Anticipation of Contemporary Sacred Buildings - New Directions in Designing Semantic Architecture

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Abstract. Architecture, particularly sacred architecture, has always been an answer to the transcendent needs of humans of a given era. For today's humans, order is only an element of the matter. The religious scholar Charles Taylor, when describing the contemporary world, used a reverse version of this concept - a >disenchanted world<. Contemporary religiousness is a radical departure of humans from the cosmos. A man, also in the religious sphere, emphasises the individual and private nature of experiencing the sacred, which is unquestionably important for contemporary creators of sacred spaces. The analysis of sacred constructions in Europe within the last 20 years clearly shows that spaces which particularly stand out are those used for individual prayer, rather than liturgy of the community of believers. This is probably caused by the needs of the contemporary human, who has a new, more individualised way to pursue happiness, as well as by loosening of certain bonds and common ways of living. At the same time, facilities intended for group ceremonies are also created. Lukas Feiresiss, in the book entitled: "Closer to God", divides the latest sacred projects around the world into three groups: "Silent Prayer", "Living Worship", "Amazing Grace". However, scientific publications mostly present small projects for individual prayer and mostly for contemplation. This individualisation is reflected in the quiet places – small chapels. It is difficult to say that it is a common tendency; surely works of contemporary sacred architecture are created that are designed for the community of believers. However, the formation of many places of quiet or focus within the last dozen or so years is a new phenomenon. An aspect of this phenomenon is also interesting from the point of view of symbols used in such places. In the age of continuous information flow, quiet and individual prayer constitute opportunities to enter the space of the sacred. Contemporary small forms of quiet reflection indicate various trends; the semantic aspect of these forms is the key to architectural criticism. Due to the a priori nature of phenomena related to symbols, this layer remains unchanged. When describing symbols of places of quiet reflection, the symbols used should be described: gateways, nave and aisles, stair vaults, circles, arches of the heavens, and apses. All these elements form unique sequences of form, at the same time referring to cosmological symbolism. Contemporary sacred architecture is characterised by many extreme stylistic directions. In spite of the above, architects in their creative work reach for the original patterns – semantic archetypes, and all the aforementioned projects are saturated with symbols of the cosmological order. The anticipation of sacred architecture is the myth about creation of the world and the primeval beginning. For architects, it is important that "the archetype can be repeated (imitated) in a primitive manner", but also that a man seeks, even at the lowest level of his religious experience, to come close to the archetype and to realise it in some manner. The contemporary man, in spite of advanced technology and mastery of the matter, in many aspects still desires symbols, as he remains Homo symbolicus. In the sacred architecture, it seems to be
impossible to escape the Platonian triad: the good, the truth and the beauty. Return to the original patterns and ideas in the sacral architecture indicates the stability and the a priori nature of semantic forms. Natural matter, cosmological symbols not only indicate the constancy of sacred meanings, but also constitute a guideline for future creators.  

1. Introduction  
Architecture, particularly sacral architecture, has always been an answer to the needs and the mental condition of humans of a given era. "Stylistic freedom given to the church architecture by the provision of KL Vaticanum II went hand in hand with various trends in architecture of this time," Kucza-Kuczyński rightly notices [9, pp.11-12]. In the modern post-industrial information society, secularisation of space took place. For today's humans, order is only an element of matter. The world of people of previous eras was associated with that which can be called > enchanted world < – so believes the outstanding sociologist Max Weber [16, p.52] The religious scholar Charles Taylor, when describing the contemporary world, used a reverse version of this concept - a > disenchanted world <. In the description of the contemporary religiousness, the Canadian philosopher sees today a drastic departure of humans from the cosmos. The life of a mass human in all its domains seems to be deprived of difficulties and problems, which involves breaking of social bonds and needs, which was created at times of danger [12]. The contemporary society, also in the religious sphere, emphasises the individual and private nature of experiencing the sacred, which is unquestionably important for contemporary creators of sacral spaces. The analysis of sacral constructions in Europe within the last 20 years clearly shows that spaces which particularly stand out are those used for individual prayer, rather than liturgy of the community of believers. This is probably caused by the needs of the contemporary human, who has a new, more individualised way to pursue happiness, as well as by loosening of certain bonds and common ways of living." All these elements," Taylor notices, "indicate the establishment of a new way to exist in the society. In fact, it <leads to individual happiness>" [16 p.69-70]. At the same time, facilities intended for group ceremonies are developed. Lukas Feiresiss, in the book entitled: "Closer to God", divides the latest sacred projects around the world into three groups: "Silent Prayer", "Living Worship", "Amazing Grace" [3]. The first group of facilities are individual meditation chapels. Feiresiss organises them in qualitative terms rather than quantitative. Many of these facilities are places of individual prayer and meditation. The diversity of solutions indicates the lack of a common direction in these executions "for the first time, to such a considerable extent, diametrically different trends coexist. The paradigms of absolute freedom, liberalism, tolerance and pluralism, supported by technological possibilities result in unprecedented ambitions of investors and authorities. " [8]. The scale and individual meditation is a shared direction in designing. Like in the contemporary directions in post-modernist architecture, we can notice various stylistic tendencies, which does not change the narrative foundation [17].  

This individualisation is reflected in the quiet places – small chapels. It is difficult to say that it is a common tendency; surely works of contemporary sacral architecture are created that are designed for the community of believers. However, the formation of many places of quiet or focus within the last dozen or so years is a new phenomenon. An aspect of this phenomenon is also interesting from the point of view of symbols used in such places. In the age of continuous information flow, quiet and individual prayer constitute opportunities to enter the space of the sacred. "Secrecy and solitude are the values that form the very essence of human personality. Lack of respect for the secret internal life of other people reveals a hidden contempt towards God" (Merton) [11, p.92].

2. Architectural Design and Methods  
The contemporary small forms of quiet reflection indicate various tendencies; the semantic aspect of these forms is the key to architectural criticism. Due to the a priori nature of phenomena related to symbols, this layer remains unchanged. When describing symbols of places of quiet reflection, the symbols used should be described: gateways, nave and aisles, stair vaults, circles, arches of the
heavens, and apses. All these elements form unique sequences of form, at the same time referring to cosmological symbolism.

An example of execution of a sacral place of quiet reflection is the design of Christian Kerez in Oberrealte in Switzerland, completed in 1992-1993. To this day, it has been the only sacral structure designed by the Swiss architect. The chapel was made to the order of a private investor on the site of the chapel destroyed by an avalanche. The chapel's simple form brings to mind associations with the archetypical form of shelter. Raw concrete walls with smooth structure herald the importance of the unspoken secret of God. A small Greek cross is the only symbol placed outside the chapel. The interior of the chapel is deprived of any decor elements, which intensifies the impression of silence. Uncovered foundations of the old chapel indicate images from the past as a small gap. The narrow gap is the only symbolic element of the interior, which is intentionally separated from the view of the mountains [5, p.100]. Dark, small and empty space of the chapel provokes reflection and prayer. The observer must remain alone with his reflections. In this design, all elements have symbolic meaning. The cosmic riser represents the centre of the world, the place that the Axis mundi crosses, where the heaven and the earth connect. In this minimalistic interior, the riser has double the force, at the same time referring to the universal semantics of space. In this small structure, one can feel the time stop. Taylor refers to it as >Platonic eternity<, within which there is a level going entirely beyond the stream of time; the eternity of God as understood by the Christian tradition, a kind of concentration of the whole time". [16, p.53] This stoppage is only possible due to symbols that indicate a certain secret. Such a return to symbols of the cosmological order confirms their universal nature. The structure, despite its contemporary form, anticipates the return to the primary sacred.

A design within the circle of sacral architecture that has been discussed many times is the Bruder Klaus Kapelle in Mechernich–Wachendorf (Rissdorferweg, Germany) by Peter Zumthor, built in 1998-2007. Even after 10 years from its completion, it enjoys considerable interest among the critics and architects. The Investor, like in the case of Kerez's chapel, was a German farmer who felt the need to build a chapel under the invocation of the medieval saint Brother Nicolas, who used to be a farmer before he completely devoted himself to prayer and work for others in a hermitic life [15, p.41]. Despite a seemingly sparing form, the chapel is rich in symbols. The smooth vertical surface outside the chapel creates associations with the >sacred stone<. Like in Kerez's construction, only the Greek cross implies the sacred nature of the space, and the triangular diaphragm door invites believers inside. The hierophany is intensified by the use of completely different tectonics inside and outside the form. Like in the Swiss chapel, the interior was deprived of unnecessary accessories and symbols. Despite its bare look, the interior has a rich layer of meanings: at the level of should human, there are only three items here: a rectangular metal candle holder affixed to a wall, a vessel for holy water, and a bench made of solid wood. A wagon wheel is hung at the height of a human – symbolising the Holy Trinity. The chapel's tectonics also indicate semantics of space. Light falling through a hole at the top of the chapel refers to the already described symbol of verticality and the firmament. Pilgrim's eyes follow the light that illuminates the church's interior. All symbols of space reflect the cosmological order. The firmament, the light, stars, and finally the floor, bringing to mind associations with a water reservoir, belong to the world's order. Even Brother Claus' cross fits within a circle, the cosmological symbol of God. The strong experience of the sacred that is evoked inside the chapel results from the ubiquitous symbolism of the cosmological order, which - as written by Hani - "is the key to theological symbolism" [6. P.17]. To the surprise of Zumthor, the chapel enjoys considerable interest, which indicates that the contemporary man is keen on symbols. Like in the case of Kerez, the chapel is intended for individual prayer and meditation. The interior closed off to the landscape encourages to individual reflection.

The place of meditation and prayer in the Parisienne UNESCO complex, created by Tadao Ando, is another example of a place of quiet individual reflection, exemplifying the anticipation of the contemporary sacred dating back to the universal semantics. Professor Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński, specialist in the field of sacral architecture [Konrad Kucz – Kuczyński – Professor of technical sciences, architect, publicist, graphic artist. Founder of the Sacral and Monumental Architecture
workroom at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology. Author of numerous reports, including sacral aptly noted that". Tadao Ando has undoubtedly become a great successor of the masters of architectonic concrete. His <sanctification of concrete> has become a characteristic feature of structures made by this Japanese architect [9, p.15]. Due to the chapel of Heavenly Peace being located in the UNESCO complex, it has a non-denominational nature. Simple, concise form in a circular plane is not devoid of symbolism. The shape itself refers to the symbol of a circle – the perfect figure symbolising eternity [4, p.57]. Since it is a symbol commonly used in many cultures, it is the perfect form with a universal spatial message. The participant of the chapel's space has no doubts as to its sacred nature, and not only form but also the juxtaposition of symbolic elements induces to personal reflection. This small design is another proof that sacred space cannot go without symbols, which constitute a universal spatial message with a non-denominational nature. The sacred of this place was expressed by cosmological symbolism and beauty, as the attribute of God's creation. The author of Asian origin, by reaching for the minimalistic aesthetics of the East, at the same time did not abandon the meaning of space. The universal the chapel at UNESCO will be the first project executed by Ando in Europe. The architect himself emphasised that the source of architecture lies in the personal experiences of a human being. In one of the interviews, he said: "Architecture not fulfil its role only thanks to a human who experiences it. So the architectural space comes alive only in contact with a human who experiences it in our contemporary culture. It cannot take on such meaning unless it enters the ambiguous sphere of human feelings - happiness, love, peace, stress. This is the true domain of architecture, which cannot be precisely formulated. Only through the synthesis of both worlds - the real and the conventional - architecture exist and rise to the level of art'. [19].

Recently, places to individual prayer have been designed to the order of private investors as one of the elements of an entire residential complex. One of such structures is the private chapel in Valleaceron in Spain, created by Studio Sancho – Madridejos, designed and built in 2001. The chapel, which is located within the landscape, is a private chapel and constitutes an element of an entire design of a villa, a hunting house and a guest house. The project was completed in Spain. The form is composed "almost like an origami, with irregular shape and perfect proportions"[5, p.110] resembling the boulder from the local landscape. The building is located on a rocky hill, without high vegetation, and seems to be an element of nature. The chapel has large glass surfaces; the interior is illuminated as if it was part of the landscape. Large openings allow for "a lot of light for prayer" to get inside [5, p.114]. Like in the case of Zumthor's chapel in Germany, the chapel in Spain brings to mind association with a boulder and is a reminder "that, if we eliminate nature, nothing will remain to provide support to the effect of the grace, nothing will remain that could be consecrated and devoted to God, and this is not consecration but desecration of the temple of our existence"[10]. In this project, the tectonics refer to the symbolic form of rock. the sacred creates light, and the only symbolic element is a small isosceles cross, barely visible on the smooth wall. Just like in the case of Kerez, Zumthor and Ando, the structure is intended for individual prayer. The form simultaneously opens and closes to a human being, indicating nature as the final source of cognition.

When recalling contemporary sacred projects that show new tendencies going back to the primary sacred of contemporary sacral facilities, it is worth mentioning another example of sacral structure, namely the chapel in Douro (Portugal) designed by Alvaro Siza in 2001. The minimalist form of the structure, characteristic of Siza's architecture, refer with its material to a baroque entry gate. Despite the sparing form, the building is not deprived of semantic meanings. The small size is dedicated rather to prayer, although interior equipment elements indicate that a mass can be held there. When determining which direction the chapel should face, the architect referred to the symbolic meaning of the East, which means that "the cosmos engages in prayer, waiting for the Redeemer" [13]. Ratzinger, in the book The Spirit of the Liturgy, emphasised the symbolic meaning of spatial arrangement of the Christian temple. "Liturgy is never made in a world created humans. It is always a cosmic liturgy [...] Therefore, wherever possible, we should take on the apostolic tradition of heading East, both in church buildings and in performing the liturgy" [13]. Not only the church's position, but also the semi-circular window visible from the road emphasises the cosmological symbolism of the East.
This feature is quite unique for an eastern church window, and maybe that is why it constitutes a sign of the sacral purpose of this place [13]. There is nothing outside that would indicate that it is a Christian chapel. Over the wooden door, in the stone lintel is a small triangle symbolising the Holy Trinity. The interior of the temple is dark, with a smooth architectonic concrete finish; an altar was placed on the central axis of the composition, on which a semi-circular window is visible from outside, which only here gains its full meaning. The lit-up window brings to mind a rising sun, symbolising the Risen Christ, and emphasises the stone altar. A negative cross was placed in the northern wall, emphasised by raised wall and embedded marble instead of glass. Heathcote and Moffatt, when trying
to describe the atmosphere of this interior, compared it to La Tourette of Le Corbusier, using the description of Keith Murry and Robert Maguire from 1965: "There is a deathly silence and emptiness, but changed by the light" [13]. Each element of the chapel is carefully selected and designed. The whole interior, designed in the human scale, provokes reflection; there is nothing to distract. Despite the minimalistic nature, the sacred of the space is formed by symbols: semicircle, light, cross, and altar... Quiet reflection in such a location, which is possible for everyone, confirms the universal nature of symbols of the cosmological order, as well as the still-growing need to design structures related to individualisation of faith and religious experiences.

The clearest example of a chapel on the road - small architecture is the Santa Maria degli Angeli church in Monte Tamaro, created by the Swiss architect Mario Botta. The structure is a private chapel, celebrating the memory of the late wife of the investor. The chapel has all elements necessary to perform the mass. The interior of the chapel is rich in meaningful elements, as described by Cappellato, "it is enlivened by strong contrast between smooth, round walls plastered in black and white segments of the roof. Soft light penetrates through holes between ceiling beams. Cold and practical items made of oak wood emphasise the spartan character of this sacred room, which is able to communicate the atmosphere of deep religiousness, which is equally as difficult to find in the contemporary architecture" [1]. It should be emphasised that the symbolic meaning of this space highlights that "the world of beliefs, feelings and ideas is reflected in the simple and clear world of this exceptional place" [1, p.166]. The layer of meanings in the chapel was designed as a sequence of a priori symbolic elements: road, cross, circle, arc – rainbow, gateway. Both the sequence, the matter and the form are not accidental. Using the original forms, Botta returns to the essence of sacramal architecture. The road is life, the cross – truth, the rainbow – covenant, the circle - God, and the light in the niche – resurrection. The whole concept fits with the mountain location of the chapel on the "road". The participant - the onlooker can choose which road to follow. This choice is also symbolic.

3. Results and discussions
In recent years, many examples of small sacral facilities have been created, which are an example of a return to the archetypical original forms. Architects use cosmological semantic forms. Every year, several such facilities are created, mostly at the initiative of a private investor. At this point, three more facilities should be mentioned: the chapel in Tarnów near Warsaw, designed by Marta and Lech Rowiński, completed in 2012, the Saint Jacob's Chapel in Auerberg, Fischbachau, in Germany, designed by the architect Michele De Lucchi, completed in 2013 [18], and the Chapel in Bregenzerwald – Bregenz Forest, designed by the architect Bernardo Bader [7], completed in 2017. All of them reach for the original patterns and semantic ideas. Not only by referring to natural materials, such as stone, wood and ceramics. The form of all three projects is associated with the home archetype – the original place of shelter. A man in the relation and Logos "returns Home". The association with nature seems obvious, and it is the source of cognition. One of the last full review publications concerning sacral architecture, entitled "Closer to God" [3], the chapel in Tarnów is mentioned as the only and the first example of contemporary sacral architecture.

4. Conclusions
Contemporary sacred architecture is characterised by many extreme stylistic directions. In spite of the above, architects in their creative work reach for the original patterns – semantic archetypes, and all the aforementioned projects are saturated with symbols of the cosmological order. The anticipation of sacral architecture is the myth about creation of the world and the primeval beginning. For architects, it is important that "the archetype can be repeated (imitated) in a primitive manner", but also that a man seeks, even at the lowest level of his religious experience, to come close to the archetype and to realise it in some manner [2] "The Christian teaching does not reject cosmology itself, as the human condition in its essence is not only related to the spirit, but also assumes the matter. On the one hand, a man in on this earth as a result of his corporality, while on the other hand, infinity and eternity open up as the spirit in the matter, exceeding the cosmic dimension and reaching transcendence"
The contemporary man, in spite of advanced technology and mastery of the matter, in many aspects still desires symbols, as he remains Homo symbolicus. In the sacral architecture, it seems to be impossible to escape the Platonic triad: the good, the truth and the beauty. Return to the original patterns and ideas in the sacral architecture indicates the stability and the a priori nature of semantic forms. Natural matter, cosmological symbols not only indicate the constancy of sacred meanings, but also constitute a guideline for future creators.

At the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology in the Studio of Sacral and Monumental Architecture, research on contemporary sacral and monumental architecture is carried out, the head of the studio is prof. Anna Maria Wierzbcka. During the annual scientific and research workshops, young scientists explore the importance of sacred and monumental architecture. The research has a qualitative and empirical charter. Their results are used for both practical and didactic work. 2017 won the award and the best sacral diploma by the U. S. magazines faith and the form of Student Work " Award Joanna Wierzbicka, “Sacred Space of a Modern Man ” Warsaw, Poland.

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