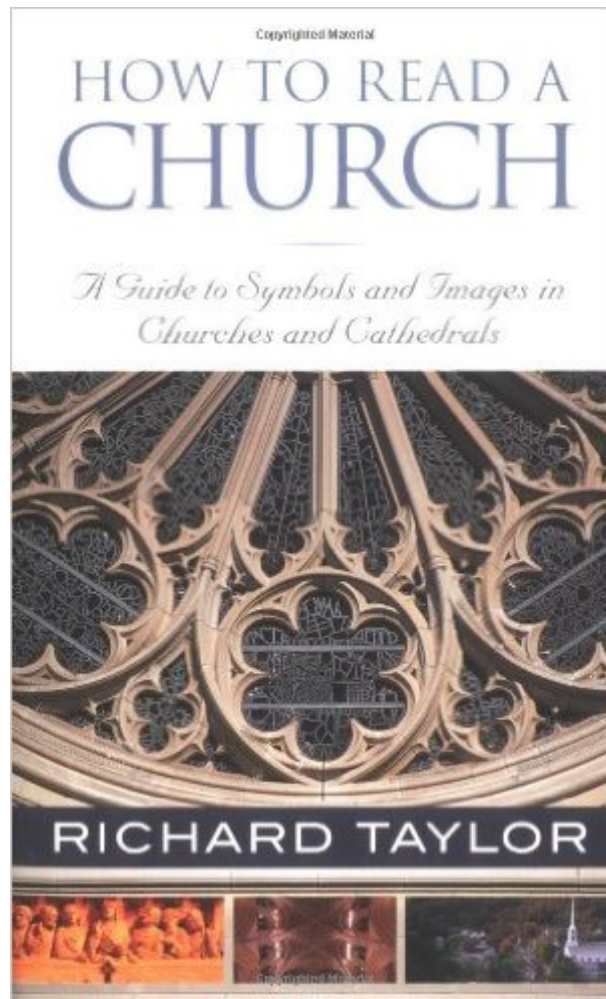


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# How To Read A Church: A Guide To Symbols And Images In Churches And Cathedrals



## Synopsis

Explores the principal features of a church or cathedral and what each represents, such as the significance of church layout, the importance of such details as the use of colors or letters, the identity of people and scenes, and the symbolism of animals and plants. Original.

## Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: HiddenSpring; unknown edition (July 1, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1587680300

ISBN-13: 978-1587680304

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.7 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (17 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Ever wonder why some saints in paintings and sculpture have square haloes? Why columns have foliate capitals? And what are all those hand signals? Richard Taylor explains in *How to Read a Church*, written not as a scholastic thesis but as a general guide for lay persons. The basic layout of churches, the number and placement of stained glass windows, the grouping of figures and how to identify who's who - all of this can be helpful in figuring out what the builders and decorative artists were trying to convey to those viewing and appreciating the results of their labors. The book works as a resource, and does not have to be read from cover to cover. Individual chapters, such as that on styles of crosses, can be read separately and perused at leisure. Nice resource.

Taylor's book is a terrific resource explaining a much misunderstood subject. Churches are indeed designed to be 'read'; to be, in the words of another reviewer, "a feast for the senses." Taylor explains that classical church architecture reflects the understanding that a church is a ship (the word 'nave,' referring to the interior of a church, is from the Latin 'navis' for ship) sailing the faithful to a New Jerusalem, led by their 'captain' priest. Rich eucharistic symbols like the pelican, a bird

which feeds its young with its blood, are explained in detail. Were more people to absorb the lessons of this book, we perhaps would see an end to the artless, crude church designs that have dominated over the past 40 years.

While the contents of the book are most interesting the author does not deal at any length with the specifics outlined in the title. The bulk of the text deals with in-depth explanations of various bible characters and stories. The couple of line drawings towards the end of the book show captions to explain various parts of the garments illustrated but NOT all of them are explained and then other descriptive words are introduced which are not shown on the illustrations. I did read the entire book and it was rather a disappointment.

I was more than happy with "How to Read a Church". Even if you were raised in the Catholic religion as I was, the symbolism utilized by the church was hardly ever explained or alluded to. After reading the book I felt that I understood far more about churches, faith and the motivation behind the use of the symbols. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who has a basic understanding of religion and churches, but is looking for more of the necessary background. I only wish that we had examined a bit more of the material contained in this book, and, had a bit less catechism thrust at us in our childhood religious studies. Richard Taylor proved to be an excellent author. He is tremendously well informed, writes very well and was surprisingly amusing. "How to Read a Church" was an absolute delight and will be kept at hand for easy reference.

This book was exactly what I wanted to get my mother for Christmas. She went to Europe and when she came back all she talked about were the cathedrals. The photography and stories behind each picture were priceless. Well worth the money!! Loved it.

This book gave great insight of why something was where it was in a church. I especially enjoyed that it was easy to look things up, such as baptismal font, what the difference between an altar and a pulpit was. Very reader friendly.

Well written and organized. I learned a lot. Potential buyers should know that the focus of this book is on Anglican and Catholic churches. I'd recommend it very highly.

I've not yet finished the book, but early on Mr. Taylor mentions that the "Catholic Church 'banned'

the Latin Mass in order to increase participation by the laity. Whatever the high points of this book may be, the Church never "banned" the Latin Mass. In fact, the Second Vatican Council, which ALLOWED for some parts of the mass to be translated into the vernacular, also encouraged local parishes to catechize (educate) their members in the basic Latin prayers of the Mass so they could participate. It appears that it was easier to translate the mass into dozens of different languages than it was to get Catholics to learn a few phrases and prayers in Latin. At any rate, the Latin Mass is still celebrated with great enthusiasm and beauty in parishes all over the world (unfortunately some of them are schismatic, but many are in communion with Rome). As for the vernacular mass, "full and active participation" is a rarity in most parishes. Pope Benedict has reiterated this call for Catholics to learn some of the basic prayers in Latin so that in this truly global society we may pray together with one voice. Back to the book - Mr. Taylor's premise is dead on; Churches were meant to be read - to create a feast for the senses and create an atmosphere of awe and sanctity. I look forward to finishing the text, and perhaps using it as a textbook for a class.

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