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## TWO TRADITIONS – ONE REALITY

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### DWIE TRADYCJE – JEDNA RZECZYWISTOŚĆ

#### Abstract

Creating monumental, religious architectural forms is based on the tradition of building temples. Christian temples, derived from the Eastern and Western tradition, are as different as these two traditions that have emerged from a common source. Architecture is a form of expressing material beauty, which must be accompanied by transcendental beauty – only then can we speak of a given building as a work. The canon does not change in its dogmatic essence – it does so only in the practical one, which is why we can speak of a certain evolution and a certain freedom for architectural creativity in terms of temple design. Reality verifies the efforts of designers, whose works are created in the rational sphere, their spiritual sphere being decided on by people, without whose participation buildings remain only an empty form in space.

*Keywords: religious spatial forms, church, monumental architecture*

#### Streszczenie

Kreowanie monumentalnych, sakralnych form architektonicznych oparte jest o tradycje budowania świątyń. Świątynie chrześcijańskie, wywodzące się z tradycji Wschodniej i Zachodniej różnią się, tak jak różnią się te dwie tradycje, wywodzące się ze wspólnego źródła. Architektura jest formą wyrażania piękna materialnego, któremu musi towarzyszyć piękno transcendentalne, i dopiero wtedy można mówić o danym obiekcie, że jest dziełem. Kanon nie zmienia się w swojej istocie dogmatycznej a jedynie praktycznej, stąd można mówić o ewolucji i pewnej swobodzie twórczości architektonicznej w odniesieniu do projektowania świątyń.

Rzeczywistość weryfikuje usiłowania twórców, których dzieła powstają w sferze racjonalnej, o ich sferze duchowej decydują ludzie, bez uczestnictwa których budynki pozostają jedynie pustą formą w przestrzeni.

*Słowa kluczowe: przestrzenne formy sakralne, kościół, cerkiew, architektura monumentalna*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary architecture is becoming either increasingly sophisticated or quite the contrary – outright banal – in its spatial forms. The discussion concerning the role of archetypes and subtle plays with architectural forms in the work of architects – both the stars of global architecture and those who merely operate locally – ceaselessly plays out on the forums of

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architectural periodicals and webportals, as a part of the “online global village”. In this sea of information – the multitude of books, articles, photographs, reviews and reflections on the subject of the significance of architecture within culture and the arts – we can sometimes find interesting strands, particularly in the context of the discussion on the subject of the continuation of architectural forms and their cultural significance. Sudden changes or discontinuities in this process are indeed interesting. This is particularly visible in the field of religious and monumental architecture, which, by touching on the spheres that are the most significant to the architectural audience, inspires much emotional commentary. This article is an attempt at joining the theoretical section of this discussion, backed by trying to find either a confirmation or negation of the thoughts it contains on the basis of completed projects.

## 2. FIRST, A LITTLE PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY

The Past – is not always Tradition  
Tradition – is not always the Past

The sources of architecture as a means of the preservation of human life and survival in the world are derived from two spheres of human existence – the pragmatic and the spiritual – the sphere of everyday existence and that of future existence.

The body of architecture – the components of its various different spheres have developed from the simplest forms in the distant past and have turned into the most technically and technologically complicated ones of the present. The spiritual side of architecture does not demonstrate such progress or dynamism as its material and technological side in the slightest. It is the opposite, in fact – the architecture of religious buildings, “spiritual “ ones, has started to fully utilise the resources of lay architecture. While lay architecture has, in turn, borrowed (starting in the period of the Enlightenment) the entire arsenal of the forms and shapes of religious architecture, which later made it possible to sanctify the entire practical, everyday side of life through architecture, as well as to debase the forms of religious architecture.

The contemporary state of affairs in the sphere of “spiritual”, religious architecture forces us to return to and remind ourselves of the first models of these spatial and spiritual practices. In a sense, we can speak of the ancient groundwork of religious architecture, derived from the most ancient forms of perceiving the world and thinking about it, understanding it, and the capacity for creating a world of our own.

The roots of the tradition of Christian architecture reach back deep to the times before Christ. The Judean Temple, which is described in the Old Testament in great detail – is not the only source of Christian architecture. Central Europe knows both Traditions of Christian architecture – the Eastern and the Western one, of which the first is distinguished by its dominance of the vertical axis (between heaven and earth), while the second by the horizontal one (east-west). However, in doctrinal terms, the “Light from the East” and the “Light from on high” are equally important. The Temple of the East is typically a domed and cruciform massing, while that of the West – the ark of salvation, “St. Peter’s boat”. In both Traditions, the horizontal axis leads to the semicircle of the apse – which can take on the shape of a semicircle, a shape resembling one half of an octagon, or that of a rectangle, which is rarer and typically encountered in timber temples.

The Eastern tradition predominantly uses the semi-sphere, placed on a circular drum – which, through an octagon, rests upon the square form of the plan of the main nave or the aisles, as well

as the presbytery. This is how the ancient and Medieval temples of Greece or the Middle East were built. The lasting continuity of forms and shapes have crystallised certain spatial archetypes of religious architecture. Such archetypes form the foundations of Tradition. Tradition, in turn, is present as the foundation of the identification of both the Eastern and the Western Church. Tradition is not solely achievable through rational thinking – a significant load of Tradition has been preserved in the Mystery, in the life of the Holy Ghost and the Church. Tradition was enhanced during Ecumenical Councils, and through its continuation it links the past with the future, giving people certainty – for is it not certainty that is probably the most important element in experiencing the future?

From proto-religion and the most archaic beliefs to the Old Testament, and through it, to the New Testament, we can speak of a continuity of Tradition, linked with man's need to coexist with things that are unachievable and inconceivable, yet that continuously accompany his life. Tradition, in the full meaning of the word, is sanctity – the highest value known to man. Man's capacity to host the breath of the Spirit manifests itself in works of culture, in the environment of man's existence, shaped into Beauty.

Architecture is one such work.

Tradition encompasses faith and life itself, it is based on the postulates and canons (practical principles) of Ecumenical Councils. Contrary to appearances, dogmatic canons are largely unchanging, while practical canons change due to historical or practical shifts, as discussed by Sergiusz Bułgakow<sup>3</sup>. This is very important as it has been erroneously believed by many that Orthodoxy means an inability to change, a lack of movement, conservatism, the antithesis of development. Meanwhile, the Orthodox theology of the twentieth century has made much progress in the direction of the dynamism of both the ideology of Orthodoxy and Christianity overall, discovering the works of the Old Church Fathers from previous times, as well as coming closer to other religions, primarily the various branches of Christianity. The foundation and source of optimism for the future effectiveness of this work and the development of Orthodox Church knowledge is the heritage of the Fathers of the Church and the experiences of the Ecumenical Councils. Pope Francis has stated<sup>4</sup> that Tradition and memory of the past should give us the courage to open new spaces to God. Those who search solely for disciplinary solutions, those who overly lean on the "safety" of doctrine, those who ceaselessly strive to revive a lost past – have a static, involutory vision. He said that this is what caused faith to become but one of many ideologies. Father Napiórkowski's<sup>5</sup> words concerning the transformation, or rather the secularisation, of not only buildings, but even entire urban layouts<sup>6</sup>, are in line with this tradition of Western thought. It appears that the loss of faith in our times arises from a loss of true human values. Although it may appear odd to state so, perhaps architecture and the arts can aid us in a return to those values.

The true religious architecture of the first centuries – starting with the catacombs, based on the patterns of pre-Christian, ancient architecture, those of archaic peoples and epochs that have survived to our times in the lost spaces of South America, Africa, Oceania or Sibe-

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<sup>3</sup> Bułgakow S., *Kościół jako Tradycja* [in:] Bułgakow S., *Prawosławie. Zarys nauki Kościoła prawosławnego*, „Ortdruk” – „Formica”, Białystok–Warszawa 1992, pp. 37–39.

<sup>4</sup> Sparado A., *Leczmy rany*, „Tygodnik Powszechny” no. 39, 29 September 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Napiórkowski A., *Secularised City: Between Religiosity and Spirituality*, IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, 2019, no. 471, art. 112033, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/471/11/112033/pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Podhalański B., *Ikoniczność Metropolii*, Wydawnictwo PK, Kraków 2019.

ria – demonstrates a range of means of expressing suprarational, yet very important human imaginings. Found in the darkness of the past and discovered anew, religious spatial forms permeate various other religions. Among them we can find:

- Geometric figures: the wheel, the (semi)sphere, the rectangle, the octagon, the pyramid.
- Axes: vertical, horizontal, when intersecting, they enable orientation within space, establishing its hierarchy.
- Elements of structure (and its shapes) – columns, arches, vaults, walls, friezes, beams, towers.
- Light – from above, from the east, it expresses and manifests God, playing the most important role in manifesting shapes and spaces through light and shadow.

The organisation of the abovementioned forms, shapes, structures and axes through light introduces a hierarchy, a structure, a symmetry-asymmetry, harmony, it serves as a semantic body of conveying various messages, inducing certain experiences in man, stimulating him to perceive, to participate, to contemplate that which he considers to be expressed by an architectural form – sanctity.

### 3. FIGURES, AXES, FORMS AND LIGHT IN CONTEMPORARY WORKS OF ARCHITECTURE

In order to attempt to compare whether we can actually find traces of the aforementioned archetypes<sup>7</sup> in contemporary works of architecture (due to the limited space afforded by this article), two present-day temple projects were selected, one from each tradition: the Eastern and the Western. The following cases were used: the Orthodox church of the Care of the Mother of God in Bielsko Podlaskie, designed by Jerzy Uścińowicz, and the church in Santiago de Chile, designed by Gabriel Guarda and Martin Correa Prieto. Both projects have been widely commented on, both by architects and architecture critics in architectural magazines. The orthodox church is still under construction, yet remains an example of a contemporary architectural interpretation of the canon that applies to the architecture of Orthodox churches and its composition conforms to the four previously mentioned forms.

It features legible geometric forms, axes – a vertical and horizontal one – and an almost complete set of structural elements, while light plays a very important role in its interior. The massing of the building has the form of a standing cuboid with the proportions of two cubes, crowned with a dome featuring a slim lantern, which gives the whole a clearly vertical character. Built out of brick, it is convincing through the honesty of the local material, used in nearby monumental buildings. The building is not without its architectural detail, as it plays a significant role in the composition of the massing and the facade. It is placed asymmetrically, partially at a standing person's eyelevel and partially in the upper parts of the facade. The monumentalism of the building is highlighted by the placement of windows practically at ground-floor level, bringing to mind the forms of the first Greek masonry churches, or the mighty walls of Athos' monasteries.

The elongated proportions of the narrow windows, placed in the upper portions of the walls, underscore this impression. The tall lantern that crowns the building, based on a drum supported

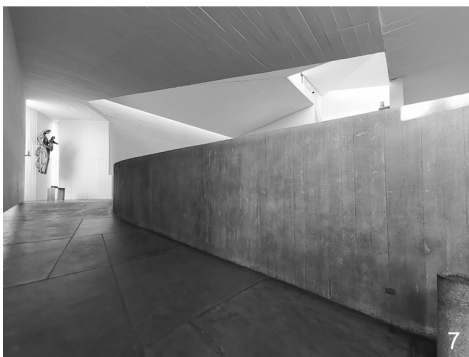
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<sup>7</sup> Uścińowicz J., *Symbol, archetyp, struktura: hermeneutyka tradycji w architekturze świątyni ortodoksyjnej*, Dział Wydawnictw i Poligrafii Politechniki Białostockiej, Białystok 1997.



- III. 1. Interior of the Orthodox church of the Care of the Mother of God in Bielsko Podlaskie, designed by J. Uścińowicz. Phot. by J. Uścińowicz
- III. 2. Orthodox church of the Care of the Mother of God, under construction in Bielsko Podlaskie, designed by J. Uścińowicz. Phot. by J. Uścińowicz
- III. 3. Main body of the Orthodox church of the Care of the Mother of God in Bielsko Podlaskie, designed by J. Uścińowicz. Phot. by J. Uścińowicz
- III. 4. Detail of the main body of the Orthodox church of the Care of the Mother of God in Bielsko Podlaskie, designed by J. Uścińowicz. Phot. by J. Uścińowicz

by four vaults, with a Greek cruciform plan, highlights the building's verticalism. The bell tower, connected at first-floor level with a passage supported by a mighty arch, is slightly shorter than the main body of the church, with simple walls and arches that were harmoniously used to design its architectural form. The entirety blends in with the surrounding landscape, creating a local landmark and significantly enriching its assets. The interior, as required by Eastern tradition, is covered in polychromes, while the visitor's attention is focused by the icons that decorate the contemporary iconostasis. The interior is not excessively lit, creating an atmosphere facilitating focus and contemplation. The indispensable candles cause the light to be put in motion, setting forth a symphony of golden glints that harmonise with liturgical cong. The building is the realisation of the idea of its Author, J. Uścińowicz<sup>8</sup>, who based it on implementing tradition through the innovative use of that which tradition gives us today.



- III. 5. Chapel of the Benedictine Monks near the Holy Trinity monastery, Santiago de Chile, Las Condas district, designers: Gabriel Guarda, Martin Correa Prieto. Phot. by B. Podhalański
- III. 6. Chapel of the Benedictine Monks. Light alters the perception of the building. Santiago de Chile, phot. by B. Podhalański
- III. 7. View of the interior of the chapel of the Benedictine Monks from the entry ramp. Santiago de Chile, phot. by B. Podhalański
- III. 8. We can see two main axes in the chapel's interior – a horizontal and a vertical one. Santiago de Chile, phot. by B. Podhalański

<sup>8</sup> Uścińowicz, J. *Tradition through Innovation – "Return to the Future"*, IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, 2019, no. 471, art. 102012, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/471/10/102012/pdf>, p. 11.

The second of the selected buildings was designed in a completely different way. It has been described in detail by Butelski<sup>9</sup> and other authors. The Chapel of the Benedictines and the monastery of the Holy Trinity in Santiago de Chile, in the Las Condas district, was designed by two young architects, Gabriel Guarda and Martin Correa Prieto, being their only completed project. After its completion, they joined the monastic order and began to live in their own building, a monastery located near a chapel<sup>10</sup>. This chapel, despite being designed in a minimalist fashion and in the Western tradition of church construction, features practically the same set of forms as its Orthodox counterpart, yet their relationships and composition are different. The very simple, austere massing is based on the form of a cube and a cuboid, a tube and a lying-down, trimmed pyramid with a rectangular base, which intersect with it. The interior surprises us with the peacefulness of its expression and its light, used as an element of the material that creates architecture.

It appears that if any new element had been added to the interior, it would have disrupted its monumental simplicity. The relationship between the floor plan and the height is different, the vertical axis is not as strongly highlighted as in the Orthodox church. Much contrast can be seen when comparing the ascetic, white interior of the Catholic chapel with the Orthodox church, full of colourful polychromes. It does not feature some of the structural elements and forms that are typical of other churches, but this is a result of deliberate architectural intent. Light, in turn, plays the most important role in its composition. Appropriately shaped wall surfaces, skylights and windows cause the light that enters the interior to form an integral part of the architectural section of both the building's massing and its interior. In order to appreciate its role, we need to spend a lot of time in this place, observing how changes in the angle of the sun's rays and their intensity, colour and the shadow cast by the clouds, are capable of dramatically altering the atmosphere and the manner of the reception of this architecture by its observer.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

We can try to prove that architectural means of organising the geometric forms of spatial temples induce something more than merely their internal space and their facades. By combining two components: the physical and the transcendental in a monumental manner, they cause temples to radiate sanctity.

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