuary mattered to
Catholics because it represented the reality of heaven. In 1878 John Gilmary Shea wrote:

He [the poorest and humblest Catholic] looks up to its Gothic arch or its
fretted ceiling, to all the rich tracery of the altar, the breathing pictures, the
vestments and sacred vessels worthy of the service of God, and feels that
they are his; and that, beautiful as they may be, they are but a faint image
of the glorious things prepared for him hereafter, if he is but faithful to the
end.

Although the sanctuary embodied the unknowable, people knew what it should look like.
They became accustomed to the prescribed and not-so-prescribed methods of decoration.
Cardinal Gibbons spoke of St. Patrick’s Cathedral as the “one familiar spot in a foreign
land” where the immigrant “beholds the altar ablaze with lights” and feels at home.
While “glare” connoted a harsh, blinding light or an excess of splendor, “blaze” seems to
have recalled the symbolism of the pure burning candle or the burning bush, indicating an
abundance of love and devotion rather than pompous display.

In 1896 the “dim glow of gaslight” was replaced by a “blaze of electrical light” in
the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia. The motivation behind this
change was the desire to appreciate the church’s beautiful interior architecture and
decoration. Electric lighting would make it possible to admire works of art hidden from
sight in the dark recesses of the interior. Seven hundred lights were used. They outlined the cornice and circular base of the dome, lighted side aisles with red-tinted globes, threw light upon the fresco altar painting, and were integrated into sanctuary candelabra. It was a cause for celebration. On October 28, 1896 three thousand spectators joined together to witness the instantaneous illumination of the church; as the choir began to sing “Thanks be to God” from Mendelssohn’s “Elijah” the Archbishop pressed the button that made it all happen.99

To further illustrate the reception of modern lighting is the example of St. Ann’s Church in Manhattan. By 1901 the nearly bankrupt parish included the installation of electricity among the necessary church repairs. Designed by Napoleon LeBrun and completed in 1870, this church was declared ‘the most gorgeous of our Catholic temples’ by a contemporary Catholic newspaper.100 Unlike the first decade of the twentieth century, the 1870s were marked by affluence in the history of St. Ann’s. John Gilmary Shea described the building in 1878:

The interior decorations are not glaring, but quiet and subdued, giving the church a devotional, without a gloomy look, and that eminent sense of quiet which falls so soothingly on a mind vexed and perplexed by the cares of this world.101

Lighting could change the whole atmosphere of the church, as experienced when the removal of an unused gallery allowed more light to enter. The parish history records that as a result, “St. Ann’s lost something of the dimness which had become traditionally connected with it and which some had felt added to the religious atmosphere.”102
repair occurred at about the same time that electricity was installed, perhaps compounding the lamentable effect.\textsuperscript{103}

There is no indication that the churches mentioned above were clients of Benziger Brothers, although they could have been. Their stories illustrate the social dimension of church products in an urban parish at the turn of the century. Whether they glared or blazed—a mixture of practical, aesthetic, and devotional concerns informed the decisions made. Clearly there was a contest between the authority of the Church and the desires of Catholics. When electric lighting became available the popular inclination seems to have been to use its brilliance to increase the splendor of God's house. Had this not been so, the Church would not have had to prohibit its use on the altars, inside the tabernacle, behind the Blessed Sacrament, and in sanctuary lamps.\textsuperscript{104} The modern destabilizes. The Church dictates tradition. The story of lighting in Catholic churches around the turn of the century is thus an interesting tale of progression and regression—an exaggerated example of the give and take that occurs when any culture modernizes.
Chapter 3

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Benziger Brothers and "Bad Art"

Benziger Brothers trade catalogues provide a visual record of what was used in Catholic churches and an insight into the tensions inherent in their decoration. Yet this compelling area of study has received little scholarly interest. The objects themselves, unmarked and unused, are not considered worthy of attention because they are not works of art. John Dillenberger did not cover them in his 1989 study *The Visual Arts and Christianity in America* because: “Non-Spanish Catholic art for churches, with a few notable exceptions, had little artistic merit, much of it being of the religious supply store variety.”¹⁰⁵ This bias against the Benziger Brothers’ brand of “bad art” began among the ranks of the clergy, developed substantially under the steady hand of the Liturgical Arts movement, and triumphed in the 1960s with the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰⁶

Articles in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* in the first quarter of the twentieth century show that clergy did not critique the type of church goods used, but the ways in which they were used.¹⁰⁷ A 1901 article repeated the general principle that architectural styles should not be mixed within one church, an indication that audiences still needed to be educated in this regard. It also stated that ornaments should match the scale and
sanctity of the edifice and its parts, and that certain areas of the church had a greater
“claim” to ornament than others. Excessive ornamentation, but not the ornament itself,
was a sign of bad taste.108

Many parishes, eager to show their faith, depleted their funds building massive
churches, leaving no resources to furnish and care for the interior. In 1904 the author of
“The Care of Our Churches and Sacristies” expressed this view: “To build a beautiful
church with the sacrifice of all one’s energies, whilst neglecting the renewal of the details
of the sanctuary, seems like building a mansion therein to starve one’s family . . . .”109
His directions for care of the church paint a picture, not of bad taste, but sorry neglect:

There are to be in the House of God . . . no altars dust-covered and
begrimed with dirt; no shabby, threadbare, and discolored vestments; no
crumpled, grayish albs; no ragged linens or wax-besmeared and spotted
cloths; no missals with tarnished locks and with their covers loose and
worn; nor tattered thumb-marked leaves within; no sacred vessels with
their golden surface washed away, or indentations, proving careless use;
no broken cruets, blackened candlesticks, mold-stained altar cards in
soiled frames; no shredded towels, broken pitchers, bells or books; no
rusty keys or sullied censers and aspersories; no altar candles, stearic
lights instead of wax, that gain their name from their defective weight; no
frankincense whose stifling fragrance does dishonor to the gift, and brings
down heavy clouds like Cain’s sad offering of old that wrought his
brother’s death.110

Although appearance was important, proper devotion and the glory of God were the
primary concerns.

Two articles published in the American Ecclesiastical Review in the 1910s
illustrate the growing interest in restoring the Catholic Church as the mother of Christian
art in the eyes of the public. Charles D. Maginnis, F. A. I. A., wrote in 1911: “With an
architecture which is, in the main, unworthy even of critical interest, higher and more enlightened standards of taste are plainly imperative if the church is to manifest its religious culture to the American people.” Despite this cry for good taste, he also maintained: “Art we must have; whether it be good or bad, —for art is the very breath of Catholic life.”

C. Costantini’s 1914 article “Notes on the Appointments and Decoration of Catholic Churches” shows a more stringent point of view. His attitude toward “industrial art” is a sign that the tide was beginning to turn against the likes of Benziger Brothers. In his opinion, this type of art was false and thus vilified and offended God. It was “fatal to genuine Christian art” because cheap goods, plentiful and within convenient reach, “will never yield anything durable, noble, precious even for further ages.” These objects debased the “older magnificence [of churches] into shreds of red and yellow curtains, tinsel, painted statues, oleographs, mere paper decorations.” They created a market that deprived churches of real art, and artists of real work. He declared: “It is time to shake off the inertia of pernicious tradition.” Yet one wonders if he was referring only to traditional modes of decoration, or if he was also referring to traditional folk practices. When advising against the accumulation of ornamental clutter on altars and in shrines, he revealed a bias in favor of the art object over the devotional object. He wrote: “Do not attach to statues or pictures, ex-votos disfiguring or spoiling works of art; nor intended ‘ornaments’, of like effect.”

In the late 1920s this movement to break with bad habits and dispel a fear of the modern was codified and soon began to spread. The Liturgical Arts Society, an
organization of architects, artists, and clergy, formed in 1926, "with the aim to develop more worthy standards in the art of the Church of the United States." In 1931 the Society's first journal stated: "... the Society is less concerned with the stimulation [sic] of sumptuous building than it is with the fostering of good taste, of honest craftsmanship, of liturgical correctness." The journal, which circulated throughout the world and had global impact in certain circles, was published until 1972. The Society went undisturbed by the changes of the Second Vatican Council because its concerns anticipated them.

The fact that most Catholics were caught off guard by the Council's decisions illustrates the degree to which the Society and its values were divorced from the realities of American Catholic practice.

The theme of lamentation regarding the use by churches of mail-order catalogues and their inferior products is typical of the Liturgical Arts movement. Two books published in 1927 by architect Edward Joseph Weber illustrate this position. In Catholic Ecclesiology and Catholic Church Buildings he railed against the "faults, shams and make-believes" in Catholic churches: "All vulgar tawdriness, every hint of imitation or deception, and all useless profusion of white marble, must be strictly eschewed. Onyx and lacquered brass should be used sparingly, while cheap, tinselly and gaudy effects in white and gold should be rigidly barred." He could almost have had Benziger Brothers in mind when he described "... another case of the rank failures that are happening every day under our very eyes:"

The amount of money wasted on the worthless gaudy altars, with a host of composition statues and a mass of meaningless ornament and absurdities... The... shrines have the worst possible statues, purchased by catalogue from stock designs. Their main characteristics are enervated
faces with the figures in undecorative poses and all are painted in gaudy colors. The scenes for the Stations of the Cross in equally bad taste are full relief groups, done in imitation stone... The votive light stands which receive the tapers of the faithful are of that tasteless catalogue type so common today... Of the many outlandish ornaments in this church, the metal ring electric-light nimbus for the statue of Our Lady must not be forgotten. This, of all things! Nothing could be worse. The nimbus for a statue should in general be of the material from which the statue is made, and as for electric lights on it, perish the thought! 117

Weber and others in the Liturgical Arts camp despised these goods, yet the fact remained that they were popular. Weber could not understand it:

The commercial purveyors of altars, statues, church furniture, stained glass and metal work, the philistine, the tyro and so-called artist, who would sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, seem to be, by some misapprehension, preferred. On good authority it has been stated that ninety-nine out of every one hundred churches in this land today are exhibitions of bad taste and this is very close to the truth. There is something irrational in this egregious state of affairs in so far as the world's Christian art is concerned... 118

Benziger Brothers even published one such liturgically-minded book in 1933, Geoffrey Webb's *The Liturgical Altar*. The introduction by the Very Reverend Bede Jarrett might indicate the distance that Benziger Brothers wished to place between itself and the criticisms levied against its manufactures. Jarrett wrote:

It is indeed to be remembered that often enough our people have a desire for beauty above the level of the shop-article. Indeed, the shop is often enough itself ashamed of the article which it produces. But its experience is that the priests and nuns ask for the bad stuff, and that thus they cannot get away from it, much as they would like to do so. The priests and nuns order not what they prefer, but what mistakenly they think their people prefer. So the vicious circle revolves. 119

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Yet the author himself seems to have fallen in line with the general sentiment of the Liturgical Arts Society. Webb wrote:

... one has only to turn to the illustrations of altars in the commercial advertisements of many Catholic publications to find a constant disregard of the rubrical directions governing their design and furnishing.120

This criticism and others go a long way to explain why the catalogues of the 1920s and 1930s visibly concern themselves with the rubrics, and why they do not display the Benziger name proudly. The exceptional catalogue of this period, once again, is the 1928 catalogue, which showcased the company’s marble altars. Significantly enough, an advertisement for Benziger Brothers’ marble altars and bronze furnishings made it into the advertising section of Edward Weber’s Catholic Ecclesiology, indicating that the company was respectable, if only in this regard.

In an age that sought a distinctly Modern aesthetic even in church decoration, the traditional mass-produced goods of Benziger Brothers were anathema. The vehement reactions against catalogue art in the twentieth century indicate not only a shift in taste, but bring into focus the degree to which companies such as Benziger Brothers affected the material world of American Catholicism. According to Weber, an estimated ninety-nine percent of the country’s churches integrated inexpensively manufactured church ornaments into their devotional space in 1927. The question of their artfulness is irrelevant.

Benziger Brothers was a business precariously situated between the regulations of the historically conservative Church, the opportunities provided by modern technology,
and the purchasing power of American Catholics. It was up-to-date in terms of production and advertising, yet its products maintained traditional forms. Tradition was marketable in the nineteenth century—Benziger Brothers and its products were extolled by the Pope in 1887 and by the nation in 1893. Yet this business of dealing in tradition was not as popular among the taste-makers in the twentieth century, hence Benziger Brothers became “the philistine, tyro and so-called artist” in the eyes of the cultural authority of the time. Aside from illustrating manufactured church goods in the history of the American Catholic Church, the story of Benziger Brothers tells of the contest between tradition and modernity in a changing society.
Figure 1. Partial Map of Manhattan, 1863. This map shows the locations of Benziger Brothers’ showrooms and factories throughout the years. (1.) William Street, 1858-1864. (2.) 9 Dey Street, 1865-1873. (3.) 311 Broadway, 1874-1883. (4.) 36 Barclay Street, c. 1884-1928 (at least). (5.) 90 Fulton Street, Factory, 1866-1871. (6.) 43-45 Dey Street, Factory, 1872-1893.

Dates and locations were determined using New York business directories, 1858-1905, city directories, 1861-1881, and information from contemporary catalogue covers. The map itself is from Trow’s New York City Directory for 1863.
Figure 2. Benziger Brothers Brooklyn Factory. Images of the factory abound in the Benziger Brothers material, this one is from 1893's *Catalogue of Vestments, Banners and Regalia.*
Figure 3. Design Patent for the Combined Crucifix, Font, and Candelabrum, assigned to Benziger Brothers on September 17, 1901. Feeley Company advertised the same item in its c. 1910 catalogue. This product was designed for personal home use and sick calls.
Figure 4. Page Illustrating Ostensoria, from 1879's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia*. Benziger Brothers' liturgical objects were available in Byzantine, Modern Byzantine, Byzantine-Gothic, Byzantine-Roman, Roman, Renaissance, Rococo, French, German, Etruscan, and Gothic styles.
Figure 5. Gothic Ostensorium, Columbian World’s Fair. The oversize ostensorium was the centerpiece of Benziger Brothers’ exhibit of its New York manufactures at the 1893 World’s Fair, where the company received an award for its “High Class Workmanship in the Production of Gold and Silver, and Plated Church Ware, and in the Adherence in their Production to the True Ecclesiastical Style.” Page from 1893’s Catalogue of Vestments, Banners and Regalia.
ERRATA. Page 19.— Charges No. 75 should be No. 90 and the price with Copper and White Argent, $5, should be $10.00 instead of $60.00; and the price of the solid silver, all gilt, should be $110.00 instead of $100.00.
Page 15.—有一定的文具有错误，需纠正。
Page 26.— The prices of Holy Water Pots Nos. 85 and No. 86, should be reversed.

Figure 6. Alphabetical List of Catalogue Contents. This page from 1885’s Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Statues, Vestments, Banners and Regalia, gives a sense of the volume and range of items Benziger Brothers carried.
Our best chalice, at a price which places it within reach of most priests, who appreciate artistic and durably wrought altar vessels.

The cup is supported by a solid base bearing a cross of delicate, intricate execution of detail. Heavy plating and rich material. The cup and stem are etched silver.

Figure 7. Chalice, 1937. This object from the 1937 catalogue, *Church Goods*, displays a continuity of traditional style and form (compare with Figure 8). The presentation of a singular item on the page surrounded by clusters of words might be seen as an attempt to imbue this standardized product with a sense of uniqueness.
Figure 8. Chalices, 1879. Page 1879's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.*
Figure 9. Cover of 1879’s *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia*. Representative of the “prototypical” catalogues. Red lettering, gilded ornament on neutral ground. 9" by 11 1/2", 116 pages. Library of Congress.
TO OUR PATRONS.

Our Illustrated Catalogue of 1873, the first attempt in this country to a complete description and illustrated Catalogue of Church Goods, was so cordially welcomed by the Reverend Clergy, Religious Institutions, and the Catholic Press, that the preparation of the present Catalogue has been to us a most pleasant task.

This Catalogue is double the size of the first one, and, in every respect, is by far

THE MOST COMPLETE EVER ISSUED IN THIS COUNTRY.

Many new articles and illustrations have been added in the Port devoted to “Goods manufactured in our own Establishment,” as well as in the other Ports, and we now present, for the first time, a nearly

Complete Series of Illustrations of all our different Classes of Vestments:

Chasubles, Stoles, Veils, etc., and of Burners, Scarfs, and Badges, which we hope will prove of great help to our customers in making out their orders.

The great decline in price of both labor and material, as well as the absence of any gold premium, has enabled us, we are happy to say, to reduce the prices of both our own manufactures and of imported goods, many of which are now

ACTUALLY CHEAPER THAN "BEFORE THE WAR."

We make it a point to supply every article in our line, and, as we resent to give satisfaction, any goods which do not please may be returned to us, provided they are sent back at once, in good order, and free of expense.

Our stock is greater in variety, fresher, and superior in quality to any of the kind in this country, while our many facilities and business advantages enable us to sell at the lowest figures.

We are sincerely thankful for the kind and liberal patronage extended us by the Reverend Clergy, Religious Institutions, and the Trade, and solicit a continuance of their favors. We guarantee prompt and liberal attention to all orders, and the most liberal terms.

BENZIGER BROTHERS.

PLEASE PRESERVE THIS CATALOGUE CAREFULLY.

It is intended for permanent use, and, therefore, the prices, which are variable, are given separately. New Price-Lists will be issued as occasion requires; and Supplements to this Catalogue will appear from time to time.

Figure 10. Letter “To Our Patrons” from 1879’s Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.

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PART I.

CHURCH ORNAMENTS.

MANUFACTURED IN OUR OWN ESTABLISHMENT.

Please see remarks on next page.

Figure 11. Chapter Page from 1879's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.*

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Figure 12. Cover of 1890's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Statues, Banners and Regalia*. Example of the "authoritative" catalogue, almost identical to the cover of the 1888 catalogue. Purple on light blue ground, gilded lettering and border. 9" by 13", 211 pages. Library of Congress.
Figure 13. Cover of 1885's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Statues, Vestments, Banners and Regalia*. Example of the "authoritative" catalogue. Gilded lettering, border, and ornament on pale green ground. 9 ½" by 11 ½", 191 pages. Library of Congress.
Figure 14. Back Cover of 1890’s Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Statues, Banners and Regalia.
Figure 15. Cover of 1900’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture*. Example of the “artful” catalogue. Gold and black. 9" by 12”, 176 pages. Winterthur Library.
Figure 10. Back Cover of 1900's Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture.
An experience of forty years, backed up by a full corps of accomplished artists and skilled artisans, who have been with us for years, and the latest and most important machinery, enable us to produce goods in gold, silver, and base metals that are unsurpassed for beauty of design and excellence of workmanship.

A visit to our factory would make possible our thorough equipment and warranted facilities for the manufacture of everything in the line of the Goldman Brothers' products, and of ornamental metal work from the finest metals, to the newest shapes or new and more efficient machinery for gas or electricity. In our shops may be seen in active operation all the various branches of trade necessary for the successful carrying out of every detail of the manufacture of the many articles belonging to the altar, the sanctuary, and the body of the church.

One of the most interesting experiences in our factory is that of metal spinning. The results for this work are a tabor, censer, vessel or metal forms, respectively known as clews, a wheel, a set of metal tools, and foundry moulds, an intelligent mechanism. Given these, a bush of metal, gold or silver, copper or brass, may be changed and speedily transformed into a finished article, without waste of any kind, and without exposure to the heat at all.

Turning is a work of much importance, and is another that a machine might be directed to do. It is the turner who can make perfectly precise and solidly pieces of metal man handle at one, in a moment, before the eyes. It is he who makes the "thread" of a

Figure 17. Illustrated "Visit" to the Benziger Brothers Brooklyn Factory. Descriptions like this one seem to have their genesis in 1894's Silversmith's Art and are found in the "artful" catalogues. This is an example from the 1905 catalogue, Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture.
Figure 18. Cover of 1903's *Our Manufactures*. Example of the “artful” catalogue. Pink and red flowers, red lettering, green branches and leaves on stippled green background. 9½” by 13”, 200 pages. Cooper-Hewitt Library.
Figure 19. Cover of 1905’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture*. Example of the “artful” catalogue. White, purple, green, orange elements on bluish-green background. 9” by 13”, 352 pages. Library of Congress.
Figure 20. Example of Art Nouveau Page Border, 1905’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture*. 

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Figure 21. Example of Art Nouveau Page Border, 1905’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture.*
Figure 22. Art Nouveau Candelabrum. This product was illustrated among many traditionally-styled objects in the 1903 and 1905 catalogues.
Figure 23. Copyright Notice, 1905’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture.*
Figure 24. Cover of 1917's *Church Goods*. Example of the "no-nonsense" catalogue. 9" by 13", 71 pages. State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The covers of the 1927 and 1937 catalogues are even more "no-nonsense." They illustrate no images, just the title, *Church Goods.*
Figure 25. Cover of 1928 Catalogue. Red and white lettering on photographic ground. Example of the “no-nonsense” catalogue. 9" by 12 1/4", 328 pages. New York Public Library.
No. 1319. Byzantine Candlesticks.
25 inches high, per pair.
Crucifixes to match the Candlesticks.
24 inches high.
No. 1316. Gothic Candlesticks.
33 inches high, per pair.
Crucifixes to match the Candlesticks.
32 inches high.

No. 1318. Roman Candlesticks.
26 inches high, per pair.
Crucifixes to match the Candlesticks.
25 inches high.

No. 1317. Byzantine Candlesticks.
30 inches high, per pair.
Crucifixes to match the Candlesticks.
29 inches high.

No. 1315. Gothic Candlesticks.
32 inches high, per pair.
Crucifixes to match the Candlesticks.
31 inches high.

No. 1314. Gothic Candlesticks.
24 inches high, per pair.
Crucifixes to match the Candlesticks.
23 inches high.

Glass Bobaches,
Fancy and Plain.

BENJAMIN BROTHERS, NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, AND ST. LOUIS.

Figure 26. Imported Candlesticks, 1879's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.*
Figure 27. Imported Candelabra, 1879's *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.*
Figure 28. Imported Sanctuary Lamps, 1879's Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.
Church Ornaments, Imported from Europe.

No. 1283. Angel Candelabra.

For 2 lights, 20 inches high. With varnished lilacs.  

No. 1276. Flower Basket.

For 2 lights, 20 inches high. With lilacs of varnished glass.

No. 1251. Brackets.

For 1 light, varnished.

No. 1252. Brackets.

For 1 light, varnished.

No. 1253. Brackets.

For 1 light, varnished.

With hand of varnished brass or wood piece. For 1 light, varnished.

The same, with grapes, and wheat, and lilacs.

Figure 29. Imported Brackets, 1879’s Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Material for Vestments, and Regalia.
THE ADVANTAGE of the New Patent Candelabrum with Interchangeable Arms is, that almost all the different positions can be made as with the celebrated Patent Candelabrum with Movable Arms. The price is half of that of the Candelabrum with Movable Arms, so that we can furnish TWO PAIRS of the new Candelabrum at the price of one pair of the other.

HOW IT WORKS: With each pair of these candelabra will be furnished an extra set of arms, marked 6 in illustration. If different designs are desired, arms 6 are taken out and arms 5 put in their place. Arms 6 are arms 5 reversed. For this change to 6 the sockets are unscrewed at side marked 7 and screwed on side 6.

The celebrated Patent Candelabrum with Movable Arms (No. 1844) which is sold at $18.00 per pair, has of course a great and unique advantage, that all changes are made by simply moving the arms, and not being obliged to take apart the arms or the sockets.

Figure 30. Patent Candelabra. The candelabra with interchangeable arms was marketed as an improvement over the candelabra with movable arms, pictured at the lower left. Benziger Brothers patented variations on this theme from 1893 to 1933, at least. The Candelabrum with Movable Arms first appeared in the Benziger Brothers material in the 1893 circular, which warned that others had infringed upon their property, and had been caught. Patent candelabra are ubiquitous in the subsequent catalogues. This page is just one of four devoted to patent candelabra in 1905’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture.*
Figure 31. View of Benziger Brothers' Salesroom. 1928 Catalogue.
Figure 32. View of Benziger Brothers' Salesroom. 1928 Catalogue.
Figure 33. Gas and Electric Light Fixtures, 1905 Catalogue. This page also appeared in the 1900 catalogue.
Figure 34. Gas and Electric Light Fixtures, 1905 Catalogue. This page also appeared in the 1900 catalogue.
Figure 35. Gas and Electric Light Fixtures, 1905 Catalogue. This page also appeared in the 1900 catalogue.
Figure 36. Photograph, St. John’s Church, Utica, New York in 1905’s Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture. Here Benziger Brothers’ manufactured lights outline the base of the arcade in the sanctuary, climb up columns, and illuminate chapels.
Figure 37. Photograph. St. Francis of Sales Church, Cincinnati, Ohio in 1905's *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture*. Here Benziger Brothers' manufactured lights are incorporated into the architectural details of the apse. Also note the standing fixtures in the sanctuary.
Figure 38. Photograph, St. Michael’s Church, Buffalo, New York in 1905’s *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture*. Note Benziger Brother’s hanging fixtures and the standing candelabra positioned among the pews.

2 Ibid., 219.

3 Ibid., 209.

4 Ibid., 215.

5 Regarding the role of the importance of religious publishing in the context of devotional Catholicism, see Dolan, 212-215. He mentions Benziger Brothers once in this context: “In 1891 Benziger Brothers in New York, . . . the largest publisher of Catholic novels, advertised a list of one hundred and sixteen novels.’ This literature was ‘self-consciously didactic’ and concerned primarily with religious subjects; like Catholic newspapers and magazines, it fostered devotional Catholicism.” Dolan, 215, quoting Paul R. Messbarger, Fiction with a Parochial Purpose (Boston: Boston University Press, 1971).

6 My source for information on devotional Catholicism is Dolan, specifically, 180-192, 211-239. The following statement shows that Papal actions were ultimately the causal agent of a business such as Benziger Brothers: “Few of these rituals were new to the nineteenth century. They were traditional Catholic practices which had been revived with great vigor during the devotional revolution of the nineteenth century. New papal indulgences attached to these devotions made them especially appealing, and their popularity kept an entire industry of religious publishers and merchants in business,” Dolan, 231.

7 This colorful and romanticized history of the Benziger family is found in Marieli and Rita Benziger, August Benziger: Portrait Painter (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1958), 33-44. Since almost all of the histories available on the firm of Benziger Brothers were written by members of the family, the accuracy of the accounts must be taken with a grain of salt. In the absence of company records or reports by an outside agency the task of deciphering reality from advertising spin is nearly impossible. Given that the family name was synonymous with product name it seems inevitable that certain aspects of Benziger family history were adjusted to meet the company’s ends. Karl Benziger’s family history, written in German, was inaccessible to the author.


9 Mariela and Rita Benziger, 43.
A colored illustration from one of Benziger Brothers’ publications reappeared as a sample page in 1883’s *Catalogue of Church Ornaments* . . . , showing the company’s emphasis on advertising books. In a 1898 catalogue of books, which was cleverly named, “Portrait Catalogue of Catholic Authors,” images engaged the customer in the lists of titles. In the 1917 catalogue *Publications and Importations* Benziger Brothers illustrated the cover, binding and page edge treatment of books for sale. In the 1920s the black books themselves were illustrated in color along with a selection of other objects in the back sections of church goods catalogues.


Ibid., 1-4.

Ibid., 3-4.


Cincinnati and St. Louis were two of the points in ‘the German triangle.’ The third was Milwaukee. A great number of German immigrants settled here in the mid-nineteenth century, Dolan, 137. It makes sense that the German-speaking Benzigers would open stores in the hubs of this area.

Benziger Brothers. *Silversmith’s Art and Ecclesiastical Metal Work at its Home/Benziger Brothers’ Factory* (New York, 1894), 5-6.

Wilson’s *Business Directory of New York City* listed Benziger Brothers as “Silversmith” in 1870 and 1871. The company continued to be listed as a bookseller until the 1880s.
The company founded its first factory on Fulton Street in 1866 according to a 1894 Benziger Brothers circular and the city directory. Most Benziger Brothers sources list the date as 1864. It seems likely that in the wake of the establishment of the Brooklyn factory in 1894 the age of the previous factory was rounded up to thirty years of age.

Dolan, 161. For reference to the “brick and mortar” priest as a dominant image in the mid-nineteenth century, see Dolan, 170-171.


*Trow’s New York City Directory* 1865, p. 18, and 1868, p. 31.

Colleen McDannell relays the Catholic quality of Barclay Street in, Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 170. J. and R. Lamb and its “Church Furniture” was associated with the needs of the Episcopal Church, see Jennifer M. Merritt, “ ‘Communion Plate of the Most Approved and Varied Patterns, in True Ecclesiastical Style’: Francis W. Cooper, Silversmith for the New York Ecclesiastical Society, 1851 to 1855,” (Master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1997), 26. I suggest that these classifications were aligned with denomination because the categories did not aptly describe the products supplied, but they were indicative of some kind of distinction. This observation, the classification of certain companies with a known denominational slant, and the fact that none of the dealers of “Church Furniture” were located on typically Catholic Barclay Street, according to the directories, lead me to the conclusion that “furniture” denoted goods for Protestants and “articles” or “ornaments” denoted goods for Catholics. To what extent these classifications determined patronage is up for debate.


Zalesch, 78, n. 1.


W. J. Feeley Company, c. 1896, 64.
Despite the “cheapness” of their wares, these objects were still worth stealing. In 1921, thieves stole money as well as silver objects from the Benziger Brother factory. Report of theft, *New York Times*, 30 October 1921, p. 2.

Merritt, 8, n. 1.


Merritt, 36, 49.


Merritt, 16-17.

Benziger Brothers, *Silversmith’s Art* . . . , 9.


Oliveri, 63-64.

Some Benziger Brothers materials that cite this award are 1893’s *Catalogue of Vestments, Silversmith’s Art*, and 1900’s *Church Ornaments*.

Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 177.

Date of “Printer” title in Marieli and Rita Benziger, 42; quote from the 1900 catalogue, 16.


Benziger Brothers ostensibly owned a marble studio in Italy (1917 catalogue) and employed artists in Europe to reproduce famous paintings for the altar (1928 catalogue). The statues of Froc Robert eventually became “our” statuary in time. Indeed, in the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, the company had exhibits under its name in the United States, France and Germany pavilions, as its trade card from Fair shows.

47 A bound collection of Benziger Brothers materials in the Avery library shows the recycling of circulars and other ephemera, c. 1886-1890.


49 Refer to n. 2%. Benziger Brothers' product designs were also used by others for inspiration. The 1900 catalogue was labeled “Designing Room,” indicating that it was employed by another company. Reiman Michel, a silversmith for Kirk Co. in Baltimore, looked to at least one Benziger Brothers catalogue as a source of ideas. A page from one of the 1920s catalogues, identical to Figure 7, is among his papers in the Downs Collection at Winterthur. Winterthur Museum also has some of his tools in its collection.

50 As illustrated in Paul Atterbury and Clive Wainwright, eds., *Pugin: A Gothic Passion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 244.

51 New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, 3.

52 *Trow’s New York City Directory* lists the home addresses of Martin and Nicholas Benziger in Europe from 1879 to 1881.


55 An example of a French church goods catalogue is in the collections of the Winterthur Library: Maurice Lenain, *Fabrique d’ornements d’église* (Paris, 1889). The international nature of the market is exemplified in this catalogue’s index: it is translated into English, Spanish, and Portuguese.


57 Ibid., 4

58 Benziger Brothers, *Silversmith’s Art*, 44, and Benziger Brothers, *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Statues, Banners and Regalia* (New York, 1890), 6. How remarkable this award was is uncertain. Maison Blais had previously won similar distinctions and many of the French catalogues illustrated the papal arms on their covers, whether they had permission is unknown. See Berthod.

60 Benziger Brothers, *Catalogue of Church Ornaments, Vestments, Statues, Banners and Regalia* (New York, 1888), 6

61 Benziger Brothers, 1888 catalogue, 5-6; Benziger Brothers, 1890 catalogue, 7.

62 Benziger Brothers, Circular (New York, 1894), 1.

63 Benziger Brothers, *Silversmith's Art*, 13

64 Ibid., 16.

65 Benziger Brothers, *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture* (New York, 1900), 6.

66 Ibid., 9.


69 Benziger Brothers, *Our Manufactures* (New York, 1903), 152, and Benziger Brothers, *Church Ornaments of Our Own Manufacture* (New York, 1905), 131.

70 Benziger Brothers, 1903 catalogue, 49.

71 Although photographs were used in earlier catalogues, they were used sparingly to draw attention to new or special items. Jackson Lears relates that the use of photography in advertising was still limited as late as the 1910s, in Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 293.


73 Explanations on symbolism in Benziger Brothers, Catalogue (New York, 1928), 27, 239.

74 Benziger Brothers, *Silversmith's Art*, 5.
Isaac Frink appears alone under the category “Church Lights” in 1891. A copy of his 1892 trade catalogue is at Hagley Library. It is most likely that Benziger Brothers also sold lighting fixtures in the 1890s, yet there is no evidence to confirm that assumption.

Benziger Brothers, 1905 catalogue, 165.

Feeley, c. 1896, 64.

Testimonials indicate that Benziger Brothers’ electric candelabra were used in the sanctuary and in front of stations of the cross, in Benziger Brothers, 1900 catalogue, 175. Photographs in the 1905 catalogue of church goods illustrate their use in the nave.

In 1927 Catholic architect Edward Weber acknowledged this conflict and bemoaned the fact that the nave and ceilings of churches were lighted at the expense of the altar and sanctuary. He wrote that, “The problem of lighting adequately the sanctuary—the Holy of Holies—so that the altar becomes the cynosure of all eyes, while at the same time allowing sufficient illumination for the nave, requires a great deal of thought. This condition really demands lighting systems separate and distinct,” in Edward Joseph Weber, Catholic Church Buildings (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1927), 309.


Wapelhorst, 101.

It would take an expert to untangle the history of the Church’s legislation. While I have pointed to examples of it here, I cannot claim that I have encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. I rely on Geoffrey Webb’s 1933 description of the different bodies of authority: “The rubrics which govern the construction and appearance of the altar and its canopy [and most liturgical objects] are contained in four of the Church’s liturgical books, the Missale Romanum, Pontificale Romanun, Rituale Romanum, and Caerimoniale Episcoporum . . . They are the Church’s official liturgical legislation, and so hold the highest authority possible . . . [T]he decrees of the Congregation of Sacred Rites, founded by Pope Sixtus V. in 1587 . . . are of a different character. They deal with local abuses which have grown up at different times, and are therefore corrective rather than creative . . . [T]hey point back to the original rubrics, with the object of keeping to the fore the prime purpose of the altar, and as much of its primitive simplicity as possible. But in them the Church is dealing with human nature in every part of the globe; so that in practice she often tolerates what in fact falls short of the full statement of the principle,” in Geoffrey Webb, The Liturgical Altar (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1933), 35-36.


Wapelhorst, 98.

In 1933 Geoffrey Webb chastised his readers: “... the difficulty of finding the Church’s directions in an accessible and inexpensive form is constantly urged as a reason for not following them.” The variance with which these rules are enforced is also indicated by Webb’s mention of two decrees that apply to the veneration of the altar, which “are no longer binding, owing to their nonobservance, even in Rome,” Webb, 16, 76.

Prior to this, gas lights were also prohibited. Webb, 82, n. 1.


Ibid., 205.

Benziger Brothers, 1927 catalogue, p. 95.

Bernard Berthod, “Textes canoniques classés par ordre chronologique,” 59.

Benziger Brothers, *Church Goods* (New York, 1927), 106. In 1940 the S. C. R. allowed the use of electricity in the sanctuary lamp under certain circumstances, Berthod, 60.


Fox, 18.

Nieuwbarn, 32-34.
97 Shea, 18.


101 Shea, 153.

102 Brown, 34.

103 Photographs of the church's interior from 1902, 1927, and 1954 show the variety of lighting fixtures and lighting techniques that were used over the years. In 1902 there were bracket fixtures attached to columns; in 1927 light flooded the sanctuary, but its source was hidden, and in 1954 there were hanging fixtures and bracket fixtures among and on the columns lining the nave, both types had globular glass shades, in Brown.

104 For regulation regarding electric illumination of interior of Tabernacle see, "Roman Documents of the Month," American Ecclesiastical Review 45 (November 1911): 592. For the regulation against placing light behind the Blessed Sacrament see Wapelhorst, p. 110.


106 The Second Vatican Council met from 1962 to 1965, creating sixteen documents that called for changes that would make the Catholic Church more accessible to its constituents and more attuned to secular life. The absolute authority of the Church was purposefully lessened and an emphasis on flexibility took its place. The changes in the celebration of Mass required physical changes. Latin was replaced by vernacular languages, requiring new printed materials, and priests now said the Mass facing the congregation, requiring a reorganization of the objects upon the altar. The removal of communion rails was also a sign of this desire to allow access to the interior workings of the Church. Priests who were active at the height of these new and exciting changes might now consider "Vatican II not so much the dawn of a more open, inclusive church, but an anomalous thunderbolt of progressivism sandwiched between a past and future that recoil from change and unfettered debate." Diana Jean Schemo, "Nearing Retirement, Priests of the 60's Fear Vatican II Legacy is Lost," New York Times, Sunday, 10 September 2000, p. 1., continued on p. 34. Devotional practices changed after Vatican II: the "clutter" of statues and
pictures gave way to a simple devotional setting, novenas and parish missions were less popular, fewer people prayed the rosary or went to confession, Dolan, 430-434. For more on Vatican II, see Dolan, 421-454, and Vatican, The Teachings of the Second Vatican Council (Westminster, Md: The Newman Press, 1966). For more on the issue of taste in Catholic decoration, see “Christian Kitsch and the Rhetoric of Bad Taste,” in McDannell, Material Christianity, particularly 167-186.

107 Articles from this journal, a monthly publication for clergy, played a large role in providing commentary on Catholic church decoration for the purposes of this article. It was one of two indexed journal available to the author, and the only one that provided insight into attitudes toward lighting. A more complete study, including more popular literature, would require research into the large body of Catholic newspapers and journals, as well as individual church archives.


110 Ibid., 559.


112 Catholics of southern European descent were the most likely to show such outward devotion using ex-votos. One wonders if the ensuing reaction against the form and decoration of American Catholic churches was also in some ways an attack on immigrants, notably recently-arriving Italians, who had yet to “Americanize.”


114 Dillenberger, 164-168.

115 John Dillenberger’s study of journals and the visual arts of Christian churches reveals a trend in this type of literature regardless of denomination. He writes that in these twentieth-century sources “there is a concern with quality. Article after article berates the poor quality of art objects in churches and indeed of the architecture itself. Attention is given to pioneering developments in art and architecture, with the hope that they may influence the future,” His description of religious journals at the turn of the 19th century with regard to Protestant culture might be applied to the literature surrounding Catholic churches in the twentieth century. He writes: “Apologetically, writer after writer makes reference to the early preoccupations of settling a new country, which did not allow a
context of leisure and refinement for art to be born,” Dillenberger, 164, 57. In addition to the demands of becoming settled in a new land the immigrant “Church was too busy repelling attacks from without” to develop artistic standards according to Weber, Catholic Church Buildings, 24.


119 Bede Jarrett in Webb, xi-xii.

120 Webb, 20.
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Tiffany Studios. Ecclesiastical Department. New York, c. 1918.


