

## THE SPIRIT OF VATICAN II: THE IDEALIST ASPECTS OF LITURGICAL ARCHITECTURE IN EUROPE

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the “idealist” intellectual workshops behind the 20th-century liturgical architecture before and after the Second Vatican Council. These workshops established their concepts on the intriguingly historic presumption that, in order to refresh the Catholic liturgy, one must seek and return to the origins of Christianity. In other words, their worldview was characterized by the spirit of *ressourcement*, which was one of the great motivators of the new liturgical paradigm brought about by 1962. *Ressourcement* had both monastic and secular aspects to the invocation – or recreation – of the early apostolic communities by means of new spatial and contextual programs in contemporary church architecture. These programs were conceptually compound, and were often guided or implemented by the clergy itself. The study also sheds light on some of the 21st-century interpretations and the survival of the same ideas in today’s architectural culture.

**Keywords:** contemporary liturgical architecture, modern churches, liturgical reform, Second Vatican Council, Benedictine Order, Early Christian architecture, *ressourcement*.

### Introduction

This study seeks to examine how reformist approaches to the arrangement of liturgical space were already taking shape before the Second Vatican Council. This was in close connection with a renewal approach to liturgy as such and with efforts to renew communities spiritually. We attempt to show that the reform in Western Europe took place with the participation of monks and the realization of monastic ideals, and with respect to the gathering spaces of the house churches in the early centuries of the Christian Church. In order to fulfill this task, we try to introduce the spirit and symbolism of the Second Vatican Council, and show its idealist interpretations by architectural examples mostly from Central Europe.

However, we are conscious of the fact that this is not the only possible interpretation. We cannot ignore the current North American critics of this hermeneutic model, and the oppositions to the works of the most academically orthodox European authors in the field. Nevertheless, we understand that the vitality of Christianity today may not be in Europe, but in Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines or Central Africa, where communities may see the teaching of Vatican II in a different light due to their temperaments. Despite these emerging interpretations (López-

Arias, 2021) and contemporary trends, on which we have published other articles elsewhere, we focus once again on the spirit and building praxis that originated from the idealization of Early Christianity, or, in other words, the *ressourcement*.

The liturgical constitution of the Catholic Church’s Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) emphasized the importance of the active participation of the Christian congregation (*participatio actuosa*) in worship. The Synod Fathers wanted the message of the gospel to reach as many believers as possible, and their spiritual descendants put this aspect before everything else. For them, the altar is the eternal table of the Lord, gathering all Christians with the help of the comforting Spirit (*Paracletus*). They saw in this gathering a last chance for humankind to regain its lost dignity after suffering the wars and persecutions of the 20th century.

They referred us to that time when Jesus Christ sat at a table with the wanderers he met on the road to Emmaus. Despite these wanderers not recognizing him, he initiated them into the mystery of the Resurrection after being invited into their home in their native village. Only after the Lord broke the bread, blessed it and gave it to them did they recognize him – and immediately afterwards watched

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him disappear before their very eyes (Lk 24:30–31). During his earthly ministry, Jesus of Nazareth set an example of brotherly love and of uplifting the lowly. Therefore, it was with the disciples of Emmaus, and with them the Lord himself: “For where two or three men are gathered together in my name, there I exist in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

The early Christians saw the Lord’s Supper as a foreshadowing of salvation from the beginning. A cultic complement to the synagogue ceremonies was a ritual feast spent in the family circle, the Messianic Waiting (e.g., the pre-Pesach *Seder*). At the table, the head of the family said a blessing over the wine (*kiddush*), broke the bread, and symbolically invited those gathered men to the New Jerusalem. Before the last cup was emptied, the same prayer was said at the table as when the sacrifice was consecrated in the Temple (as part of the *avodah* prayer) (Bouyer, 1991, p. 26; Ratzinger, 2000, p. 78).

### 1. Monastic orders designing the ideal church for Vatican II

The hour of salvation came even closer with the Christian feast, as the “master of truth” was now truly with his followers with bread and wine. This symbol of communion, this gathering of people eating together, was significantly appreciated in the 20th century, especially among those who had researched the origins of Christian worship. The Benedictines were among the first modern interpreters of communion. They preached the sacramental table community not only in theory but often as an architect. The first of these is Dom Paul Bellot, a Benedictine brother from Solesmes and an architect educated at the École des Beaux-Arts, who became known as the rebuilders of the Quarr Abbey on the English Isle of Wight (1911). One of the co-designers of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City (1968–1976) was a Benedictine, Gabriel Chávez de la Mora. Also notable is a joint design by Dom Gabriel Guarda and Martín Correa, known as the Trinity Monastery of Las Condes (Chile) (1961–1964). Its confrontational altar and “perspective” floor plan met the expectations of the Sacrosanct Conciliar early on (Fernández-Cobián, 2009, pp. 19–23).

We could also mention contemporary progressive secular architects who worked for the monastically prepared liturgical reform in Europe and overseas. Marcel Breuer’s University Church in Collegeville (Minnesota) was also built before the Second Vatican Council (1961), but with a folk altar and arena-like floor plan according to its guidelines (the plan was commissioned by St. John’s Abbey). This includes the abbey of St. Procopius of Edward Dart in Lisle, Illinois (1968). With its central spatial organization, the church of the Benedictine College proved to be a pioneer in Sarnen in Switzerland (1963), per Ernst Studer’s plan (Debuyst, 2005, pp. 135–148).

If we want to expand the list of ecclesiastical representatives of modern church architecture, we should include the Spanish architect and Dominican, Francisco Coello de Portugal, the designer of the fan-shaped Church of St.

Dominic in Burgos (1966), and Father Gerardo Cuadra Rodríguez, who constructed a raw concrete apostle virtuososo church in La Union (Fernández-Cobián, 2009, pp. 20–21). Already in the last year of the Synod, Rodríguez arranged the sanctuary according to the principles of the liturgical constitution: the ambo, the altar, and the cross formed an unusual, diagonal composition at the time. This solution is widespread worldwide today.

The French Dominican Marie-Alain Couturier, a dominant figure of the magazine *L’Art Sacré*, appeared as an advocate for the avant-garde warrior, Fernand Léger, at the handover of Matisse’s Chapel in Vence (1951). Through Couturier’s intervention, Léger was commissioned to design the glass windows of the church in Audincourt, the architect of which was Maurice Novarina (1951), and then Le Corbusier was commissioned to design the chapel in Ronchamp (1950–1955). Not long after that, under the supervision of their Dominican friend, La Tourette monastery was created (1956–59) (Crippa, 2009, pp. 190–204). In 1955, due to the influence of Couturier’s spiritual heirs apparent, Augustin-Marie Cocagnac and Marie-Robert Capellades, the *L’Art Sacré* published a special issue about Ronchamp.

Later, according to their instructions, Le Corbusier drew the plan of the church in Firminy, which was built by José Oubrerie long after the master’s death, in 2006. The plans for St. Peter’s Church were drawn up first by Le Corbusier before 1965, built from 1971 to 1975 after his death, and then continued in 2003 after a long hiatus. To finish the incomplete plan, Oubrerie also relied on the former admonitions of the Dominicans of *L’Art Sacré*, so Couturier’s influence spread to the 21st century (Oubrerie, 2009, pp. 162–177). For the sake of curiosity, it is also worth noting that Brother Marie-Alain spent his probation in the Benedictine order before deciding on the Dominican novitiate.

### 2. An early Benedictine workshop for liturgy

A whole host of monks and priests contributed to liturgical reform, leading the way in architecture, the promotion of avant-garde art and in liturgical studies. The Benedictine monasteries of the West, such as the Abbey of Chevetogne in Belgium, founded in 1925 by Dom Lambert Beaduin, a Benedictine of Mont César, excelled very early in the reform. The monastery, placed in the service of “Christian unity” (Kocik, 2012, p. 106), became one of the main pedagogical workshops of the liturgical movement after Solesmes and Maria Laach.

Beaduin was a believer in the worship turning to the people, which proves that the spirit of reform lived here long before the Synod. However, the workshop in Chevetogne still used the old book of Mass, and because of the Roman pattern, it was obvious that worship could not only turn “away” from the people, but also towards the people (under normal circumstances, therefore, the two may differ significantly) (Lang, 2004, p. 69). The typical orientation of the Roman basilicas applied only to a relatively

narrow circle of churches. The 8th century transcript of the first text from the 7th century (*Ordo Romanum I*) also shows that later the eastern orientation had become common. The headings were to distinguish between prayers, supplications, and exhortations read to the east (*stat versus orientem*) and to the people (*contra populum*) (Lang, 2004, p. 92).

In any case, Beaduin wanted to prove, through the example of the Roman basilica, that the *versus populum* was the original direction of Mass, although it was only a consequence of the orientation customs of Roman churches and martyrs, not the active participation of the Christian community, as later interpreted by the Reformers. According to Beaduin, the advantage of confrontation is that congregants cannot only hear the gospel more clearly, but they can stand around the altar at the sacrifice along with the priest. If the celebrant is opposed, i.e., facing the congregation, Beaduin believed, it better expresses the neighborly love and the equality of the Christian brothers: the dignity of the redeemed man.

The work of Brother Lambert Beaduin, still raises questions about the liturgical tradition. The confusion of the orientation of prayer, the altar wedged between believers and the priest, are no longer positive developments. It is also a common misbelief that the Lord's Table resembled the rectangular dining tables of today, instead of a horseshoe or sigma shape customary in the time of Jesus. Some say that dinner around such a table is a prototype of the Mass. Martin Luther says in his book titled as the *German Mass and Order of Divine Service* (1526) that his disciples at the Last Supper surrounded Jesus Christ, and that he sat at the head of the table and faced them.

This misconception can be drawn from the anachronistic depictions known in the Reformation era (e.g., Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper) that projected the dining habits of their own age into the past. The spread of ideas related to the depiction of the Western-style canteen was later discussed in the narrations on the round table of the Arthurian legends and their romantic interpretations popularized during the 19th century. However, the ancient feasts were different: the guests lay side by side, not sitting around a real table. Only one side of the furniture, often assembled from several smaller parts in a horseshoe shape, was occupied because on the other, waiters were humbly awaiting their orders. The head of the table was at the edge of the horseshoe, not in the middle (Bouyer, 1991, p. 96; Lang, 2004, p. 65).

The symbol of the Messianic table community can be understood in another way just from the life of the monastic orders. Brotherly love plays a central role in monastic orders, as it is the guarantee that members of the community will spend their time in prayer and work (*ora et labora*). There is no room for partisanship and bias in this, but the youngest have a say (Regula 3:1–4, 5:5–8, 7:10–13, 7:31–37, 69:1–4). Thus, in monasteries, in addition to obedience, the role of communication also increases. Even the typical layout of the *planum* expresses a kind of dialogue: the stalls face each other and surround the altar or reading

stand. Reciting the psalms, the monks do not always turn east (*versus orientem*), but their prayers still point to God as the inner center. According to tradition, in reading aloud the psalms, the monks are associated with the unceasing praise of heaven. It is faithfully symbolized by the meeting of the horizontal and vertical axes of the church. The stalls are lined up along a third transverse axis, further strengthening the common center.

All this well shows that the liturgical constitution of the Second Vatican Council was being acknowledged. In addition to the prominent role of the center, active participation can also be found here, as in the daily prayer classes – as in the life of the monastery – everyone has a personalized task. Thus, the community-centered approach to reform was not new to the orders. The message of the Synod to the monks who practice brotherly love on a daily basis was to reap the riches of the “lay” believers as richly as possible from the fruits of their God-attended lifestyle. All this meant that the model of the monastic church – and in some cases its ideal purity – also extended to the architecture of secular churches.

### 3. Hans van der Laan and his architectural resourcement

The churches of Dom Hans van der Laan are excellent examples of the above. Among his works, the Benedictine monastery of Vaals, less than a hundred kilometers from the Belgian center of the liturgical movement, the Chevotogne Abbey, clarifies our picture of the spiritual background of the liturgical reform (Furlong & Verde, 2000, pp. 52–89). The beginning of the long construction period of the Vaals in the Netherlands (1956–1986) preceded the Synod by six years, while the finishing work lasted until recently, thus preserving the memory of the most active era of reform. The sanctuary of the church is arranged in the pattern of a table community, in which the altar in the middle is surrounded by rows of stalls and lay people seats. The apse is missing. Instead, the combined space of the sanctuary and the *planum* (choir) is visible only, and is complemented by the nave and an ambulatory.

This arrangement is similar to the Romanesque pilgrimage churches modelled after the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. These are: the Cathedral of Santiago da Compostela (ca. 1078 – ca. 1128), the Church of St. Martin in Tours (renovated ca. 1050, rebuilt in 1123), the provost of the Order of St. Sernin in Toulouse (ca. 1060–1119), the Sainte-Foy convent church in Conques (ca. 1100 – ca. 1130) or the St. Martial Abbey Church in Limoges (1063–1095). A direct forerunner is the type design preserved in the monastery of St. Gallen from the 19th century, where, around the altar of St. Peter and the western sanctuary, we find the “atrium” that continues the line of the aisles. However, unlike the medieval examples, there is no significant architectural difference in Vaals between the sanctuary plan and the rest of the church. The row of pillars accompanying the main nave continues to the sanctuary, no matter what, and there is no level

difference between the tracts. Laan lives everywhere with an unstressed, mundane expression while almost returning to the ancestor of the Latin Church, the Roman basilica. Only the liturgical equipment divides the hall, which is also homogeneous in its use of materials.

It would seem obvious to compare the monastery with ancient Benedictine constructions e.g., Monte Cassino, Subiaco or Praglia, as if the “workshop” of Benedictine architecture had prevailed in Vaals as well. However, due to the activities of his associates and the atmosphere of renaissance, i.e., a theological movement calling for a return to the genuine sources of the Christian faith, Laan’s works are more strongly tied to the earliest aspirations for liturgical reform (Kocik, 2012, pp. 103–105). This is evidenced by Laan’s transcripts of the floor plans of the early Christian churches in Rome, and of course, Vaals abounds in ancient historical elements. These include a bell tower (campanile) separated from the mass of the church, a vaulted flat ceiling, a tiled high roof, a floor plan without a nave, and an engraving reminiscent of the basilica. The triumphal arch is missing from the row, and is replaced by the windows of the gabled wall, which also turns east. Since the triumphal arch symbolizes the gate of heaven, its abandonment may be a kind of indication of Jesus’ original teaching: “the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Lk 17:21).

The Book of Revelation portrays heavenly Jerusalem as a perfect place where there is no longer a need for a sanctuary, as the whole city is permeated by the glory of the Lord (Ap 21:22). Here we can read that the floor plan of the city walls is a regular square. As a symbol of a square, it does not refer to the sky as a circle or ellipse, as it has a measurable circumference like things on earth. (The word γεωμετρία in Greek originally means “earth measuring”, which was the task of a surveyor. This once included only measurable things, such as the side of a square, but not the irrational  $\pi$  value that determines the length of an arc.) This image expresses that perfection will not only reside up there, but will also descend from heaven and shape the earth into its own image (Ap 21:10; Mt 6:10). The seemingly ordinary orthogonal construction of the temple is therefore a forerunner of the prophesied holy times: the static light of heaven in the dynamic world.

The architectural harmony of the Valais monastery is given by the precise detailing, the regular rhythm of the repeating elements and the unity of the structure. In addition, it is accompanied by a simple, almost puritanical use of materials and a consistently implemented ratio system. The latter was based on a series of numbers similar to, but more complex than, the Fibonacci series. The introduction of that is also linked to Laan’s name, although mathematics knows it as a plastic number sequence or, after Richard Padovan’s (2002) name, a Padovan series.

While the numbers in the Fibonacci series follow each other at a tight pace, a dialogic pattern can be discovered in the formation of the plastic number sequence. Every fourth number corresponds to the sum of the first and

second numbers, while the missing third only affects the fifth number. This shows the rule of parity – the same thing that determines the dialogue – like mode of prayer of the psalms. Here it is worth remembering the tradition of the psalms, according to which reading the psalms aloud joins with the chants of the heavenly hosts (Guardini, 1998, pp. 76–82; Ratzinger, 2000, pp. 151; Földvály, 2003, pp. 127–129; 2006, pp. 162–165). The dialogue is realized not only horizontally but also vertically. The harmony of all lends the beauty of the celestial spheres to the singing church. With the help of mathematics, Laan incorporated this cosmic dialogue into the walls of his monastery.

The Dutch monk attempted to derive theoretically the building blocks of the house from the two principles of space and compactness. According to him, the architectural space is an emptiness cut out of the compactness of the outside world when viewed from the inside, while it is seen as a compactness created in infinite space when viewed from the outside world. Therefore, the experience of conciseness and emptiness is inseparable from the viewer’s point of view: the personal space integrates geometric space. Approaching from here, the homogeneous space can also be intellectual; the material can also be transparent. Laan does not want to change the material; he wants to change our point of view. Hence, the inner strength depicted from rather modest-looking buildings (Laan, 1992, pp. 12–16).

In the case of Van der Laan, it would be more appropriate to talk about a kind of tradition rather than reform. Of course, he was also aware of the transformation of the physical devices and the changing liturgical demands that fit into the monastic worldview he represented. He saw the limiting force inherent in traditional building materials (brick, stone) as a source of beauty in contrast to the chaos of proliferating forms. For him, architecture is a craft in the noblest sense of the word – and, as such, sacred (Heidegger, 1971, p. 59) – where it is not so much the created form than matters as does how you organize and learn about things that already exist.

Accordingly, there are many recurring elements in the Vaals ensemble, such as the triple segmentation of the wall panels or the alternation of the gate-window-gap, which, however, do not become monotonous. The building blocks of the interior can be grouped in tertiary form, such as the table-chair-shelf triple, the elements of which are again arranged in three ways: in a central, bay-like or free-standing composition. The same goes for graphics. On the blueprints, Laan used three types of fills: blank (light surface), solid (shaded surface), and wavy (matte surface). The combinatorial play of scholastically organized surfaces, structures, and objects permeates the entire building. In this system, liturgical instruments, books, bookkeepers, kneeling, and costumes also have precise, pre-planned places (Furlong & Verde, 2000, pp. 16–21, 64, 72, 151).

Approached from the environment, Hans van der Laan's mathematically well-thought-out, comprehensive architectural system must be considered closed. The solitary rural monastery is not connected to the landscape and the settlement, although it complements the corner-tower convent of Dominicus Böhm and Martin Weber, which began to build in 1922. All this can also be explained by the "alienation" of the monastic community expelled from Germany and then settled on the Dutch-Belgian border in the Protestant area as a victim of the Kulturkampf of Bismarck in the 19th century, which was further exacerbated by the ordeals of the two world wars. The monk-architect replaced the natural context of the landscapes, which matured over the centuries, with the internal complexity of the plans and his own system of proportions. A good example of this is the monastery of the Jesu Moder Marias (Mary, Mother of Jesus) built by the Swedish Benedictine Sisters in Mariavall-Tomelilla (1986–1995) (Furlong & Verde, 2000, pp. 122–159). As in Vaals, the scheme of the three-nave basilicas also returns here, but we can notice an interesting feature that puts both buildings in a new light.

There is no ambo in the sanctuary of the Vaals church, which can also be considered a plan, so the place of reading is among the stalls. The choir and the leader of the choir are located in the same place, from where the psalm is conducted, and the word is proclaimed from a book placed on the altar. All this is in line with the practice of small masses before the Second Vatican Council, which is also justified by the year the construction began (Földváry, 2006, p. 154). In the space between the pillars, which replaced the eastern triumphal arch, with the back of the bypass corridor, a wider bench was placed, which stands out from the stalls as well as the dizziness erected on the north side. Its stretched backrest suggests that this is the place of the clergy leading the concelebrated Masses. The sanctuary and the plan coincide here (Bouyer, 1991, p. 42), unlike in the Mariavall monastery church. Although the altar of the latter is also located on the *planum*, it also has a sanctuary, which unusually follows the dizziness placed behind the table of the Lord. The dimly lit room preserves the sacrament of the altar as if it were a chapel reserved for this purpose. At the end of the apse highlighted by the triumphal arch, a wall booth frames the tabernacle. There is no ambo.

In connection with the rare composition, the question is why with the so consistent unity of the sanctuary and plan in Vaals, in Mariavall it expands with the "second sanctuary" or chapel of the apse. The obscured room, which continues the eschatological axis of the church, feels as if the most hidden mystery of the church is preserved in it, when the holiest place is actually the altar of the sanctuary merged with the choir in the foreground of the apse. So, this arrangement is problematic. Strictly speaking, we should consider it wrong, but it is not quite so. The chapel separated from the place of sacrifice is the abode of the Eucharist, the permanent divine presence, which can be symbolically identified with the mysterious sanctuary of the Jewish Temple. The Holy of Holies is home to the

Ark of the Covenant, which is traditionally surrounded by a shining nebula because God Himself was present there (Ex 40:34–38; 1Kg 8:10–13).

When the Eucharist to be distributed among the faithful in Mariavall is taken from the chapel built as an extension of the nave to the altar, the divine presence is transferred from the twilight to a bright room. In this, it is easy to find the saying of the parallel between the sacrament chapel of the monastery and the Jewish sanctuary: "The word became flesh" (Jn 1:14) – the Creator inhabited a body visible and palpable to man, thus revealing himself to us. At this moment of the sacrificial liturgy, the chapel, like the sanctuary of the Temple, is emptied and moved to the faithful by the Spirit of Christ residing there (Mt 18:20).

The liturgical reform assigned itself a great mission: to fulfill the redemptive purpose of God in the believing community with the help of the Holy Spirit. The gaze of the reform adherents was fixed on the golden age of Christianity, yet, perhaps unknowingly, they longed for the totality of the monastic way of life (Böhringer, 2006, pp. 30–36, 63–71). The architecture of Hans van der Laan is the best proof that the reform in Western Europe took place with the participation of monks and the realization of monastic ideals. This is a novelty for research in the era, as the reform was previously associated mainly with the rediscovery of early Christian architectural patterns (Bouyer, 1991, pp. 15–38). Where the liturgical renewal, detached from the monastic spirit, entered the swampy ground of experimentation, the living connection with Christian teaching, the authenticity of the church, also became questionable.

#### 4. The secular idealization of Early Christianity

Early Christian communities in the Roman Empire were forced to perform their rites in catacombs or house churches because of persecution. At the same time the liturgical customs that determined the use of space in later churches may have developed very early. According to the Benedictine monk Frédéric Debuyst, Christianity has adapted well to both urban and rural living conditions from the very beginning. The earliest Christians were shrouded in the silence of catacombs beneath the ground, but remained largely unnoticed even above the surface of the earth, until the first converts to fulfill the "Great Commission" converted in turn the wealthier patrons who had hosted them (Mt 10:11–14). The liturgical residential buildings of the Roman Empire, from Syria to Spain, were reminiscent of the house in which Jesus spent his Last Supper before marching with his disciples to the Mount of Olives. In the life of early communities, such house churches were the most obvious venues for the Christian Mass. The genius loci of the ancient settlements did not carry any uniquely Christian character, only the multicultural color of the crowded streets of the cities or the bucolic atmosphere of the rural areas.

The Christian house church was not a cultic district set in the pattern of the ancient *Temenos*, but rather a complex living space reserved for initiation events, worship, and everyday life. Children played in the courtyards of the atrium in Roman or porched Greek dwellings, and women and servants dominated the kitchen. The Christian cult took place within the profane living space, in a place set aside for the initiates. There was also a need for transitional spaces where initiators, baptisms, and penitents (*catechumens*) could take their seats. These were joined by external rooms that were still within earshot of the venue of the ceremonies (Földvary, 2006, pp. 175–176; 2003, pp. 112, 168–169). The former corresponds to the place of census (*consignatorium*), the examination room (*scrutinum*) and the place of baptism (*baptisterium*), while the latter corresponds to the foyer of the church (for example, atrium or *peristilium*). When a prestigious teacher arrived, he took a place here among the people, where many, from the youngest to the oldsters, listened to his long speech if they did not fall asleep in the meantime. Worship, in today’s eyes, took place in a surprisingly natural, lifelike setting (Ac 20:7–9).

Until recently, this is why many believed that after three centuries spent in house churches, there was still a long way to go to consolidate the Christian rite. While this must undoubtedly have happened in terms of institutionalization, it would be difficult to say anything factual about the initial changes in the liturgy. In any case, the large number of Christian basilicas that appeared after the Edict of Milan (313) already testify to a mature use of space, which raises the possibility that the cultic spaces of residential buildings were also used according to these schemes in the past. Just as in the basilicas after Constantine the Great, the house churches could not lack the place of the sacrifice or the presbytery reserved for the leaders of the community.

Did the dwelling house shape the liturgy, or did the liturgy influence the use of the house church? According to Debuyst, the sanctuary of the church was originally just a dining room (*cenaculum*), where the initiates settled around a table (*mensa*) set up in the middle of the room (cf. Lang, 2004, pp. 63–64; Bouyer, 1991, pp. 15–26, 39–54). If his hypothesis is true, then the altar of sacrifice must have been missing from the Christian cult space. This would be surprising, since even in the well-known house church of Qirq Biza in Syria in the 4th century, an apse-like presbytery served the preaching, and the place of the sacrifice was in a shrine opposite the presbytery. The former included a throne and *bema*, and next to the sanctuary was situated the *prothesis* used to prepare donations. In the not-too-large sanctuary, it would have been pointless to feast around the altar, since for this purpose a separate room was maintained in the forecourt, modelled on the *synagogues*.

The sanctuary, bordered by pillars, which, according to Eastern practice, could only be entered by the priest and his deacons, was presumably covered with a curtain during the intimate minutes of the Transfiguration (Lang, 2004,

p. 68). If the house church of Dura-Europos (3rd cent.), which was older than Qirq Biza, was also used in this way, its inner cult space did not develop from the dining room, that is, from the *cenaculum* room, but from the beginning functioned as a sanctuary (Lang, 2004, pp. 72–73; Bouyer, 1991, pp. 27–38). In any case, reading Debuyst is a good example of the way in which his generation interpreted the early Christian Mass and the simplicity of the gospel. The house church, along similar readings, has inspired proponents of liturgical reform for nearly a hundred years, creating a “tradition” that can rightly be called a defining trend in contemporary church architecture.

## 5. Apostolic communities invoked by modern architects

The first example of the house church trend was Emil Steffann’s building during World War II (1943) in Boust, Lorraine, France. In this French border settlement during the German occupation, no permit was issued for congregational – only farm – buildings, so Steffann disguised the church as a barn. The historical situation and lack of equipment at this time was reminiscent of the Roman persecution of Christians for a few years, offering a rare opportunity to rediscover and articulate the Christian ideal of poverty in a landscape-hiding, hidden house, with all its puritanical details and building materials (Debuyst, 2005, pp. 17–24). After the subsiding of the storms of war, the “economic edifice” and its history inspired more and more designers, so churches of similar barn and house shapes began to be built on a larger scale. The most notable of the latter is the 1955 Church of St. Lawrence of Steffann and Heinrich Kahlefeld (Gern, Munich), which, with its largely undivided, saddle-roofed Puritan interior, evokes the deprivations of the war years.

There is hardly an architectural textbook today that makes no mention of this building, which already seven years before the Second Vatican Council had implemented the *versus populum* program of the “progressive” trend (Zahner, 2009, pp. 51–53; Debuyst, 2005, pp. 89–95; Schnell, 1974, pp. 81, 83; Stock, 2004, p. 133). The altar of the church, with rows of benches on the front and side and an arched presbytery at the back, enhanced its centralizing character, and was placed in a central position early on. Its roof ridge is perpendicular to the sacral axis, like that of the barn church in Boust. Although its roof ridge ran parallel to the shorter axis of the church, in Munich the direction perpendicular to the ridge became more pronounced, which gave the interior a horizontal dynamic. The floor plan of the transversely arranged church is similar to the T-shaped praying posture of the first Christians (Ratzinger, 2000, p. 48), and this communion with the Protestant Churches, a return to the ancient Church of that time, also expresses a serious intention.

Steffann designed with the western apse and altar erected in the navel of the nave in accordance with later *versus populum* spatial layout suggestions. For the sake of perfect orientation, the church moves away from the

directions set by the plot boundaries and the street network, while the parish wing of the building largely adapts to them. The functional structure of the building, its tectonic structure, its hand-laid brick wall and its internal arched foyer (*endo-* or *esonarthex*) are reminiscent of early Christian basilicas. The transitional space of the narthex is the reduction of the columned courtyard (*peristilium*) of the basilicas, which in ancient times was the abode of baptisms, as it is here (Földváry, 2006, pp. 175–176; 2003, pp. 112, 168–169).

Although the ambo is missing, it was customary to read the gospel from the altar at the time the church was built. The multifunctional altar also served as a starting point for Johannes van Acken's Christ-centered ecclesiastical program. Acken's model was a church of static worship "focused on the Savior", which he envisioned as a homogeneous, total space. Like the "cult center" of Lutheran worship, the focus has been on dominance. In a functional and geometric sense, this was the only focal point of the space, next to which the dramatic aspect of worship, the cultic act that can be experienced in its mobility, was pushed into the background. The center would have combined the props of both preaching and presenting the sacrifice: the altar, the canteen, the ambo, and the cross (Acken, 1922; Zahner, 2009, pp. 42–43). The churches of Steffann and Kahlefeld had to compete with ideal designs such as the Messopferkirche (1922), reminiscent of Dominicus Böhm's theater or the central Sternkirche of Otto Bartning (1922–1924). Bartning's later fan-shaped plan, the Gustav Adolf Church in Berlin (1932–1934), also testifies that in the decades before the synod period, Protestant communities also sought to centralize the liturgical space (Schnell, 1974, pp. 39, 45, 58, 59). Influenced by the spirit of the age, Steffann and Kahlefeld rightly recognized that the modern Catholic Church could not be reduced to a simple vision of a "upstairs room" for the Last Supper. After the Second Vatican Council, many plans came to light that formally took over the layout of the landmark St. Lawrence Church, but failed to give back its complex meaning. The idea of simplicity, which in Steffann's work was synonymous with unity, covered the shortcomings of its descendants. Acken's theology disappeared behind the use of freestanding (*circumstantia*) altars. The ambo came out of the center first, and then out of the double meaning of the altar and table, until only the latter, the table, began to prevail.

An extreme example of this is the plan by Glauco Gresleri and Silvano Vanier, the student chapel of the Casa dello Studente in Pordenone (1972), where a canteen tightly surrounded by benches serves as an altar. A barn chapel (1979–1982) built in Rattenbach under the direction of Aloys Goergen and designed by Franz Xaver Lutz, features a four-sided camp dining table in its gallery (Debuyst, 2005, pp. 81–89). This solution is far from reminiscent of Calvary, the tomb of Christ, or the foundation of the Ark of the Covenant. On the other hand, however, the simple wooden structure carried the puritanism of

the Boustian barn church to Bavaria, which, due to the historical parallels of its origin, became a symbol of the deprivation and faith of early Christianity.

## 6. Interpretations by contemporary candidates

In Germany, much of the newly built or remodeled churches are still influenced by the doctrine of resource-ment. Construction programs are developed in a joint effort by the commissioned architect, parish priest, and believers. It is popular to emphasize the communion of the church and the "original state" of the liturgy, which church builders associate with the aesthetic and ethical obligations of early Christian house churches, with their ideal of external simplicity and inner wealth. This is well exemplified by the case of Ottokar Uhl, who spent a total of ten years designing and constructing the Church of St. Jude Thaddaeus in Karlsruhe-Neureuth (1979–1989). Christianity played a key role in restoring a divided Europe, especially German political unity. After the change of regime, this also gave a new impetus to the ecumenical approach of Christian denominations. Soon the renaissance of barn and house churches came and theological consultation took wing (Zahner, 2009, pp. 55–56).

The brick masonry of St. Jude's Church symbolically signaled that the community needed to be rebuilt from socially atomized individuals. The assignment therefore addressed not only a church but also a parish and a congregation hall. Despite its complex purpose, the plan also had to radiate complexity, which justifies the indistinguishability of the building's mass. Only the liturgical space is elevated by a transverse column that allows free light to flow through its skylights. The actual church is introduced by an atrium with buzzers on either side. Inside, there is a table-shaped altar on a common podium and next to it an ambo; the elements can be moved together with the chairs of the believers. The gallery, which hangs loosely into the space, has a choir, which can be reached by steep stairs. The gallery, the atrium and the framed and divided (stereotomic) floor plan presuppose a conscious designer's resolution while following the pattern of ancient house churches.

The cross-shape can be recognized on the floor plan of the liturgical axis and the superstructure at right angles to it: as if it were a timid manifestation of the early Christian times that unfolded its wings. There is no separate sanctuary in the church, but on the side a horseshoe-shaped screen made of translucent glass bricks separates the space reserved for the sanctuary of the altar. The podium also ends with the podium. The space ends in an unbroken flat wall, with doors leading to the sacristy and the staircase. The boundaries of the consecrated place thus coincide with the communal space, which encloses in a U-shape the four-legged altar placed in the center of the "ship". Although the position of the ambo and the dizziness mark the axis of the temple, there are also known variants of the plan, which suggest a diagonal arrangement (Stock, 2004, p. 123).

The latter cannot be justified either by the basic requirements of the liturgical space or by a liberally interpreted tradition. In the Middle Ages, the ambo was often placed on the south, so-called lesson side of the church, or elsewhere in the choir barrier (*Lettner* in German or *jubé* in French), but in both cases there was much more room for maneuvers between the altar and that. Most recently, this is why we can see photos of the interior of the Karlsruhe church, which, despite Uhl's original plans, testify to the axial-symmetrical arrangement of the podium. Luckily, the furniture that can be rearranged does not preserve the mistakes of the liturgical space, but in churches where similar compositions – due to the symbol of the altar and in accordance with the standards of permanence (GIRM, 298, 299, 303; ODEA, 2:5). They were even fixed there, becoming a “rule engraved in stone” and later becoming a flawed pattern. Less fortunately, this characterizes many of the churches in Munich that would otherwise aspire to high architectural quality.

Most of them may have been directly affected by the solution of Steffann and Kahlefeld, but it is important to keep in mind that the centrally fixed altar of the Church of St. Lawrence had a different meaning before the Second Vatican Council. After the Synod, instead of centralizing liturgical equipment, the requirement became an easy and clear distinction among functions. However, the two approaches have recently been confused, resulting in the practical consequence of a diagonally arranged “altar island” providing extremely tight room for movement. This rigid formation appears to behave like the podium of Uhl, but on the contrary, it can no longer be rearranged, so it is reminiscent neither of the Last Supper room nor of the inner sanctuary of the sacrificial altar. Plastic sculptures like this no longer have the intention of orientation, so they can be placed anywhere in the assembly space without constraints.

One of the first examples is the church of St. Christopher Erhard Fischer in Munich (1971) (Stock, 2004, p. 139). Within the Bavarian capital, a similar solution can be found in Andreas Meck's St. Nicholas Parish Center in Neuried (2002–2008), and in the Catholic Church of Florian Nagler's Messianic Ecumenical Church Center (2001–2003), but the pattern also took root in more remote areas in Austria, Italy and Spain. This foreshadowing is followed by the Church of St. Francis of Peter and Gabriele Riepl in Steyer (2000–2001) (Wöhler, 2005, p. 158; Riepl & Riepl, 2004), Church of St. Paul the Apostle by Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas in Foligno (2001–2009) (Gregory, 2009), and even the parish church of Ignacio Vicens Hualde and José Antonio Ramos in Ponferrada (2006–2010) – although the latter's altar island was eventually built much more airy than originally planned in 2004 (Vicens Hualde, 2009, pp. 88–91; Mangado, 2007, pp. 12–13).

From these it is worth emphasizing Meck's parish church in Neuried (2008). Due to its orthogonal layout, functional complexity, atrium spatial organization and brick architecture, the church and communal house are closely connected to both the idealized ancient church

models and the place. The building inherited the former bell of the Frauenkirche (Church of Virgin Mary) in Munich from the old, outgrown church of Saint Nicholas. The relocation of the bell is commemorated by bearing of the cross between the old and the new church, whose thirteenth station (Jesus' body is taken off the cross and laid on his mother's lap) is marked by a robust six-pronged cross in the square in front of the new St. Nicholas.

The granular concrete of the churchyard is reminiscent of a conglomerate that has long been used as a building material here – it is also part of the genius loci – but the grey covered-open courtyard leads into a clean, white church interior. The undivided, sculptural interior contrasts with the brightly textured exterior clinker brick façade, which is solved by the use of material in the transitional space, but the quality change is still striking: to feel where the loud outside world ends and where the silicon begins. In this connection, Meck quotes Romano Guardini in his description of his work: “and in silence there is God”, and the church is only a socket of silence (Meck Architekten, 2008).

The mantle of the wide and high airspace is broken by only two windows: one on the north wall and one on the roof. The inner edges of the gaps hold together like in Le Corbusier's plan for Ronchamp, but this time the white light does not disintegrate into its components. The space is like a “white dish” (Hinkfoth, 2009, pp. 30–32.), i.e., the colors and figures fade into the background, while the inner edges are soft and blurry. In the seemingly weightless interior, the composition of the cross, the baptismal font, and Rudolf Bott's floating altar appear to be timeless objects. Their position appears random in the asymmetrical, U-shaped nave: the well is still in the foreground, the altar is on the opposite side of the nave, and the cross is between the two of them. The orientation is only indicated by the position of the rows of benches and the tabernacle, while the building is not – because its construction suits to the street and the installation lines to meet the complex construction program. The parish includes not only a church, but also a priestly apartment, an office, guest rooms and a community house. Life takes place here in many ways; it does not fall to pieces: every element finds its place within the context of the courtyard house. It would be difficult to a further enhance the symbiosis of everyday life and sacred space.

Another major center, Florian Nagler's ecumenical complex church, like Meck's accomplished plan, can be called one of the modern Christian strongholds in the suburbia. The Messestadt edifice stands on the outskirts of Munich, but breaks away from the spiritual vacuum of the suburbs. Plasterless, whitewashed brick walls reject interior richness: narrow alleys, enclosed and open spaces, terraces and hanging gardens with fabrics, occasional rooms and permanent consignments opening, complementing organic patterns. Churches, apartment, kindergarten, playground and garden. A modern German city taming into a maze of Mediterranean streets and courtyards. It is a meeting place for Catholics and Lutherans who can live



together in an almost ancient church community within the walls of the building complex (Brinkmann, 2005). “We wanted to plant the two congregations like flowers in a garden, so that they could take root”, Nagler writes (Fischer, 2006). Equally proportioned private and shared spaces can be used by both denominations for their own and ecumenical purposes.

The narrow passages enclose the freestanding Latin campanile in a tight frame as a visual element. The drawing of geometric integrity and dilatations projecting the internal structure, makes the otherwise closed and robust building transparent, which deemphasizes even the heavy walls, changing their quality and meaning (Wessely, 2005; Hinkfoth, 2009, pp. 28–29). Sliding doors or only signage frames contrast the streets and the redbrick courtyards. Wall inscriptions inform about the Catholic Church of St. Florian and the Lutheran Sophienkirche. The churches are similar from the outside, but they are clearly distinguished by their furnishings and the materials used in the interiors. The walls of the latter are covered with densely woven lamellas on the inside, and the ceiling is covered with beam gratings. Egon Eiermann’s seemingly weightless chairs lined his nave, while heavy black oak benches lined the St. Florian’s Church. Here you will find an undivided, bright room and there a sanctuary with magnificent colored glass by Hella Santarossa.

The focal point of this space is a podium, on which the ambo, the altar, and the dizziness are part of a sculptural composition made of the same compacted clay. Although both the preaching and the sacrificial liturgy are concentrated in this place, the side chapels of the church also benefit secondarily from the role of the center. To the right is the Blue Glass Chapel of the Pilgrims, to the left and slightly below, the Baptistery in red light. The middle window is radiated by a yellow light, a pattern of divine outpouring (emanation). The three basic colors (red, yellow, blue) meet from the three directions at the altar, which faces the courtyard of the house, the profane living space. On the grey base, the fourth side opposite the table covered with a white stone slab is translucent and unaccented, but also white. The equality of the light of the altar and the profane living space is a subtle symbolic reference to the sacrifice that sanctifies the everyday life that takes place in a fuller Christian community.

## 7. Truly humble places today

The simultaneously romantic and utopian image of Apostolic times also enjoys some degree of popularity in Hungary, and in some cases even more faithfully reflects Steffann’s interpretation than the buildings of Andreas Meck or Florian Nagler. An outstanding work among these is the Franciscan farm in Kisfakos (2001). The expansion of the youth home on the forested edge of the settlement near Nagykanizsa started with the brick building of Ferenc Cságoly. This was soon supplemented by the guesthouse of Bálint Marosi, followed by the barn chapel of Gábor Sajtos. With the third element of the building complex,

a courtyard was created, which was closed by a group of trees from the south and an oak tree behind the chapel (Nagy, 2007). The original plans were realized in a Franciscan spirit, floor by floor. Due to the lack of money, the work had to be scheduled in such a way that it used the least materials possible, and if possible, could be used in a semi-finished state.

The building remained open from the courtyard and as a continuation of it; only the unfinished shell of the chapel provides some cover from the outside. The building, which includes a small liturgical space and an accommodation on the gallery, is not much different from a warehouse. The hall on the concrete plinth is divided by transverse beams and is covered by a broken-line saddle roof guarded by elbow pillars. The roof only protects from rain and sun, and together with the open building frame it forms an airy structure. The wall of the chapel, pierced with picture-frame windows, overlooks the valley and breaks down into its structural elements beyond the corner of the house, giving the same airy feeling. Part of the sanctuary wall lacks cladding, and sunlight greets by scrubbing the planks, making the carpentry structure transparent: shady grooves contouring traces of human labor, evoking the community that is the creator and user of the building (Frampton, 1996, pp. 522, 527).

An altar was also set up in this small place, which creates a sensitive connection between the profane and the saintly with its simplicity. The fork-legged table could even be a piece of furniture designed for the barn chapel in Rattenbach, but it is not far from the world of the pilgrimage chapel of Tamás Czigány and András Cseh. From a distance, this pilgrimage chapel was also a residential building made together with the pilgrimage house of St. James in Pannonhalma in the summer of 2010 in Cseidervölgy. The harrow-walled house, which carries on the wall-high-roof design of the nearby wine house (2003), stands in a forest-based rest area under the Benedictine abbey. Its two-level wall was built of larch beams blocked with three elements. The fine-touch homogeneous construction rises on a rectangular floor plan consisting of only two rooms, a place of prayer and a foyer (*narthex*). In the center of the place of worship is a square table with benches attached to a wall around it.

There are no windows. Light is filtered through the horizontal joints of the wall and the nine-part ceiling formed by beams trapped in the joints. The lightning beam, of course, refers to the sky, while the solid bottom refers to the ground. Although it can be concluded from the western entrance that it is oriented to the east, the structure ending in a gabled roof with a stepped gable focuses more on a vertical axis. As part of this axis, the altar was centered with a purpose as complex as that of the St. Laurentius Church of Steffann and Kahlefeld: ambo for family prayer classes and the place for the Eucharist and recitation during pilgrim masses. The reason for the exceptional unity is to be found in its simple form and construction. The plan of the Czigány’s preserved Johannes van Acken’s Christ-centered liturgical program better than

the Franciscan homestead, but both examples prove that Vatican Council II and its emphasis on liturgical reform have had a vivid and lasting effect on church architecture well into the new millennium.

## Conclusions

Due to our analysis on the changing role of the church designer and by virtue of several architectural creeds, it can be stated that the church building is a well-working contemporary media of the renewal of religious worship. The architectural decision qualifying the program of a church is also a mediator of the teachings of the Church and lies within the field of creative criticism; therefore, it is an active participant and adjusting factor in the ongoing liturgical conversation within the Catholic Church. According to the experiences of the realized examples of contemporary churches, one can claim that the spatial concept of the 20th century liturgical reform movements have been re-evaluated due to the changing demands of church architecture. The common point of reference of the religious orders and movements preparing the liturgical reform is the Early Christian community, worship and lifestyle. The idea of original Christianity continued to live on after the Second Vatican Council. Its heritage of form and space has been giving inspiration to Central European churches until the present day.

The conditions in the monastic liturgies were available for the realization of the liturgical constitution of Vatican II. The monasteries mostly defined the message of the Council in such a way that the laity may be involved in the religious praxis and regulations of their own traditions. Ressourcement postulated that liturgical reforms lead the Church back to apostolic times, which resulted in the seminal concept that the houses of God should become similar to the ancient house churches in their spatial arrangement and architectural character. Lots of the world's famous churches were built in this spirit, including the Church of Saint Jude Thaddeus in Karlsruhe (1979–1989). During its design and construction, Ottokar Uhl had spent ten years in negotiations to get relevant answers for the questions of both architecture and contemporary liturgy. A work of similar importance are the Dominikuszentrum of Andras Meck (2008), and Florian Nagler's ecumenical complex in Munich, Germany (2001–2003). Today, ressourcement has been re-evaluated thanks to the liturgical guidelines of the third millennium. Instead of pursuing utopian perfection, new architectural solutions have emerged which can still suit liturgy's structure much better, and depict a more understandable and realistic image of Christian life.

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