Phenomenon of Polish Religious Architecture of the End of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract. It is truly difficult to find another European country where over two thousand churches were built over the last thirty years. This boom in religious architecture in our country, which is compared to the times of the very dawn of Christianisation, or to the period between the World War I and II, when Poland regained independence after the period of partitions, should be associated predominantly with the figure of Karol Wojtyła – the Polish Pope. He encouraged crowds of investors and residents of Poland to strive for new religious buildings to be erected in new districts of towns and cities, where for decades’ residents had not been able to obtain political authorities’ permissions for new places of worship. The goal of the research was to determine differences between the style of religious buildings erected at the same time in Western Europe and in our country. Isolation of Central European states in the 1970s and 1980s from access to the most advanced building technologies and materials forced to reach for traditional methods of erecting temples. A considerable role in this respect was also played by economic reasons, as churches were largely built by means of the economic system and were financed by parishioners. Amongst churches that mushroomed in Poland since the end of the 1970s, as well as in the 1980s and 1990s, several stylistic tendencies can be differentiated, characteristic for the contemporary architecture. Not all directions present in the European architecture were represented in the Polish architecture in that period. It seems that the majority of the projects represent the trend of Late Modernism. In the early 1980s, Postmodernism reached Poland, much later than projects implemented in the United States of America and in Western Europe. Religious architecture, inspired by forms of historical temples and monasteries, present for centuries in our landscape and well known to users, was being built according to the principles of these stylistics, too. The significance of the tradition of the place was restored; while searching for neo-nativeness, designers turned to forms well-known and accepted by the faithful. These quests fascinated some architects at the time. The analysis of hundreds of built churches, in terms of their external form, as well as their interiors, points to the acceptance of the quest of references to the past. Simultaneously, it should be emphasised that within the territory of our country, especially in the countryside or in small towns, one can encounter religious buildings which are quite uninteresting and difficult to be assigned to any trends in the contemporary architecture. Parishioners often lost patience and were tired of waiting for decades for permissions to erect new churches; at the same time, they were afraid that the period of fewer restrictions relating to building new temples would soon pass. Today, these projects, often implemented in great haste, wait for subsequent generations of users, architects, and artists to start to restore them for the resources of culture.
1. The church as an important element in the city’s functional hierarchy.

Churches have symbolic significance in the human conscious. Historical analysis confirms the socially important role of the church as a conveyor of the heritage of material culture and philosophical content. The internal and external space, as well as the immediate vicinity of a religious structure have always been a place of cultural life, serving to facilitate permanent contacts between the population, the exchange of news, creating a scenery for celebrations and holidays, as well as the more ordinary events of religious life. "One essential need of urban communities is the holding of common, unique values. They are an important factor in the integration of residents with a city... especially those which are capable of attaining the role of a symbol with a high strength of social radiation." [1] In turn, Edward Norman, who was a lecturer at numerous universities, including Cambridge, seen as an authority on matters of church tradition and a scholar of the process of Christianity's evolution, striving in the direction of the spiritual needs of communities all over the world, stated that women and men constantly experienced the need to have places in which transcendental reality could be expressed through material forms, places in which monuments of faith could shape the reality of this world while in wait for immortality. [2]

A religious structure is encoded in the public conscious as an element of the functional hierarchy of a city, fulfilling important functions for the urban community. One distinct quality of contemporary religious architecture is that "A church constitutes a centre of not only worship and the sanctification of the faithful, but also a centre of charitable, social or cultural activity." [3] In many Polish cities and towns, new churches erected in the 1980's constituted centres of cultural life, because, apart from the sacred, they contained theatre stages, libraries, computer or language learning rooms. [4]

The construction of a temple is an extraordinarily difficult task. The intent of the architect is to present - through the church that is being designed - the Unspoken - the Mystery of the Indefinable. The search goes in the direction of finding symbols which would express the content associated with the being of God, the Absolute - Eternity. According to philosophers this is practically impossible. As Józef M. Bocheński wrote [5], there are three groups of positions on this subject:

- the first, presented by H. Bergson and K. Jaspers, who are philosophers of the neoplatonic tradition, state that what is unspoken cannot be presented using symbols that have objective references. Only through intuition can we communicate with our audience, using images in such a manner that another person can experience them. In Bergson's work we will not find any phenomenological descriptions, nor any evidence, but mostly images that are meant to stimulate intuition.
- another group of thinkers expresses precisely the opposite position, referring to Wittgenstein's thesis "What cannot be shown, cannot be said". According to this group of philosophers, symbols that could communicate something in reality have only an emotional value, and thus do not tell us anything.
- a different theory is presented by J. Hartman, who believes that what is unknowable to us exists as that which is described as irrational. That what is irrational is called metaphysical by Hartman. This theory has been interpreted in such a manner that relations that are conceived about God are isomorphic with those that we empirically know.

The entire Mystery of the Church thus revolves in the sphere of intuition and emotion, which become the most important matters to an artist. Every architect who designs temples tries to convey immeasurable values, perceived in the sphere of sensations, emotions, impressions. And this is what this difficulty is about. [6] Public buildings are designed differently from a religious building. In the face of the SACRED one requires humility, because the architect stands before a great mystery. Years ago Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński wrote "Creating an architecture of a "symbol" requires not only knowledge, but also a gift. This gift can only be strengthened by knowledge" [7] It appears that the personal experience of the architect and the interpretation of faith becomes extraordinarily important here, because forms can differ. An original form must consider the genius loci, but also the proportions of the new structure, its scale, a certain moderation and nobility of form, which through said nobility becomes
a religious symbol. [8] In terms of solutions we can observe multiple directions in terms of positions, but respect for the surroundings always becomes an immense, stimulating creative inspiration.

2. Political and social conditions for the construction of new churches after the Second World War in Poland

In Polish architecture after the Second World War, up to the 1970's, new religious structures were only seldom built. Andrzej K. Olszewski wrote: "Corbusier built a church only when he was old, while in his youth he had said that he will not be building them because they will not be needed..." [9] In Poland the need to construct new temples was immense, because most of our country's society is Roman-Catholic. Conflicts between the priesthood and the faithful against the communist government were unavoidable1. Churches built in the 1960's and 1970's represented New Modernism. At times they were modelled after Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp, which is considered one of the first modern religious forms. Two churches were built in Krakow at the time that through the shape of their curved roof and in the statements of their authors had been inspired by Corbusier's complex massing. The communist authorities assumed that churches would not be needed in Nowa Huta, the new district of Krakow built during the 1950's. But the decisions of the residents were different. The struggle for the first church to be built lasted many years. Ultimately, it was being built from 1968 to 1978. It plays a symbolic role, being called the Ark of the Lord, also because the massing, with a great cross - mast, can give the appearance of a boat2. It was surrounded with tall buildings in order to hide it from the eyes of random pedestrians already during its construction, by order of the communist authorities. The layout of the interior was adapted to the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, to have the altar located in the centre of the church, which positioned the chapel behind the altar. The second of Krakow's churches that referenced Le Corbusier through the spiralling form of the helix with a highly curved roof and the shaping of the entire silhouette out of soft lines is the Church of Jan Kanty in the north-western part of the city.3

The nostalgia for that which has passed, as well as returns to the past have often appeared in the history of Polish architecture during special moments. It was usually a period that, on the one hand marked the end of a period, while on the other foreshadowed the beginning of a new one, both in terms of its political, social and artistic form. In 1980's Poland the search for domestic qualities in architecture inspired by historical forms and the sentimental attitude, freedom and openness of postmodernism became an occasion to perform experiments, whose effects and reception of western models resemble the stylistic pursuits of the past.

3. Postmodernist examples of new religious buildings in Poland after 1980

Postmodernism appeared with significant delay in our country, for only at the beginning of the 1980's, already after the political and social breakthrough. Churches were being built as monuments to freedom and truth, at times looking like fortresses, fenced off by walls protecting the sacred inside from the communist profane outside.4 Similarly, to historical temples, tall or small towers, larger or smaller chapels, accentuated porticos and entry portals, the use of columns on various scales found recognition among both the developers and the audience of religious architecture. [10]

One of the first postmodernist churches was the construction of a temple in the new large residential district of Ursynów Północny (Northern Ursynów - transl. note) in Warsaw5, which was a transformation of the silhouette of the Polish Baroque churches of Mazowsze. [11] The frontal facade, flat and with a triangular crowning, dominated in the entirety of the simple, stocky massing. (Figure 1)

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1 For instance in Stalowa Wola legally peformed construction work on a church was halted, while in Nowa Huta the building permit for its only church issued in 1957 was revoked, there were numerous similar examples.
2 The Church of Our Lady the Queen of Poland was designed by Wojciech Pietrzyk
3 Designed by architect Krzysztof Bień in the years 1984-1992.
4 Cf. the Chapel in Grabno designed by Wojciech Harabasz, also: the Catechetical House in Radom - authors: Anna Bielecka, Tomasz Tureczynowicz, Piotr Walkowiak „Architektura” (Architecture) iss 1, 1986 p.7,
5 Authors: Marek Budzyński and Piotr Wicha,
Meanwhile, to the sides the entire wall was sort of supported by simplified volute flows, reaching down to the ground. The authors, in order to demonstratively highlight the connection of the form with the local tradition, connected the facades with the ground by introducing large stones, almost from the very foundations up to a height of several tens of centimetres above ground level. The brick wall is only visible above them. The enormous cross that cuts the entire facade creates a crevice and the main entrance into the church. Inside, the presbytery wall is also flat and built out of brick, and the entire layout of the floor plan is a reference to a triple bay church with a perpendicular transept. [12] The imagination of the architect made the decision about the selection of the style of the structure. Details were more geometrised or inspired by historical originals to a greater extent.

In postmodernist massings there appear allusions and citations from the past to existing towers, chapels and traditional altars, remembered from the interiors of historical temples. One example of a form of a church with a large tower and small domes and historicising towers that was inspired by tradition, while also having contemporary geometric entrance portals, is the church in Głogów, built during the years 1981-1986. We can find a search for new nativeness and local traditions in numerous instances. Religious layouts saw the continuation of the manner of creating architecture with reminiscences of defensibility in order to increase its monumentality and optically enlarge its scale relative to its surroundings, creating a suggestion of "growing over time", highlighting the separateness of the sphere of the sacred. Illusionist measures were used in the expansion and modernisation of the Chapel of the Mother of God of Częstochowa near the Łazienkowska Thoroughfare in Warsaw, creating the impression that there is much more architecture than there, in fact, is. Of note is the great care in the decoration of wall surfaces. Its details form parapets, numerous friezes, vertical and diagonal avant-corps, clearly marked framings of window and door openings. The texture of the walls is built by colourful brick with bright joints. [13]

The sanctuary of St. Peter the Apostle in Wadowice, the place of the birth and childhood years of the Polish pope - St. John Paul II, is a classic example of postmodernist solutions. The structure has been

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6 The Church of Our Most Blessed Lady the Queen of Poland in Głogów, designed by Jerzy Gurawski and Marian Fikus.
7 Designers: Anna Walkowiak, Tomasz Turczynowicz, Piotr Walkowiak,
under construction from 1984 as an expression of gratitude of the residents of the city for bringing our great compatriot to the Holy See and for saving his life after the assassination attempt on the 13th of May 1981. The votive complex has a composition of an axial layout, in which the authors wanted to portray the journey of our countryman from Wadowice, through Krakow, to Rome. A traditional cross-shaped layout with a perpendicular transept was used for the floor plan. The outer buttresses create a rhythmic layout of transverse structural frames, fulfilling the symbolic role of "gates of St. Peter", which lead to the sacred. [14]. We can observe a combination of geometrisation both in the exterior and in the interior,(Figure 2a) which is a continuation of modernist tradition with historical logic schemes and symbols.(Figure 2b) Many semantic elements, so significant in the architecture of postmodernism, have been introduced here. [9] In the floor surface of the main nave and the presbytery a simplified drawing of the floor plan of the square in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome has been repeated, with a marking of the place of the assassination attempt on the Holy Father of the 13th of May 1981, with a simplified, schematic floor plan of the entire Basilica, which, reaching the wall of the apse, tilts vertically to a height of six metres. (Figure 2c) A spatial altar was formed in this manner, where in place of the grave of St. Peter a semi-circular gilded tabernacle was placed. [15]

![Figures 2 a), b, c)](image)

Interior of the church of St. Peter in Wadowice, built as a votum of gratitude by the inhabitants of the city for choosing their compatriot as a Pope- John Paul II.

At times only drawings of intentional churches, which were never meant for construction, were being drawn during this period. Temples were being shown as inaccessible fortresses surrounded by walls like impenetrable castles. The drawing by Jacek Marzan and Konrad Chmielewski from Warsaw was particularly distinct, depicting a church built out of tree branches in a forest near Toruń, where Priest Jerzy Popiełuszko was murdered by the communist authorities in 1984. Censors were preventing the publication of this drawing in the press for a long time. [10]

Many Polish churches were being built out of concrete and brick during the 1980's, as high tech materials - glass and steel, were not easily obtainable. Brick walls and towers were erected with

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8 The authors of the design are: Jacek Gyurkovich, Ewa Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich, T. Przemyśl Szafer, the sanctuary was consecrated by John Paul II on the 14th of August 1991.
9 The interior design of the Church received in 1992 the Special Award of the Association of Polish Architects.
10 „Forest church near Toruń”, author: Konrad Chmielewski, drawing by. Jacek Marzan, after: Wystawa pt. Polskie współczesne rysunki architektoniczne Kraków-Berlin 1989 – archive of SARP Kraków.
meticulous precision, with much care for every detail - a return to building craftsmanship, which had either declined or fallen to neglect, was observed during those projects.

Postmodernist solutions of religious complexes were not common, with numerous projects in the current of New Modernism being built during that time, while in the landscape of the highlands - that of Regionalism. [16]. In Poland this drawing on citations and allusions to past periods lasted much longer than in the countries of Western Europe, as here what mattered was the strength of their intellectual influence and a fascination with a return to the past of a country of "panel buildings", with which their audience came into contact every day.

4. The surrealism and new rationalism in sacral architecture.
At times the intellectual baggage contained in a building is multi-layered, immensely difficult to guess. Such an impression is left on the audience by the Higher Seminary of the Congregation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Zakrzówek, Krakow, built in the years 1983-2003. This very large layout, the idea for which was the combining of an academic, didactic and residential function for 100 alumni with a building of an expansive monastery and church.\textsuperscript{11} The built project surprises us with fragments of architecture that are not constrained by categories of the basic principles of construction. We can find here postmodernist architecture, at times that of deconstruction, but primarily that of new rationalism. Elements of the alphabet of building were used towards a deliberate and intentional goal by the artists. The entirety is dominated by the poetry, symbolism, magic and philosophy of the creation of an unreal world, full of surprises and mysteries. The freestanding, gigantic and suddenly ending concrete porticos form the first gate that separates the world of the sacred from that of the profane, while further, a four-storey building with rectangular windows was covered by a freestanding, additional wall with window openings that have a different shape - that of a semicircle. In this manner the designers wanted to provide the inhabitants with an even greater isolation from the external world. The main entrance to the complex was created by a surprising rupture of the external wall, creating a large crevice. Inside we are also met with the unexpected. A row of columns, each about 1 m wide, does not support anything, because their height ends several dozen centimetres below the ceiling, while in another place a wall that is several metres high is not supported by the floor, because it ends right above it. Stairs lead to nowhere, while a metal chair was thrown outside of a railing and suspended in the air like a surrealist sculpture. There are many surprises like this. In one of the halls a tall, almost 1 m high concrete wave was introduced on the ceiling, in order to improve acoustics. According to the wishes of the designers, we become acquainted with the philosophy of the "Path of Four Gates", which leads us into an unreal, imaginary world. It is difficult to find a structure with such a large amount of emotion, fabulousness, artistry and poetry in this country. This unique architecture cannot leave us unmoved and without admiration. It certainly forces us to think upon the mystery of existence. We will not see in this structure any references to traditional Polish architecture, instead the atmosphere of Italian neo rationalism can be clearly sensed here, and the torn wall of the main entrance clearly references the experiments of the New York-based SITE group [17] of the 1970's.\textsuperscript{12} It is rare for poems to be written about an architectural edifice before its completion. Below is a fragment of one such poem, written in 1989 by Krystyna Traustolt - an architect from Warsaw - titled "BEAUTY and PROPRIETY.

"... I enter the thickness of time and I hear: Do not believe in the laws of nature
For they are the greatest lie in the universe
Imagination and mystification are the truth. Play and pretense are the truth
It is from them that bewilderment and selfless curiosity are born.
The laws of nature are an illusion; the column does not support nor does it stand
\textsuperscript{11} The designers of the entire complex are: Dariusz Kozłowski, Wacław Staśeński, Maria Misiągiewicz
\textsuperscript{12} The head of the SITE group was James Wines, who promotes the permeation of architectural designs, the environment and the visual arts in the group's projects, examples include, for instance, the BEST pavilion in Sacramento, California, 1976-1977, where a fragment of a jagged external wall slides back to open the entrance to the store every morning, or in Houston, Texas 1974-75, where a store building looks like it has survived an earthquake.
The stairs float by themselves, all rational threads stop mid-sentence...
And the air parts, to cover every twist of the surface....
And then the walls do not touch, not to offend the Artist's imagination
And they say: stone can hang, a wall can hang
The column can carry a head in emptiness like a punchline
It is unforgivable that diagonal walls never touch the cuboids
And other diagonal walls forever avoid the cylinders.
Mysteries multiply inappropriately and matter tangles..." [18]

5. **The light in the religious architecture of the second half of the twentieth century.**
In recent historical periods light has also played an important, mystical role in religious buildings. In the religious architecture of the second half of the twentieth century we can also observe the search for various means of lighting interiors in order to obtain an atmosphere of focus and silence necessary to introduce a climate that is different than in other public buildings. Le Corbusier already preferred the darkening of interiors rather than excessively lighting them in his three religious built projects. He also provided innovative methods of introducing light. Contemporary methods of composition and new materials make it possible to search for sunlight reflections, filtering and oftentimes its specific dosing and reflections, which result in the exceptional sensation of being separated from reality that designers expect. A well thought-out lighting of a religious interior provides an atmosphere of focus and peace that is suitable to contemplation and prayer. It is difficult to find an atmosphere of darkness and shadow similar to that of Le Corbusier's works in religious buildings built towards the end of the twentieth and during the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Architect's pursuits in new built projects go in the direction of using refined manners of introducing daylight. We can observe various searches for lighting religious interiors, small windows, often densely grouped, or even entire walls that emanate with a dulled matte light. Dark interiors happen exceptionally rarely, with solutions involving bright interiors, overly lit by daylight being most often preferred. [13] It is very often important for designers to introduce light from above, from the ceiling, because it then appears easier to take the visitors to the mystical world of the absolute. The impression of being separated from the real world, from reality, becomes even more convincing then. This has looked somewhat different in our country. The members of the curial commissions who approved religious structures for construction were afraid of technical problems associated with introducing interior lighting from roofs. At least up to the middle of the 1990's, before western companies like Vegla - Saint Gobain or Pilkington introduced good types of glass that had been used for many years in the West onto the Polish market, discussions with developers showed no acceptance of such solutions. The countries of Central Europe were in a state of clear isolation from the latest construction materials, at least up to the first half of the 1990's.

6. **Conclusions**
In order to conclude the above discussion, it should be stated that the forms of new religious buildings in our country, with exceptionally numerous built projects involving said structures that we have observed since the end of the 1970's, are very non-uniform. Postmodernist examples, although modest in terms of number and size, expressed the fundamental message of this trend quite well. It appeared that they were closer to the Polish audience than the built projects of Western Europe. [19] Simplified geometric forms borne of modernism and minimalism started to appear in Poland as late as the end of the 1990's and in the twenty-first century. The simplicity of architectural space manifests itself in a

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13 Cf. for instance, the Church of the Sacred Heart in Munich from 2000 designed by the team of Allmann,Sattler, Wappner Architekten, the Church of the Ark of the Covenant in Paris from 1998 designed by „Architecture Studio”, the Notre-Dame de Pentecôte Church in la Défense, Paris of 2001, designed by Franck Hammouténe, the Christ, Hope of the World Church in Donau City of 2001 designed by H.Tesar, M. Tesar, the Church of St. Paul in Foligno in Italian Umbria of 2009 designed by M.and D.Fukas, or the Pavilion of Christ the King for the Expo 2000 in Hanover, which was relocated in 2001 to the Cistercian Volkenroda Abbey in Thuringia, design by. Gerkan, Marg und Partners, I wrote about it [in:] Ewa Węcławowicz-Gyurkovich, *Pawilon Chrystusa (Pavilion of Christ)*, „Architektura i Biznes” (Architecture and Business) iss. 12/2001 p.22-31.
search for proportions, scale, geometry and light, which have the power to shape it. Giving the faithful the possibility of residing in an environment that is rich in "the uncomplicated beauty of empty spaces" gives them a chance for inner peace, contemplation, thought, an understanding of the world and a stimulation of their individual sensitivity. These qualities of asceticism, simplicity and reduction of decoration are starting to appear in Polish religious architecture. A lot is dependent on the composition of commissions that decide on the matter of selecting conceptual designs. Admittedly, we have in our country, mostly in small and medium-sized localities, numerous examples of visually uninspired religious buildings. A part of them was built without the approval of construction authorities, especially during the first period of the 1980's. Developers and parish members were afraid that the approval of churches that had been wait for such a long time would not last long and a time of prohibition would be reinstated. The establishment of construction communities at the time belonged to forms of good and valuable social contact. The mass involvement of parish members in the act of erecting religious buildings was, to many participants of these acts, also a form of political struggle. It was the emotional act of creating "forbidden works" that counted. The case of the church that had been built in the village of Nowosiółki in the south-eastern area of the country, where cornfields had been obscuring the construction of foundations and the church was erected over the span of a single night from previously prepared elements, was widely discussed all across Poland. [20] We should also highlight the often excessive decorativeness seen in the interiors of new Polish religious buildings in comparison to build projects in other European countries. This is often the result of a lack of aesthetic education on behalf of both the faithful and the developers. Authors' rights are also not always respected in these projects. Developers and the faithful demand "enrichment", that has been remembered and accepted from previous periods.

I think that the years to come will be a time of repairing these unsuccessful projects, because the number of newly built churches has been decreasing in Poland. Only the best ones, and probably those that were built in recent years, of which there are 15-20%, will go down in the history of contemporary architecture. Such it has always been with history. "It is the churches that will become the testament of the level of the art of building of the 1970's and 1980's rather than estates of factory houses, such as it has often been in the past, that it was the temples that constituted the proof of the high quality of Polish national architecture..." [21]

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