



End Notes

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On September 2, 2012, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels will mark the 10th anniversary of its Dedication. Cardinal Roger Mahony, however, is not the only leader of the Archdiocese to envision a replacement for St. Vibiana's in downtown Los Angeles. Two of his predecessors, Bishop Thomas J. Conaty and Archbishop John J. Cantwell had similar plans; but, obviously, theirs never reached fruition. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see just what each man intended.

Sister Mary Joanne Wittenburg, SND
Cathedral Archivist
555 W. Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012



The Cathedral of St. Vibiana was formally consecrated with much pomp and ceremony on April 30, 1876. In 1893, a permanent altar of Parian and Carrara marble and Mexican onyx was installed. Five years later, 1898, electric fixtures replaced the earlier gas lamps and wooden pews substituted for the antiquated benches. Nevertheless, at least bishops anticipated the day when the building would eventually be replaced by a more “magnificent... structure that [would be] a credit to the Catholics of the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles, and the pride of the city.”

In January 1904, just a few months after his installation, Bishop Thomas J. Conaty (1903-1915) brought the matter of a new cathedral before his diocesan Consultors. The board unanimously agreed that he should petition Rome for permission “to change the location of the present cathedral to a more suitable site and furthermore be allowed to demolish the present one.” The Consultors also urged the Bishop to build the new church “within the limits of an already existing parish in the center of that portion of the city inhabited by the most respectable and influential Catholics.”

Ultimately, the site chosen was an extensive block of land between Eighth and Ninth (now James W. Woods Blvd.) streets and between Whittier and Green streets. According to the March 30, 1906 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, the church was to be “a combination of Spanish and Moorish in architectural design and ... will also combine many of the beauties of cathedrals of continental Europe in its interior arrangement.” In fact, the article continued, “During Bishop Conaty’s visit abroad last year he spent much time in studying the details of these old cathedrals and drew from them numerous ideas for the new St. Vibiana’s.”

The structure, the article went on, was to be “approached by a series of terraces and stairways on the Ninth Street side but [would] be level with Eighth Street.” The entrance would be flanked by two towers, set back approximately 64 feet from the street and rising to a height of 195 feet. “The central

dome... will be eighty feet in diameter, richly ornamented and covered with polychrome tiles of blue, yellow and green in elaborate design.”

The article concluded by noting that as yet neither the material from which the cathedral would be built nor its ultimate cost had been determined. “These have been left as after-considerations, which shows that cash is not lacking.”

Although Conaty’s advisors approved the plans for the new cathedral, his Metropolitan Archbishop, Patrick W. Riordan of San Francisco did not. He believed the proposed church was too large, too expensive and “at least a quarter of a century ahead of its time.” Nevertheless, Conaty went ahead with his plans until an economic downturn brought the project to a halt in 1907. Realizing that it would be several years before he could begin again, the Bishop decided to build a small chapel dedicated to Our lady of Guadalupe on the property. Despite declining health and tensions in Europe, Conaty continued to dream of a “new” Cathedral. As late as 1912, he was considering the purchase of a 6.5 acre site on the southeast corner of Wilshire Blvd. and Vermont Avenue for a cathedral.

The Right Reverend John J. Cantwell succeeded Conaty as Bishop of Monterey-Los Angeles in 1917. In spite of the fact that he later oversaw the expansion and renovation of St. Vibiana’s in 1922-1924, he too felt the desire “to do something ‘in reference to a decent Cathedral Church in this city.’” In 1943, the Archbishop again declared his intention to erect such a church. Two years later, 1945, he revealed his plans to locate the structure on a site in the mid-Wilshire area. He also announced that he had received permission from the Holy See to change the name of the cathedral to Our Lady of the Angels.

Cantwell’s cathedral would be in a variation of the Basilica-type style, seat approximately 2,500 people and cost about \$1.5 million. However, when the actual plans were drawn, it was evident that the property was too small for the church which the Archbishop envisioned. Although the plans were redrawn and modifications made, poor health gradually forced Cantwell to loose interest in the project and the idea was abandoned. When his successor, Cardinal James Francis McIntyre arrived in Los Angeles in 1948, he preferred to channel the funds which his predecessor had set aside for a new cathedral into Catholic school expansion.

When Cardinal Roger Mahony was appointed Archbishop of Los Angeles in 1985, he had no plans to build a new Cathedral. In fact, in 1991-1992, he had established a Blue Ribbon Committee with the intention of renovating St. Vibiana’s in order to further comply with the liturgical directives of Vatican Council II. The Northridge Earthquake in 1994, however, dramatically altered these plans.

Pope Pius X had given Bishop Conaty permission to build a new cathedral. Pope Pius XII had sanctioned Archbishop Cantwell’s request to change the name. Therefore, in 1996, the Archdiocese purchased a 5.5 acre site on Temple Street and Grand Avenue as the site for the new church. The following year, on September 21, 1997, the site was blessed and just five years later, September 2, 2002, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels was dedicated. Thus the church, about which Bishop Thomas J. Conaty and Archbishop John J. Cantwell may have dreamed, under Cardinal Roger Mahony, became a reality.