

Devoutly Wrong on St. Bartholomew's

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The resolution of that dilemma at St. Bartholomew's Church only looks like a compromise made in heaven.

Some unnamed corporation offered to buy the graceful Byzantine church and community house on Park Avenue for the impressive sounding sum of \$100 million — so as to raze them and erect an office tower. The church's rector and vestry searched their souls. They knew that their buildings were, among other things, artistic treasures of New York, but they also wanted to give their sagging finances a mighty boost.

Their answer is not to sell the church at any price — but to sell or lease for demolition the community

house and its delightful garden. That is sad news for the city.

The community house, which was designed to look like an integral part of the church, would be amputated. And the church, suddenly a jewel without a setting, would be overwhelmed by the kind of tower — enormous — that the area's zoning allows. This truncation of building and site would be a subtler form of destruction than outright demolition, but it should never be represented as an act of salvation.

The church's leaders say they gave the matter their “prayerful consideration.” What they propose to do answers only corporate prayers.

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