

# *From Austria to Australia: Three Lutheran Churches by Karl Langer*

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*In 1939, the young architect Karl Langer fled his native Vienna and installed himself in Brisbane, soon to become a central figure in the local architectural scene. Amongst his many architectural accomplishments are several church buildings he designed for the Lutheran Church: St John's in Bundaberg (1960), St John's in Ipswich (1961) and St Peter's College Chapel (1968) in Brisbane. These strikingly modern buildings supported the post-war "reinvention" of the Lutheran Church in Queensland, where architecture played an instrumental role in fostering its self-image as a progressive and outward looking faith.*

*This paper argues that a double interpretation of the notion of "distance" gives insight into how Langer overcame the straightforwardness of most church architecture in post-war Queensland. In a chronological sense, he relied on personal experiences from the past, developing further the stripped classicism he inherited from working in Peter Behrens' Viennese studio during the 1930s. Closely related to this, the expression of civic culture he admired in ancient Greek architecture and town planning lived on in the urban qualities of his church designs. In geographical terms, Langer was acutely aware of what was happening overseas, collecting (predominantly American) journals and tearing out pages which he classified for later reference. Relying on this extensive repertoire and adapting it to the particular climate of his adoptive homeland, Langer developed a highly personal architectural idiom. Thus, the modernity of the three churches discussed here derives from a transfer of ideas and forms, and their transformation across time and continents.*

*Keywords: Karl Langer; modern church architecture; Lutheranism; Queensland*

# The Lutheran Church in Australia and its Post-War “Reinvention”

In the late nineteenth century, south-east Queensland became home to one of Australia’s largest German communities and German-speaking Lutherans.<sup>1</sup> Quite simplistically, “Lutheran” was generally taken as synonymous with “German,” then, which explains why during World War One, members of the Lutheran Church were treated as enemies and government censorship stopped the importation of German texts (including bibles). During World War Two, history repeated itself and anti-German sentiment and censorship again affected Queensland’s Lutheran Churches. In the post-war era, and the 1960s in particular, Australia’s Lutherans embarked on modernising their church yet without disregarding its roots in German culture. As part of a wider, international movement within the Lutheran Church, the two remaining Lutheran Synods, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (UELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia (ELCA), formally merged in October 1966 into the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), alleviating most of the pre-World War Two divisions and factions that had restrained the denomination’s expansion.

As a result, Queensland’s Lutherans experienced a time of growth, concurrent with the post-war church building boom occurring for each of the state’s Christian denominations. From 1945 to 1975 well over a thousand new church buildings were built in Queensland, at least 120 of which were Lutheran and of these sixty were dedicated during the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Queensland Lutheran churches also seemed to become less German, with more Anglophone members (reflected in their surnames). Nonetheless, the enduring attachment to their original roots becomes apparent in the fact that these congregations frequently called on émigré architects from the Germanophone part of Europe, such as Fredrick Romberg (1913-92) and Eric von Schramek (1921-2010). In Queensland, one of the most prominent émigré architects to design Lutheran churches was Karl Langer (1903-69).

## Karl Langer: From Austria to Australia

In 1939, Karl Langer fled to Australia from Vienna, where he had trained and worked under Peter Behrens as a project architect on a wide range of significant projects such as the Tobacco Factory, the Friedenskirche and the master plan for the new Urfahr neighbourhood (all in Linz).<sup>3</sup> He soon became a

1 On Lutheranism in Queensland and Australia, see Philip W. Holzknicht, “Lutherans in Queensland,” in *The German Presence in Queensland, Over the Last 150 Years*, ed. Manfred Jurgensen and Alan Corkhill (St Lucia: The University of Queensland, 1988), 171-72; Otto Thiele, *One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland* (Brisbane: Queensland District United Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1938); Raymond Evans, “The Pen and the Sword: Anti Germanism in Queensland During the Great War, and the Worker,” in *The German Presence in Queensland*, 3-21; Everard Leske, *For Faith and Freedom: The Story of Lutherans and Lutheranism in Australia 1838-1996* (Adelaide: Open Books, 1996); Kay Saunders, “Enemies of the Empire? The Internment of Germans in Queensland during the Second World War,” in *The German Presence in Queensland*, 53-70.

2 Lisa Marie Daunt’s current doctoral research, compiled with the assistance of Robin Kleinschmidt (a former teacher, deputy-headmaster and acting-headmaster at St Peter’s College Indooroopilly, and Friend of the Lutheran Archive), Grant Douglas Uebergang and Bernard Muller.

3 Langer studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and the Technische Hochschule, and obtained a doctorate in art history. He began his own practice in 1934. On Behrens’s Viennese office (headed by Alexander Popp), see Georg Stein, “Peter Behrens und seine Wiener Meisterschüler,” *Der Neubau* 8, no. 7 (April 10, 1926): 73-81.

central figure in the architectural scene in Brisbane, teaching at the University of Queensland, master-planning many regional cities, and designing a wide range of mostly public buildings.<sup>4</sup> In 1944 his influential booklet *Sub-Tropical Housing* was published, which illustrates the thoroughness with which he developed an understanding of his adopted homeland.<sup>5</sup> In his designs, he subsequently combined this knowledge with his European training and travel experiences.

Although Langer's work has been subject to much scholarly investigations lately, revealing for example how he dwelled upon his Viennese background, his appreciation of ancient Greek architecture and German modernist ideals in overcoming the geographical and intellectual distance of his adoptive situation, his contributions to post-war church architecture in Queensland have not yet been assessed.<sup>6</sup> An important clue here is Langer's files, which were found to contain a vast number of clippings from European and American magazines, often by leading voices of the day such as: Harvard GSD dean Joseph Hudnut; the Liturgical Arts Society member (and past president) and Catholic modern art advocate Otto Spaeth; writer and Lutheran clergyman Martin E. Marty; the American modernist architect Victor A. Lundy and so forth.<sup>7</sup> As this collection reveals, Langer was well aware of the international developments in the field, and the widespread concern for a renewed symbolism in modern church architecture in particular.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a considerable proportion of these clippings discuss Lutheran churches. This preponderance might derive from the fact that most of Langer's church commissions were for this particular faith, but it may also correlate with the important role American Lutherans played in the adoption of modern architectural principles in church design.<sup>9</sup>

Innovation in terms of architectural form and liturgical arrangement had not been the principal concern of most Lutheran congregations however; their churches were mostly simple and unpretentious gable-roofed timber structures, built by volunteers.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, in the interwar years, some congregations "strove to render more beautiful their houses of worship," and in 1936 an Advisory Committee on Church Architecture was created with the "desire for correct Lutheran principles in Church architecture."<sup>11</sup> However, with the outbreak of World War Two and the building material restrictions in place until the early-1950s, built outcomes of this committee were limited. From the late-1950s on, the growing confidence of the Lutherans can be measured against the growing importance attached to their church buildings. The centennial presence of

4 On Langer, see Ian Sinnamon, "Langer, Karl (1903–1969)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed July 4, 2016, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/langer-karl-10783/text19123>; Alice Hampson and Fiona Gardiner, "From the Acropolis to Kingaroy: Creating Civic Culture in Queensland" in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand* 34, QUOTATION: *What does history have in store for architecture today?* ed. Gevork Hartoonian and John Ting (Canberra: SAHANZ, 2017), 215–25; Doug Neale, "Langer, Karl," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 400–401.

5 Karl Langer, *Sub-Tropical Housing* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1944).

6 Hampson and Gardiner, "From the Acropolis to Kingaroy," 215, 217; Ian Sinnamon, "Landscape with Classical Figures: A German Influence on Queensland's Architecture," in *The German Presence in Queensland*, 240.

7 Langer's files are held at the University of Queensland (Fryer Library, 158 Karl Langer Collection; henceforth UQFL158) and the State Library of Queensland (JO R38, Karl Langer Architectural Plans, henceforth SLQJO R38).

8 UQFL158 box 75, folder 201

9 Jason John Paul Haskins, "J. Eugene Wukasch and Mid-Century Lutheran Churches in Texas, 1950–70," in *Modernism and American Mid-20th Century Sacred Architecture*, ed. Anat Geva (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2019), 200.

10 Thiele, *One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland*, 76.

11 Thiele, *One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland*, 76.

their faith in a particular town often provided the occasion for the construction of often quite ambitious new infrastructures for worshipping. This was for example the case in Maryborough, where the congregation launched a limited architectural competition in 1965 and proudly had the entries displayed at the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Brisbane office.<sup>12</sup>

In Queensland, Langer designed at least fourteen churches and chapels, the majority for the Lutheran church.<sup>13</sup> As to the reasons for this, we can only speculate: one motive could be his alleged cultural affiliation through his Germanophone background (although as an Austrian he was raised as a Catholic); another reason was perhaps that the Lutheran congregations saw in Langer's progressive and modernist take on architecture a way to foster their self-image as a progressive, outward looking faith.<sup>14</sup> For his part, such commissions allowed Langer to experiment with a different formal and symbolic architectural register than the functionalism of most of his other work. The remainder of this paper assesses this reciprocal agency based on three buildings that best capture both parties' aspirations for contemporary Lutheran worship: St John's in Bundaberg (1960), St John's in Ipswich (1961) and St Peter's College Chapel (1968) in Indooroopilly (Brisbane).

12 *The Lutheran Church in Maryborough, Q'ld 1867-1967*, leaflet published by the Maryborough Lutheran congregation. Archives of the congregation (no file or box numbers). Langer also participated in this contest, but was not successful.

13 Although discussed in reversed order here, it seems that Langer first received the commission for new buildings at St Peter's College (leading later to the Chapel commission), which led to St John's Ipswich, then to St John's Bundaberg. The connections between Langer and his contemporaries, and how he secured these church commissions, will be the subject of further research by the authors.

14 Pastor Reinnard Mayer (Chaplain at St Peter's Lutheran College for twenty-five years, including when the chapel was designed and built, now retired), interview by Daunt, July 6, 2019.

## St John's in Bundaberg

Positioned outside the township's centre, St John's Lutheran sits without any competing neighbours; the church's tall copper spire can be seen from a distance, over Bundaberg's sugar cane fields (fig. 1). The church is a processional basilica, with a tall volume and a gallery above the entry foyer. The concrete structure is expressed internally, with the bays between containing side doors and stained-glass windows. The ceiling's timber truss framing is hidden above a two-tiered flat ceiling. Whereas much of its design (planning, furnishings and windows) kept to the traditional, St John's is a remarkable building nonetheless for its attention to detail and its architectural symbolism.

Lutheran symbolism is also prominently integrated in the design. For example, the front end of the east façade features a Christogram composed of the letters "IHS" (the first three Greek letters of "Jesus"), while to the front end of the west façade, within the brickwork detailing, the superimposed letters "x" and "p" are embedded (referring to the Greek letters "χ" and "ρ" which form the first two letters in the word "Christ"). Similarly, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, "Α"



Figure 1. Karl Langer, St John's Lutheran (1960), Bundaberg. (Photographs by Lisa Daunt, 2018.)

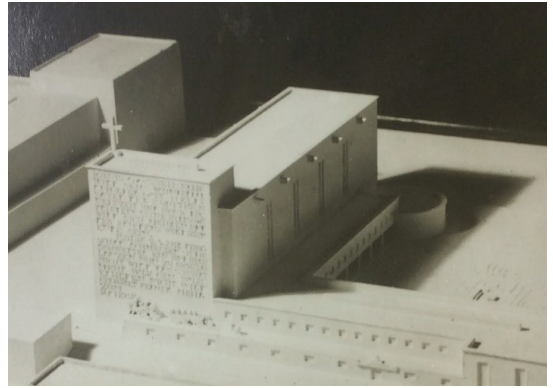
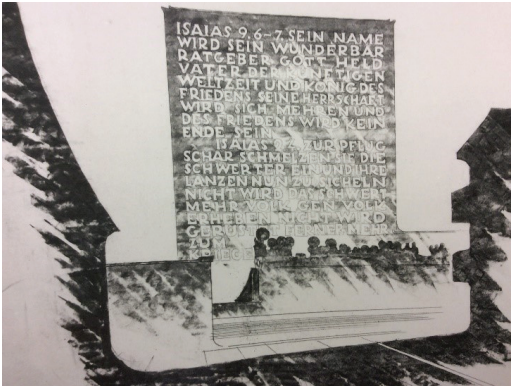
and “Ω,” are mounted on the sanctuary wall, representing the beginning and the end, and on the rear façade of the building projects the outline of a large crucifix in brickwork. As stated before, Langer also used his church commissions to develop ideas of his own. The most prominent feature of this building, namely the large bible verses (John 3:16 and John 4:11-12) displayed in concrete on the façade, offer a salient example of this. They impart a bold and permanent Christian message in the public realm, and form an overt architectural expression that for Lutherans, the bible is the first focus of faith.<sup>15</sup> The idea to use the façade of a church for displaying messages had been in Langer’s mind already long before: he used the same idea while working at Peter Behrens’ Vienna studio on his winning entry for the (Catholic) Friedenskirche competition in Linz in 1931 where the rear façade also featured two Bible verses in large lettering (fig. 2).<sup>16</sup>

The Friedenskirche scheme resembles the Bundaberg church on at least three levels: the basilica typology, the use of simple geometrical forms and the ambition to create a clearly defined urban space around the church. For cost reasons, the Linz church was to have no tower or spire; instead, Langer proposed a windowless, box-like volume that rose above the apse, slightly offset from the main axis. On its outer wall—in fact the church’s rear façade—two quotes from Isaiah about the theme of peace were displayed in large lettering. Considered as a milestone in its genre in the historiography of Austrian architecture for its then unusual rationalist approach to religious architecture, the Friedenskirche was only partly realised in a much-altered form – a frustration that might have incited Langer to recycle its most salient feature in Bundaberg where the bas-relief gained an even stronger expression in Queensland’s strong sunlight.

15 The idea for this feature is attributed to Langer in Edwin Tesch, *50th Anniversary Commemorative Booklet, St John's Lutheran Church Bundaberg, April 1960 - April 2010* (Bundaberg, QLD.: St John's Lutheran Church, 2010), 14.

16 The text on the façade is from Isaiah 9:6-7 and Isaiah 2:4. For a detailed account of the project, see Petra Weiss, “In Linz war der Auftakt verheißungsvoll... Die Architektur der Christkönig-Friedenskirche in Linz-Urfahr, 1929–1951,” in *Spiegel der Zeitgeschichte, Jahrbuch des Oberösterreichischen Musealvereines Gesellschaft für Landeskunde* 152 (2007), 101-204.





In terms of resonance, St John's striking and imposing modernist features seem to have obtained the effect the congregation had hoped for: when it opened in mid-1960, at a cost of over £61,000, it was not only hailed by the local press as "ultra-modern" and "of beautiful design, of superb architecture"; its echo reached as far as Melbourne where it was published in the journal *Cross-Section* two months after its opening.<sup>17</sup> Today, it is widely recognised for these same striking modernist features and has been state heritage listed since 2012.<sup>18</sup>

## St John's in Ipswich

St John's Lutheran church at Ipswich opened only one year after St John's in Bundaberg to commemorate 100 years of Lutheranism in Ipswich. Here Langer also chose a material palette of brickwork, copper and galvanised iron roofing, concrete trims, coloured-glass steel framed windows and a timber roof structure (fig. 3). Similar to St John's in Bundaberg, this church also creates a bold landmark that, initially, was clearly visible from Ipswich's town centre.<sup>19</sup> Smaller than its northern sibling and sited on the slope of a hill, its presence is somewhat diminished nonetheless and the extent of symbolism is also more restrained. It centres around the theme of the cross, repeatedly incorporated in the design at various scales: in the pronounced gable street façade by means of projected bricks; on top of the tall copper spire (illuminated at night); and in the spire's square-planned brickwork base which features a dense patternation of many small crosses. Greek lettering is also present, but less prominently than in Bundaberg.

Most striking perhaps in the light of our investigation, is the expressed timber structure in the interior, highly reminiscent of Otto Bartning's *Notkirchen* (Emergency Churches), realised

Figure 2. Peter Behrens, Alexander Popp, Karl Langer (project architect), Friedenskirche competition design. (Courtesy of UQ Library, box 44, UQFL 158.)

17 "Congregation at Dedication Taxed Church Capacity," *Bundaberg News Mail*, April 4, 1960, 4-5; and citing "Many Congratulations," *Bundaberg News Mail*, April 4, 1960, 4-5; St John's Lutheran Church, Bundaberg, *Architectural Feature St John's Lutheran Church*, 18, 20; St John's Lutheran Church, Bundaberg, *The Centenary Celebrations of 1977*; *Cross-Section* 92 (June 1960): 2.

18 "St. John's Lutheran Church, Bundaberg," *Queensland Heritage Register*, listing 602815 (entered December 2012), accessed October 3, 2016.

19 "St. John's Lutheran Church – Ipswich. Dedication Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1961," 3.

across Germany during 1947-50.<sup>20</sup> Using two prefabricated types of frames (a vaulted one [Type A] and an A-frame [Type B]) and a set of standardised architectural elements (windows, doors, etc.), the non-load bearing walls of these structures were realised with rubble from the ruins of the previous war-damaged church, providing for an economical and easily expandable, yet dignified solution. Langer most probably knew about this widely published program, but it was perhaps the ubiquitous “A-frame church” which was popularised in America during the 1950s that provided him with the inspiration for St John’s Ipswich.<sup>21</sup> Of this type there are many examples in Langer’s research files, including numerous timber manufacturer’s whole-page periodical adverts.<sup>22</sup>

As always, however, Langer adjusted his design to the Queensland climate, incorporating a vent along the ridge of the roof and providing operable windows along both sides of the nave. This aspect reveals his idea that in the first place, a church, like any other building, “must be safe and strong, protect the congregation from rain, wind, heat, cold and to a certain degree, noise.”<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, a church was to be more than just a building, “where only at closer inspection the sign of the cross or another symbol revealed it as a place of worship.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, a church must have “solemnitas”: dignity, sublimity, proportions and purity. These keywords indeed seemed to have guided the design of both Langer’s churches in Bundaberg and Ipswich. The congregation, for its part, seemed very happy, emphasising in the dedication brochure how “the subdued atmosphere produced by the mellow tonings of the furnishings,

20 Willy Weyres and Otto Bartning, *Kirchen. Handbuch für den Kirchenbau* (Munich: Verlag Georg D.W. Callwey, 1959), 316-17.

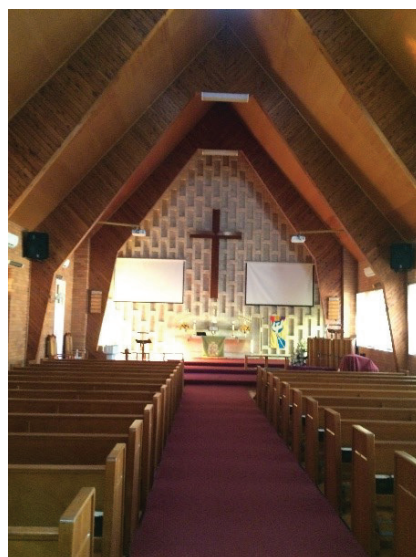
21 SLQJO R38, January 1956, no. 1021-6 pencil on trace interior perspective. See also Chapter 4, “The A-Frame Church: Symbol of an Era,” in Gretchen Buggeln, *The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 85-124.

22 For example, advert “Designed in Timber, For Beauty and Low Cost” (UQFL158, box 75, folder 201).

23 “St. John’s Lutheran Church, Ipswich, Dedication Sunday 21st May, 1961,” n.p.

24 “St. John’s Lutheran Church, Ipswich, Dedication Sunday 21st May, 1961,” n.p.

Figure 3. Karl Langer, St John’s Lutheran (1961), Ipswich (Photographs by Lisa Daunt, 2016).



walls and ceiling and the various shades of amber in the leadlight panelled windows,” all assisted “to give a feeling of warmth and reverence.”<sup>25</sup>

25 “St. John’s Lutheran Church, Ipswich, Dedication Sunday 21st May, 1961,” n.p.

## St Peter’s College Chapel

St Peter’s Lutheran College chapel in Indooroopilly (1968) was designed by Langer as part of his master plan for the school campus (fig. 4).<sup>26</sup> St Peter’s shows Langer at his best, and illustrates his ability to refer across classical principles and modern architectural form, with a view to producing a dignified yet functional building imbued with religious symbolism.

26 “Chapel of St Peter’s Lutheran College, Indooroopilly,” *Queensland Heritage Register*, listing 602816, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=602816>, accessed February 25, 2019; Job 1050-3 (St Peter’s Lutheran College), UQFL158.

The influence of Greek temple complexes and their setting on the design for St. Peter’s has been stressed by Langer himself, and has since been elaborated on by several Queensland architectural historians.<sup>27</sup> In earlier projects, including the Kingaroy Town Hall (1960-65) and Ipswich Girls Grammar School Auditorium (1961-62), Langer had designed bold modern colonnaded fronts and used wide entry stairs across the width of the façades to elevate the foyer to the building above their large forecourts.<sup>28</sup> Yet, it was only at St Peter’s that Langer’s vision of the Greek acropolis was fully realised. The site’s hilly topography indeed afforded him the opportunity “to command his acropolis,” with the chapel sited “on the edge of a hill at one end of a small plateau.”<sup>29</sup> This plateau Langer used as a wide circulation spine, and the height and the position of the tall bell tower on the top of the ridge further enhances the complex’s landmark qualities and, together with the reflective pond in front of it (now demolished), makes the chapel the heart of the whole complex.<sup>30</sup>

27 Most recently by Hampson and Gardiner in “From the Acropolis to Kingaroy,” 219-20.

28 “Ipswich Grammer School,” *Queensland Heritage Register*, listing 600601, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=600601>, accessed February 25, 2019; and photographs of Ipswich Grammer School hall and Kingaroy Town hall sighted in box 44, UQFL158.

29 Hampson and Gardiner, “From the Acropolis to Kingaroy,” 222, quoting Sinnamon, “Landscape with Classical Figures,” 250. See also Ian Sinnamon, “An Educated Eye: Karl Langer in Australia,” *Landscape Australia* 85, no. 1 (February 1985): 56.

30 Sinnamon, “An Educated Eye,” 56.

The classical inspiration also pertains to the architecture itself. In terms of form, it has been argued that St Peter’s Chapel “shows ... the quality of [Langer’s] understanding of Greek architecture. In form it recalls (but does not try to replicate) the unequivocal presence and classic calm of a Greek temple.”<sup>31</sup> This comes to the fore in particular design elements such as the use of a curved plane of the Chapel’s front façade (rather than just straight lines) and the resulting optical effect, the interior curves of the gallery soffit, and the curve of the ceiling into the sanctuary wall.<sup>32</sup> Yet, St Peter’s arced colonnade and finished white marble slab veneers—quite an expensive material for an Australian Lutheran church—also bring to mind the stripped classicism of Gunnar Asplund’s widely published Woodland Crematorium (1935-40; Stockholm, Sweden) that very likely also inspired Langer’s St Peter’s Colonnade front (fig. 5).<sup>33</sup>

31 Sinnamon, “An Educated Eye,” 55-56; also quoted in Hampson and Gardiner, “From the Acropolis to Kingaroy,” 223.

32 Sinnamon, “Landscape with Classical Figures,” 251.

33 Image on page 84 of Joseph Hudnut, “Picture, Sentiment, and Symbol,” *Architectural Record* (September 1944), 84-88 (folder 201, box 75, UQFL158).



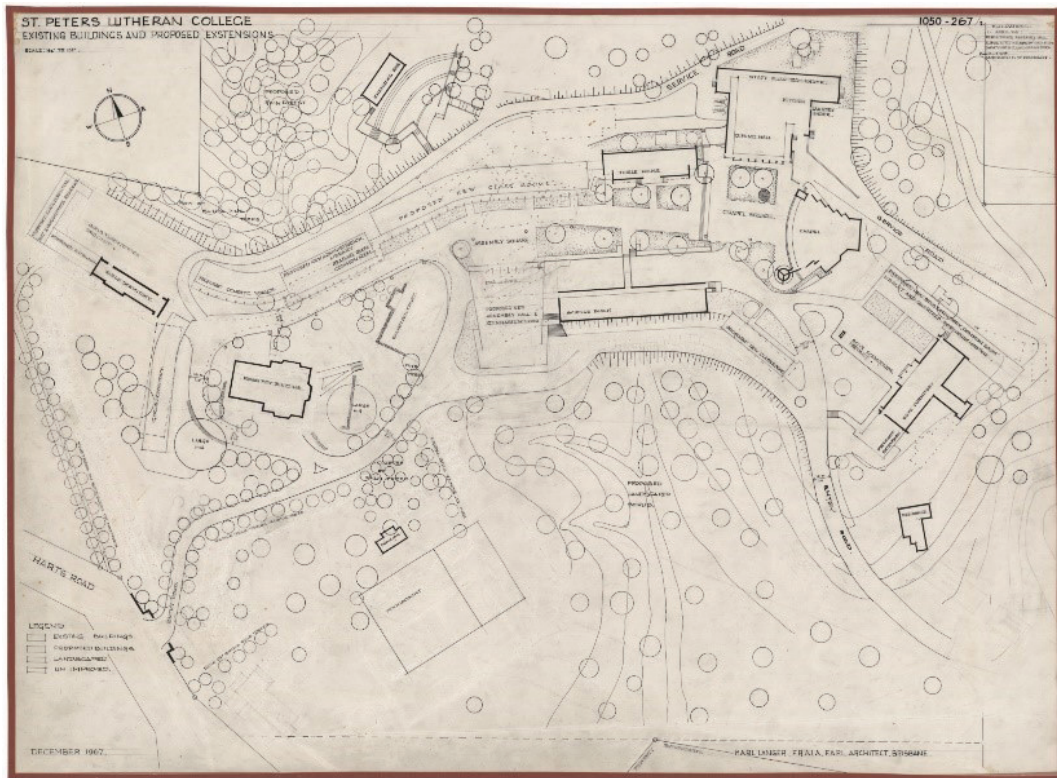


Figure 4. Karl Langer, St Peter's Lutheran College Masterplan Proposal (December 1967), job 1050, St Peter's Lutheran College. (Courtesy of UQ Library, UQFL158.)

In a similar way, Langer's departure from the rectilinear plan of his previous designs offers an illustration of how he absorbed a wide variety of influences into a highly original synthesis. Design principles such as the fan-shaped worship space, saw-toothed side walls and a sloped floor can also be found in a number of Queensland examples and various international cases such as the Church of the Resurrection in St. Louis by the renowned American architects Murphy and Mackey.<sup>34</sup> In his own design entry for the 1965 competition for St Matthew's in Maryborough, he himself also abandoned the strong, box-shaped plans of the Bundaberg and Ipswich churches, proposing a more open interior space instead, delineated by saw-toothed side walls.<sup>35</sup>

These deviations were more than merely formal changes however, but architectural responses to a new understanding of the Christian liturgy in the aftermath of the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which also affected the Lutheran Church. The renewed emphasis on the spoken word and the gathering of the faithful led to a greater attention to visibility and acoustics. This explains why the typology of the auditorium, where the audience is seated in ascending and curved rows in order to gear the attention towards the

34 "A Plan in the Outstretched Arms of Christ," *Architectural Forum* (December 1954), 124-27 (folder 201, box 75, UQFL158). Earlier Queensland church buildings with fanned plans include: Ipswich Central Memorial Congregational church (1958); Mareeba Methodist (1960) and St Joachim's Catholic Church Holland Park (1961). A feature used in earlier Queensland church buildings including: Christ Church of England St Lucia (1962) and St Mary's Catholic Church Gatton (1963). Park Presbyterian (1952, Highgate Hill) was an earlier Queensland church with a sloping floor.

35 SLQJO R83/19/2.

proscenium, became a very popular blueprint for church designs. In fact, given the importance of the spoken word and bible reading for the Lutherans, visual focus and good acoustics had always been a primary concern in their churches—and often formed a point of departure for their designs. Alvar Aalto's widely published Vuoksenniska Church in Imatra (Finland, 1958) immediately comes to mind here: its multi-vaulted ceiling rises towards the narrow north wall, supporting the sound conduction of both voices and organ.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in St Peter's, the curved sanctuary wall and the sloped ceiling create an acoustic effect that greatly enhances the intimacy of the liturgical experience (fig. 6). Whether Aalto's design inspired Langer remains food for speculation, but the fact remains that in his early career, he also worked as an acoustic design specialist for some of Europe's famous auditoria.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, in an explanatory note written for his clients ahead of the chapel's opening, Langer made no mention of his "Greek" inspiration, nor of the architectural and liturgical

36 Wolfgang Jean Stock, ed., *European Church Architecture 1950-2000* (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 233.

37 Sinnamon, "Landscape with Classical Figures," 251.



Figure 5. Karl Langer, St Peter's College Chapel (1968), Indooroopilly. Photographs taken at its opening. (Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the St Peter's Lutheran College Archive.)





modernity of his scheme. Instead, he deliberately focused instead on its symbolism and “performance” in terms of worshipping—allegedly of more interest to the congregation than the church’s design influences or architectural novelties. As Langer explained, the fan shape of the chapel and the arrangement of the pews underscore the importance of the altar as the central focus of attention. The same concern to eliminate any distraction also explains why the lights were hidden from the nave and why the curved wall behind the altar was absolutely plain. Also the use of symbols was restrained to the utmost, but, as Langer noted, “each symbol has been brought out to the fullest.”<sup>38</sup> Here, he referred to the contrast between the large and heavy Helidon sandstone altar with, once more, the Greek letters “Α” and “Ω” carved into it and the sanctuary cross. Finished as an honest matt finish, and empty, the latter represents both Lutheran piety and its belief in the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, Langer noted, it is “floating in the strong light symbolising the rising sun.”<sup>39</sup> Further, the three fins of the tower which enclose the meditation chapel, symbolise the Holy Trinity, a theme which is repeated in the meditation chapel with its three windows.

Figure 6. Karl Langer, St Peter’s College Chapel (1968), Indooroopilly. (Photograph by Richard Stringer, 1968. Courtesy of Richard Stringer, 1060/10, box 75, folder 201, UQFL158.)

38 Karl Langer, “St. Peter’s Lutheran College – Chapel Symbolic Values,” January 25, 1968, box 17, UQFL158.

39 Langer, “St. Peter’s Lutheran College.”



Summarising, we can say that in St Peter's, Langer's three main sources of inspiration create an intricate interplay: informing him about the latest ideas for modern church design overseas, the journal clippings inspired a new type of liturgical plan; his intimate knowledge of ancient Greek architecture as an expression of civic ideals informed the siting of the church; the stripped classicism he inherited from Behrens became apparent in the famed colonnade façade. As disparate as they may seem, all these influences, combined, created one of the finest examples of modern religious architecture in Queensland and beyond.

## Conclusion

The three cases discussed here demonstrate how Langer seized church commissions to explore—and also fully exploit—the urban, architectural and symbolic potential of ecclesiastical architecture in the public realm. To this effect, he relied on his European training and sensibilities, continuing to explore ideas he experimented in his pre-World War Two career and constantly revisiting the first principles of ancient Greek architecture with regards to site planning, landscaping and the presence of built form. He was not only looking to the past however; his active seeking out of ideas from abroad provided him with a ready knowledge about the advances made in international modern church design. Whereas an architect relying on such disparate influences may easily pass for a dilettante, this is not the case for Langer. Quite the contrary: it provided him with a firm intellectual basis that allowed him to—seemingly effortlessly—adapt these multifarious influences for the economic and climatic constraints of post-war Queensland. Thus, Langer's ecclesiastical designs evidence the transfer of ideas and their transformation across time and continents. “Distance” as a notion, both in the chronological and geographical sense, is therefore central to assessing Langer's contribution to the renewal of church architecture in post-war Queensland.

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