



January 17, 2023

Mr. Warren Adams
Historical Resources & Cultural Arts Director
City of Coral Gables
2327 Salzedo St
Coral Gables, FL 33134

Dear Mr Adams and Members of the Historic Preservation Board:

I am writing on the matter of the application for The Garden of Our Lord at 110 Phoenetia Avenue, Coral Gables FL., to be considered for designation as a local historic landmark. As you know, I have often advocated on behalf of local designation for properties that meet the criteria and against designation if the site in question fails to rise to the level of significance which that distinction merits. I have reviewed the application and have recently driven by the site. Long ago, I visited the garden itself. In this case, I do not support the nomination.

The church proper is not being proposed for designation and rightfully so. The wall of the Garden of Our Lord is a later extension, subordinate and dependent on the sanctuary for its spatial and compositional meaning. Without the building, the wall is a fragment, a dangling participle ripped away from its context. I have reviewed the permit plans of the garden wall, designed by Robert Fitch Smith, a noted architect whose works have received the distinction of landmark designation. The wall, on its own, is neither significant nor exemplary. There is no known planting plan establishing the layout, composition, or location of specimens in the garden. No landscape architect or master gardner is known to have been involved with what was contained between the wall and the sanctuary in the garden itself. The garden has not been well maintained and it would be speculative to reconstruct the design of the Biblical Garden, now lost. There are a series of commemorative plaques that were incrementally added to memorialize persons of distinction often by community organizations, friends or family members; but commemorative monuments are not necessarily historical landmarks. One of the plaques identifies an individual whose accomplishments did not occur here and who passed away before the incorporation of the City of Coral Gables. I am intrigued by projects involving memory, but the criteria for historical designation link historically significant persons and events to specific places. These plaques are generally commemorative, they are not historical. There is mention in the nomination of oolite pilasters and a niche with voussoirs, keystones and other classical elements. As a material, oolite is ubiquitous, the noble stone underfoot. It is what is crafted from the stone that can convey meaning. The oolite pilasters on the wall have no architectural relationship to the pilasters of the Women's Club as stated in the nomination, other than their categorical distinction. They are simply one of many categories of the architectural embellishments of classicism like columns, pediments, volutes, entablatures, *etc.* The arched niche also mentioned in the nomination is curiously attenuated and the keystone disproportionately small. It is not clear what Fitch Smith intended here. This ensemble does not rise to the level of exquisite Mannerist distortion; and on the other hand, it lacks the thematic characteristics and interest of mid-century ornament, the prevailing spirit of the day. Together pilasters, niche, keystone and

urns seem eccentric, an oddity. The curious nature of these ornamental features does not elevate this wall fragment to the level of landmark status. This wall and the walks and pool behind it are neither sufficiently exceptional or significant. Approving this nomination would confer historic site status to an entire city block which would be a misappropriation of the privilege of an historic landmark status.

I know there is a project proposed for this site. I do not wish to comment on it. I merely wish to focus on whether the one singular wall is sufficiently significant to designate this large urban block as a historic site.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jorge L. Hernandez', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jorge L. Hernandez, AIA

Colorado ARC.00406575

Florida AR-9843

Virginia AR-5765