

# Gothic Park Av. Church Isn't Dead Yet

By **ROBERTA B. GRATZ**  
A citywide governing body of the Presbyterian Church will vote this week on whether to approve the sale of

one of its churches—a Gothic structure on Park Av.—to a major cultural institution which plans to demolish it for expansion purposes.

A \$2.6 million sale agreement was worked out last January between the Central Presbyterian Church at Park Av. and 64th St. and the Asia Society, at 112 E. 64th St., adjacent to the church. The arrangement followed a heated disagreement within the congregation over the sale. The final membership approval vote on Jan. 12 was 64 to 54.

But the agreement needs approval from the New York City Presbytery—a citywide group of several hundred including delegates from 108 separate churches.

Last week, the executive committee of the citywide Presbytery voted 12 to 4 against recommending the sale's approval. Church officials note that the full Presbytery normally accepts such recommendations.

Congregation leaders had argued that the sale was necessary because of a loss of membership and financial support but dissidents claimed the economic picture was not as grim as had been pictured.

Residents and community leaders in the Park Av. neighborhood supported the dissidents, noting that the church's varied open programs and the building itself were important components of the area's "physical and spiritual life."

Last year, John D. Rockefeller 3d, founder of Asia Society, announced he was giving his \$10 million Asian art collection to the society along with funds to help build a new home. The Society is currently headquartered in a highly acclaimed 1959 glass front building designed by Phillip Johnson.

The Central Presbyterian Church was built in 1922 by the Rockefeller family — it was originally the Park Avenue Baptist Church — and was their primary home of worship until the construction in the late 1920s of Riverside Church.

Reasons cited by the council's executive committee against the sale included recognition that "the church is serving effectively in its present location," that its community functions serve 1200 people weekly, that over 100 of the 284 congregants have "affirmed their commitment to continuance" at the present site and that "in two congregational meetings close votes" — 64-54 to sell and 68-58 to merge with another congregation—did not reflect a "strong mandate to sell a strategic church location which would be difficult to obtain again."

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