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LETTERS

BROKEN HEART

In previewing the new St. Joseph's Cathedral (*Cite* 51, "Old-Time Religion?"), Mitchell J. Shields fails to provide much explanation why the beautiful Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral must be sacrificed. He reports, almost eagerly, that the view from I-45 of the new cathedral will be great once the old church is demolished.

Is this truly the reason why one of Houston's grandest churches has to be demolished? So people like Mitchell J. Shields don't have to get out of their car? Isn't it possible to appreciate new buildings, and old, in the context of their neighborhood, not just as you're whizzing by at 60 mph?

Furthermore, what about the respect for our local history? For Catholic tradition? For all the shared memories of the many baptisms, weddings, and funerals that have taken place in the existing cathedral? Is there any more information Houston's main architectural voice can provide to justify this significant loss, other than a freeway sight line?

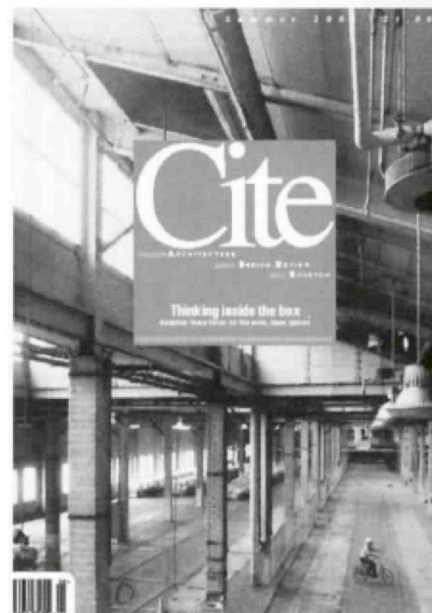
Please, a little help here.

James Rowland
Houston

Mitchell J. Shields reports: According to Tony Rourke, construction manager for the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, the primary reason the diocese decided to demolish the existing Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral rather than renovate it was financial. The co-cathedral's foundation, mechanical systems, and general structure are all in serious need of repair, says Rourke, who describes the building as a "constant maintenance job." The diocese felt that the cost of the repairs would be prohibitively expensive, and could not be justified since the co-cathedral's functions will be taken over by the new cathedral.

There was a design consideration as well, though it is described as distinctly secondary. The block on which the current co-cathedral sits, and the block behind where the new cathedral will be built, might be someday be linked into a single cathedral complex. If that occurred, the co-cathedral site could become something of a forecourt for the new cathedral.

Rourke says that there have been some, though not many, complaints



about the decision to level the co-cathedral. Partially in response, the diocese may incorporate elements of the co-cathedral, such as some of its stained glass and statuary, into the new cathedral.

CHECK IT OUT

I want to thank you for your excellent article on the Houston Public Library, our facilities and our master plan, with its special focus on the Central Library [*Cite* 51, "Reading Room: The Houston Public Library Plans for the Future," by Mitchell J. Shields]. It puts our plan, the issues surrounding a new Central Library, and indeed many of the issues facing our library and public libraries in general, into perspective. I anticipate it will generate discussion among those who read it. It is already proving a useful item for me to share with board members, partner organizations and interested individuals as we discuss "where do we go from here," particularly in terms of the Central Library.

Again, my thanks for representing the library and our plans so thoughtfully and for the additional articles related to library buildings and the placement of a new Central Library. I found it particularly interesting to see the branch libraries pictured in chronological order. We have never "pictured" them this way!

Barbara A.B. Gubbin
Director
City of Houston Library Department
Houston