Church Conveys a Church. Problem of the Language of Architecture and Religious Art in Europe Following the Second Vatican Council

Lucjan Bartkowiak 1

1 Aletti.pl Religious Art Atelier, Poland
aletti.pl@gmail.com

Abstract. Article 1214 of the Code of Canon Law states that the ultimate objective of erecting any ecclesiastical architectural structure is Religious Worship. The number of new churches that have been built so far throughout Poland and elsewhere in Europe proves that designers are lacking in terms of a background of theological awareness. It frequently occurs that new structure, what may be described as simply pure manifestations of their author's artistic egos. This contradicts what has been the crux of Religious Art for centuries. On this respect the education of architects, designers and all other participants of the development process in the "Theology of Religious Art" is essential. The starting point is to understand that Religious Art (architecture, interior design) is a "Sacred" Church Work (ekklesia) performed for the Church. Hence, the basic condition imposed upon an artist and/or participant of the development process in this respect is that they should be persons of "Faith", essentially professing "Faith in the Church" for which they work. Modernism brought about the situation in which Theology was continually "programmed" by nonbelievers and churches were being designed by atheists. People such as these are unable to fundamentally anchor their acts in or be inspired by the centuries-old Liturgical Tradition of the Church.

1. Introduction

A church is a sacred edifice meant for Divine worship, to which the faithful have the right of entry in order to perform acts of worship, particularly public ones. The abovementioned statement of the 1214-th canon of Canon Law already presupposes that the ultimate purpose of each and every religious architectural built project is the performing of acts of worship inside of it. It would be good to also mention canon 1216 here, which states: "After seeking the opinion of those skilled in the construction and restoration of churches, the principles and liturgical standards, as well as those concerning religious art, should be adhered to". Just as in any activity in the real, physical world, structural standards, architectural and construction solutions, as well as the content of source documents that refer directly to the essence that constitutes the theological foundations of the function of given buildings absolutely essential in the construction of religious structures.

The draft of a synodal document of the Diocese of Gliwice in point 1.3., referring to the principles of shaping religious spaces, highlights that "they are of a servile character in relation to efforts of a community of the faithful towards providing dignified conditions for the performance of the liturgy of the Eucharist. They should reflect theological, functional and aesthetic guidelines. Religious space is a place of the meeting of the congregation of the disciples of Christ - it is a House of the Church (Domus
Ecclesia) and a House of God (Domus Dei). Its integral properties are: adherence to the tradition of faith and a living presence within contemporaneity - Ecclesia semper eadem (the Church is always the same) - Ecclesia semper reformanda (The Church is always developing)” [1]. This is why a similar instruction for the church in Legnica postulates "the well thought out and responsible shaping of religious interiors through the involvement of persons with appropriate knowledge, expertise and an actual, high artistic level", [2].

Even a cursory analysis of the documents cited above shows the necessity of a certain awareness on behalf of a designer or creator of religious art, and its lack manifests itself in the fundamental problem of contemporary architecture, church grounds furniture and the art that accompanies them in the process of arranging new places of Christian worship. The immense wave of new churches in Poland, as well as in other European countries, shows just how much contemporary architects and artists are troubled by the lack of appropriate theological preparation in the commissions they undertake. It often turns out that new buildings meant for religious worship are nothing else but a sort of "outburst of the artistic ego" of their authors, which is completely out of bounds of what has constituted religious art throughout entire centuries. Thus it appears ever more clearly that formation in terms of the theology of religious art among contemporary designers and builders of churches, as well as all those who play a part in such processes, is necessary.

The starting point in facing this problem should be an awareness of the principle that religious art (architecture and interior design) is a work of the Church, for the Church. It postulates a basic condition for the author, who should be a man of faith, professing the Faith of the Church for which he works for. Modern times have brought about a situation in which theology is often practiced by nonbelievers, while churches are designed by atheists, incapable of taking into account the entire Liturgical Tradition of past centuries. In this form, that which is proposed for worship appears to be effete, without reflecting what the Church is and that which has always found its expression in the forms, message and colours of liturgical structures. This is why an active awareness of the theology of matter, its place and significance in the Christian perception of Revelation and Tradition is absolutely necessary in the process of creating liturgical space.

"Physical masonry temples are of no value, save for being a reflection of the temple that is Christ and that we build through our persons. Thus a church building, the way we see it in its built state, is precisely a reflection of our perception of ourselves as the Church, as living stones within the temple that is Christ", [3].

2. A church as a public building used for religious worship

Christians who, after the conventional year 313, took over public buildings for the purposes of the then-newly acknowledged religion, were absolutely convinced that the entire world, with man at the fore, is the object of salvation. This is why all that has been introduced through Christian inculturation into the sphere of ritual, just like man himself, had to be put through a sort of baptism, understood as a death of the old and a birth of the new [4]. The old imperial basilicons became basilicas in which the seats of the jury, with that of the judge at the head, became synthronones, reminding us of Christ and his apostolic retinue. The comfortable forms of the apses, often with a likeness of the emperor, became a synonym of Christ the Head, rallying the Church, his mystical Body, around him. The naves, covered by timber beams became a wooden Noah's Ark, which, as the cross, saved the all of creation. Even flowers had to become incense, for their fiery Passover to become the glory of the Lord. The difference between the domus Ecclesiae (house of the Church) of the past and the new temples, often of imperial or church founding, was, of course, acknowledged. It is sufficient to mention the Lateran or the Basilica of Liberius in Rome. Indeed, over time, even the first structures to be redeveloped, or rather extended, became beautiful basilicas, like, for instance, the Roman basilica of St. Pudenziana.

However, the small, simple, minimalist hermitages of monks remained something altogether different than the new, spacious interiors of newly-built temples. Although the former were still to serve for prayer, a personal journey towards the Lord, the latter's main purpose was for the Church to Congregate, to manifest the Beloved of Christ. "We Christians justify the construction of temples only
for the Presence of the Lord and the form of this Presence among His faithful gathered in prayer and the Eucharist: “...prayer in congregation is ascribed a particular importance, of which Christ himself had said: For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20)”, [5].

This thought also reflected the space of worship, understood as a point of intersection between two bodies: that of the Divine (the apse), with the human (naos, the auditorium). The altar became the "alcove of congress". Thus, as it can be seen, all was becoming ever more subjected to Christian dogmatism, becoming one great catechesis and a profession of faith. It is no wonder then that John Chrysostom, John of Damascus and so many other Fathers and writers of the great period of Patristics who were searching for the answer to the question about faith, encouraged visiting a temple, to contemplate its walls, which became a sort of reflection of all that the Church, as a community, is as a part of its nature: a divine-human organism, in the image of Christ Himself, to whom the councils of the fifth century were devoted in a particular manner [6]. And all of this took place over only 150 years, starting with the times of Constantine.

Figure 1. View of the interior of the church with the presbytery in the back, with the ambo, altar and chair placed along the golden axis. Phot. courtesy of don Alessandro Amapani

Here we should cite a contemporary theologian of liturgy of protestant provenance, Richard Giles, who at one of the conferences in Bose, dedicated to the problems of art in liturgy, stated that liturgical space was like a canvas, on which the living Church painted its own self-portrait [7]. This is why it is important to remember that what happened on the walls of a temple was, to the Christian community of the first millennium, not simply a decoration, but primarily a profession, The auditorium, the naos is time, chronos is the history of the Lord and His faithful. This is why there are always evangelical stories there, processions of the saints, etc. But the Presbytery is Kairos - eternity. There is no history there, no stories from the pages of the Gospel. There lies the mystery of Apocalyptic liturgy, from the fifth, sixth and seventh chapter of the ultimate book of the New Testament. The Lamb, pierced and yet upright, the Throne.... It is there that Hic et Nunc takes place. The Lord is beyond the context of time,
in the clouds, assisted either by an angelic or apostolic retinue, like in the oldest complex mosaics of Rome. There is a menorah, there are the Tetramorphs. Finally, there is Etimasia - the Presence felt only through the heart and Symbol of Liturgy. On the border of these worlds: Chronos and Kairos, is often the Annunciation, which was also thought of in the West as a key moment, when the Cherub ceased to guard the heavenly gates, the doors opened and we were able to gaze inside along with John on Patmos.

"...the churches of past times were images of the Church in such a strong manner, that when it did occur that somebody wanted to use them for other purposes - as, for instance, during the Turkish invasions - all the signs of the Presence had to be destroyed, as they became an unconquerable obstacle for non-Christians", [8].

![Figure 2. View of the church auditorium from the side of the presbytery. Phot. courtesy of don Alessandro Amapani](image)

Marko Rupnik, who has been working on the organisation of liturgical space for many years, pointed out that what becomes a part of liturgy needs to - as it has been mentioned previously - be subjected to its own Passover, thus becoming a property of Christ, and through this - of the Church. "All matter, for it to be able to enter a religious space, must first go through a certain processing, a certain transfiguration, a certain Passover", [9]. And it is here that a theological awareness on behalf of the artist is required. Of his personal Passover, a certain spiritual death that will make him able to treat work on a church project as a duty, in which ecclesial awareness, living in a community, good knowledge of the theology of religious architecture, along with its history, symbolism and sense, will become a factor that is more important than artistic individualism. Over the centuries it was clear to the builders of churches that they must be buildings of the Church of the congregation, and not the artist. One of the great exceptions was the case of the builders of Constantinople's Hagia Sophia - Antemius of Trailes and Isidor of Milletus, whose solutions with the Justinian temple have proven to be ground-breaking. The designer of a temple must be a part of the Church in order to create for
Church. Otherwise, somebody will once again, like in the conch of the apse of the archbasilica of St. John Lateran, place a Cherub in place of the all-creating hand of the Father, expressing their own ignorance of and arrogance towards Revelation.

3. Contemporary examples of appropriate approaches to the design of religious interiors
As an example of possible solutions featuring an appropriate approach to the subject, I would like to present a liturgically transformed presbytery of the parish church of Mary Help of Christians in Altamura, in Puglia, Italy.

![Figure 3. View of the parish church of Mary Help of Christians in Altamura, in Puglia, Italy. Phot. courtesy of don Alessandro Amapani](image)

The temple - renovated on the one hundredth-year anniversary of its construction - was provided with a new presbytery in 2013, one that refers to a liturgical model going back to the first millennium of Christianity, in which the most important elements of liturgy: the synthronon, the altar and the pulpit were placed along a single liturgical line, often called the golden axis or the golden line. This line stretches from the entrance all the way to the altar.

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1 It is an image of faith understood as man's journey towards the Mystery of God. In the later part of the Middle Ages this axis also included the ombeliculus, and in some churches of Spain or France there were labyrinths, meant to show the faithful the apophaticity of human efforts to understand God.

2 It would be good to mention Crispino Valenziano, who, referring to these liturgical lines making their mark on the form of the Church, the cross in reference to the main nave, wrote: "From the east to the west it is the path of the Lord, who walks towards his own, in order to reveal Himself to them: through presence in His Body and in His Blood, to those who go to Him in the procession of holy communion, heading with the others, who through the presence of His Word in the procession of the Gospel Book carried by the deacon and those who accompany him, and thus through a sacramental presence in the minister who goes forth to the convened in every sacramental service. From the west to the east it is the path of Christ, who goes among his own in order to..."
Figure 4. Ambo - Top layer. Photo courtesy of Don Alessandro Amapani

I think it would be good to mention here a fragment of a statement of the parish priest who initiated the restoration work in "his" church, Fr Alessandro Amapani, who, arguing for the restoration of the temple, highlighted a very important aspect of the necessity of preserving that which is historical, in an unchangingly theological spirit, but in a new external form: "it is important to understand the relation that takes place between restoration and history. The restoration of matter is dynamically in line with a multi-layered evolution, which applies to prayer, liturgy and life within the Church. Apart from this, the goal of preserving that which is historical must be achieved with a wise balance and dialogue with the conditions and needs of the present; liturgy and ecclesiology, due to their sacramental quality, for when the matter concerns the prayers of human hearts, must be equal in both form and structure to not only that which is outlined by the rite, but also the fundamental organisation of the Church. This is why in the process of restoring a building meant for religious worship it is essential for matter to become a conveyor of symbolic forms, which can be heard within it today, but at the same time become a testament to the evolution of the historical culture of the Church, which is expressed through space in time" [11].

In Altamura, the tabernacle was taken outside of the space of the presbytery, transferred to the apse of the right nave of the church, placing the presider's chair in its original location. The priest stands at the top of the holy axis, becoming an alter Christus - a clear image of the Master of Nazareth, the guide of our salvation, focusing around him the Christian community. Between him and the community of the faithful, on this very same line Altar - alt-ara (elevated altar) and lower, on the step separating the presbytery from the naos is the ambo, a liturgical monument strongly rooted both in the presbytery and the nave, combining these two spaces both symbolically and religiously.

participate through the presence in those who perform the service, in the community of those gathered, in the symbolic signs of the liturgical ritual - the procession cross, the paschal candle and others..."
This is a reference to the early Christian liturgical layout of a temple's space, which expressed the theology of liturgy as a path of a congregation towards God. This path is composed of two stages of human growth in faith and the community, spanning between the baptistery, the bosom giving birth for Christ within the Church, and the altar as the goal, which refers with its theology to the heavenly liturgy of golden Jerusalem. This path assumes the following stages: the christening (the baptistery, outside of the temple or near its entrance) and entering the congregation (the main entry gate into the temple), the formation of the entirety of earthly life based on listening to the Word of God and in constantly making efforts to live in adherence to it through a constant cooperation (synergy) of the baptised with the Trinity, all the way to Passover - a passage, which is liturgically expressed by a line that separates the presbytery from the naos, formerly highlighted by balusters or a different type of fence, to the east, personified through the central royal doors of the iconostases. This passage was ultimately opened in the mystery of Christ's death upon the cross on Golgotha, when, according to the message of the Gospel, the earth shook, and the veil of the temple became split in two, becoming an expression of the old Covenant and the beginning of the new in the person of Christ as the Archpriest of a new rite, which is fulfilled in the word of his sacrifice "it is done" - *consumatum est*.

3 Which are also a result of the evolution of the historical Constantinopolitan liturgy and transferring the symbol of the entrance to the heavenly paradise of Jerusalem from the central doors of the temple to the gate of the altar's podium in the tenth century.

4 In the Letter to the Hebrews (Hbr 10,19) the body of Christ was presented as a veil of the edifice; in Christ's Blood there being a guarantee of being able to enter the sanctuary, opening, as the highest priest of the House of God, a new and living path through the veil - or rather through His own Body - to us. The reference to the veil, which encloses the entrance to the Hebrew sanctuary (Ez 26,31) becomes obvious, just as it is obvious that this access is desired, between the tearing of the temple veil and the opening of Christ's side at the moment of His death (Mt 25,51; J 19,34). And this means that we have access to God in Christ's sacrifice" in: [12].
Figure 6. View of the top of the right nave with the tower of the Eucharist and a mosaic of Heavenly Jerusalem. Photo courtesy of Don Alessandro Amapani

It would be good to return to the liturgical commentary on the restored and redeveloped presbytery in Altamura, in which its author, Fr Amapani, a liturgist well-known in Italy, justified the changes in the renovated temple.

"The presbytery, fulfilling the Liturgical Reform of the Second Vatican Council, became placed on the line spanning between the presider's chair, the altar and the ambo. The relationship between the table of the Word of God (the ambo) and the table of the Eucharist (the altar) was not highlighted simply through the architectural form that they share, but also through the view that connects them, which causes an impression as if one was inside the other.

The ambo, located at the point connecting the presbytery and the nave, makes it possible to tangibly feel the same dynamic of the liturgy of the Word during the proclamation of the Word of God: a dialogical dynamic, in which God speaks to his people and the people answer their God. Simultaneously, the structure of the ambo and its placement strengthen its significance as a place of the presence of the Word during the reading of the Holy Scripture, causing it to become a discreet presence, which does not obstruct the visibility of the altar at the time of the liturgy of the Eucharist. The square form of the slightly elevated altar makes it the central place of the liturgical auditorium, causing it to appear to the faithful with all of its significance: of a place to which a path leads and a place from which one departs.

The presider's chair, in the entirety of its monumental form, built out of locally available stone, similarly to the other liturgical points of the church, possesses as its personality a gilded mosaic located at the height of the feet. This is a reference to the prophet Isaiah's vision of the temple: I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. (Is 6,1).
In this manner the temple became an expression of the relationship that occurs between its elements; it is not possible to look upon the altar without seeing its relationship with the ambo and the presider's chair, and especially with the baptismal font (which is located along the same line, right near the entrance to the main nave). The liturgical space is for action, for the body set in motion by the rite to be able to open up to the Mystery, as if almost touching it with its hand". [13].

Figure 7. View of the location of the baptistery with the baptismal font to the right of the entrance, with a mosaic of Nymphes, Christ the Beloved. Photo courtesy of don Alessandro Amapani

Such a liturgical order of the temple, from its very beginning, becomes a catechesis of that which Christian life is in its essence, understood as living within Christ.

At the end there is also another significant element required to understand the sense of the architecture of the temple, which has been understood as the visible body of mystical Christ from the very beginning. And the body is an organism: with many parts and functions. Durando di Mende expressed this thought even more explicitly in "Razionale dei divini uffici": "The church has a form of the human body; the sanctuary, which is the place where the altar is located, represents the head, the narthex represents the arms and hands, with the western part representing the remaining part of the body..."[14]. The thought that a temple is understood solely as the space of a hall, with a single nave, without the intimacy of the meeting of these participants of the liturgy and the members of the Congregation, comes to mind almost immediately. The Bodies of the Lord, who for various spiritual or physical reasons are not able to blend into the congregation.

This is why many experts on the problem postulate that architects should take into consideration this theology of the body when performing architectural design work on a temple, so that the composition of the building of the church will not be deprived of separate spaces reserved for the baptismal font, the confessionals, the chapel of the Holy Sacrament or of a different small religious space. The historical and liturgical awareness of the significance of the ark, as an expression of spiritual purification, of the ark that has for centuries constituted an inseparable element of religious architecture, and has today been all but eliminated from church architecture.
4. Conclusions
The example of the works performed in the years 2012-2013 on the parish church in Altamura proves that even today, when adhering appropriate legal standards, it is possible to organise the presbytery of a church in such a manner that will reflect the liturgical Tradition of the Christian Community that has remained unchanged for centuries, yet expressed in a "fresh" form. However, there is also a need for in-depth knowledge of the problem, of the history and theology of liturgy. Courage and determination are required for the liturgical space to not only affect us through its beauty and unconventionality, but also for it to become a sort of catechesis for the community of the faithful. The new empty churches are terrifying, particularly those whose symbolism is based on some unbound fantasy of the author of their design, who does not know or understand what a temple is, what is its significance to its fundamental liturgical points, composed in order to co-create Liturgy and build a community. Churches that are museums, which do not provide the necessary space to express themselves in a neutral manner to today's Christians, are tiring, they are like storehouses full of works of art, imprisoning excellent artefacts in their cellars. The law, theology, courage and determination must also be accompanied by balance, about which the aforementioned Altamurian parish priest wrote so well.

During the preparation of these thoughts of mine I understood just how great a problem is access to professional literature on the subject. Young architects, especially those who hold designing for the Church deeply in their hearts, should have access to the legacy of such authors like Rudolf Schwarz, Romano Guardini or, finally, Crispino Valenziano. Without knowledge of this already classical subject literature it will be difficult to count on development and progress.

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