

Topics

Testing St. Bartholomew's

Instead of ancient devils to tempt the faithful, New York City now has some "unidentified, prestigious corporation" that has offered St. Bartholomew's \$100 million for its prime Park Avenue site. If the church accepts, its landmark building would be demolished for another corporate tower.

The temptation is classically posed. There are certain good reasons to accept. The church has a shrinking congregation and endowment; worthy things could be done with the money. But at what a price: the loss of a complex of rare architectural quality, and of irreplaceable character. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue's Byzantine-style building of 1917-1919 — together with McKim, Mead and White's French Romanesque porch — has been called, by one authority, the city's "most magnificent landmark church." The church's materials are salmon-colored brick, alternating richly with Indiana limestone; the carvings are

Gold Rushes

beautifully done, the marbles colorful and varied, and the whole effect opulent. The church and its later community house, built by Goodhue's successor firm in the 1920's, are a unit in scale and style, set in a terraced garden of great intimacy and charm.

The gift of space, sun, flowers and art, and the relief from the super-scaled buildings all around, serve both the spirit and the city. The designers of the neighboring General Electric tower recognized these qualities in 1931 when they matched their tower's color to the church's; the relationship of styles and scales is one of the happiest in New York.

Even at \$100 million, we hope the parishioners can resist temptation.

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Good Deed

A man we know, as a comment on modern inflation, has framed and hung on his wall four denominations of German inflation currency — ranging

from a 20,000-mark bill all the way to one for a milliard, a thousand million mark. At some point in 1923, he believes, each bill was good for one loaf of bread. It is an old, sad story: valuable paper is quickly drained of its value, leaving its holder with no more than a curio.

But now Andrew Malcolm of The Times has reported a contrary principle. In a story from the Yukon Territory in the Business section Sunday, he told the fate of a spectacularly successful Quaker Oats Company promotion of the mid-50's. As a premium in cereal boxes, the company gave away deeds to one square inch of land in the fabled Yukon.

The deeds, each 5x7 inches, and thus 35 times larger than the land involved, have turned out to be worthless — as deeds. But as curios, they are bringing \$40 and more apiece. That, Mr. Malcolm notes, is \$10 more than a share of stock in Quaker Oats. And it remains, inflation notwithstanding, a lot more than a loaf of bread.