

Temporary worship places for permanent communities

Espacios de culto temporales para comunidades permanentes

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RESUMEN

¿Cuándo un lugar de culto es temporal? ¿Qué tipo de características de construcción marcan la diferencia entre una iglesia parroquial provisional y otra definitiva? ¿Qué significa construir un lugar de culto temporal? La construcción de un lugar de culto no sólo proviene de las necesidades urbanas, sino sobre todo de las necesidades pastorales y de la voluntad de una comunidad de tener un lugar donde reunirse. Este artículo habla de la creación de una pequeña iglesia de madera prefabricada de unos 450 metros cuadrados, en un área dedicada a la construcción del centro parroquial definitivo, resultado de un concurso.

ABSTRACT

When a worship place is a temporary one? What kind of construction characteristics make the difference between a temporary parish church and a permanent one? What does it mean to build a temporary worship place? Building a place of worship comes not only from urban needs but mainly from pastoral needs and from the will of a community of having a place where meet together. This paper tells about the creation of a small prefabricated wooden church of about 450 square meters, in an area devoted to the building of the definitive parish center, outcome of a diocesan contest.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Centro parroquial; concurso; comunidades; prefabricación; emergencia.

KEYWORDS

Parish center; competition; communities; prefabrication; emergency.

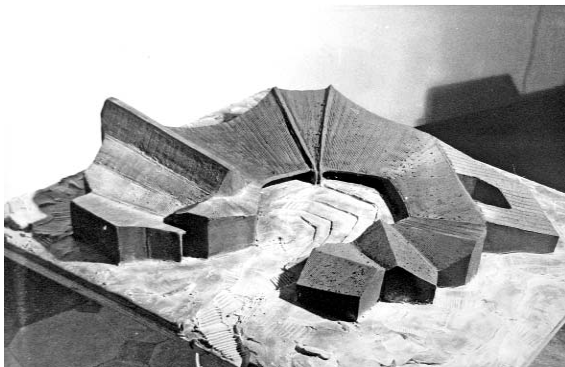
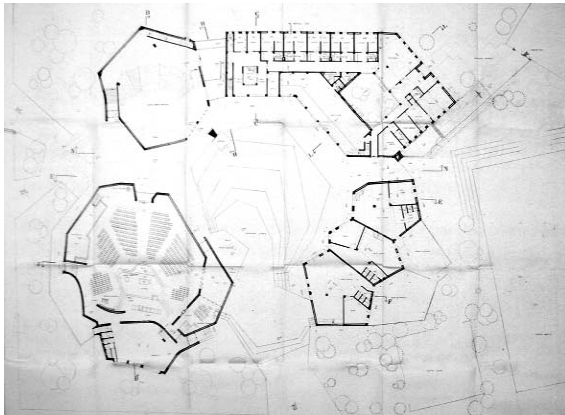


Fig. 01. Bagliani, Roncarolo, Bersano-Begey, Corsico, Giriodi and Delpiano (liturgical consultant), DOMUS-ECCLESIA, 1st project for the E11 area, Turin, 1968; ground floor plan and plastic model.

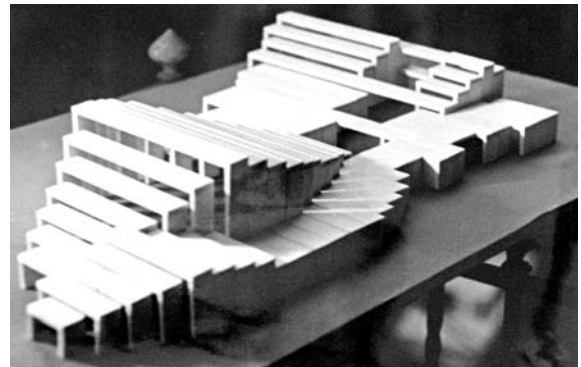
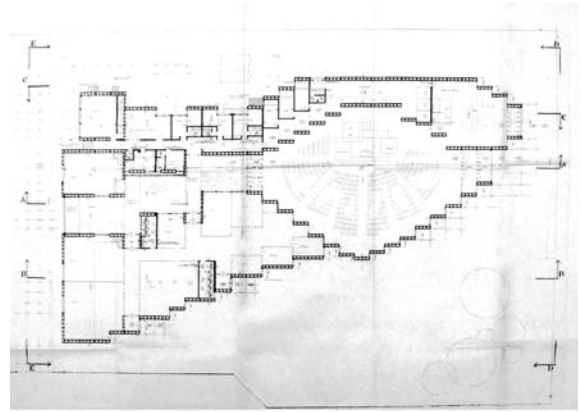


Fig. 02. Bagliani, Roncarolo, Bersano-Begey, Corsico, Giriodi and Delpiano (liturgical consultant), DOMUS-ECCLESIA, 2nd project for the E11 area, Turin, 1968; ground floor plan and plastic model.

THE STORY

A competition for the construction of new parish centres in three areas of the city of Turin was announced by the Diocesan Office Turin-Churches and by the Diocesan Commission-Sacred Art Section in May 1967¹. These areas, called E11, E7 and E20, belonged to 24 areas of PEEP (Plan of Economic and Popular Construction) provided for the city of Turin by Law number 167 of 1962². The subject of the competition was only the area E11, assigned to the winner; two other projects for the other two areas would have been chosen then among all participants. The initiative was dedicated to Cardinal Michele Pellegrino and, for the first time, it put together the two diocesan offices responsible for the construction of new churches.

There were a lot of positive appreciations. The validity of the received contributions and the interest of designers in this topic that, in the dynamics of the conciliar liturgical reforms, came up again in all its richness of interests and developments, constituted a source of comforting hope.

The first award was assigned to the group of five architects (Bagliani, Bersano-Begey, Corsico, Giriodi, Roncarolo) and a liturgical consultant (Don Delpiano) with the project called DOMUS-ECCLESIA (Fig. 01)³.

The main idea was an urban parish that, according to the suggestion of Second Vatican Council, is not exclusively used for liturgy, but develops itself during training and apostolic moments. However this space suggestive for its dynamic scheme, centripetal and cen-

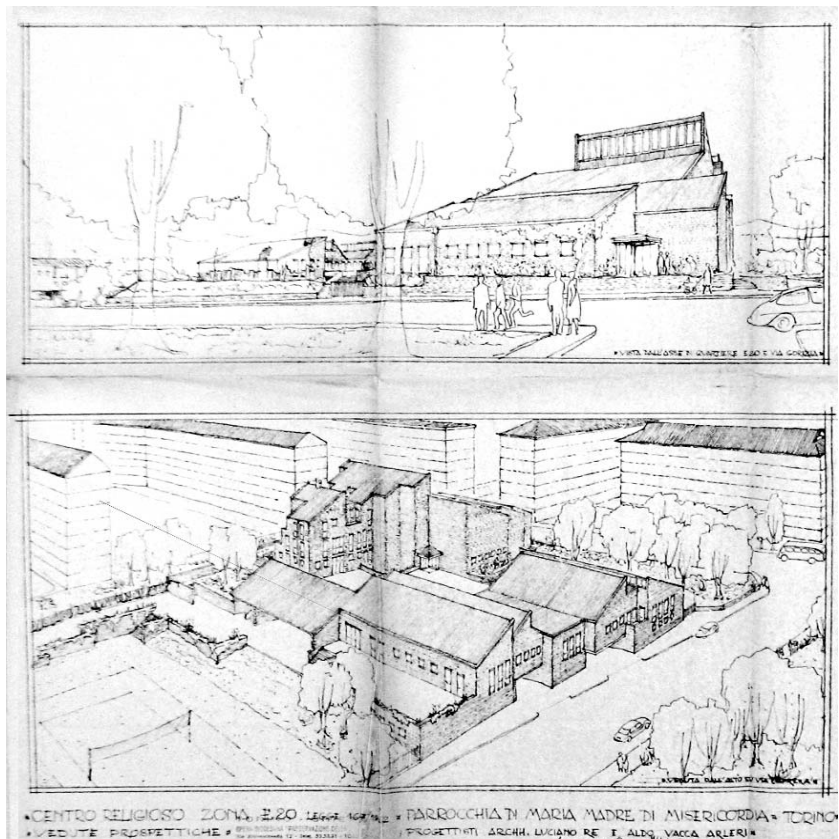
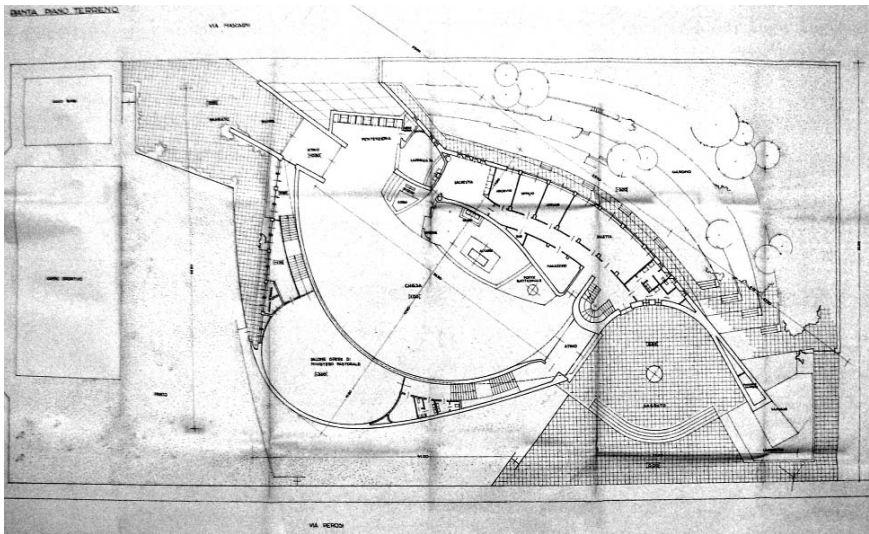


Fig. 03. Mattia, Mesturino, Rovero and Pizzetti, SUB UMBRA ALARUM, 1st project for the E7 area, Turin, 1968; ground floor plan.

Fig. 04. Re, Vacca Arleri, Tamagno, 3 AL.EL.LU.IA, 1st project for the E20 area, Turin, 1968; perspective.



Fig. 05. Canavesio, Ascensione del Signore, Turin, 1970; the church in the E11 zone.

trifugal at the same time, so well studied for the community, not just parochial, did not fit with the availability of funds. The archive documents bring to light a second project drawn up by the designers therefore, more appropriate to the economic, political and social condition of the area (Fig. 02).

The second award was assigned to the group formed by architects Mattia, Mesturino, Rovero and engineer Pizzetti with the project called «SUB UMBRA alarum» (Fig. 03). In this project the contextualization has a paramount importance, together with the suggestion of interior spaces. In the third winner project entitled «3 AL.EL.LU.IA», by architects Re, Vacca Arleri and Tamagno, the choice of a modular scanning realized by prefabricated elements is really predominant (Fig. 04).

The reinterpretation of this competition shows interesting developments, given that: the three projects began regularly the design process starting from the nomination, even if the winning project for the areas E11 and E7 will never be realized. Only the third winner will be partially built in the E20 area.

FROM COMPETITION TO REALITY

The two cases of E11 and E7 areas appear meaningful for a city that refuses constructive models that do not reflect the living conditions of the citizens. The

communities of the two peripheral areas, dealing with the possibility of starting the construction of a new church, choose to give up the laborious, prestigious and expensive initiative, to grope solving their pastoral problems in terms of human relationships rather than with constructions. Building a place of worship comes not only from urban needs but mainly from pastoral needs and from the will of a community of having a place where meet together. Moreover, due to the fact that the place of worship is the result of the decision of a community it will keep being a keystone of this district. So the projects were never realized because the community considered them too glitzy for a poor district and managed to block them.

The two examples of parish communities prefer professed poverty, and therefore become the spokesman for more modest works, that can meet the basic needs. In the first case, a simple building will become the liturgical hall of the community, still present (Fig. 05).

For the E7 area, the Foundation Turin Churches assigned the task to designers and presented a request to the PCCASI. The area devoted to the building of the parish centre was located in the heart of the district. The building appeared in total contrast to the built environment, using a free and fluid form, an enveloping figure able to encompass the entire parish complex (Fig. 06). The semi-circular liturgical hall gathered the assembly

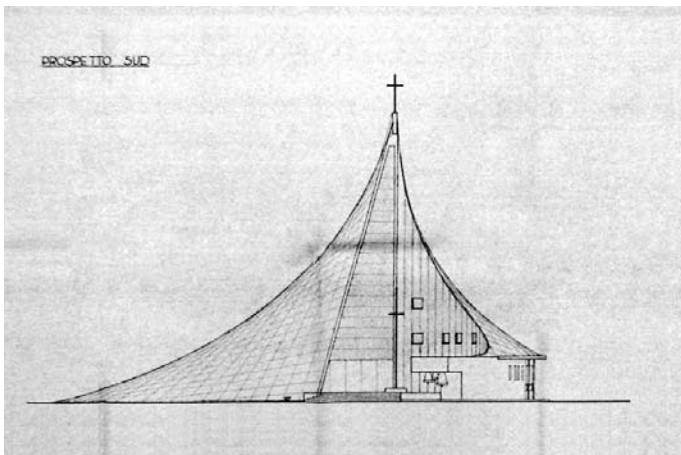
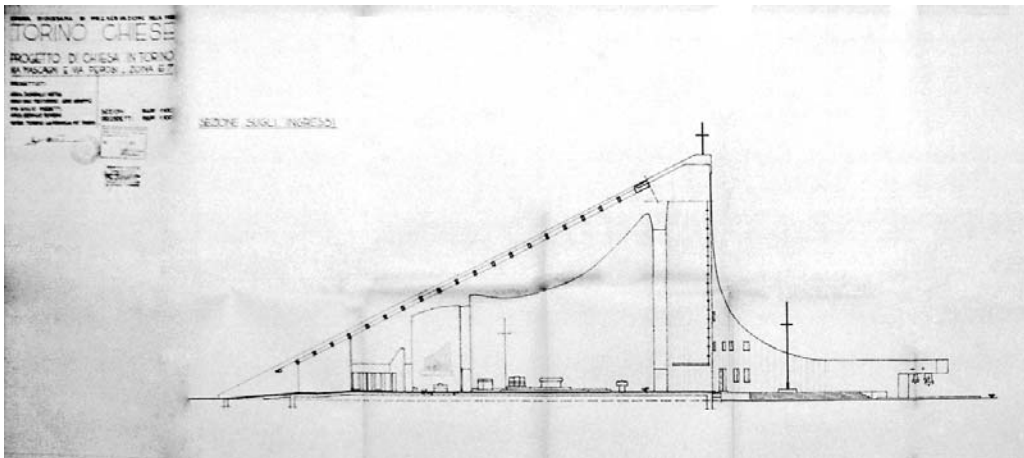
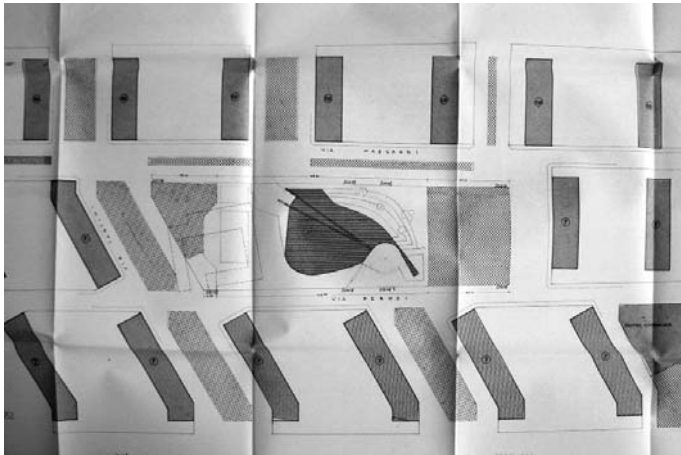


Fig. 06. Mattia, Mesturino, Rovero and Pizzetti, SUB UMBRA ALARUM, Turin, 1968; location of plan of the church in E7 area.
Fig. 07. Section.
Fig. 08. Façade of the church.

around the presbytery. The two standing sails in the shape of hyperbolic paraboloid, with edge beams, formed the roof structure collecting church, rectory and parish offices into a single volume plastically defined (Fig. 07-08).

The project was stopped at a preliminary stage. However, the settlement of some 8,000 inhabitants in the area of Via Pergolesi required a centre of worship because in this area there was not any form of adequate religious assistance. To avoid this inconvenience, the documentation was started to create a small prefabricated wooden church of about 450 square meters, with liturgical hall and home for the clergy in Via Perosi (Fig. 09-11). The project of this temporary worship place was approved by the Diocesan Commission of Sacred Art in December of the same year⁴. As a consequence, the collaboration with the group of architects holders of the winning project was closed.

The reasons for this decision are to be found in the complex situation in the area E7: the provision of a single religious centre had always been complained in view of the settlement of two major groups, each made of about 8,000 people. In the revision of the urban study, also the Municipality of Turin had provided for two religious centres (Fig. 12): the first in the centre of E7-A (the prefabricated wooden church), the second one (in Via Monterosa along the limits of E7-B area). The design of subsidiary centre was postponed because of limited funds. In fact, the new project for the parish complex was approved by PCCASI only in May 1977⁵. During the ceremony for the laying of the first stone of the church in Via Monterosa 150, on October 8, 1978, was told by the parish community (Fig. 13): «Since 1969, we said, our community will not consider the construction of a church until we are sure essential social services have been provided to the district. Now schools and facilities for leisure have been built also thanks our intervention and continued struggles. We gave up a magnificent building preferring this more modest and functional»⁶.

THE CHOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

The reconstruction of the competition of 1967 represents an opportunity to examine some parish realities. The temporary place of worship, similar to a garage or realized as a shack, expresses disagreement with a city full of contradictions. Probably for this reason, the

competition remains an isolated episode. The fact that the winning projects have never been the centre of interest is symptomatic of the fact that Turin has probably forgotten alternative models, which are outside his social reality.

The chronicle of that contest invites to question about the outcome. The spaces designed for the competition appear innovative about liturgical-pastoral point of view; they are away from monumentality and respond to the needs of the parish centre as the hub of a reality that is setting. As several Italian cities⁷, the focus of competition opens at innovative themes of Second Vatican Council, but also reflects the problems of the reality of Turin.

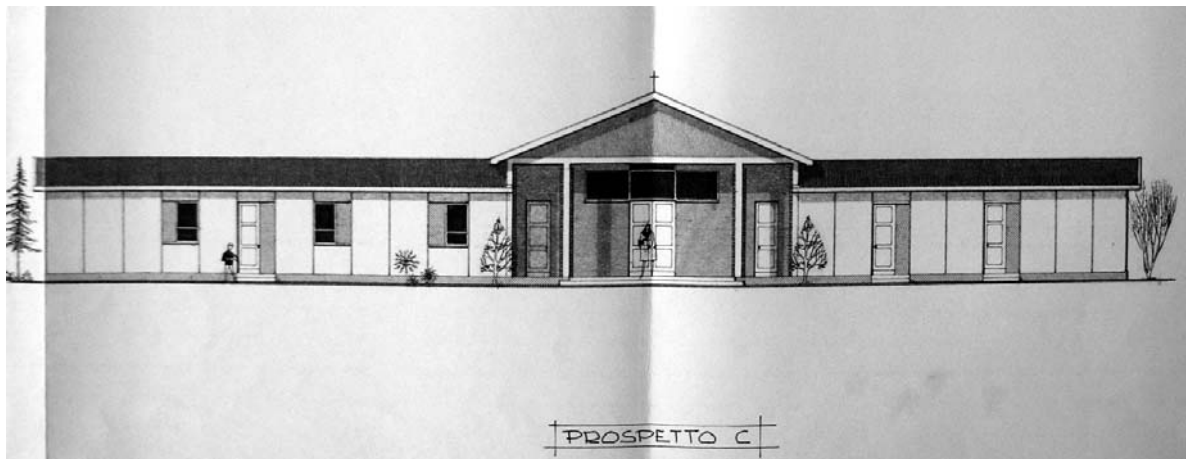
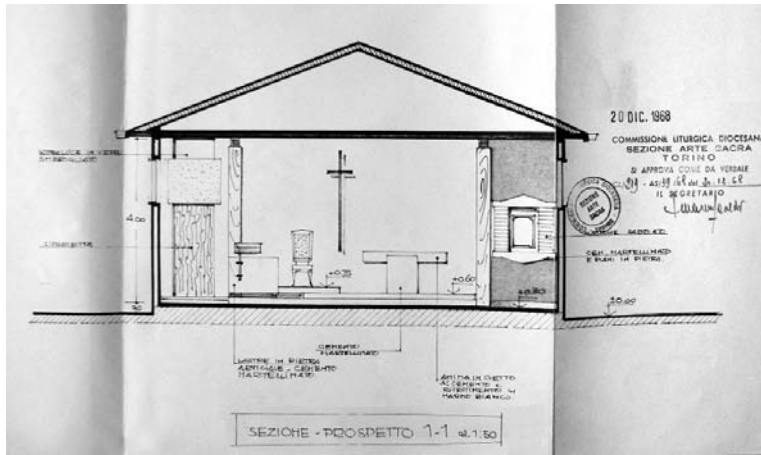
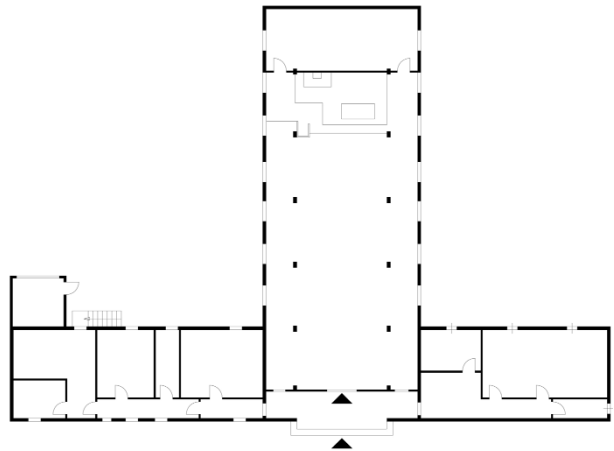
The church building must be set, through its distributive characters, at the service of the living Church that gathers in the active assembly. What is required to *aula Dei* is a new feature that should not only lead to an arid standardization of the constituent elements⁸, according to art. 124 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963)⁹. The construction of new churches is not just a constructive and technical problem but is a symptom of a reality where the citizens ask themselves if they have to prefer «new churches for new communities or communities without churches». In the districts where residential constructions have occupied all spaces, the desire of green areas becomes rejection of new buildings.

In Christmas of 1979, in the parish journal of the Resurrection's church, the parish priest, Piero Gallo says: «It is better to have a church or to be a Church?» In the aftermath of the new construction, he invites the community to reflect on what element comes first: the church made of bricks or the Church made up of men. What are the criteria to build a church?

There is a strong parallel between the Church history, the liturgy history and the construction of churches one. In addition, the ideal disposition towards the community and brotherhood results in the construction of buildings.

In 1957, Cardinal Lercaro, in the journal *Chiesa e Quartiere* spoke to the architects saying: «A parish centre does not grow around its church, it was born first as a community, even if a urban development scheme foresaw the formation of the new group of people (...). Sometimes a temporary solution (...) creates the parish community with its institutions, its worship, its faith, its institutions of charity and assistance»¹⁰.

Fig. 09. Berardo, Prefabricated wooden church, Turin, 1968; plan.
Fig. 10. Section.
Fig. 11. Façade.



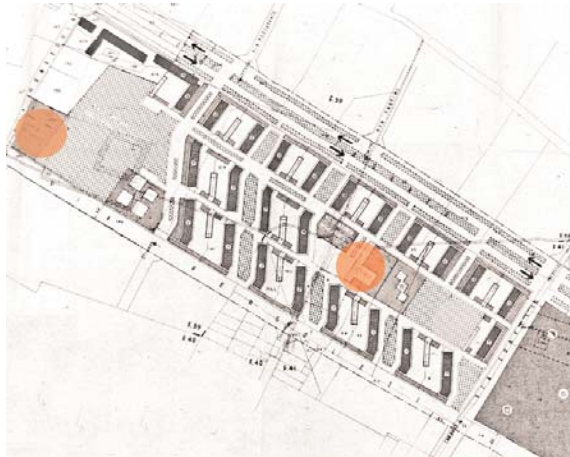


Fig. 12. The e7 area of PEEP (Plan of economic and popular construction): location for two religious centres, Turin, 1962/63.

50 years later, the tale of Don Gallo, who was the young priest of Resurrection's church, helps to understand the reason of so many choices that could appear as sterile waivers. The district's community is often made by the believer/citizen who has primary needs. The parish centre, like a primary social service, meets these requirements: it is the place for joint ownership assemblies, for children's parties, for elderly persons' meetings. In places where the widespread poverty dominates, the dream of a monumental church vanishes and the priest waives a parish house to live in rent as the other citizens of the area. The shepherd calls him his fold and he is the first to make concrete choices of poverty without falling into ambiguous behavior. Nevertheless, the sense of poverty, being equal among the citizens, the propensity to essential and the simplicity does not exclude the desire of beauty, which is why the conflict arises against some of the choices made by the Diocesan Office Turin-Churches.

This is the background of the creation of wooden church: small, simple and decorous (Fig. 14-15). The place where we recognize the local community. After ten years, in 1979, the definitive church was built but the parish community decide to keep the wooden church, that was built to be temporary. There are several reasons for this choice. Besides the fact it is necessary for a densely populated area, the church is the



Fig. 13. Barbano, Comoglio, Piccablotto, Risurrezione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, Turin, 1977/80.

popular symbol of the place: it was built for the citizens of working-class houses and despite several close calls in favour of the new church it was decided to keep it because it was autonomous both economically and pastorally. The history of the population of this area gathers around a place of worship.

They do not want monumental architecture because they live in a poor area and also they do not accept a prefabricated and modular building already repeated in other peripheral zones. Although the misery and emergency are experienced first-hand, the renunciation of beauty, meaning the quality of the project, it is not always accepted. In opposition to a common orientation of late 60s, it can be recognized the search for a symbolic and constructive dignity that reflects an ethical choice of lived poverty.

PROCEDURE OF IMAGES

The author's archive.

NOTES

(1) About the competition of 1967 and the construction of churches in Turin during the episcopate of Cardinal Michele Pellegrino cf. Carla Zito, *Casa tra le case. Architettura di chiese a Torino durante l'episcopato del cardinal Michele Pellegrino (1965-77)* (Cantalupa: Effatà, 2013).

(2) The competition call and minutes of meetings of the board shall be in the Turin-Churches Archive, Diocese of Turin [called in the text ATCh], cart. Cantieri Arcivescovo e varie Opera; Programmi-studi.



Fig. 14. Berardo, Prefabricated wooden church, Turin, 1968.
Fig. 15. Bell-tower.

(3) The project DOMUS ECCLESIA is mentioned in: Frederic Debuyst, *Chiese. Arte, architettura, liturgia dal 1920 al 2000* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2003), 70; Giuseppe Varaldo, «Domus Ecclesiae: un concorso torinese, (1996)» in *Comunità, chiese, culture*, edited by Roberto Gabetti and Giuseppe Varaldo (Torino: Celid, 2001), 63-66, 130; Donatella Forconi, *Il sacro e l'architettura. Materiali per il progetto della chiesa contemporanea* (Roma: Kappa 2005), 80; Andrea Longhi and Carlo Tosco, *Architettura, Chiesa e società in Italia (1948-1978)* (Roma: Studium, 2010), 43.

(4) ATCh, cart. n° 43, «Risurrezione del Signore». About the wooden church (arch. Michele Berardo): CI/219-AS/39/68 of 20 December 1968: «E/7 zone, prefabricated church: the project is approved; we suggest to emphasize the temporary nature of building eliminating any permanent element, especially in the area of the presbytery».

(5) The parish center was designed by architects Franco Barbano, Eraldo Comoglio e Carlo Piccablotto (1974); cf. ATCh, cart. n° 43, «Risurrezione del Signore».

(6) «The new church in Monterosa street», *La Voce del Popolo (VdP)*, November 12, 1978, 7.

(7) About competitions in Italy, cf. Valerio Vigorelli, «Un concorso di architettura sacra», *Arte Cristiana* 555 (1968): 205-206; Sandro Benedetti, *L'architettura delle chiese contemporanee. Il caso italiano* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2000), 58,80; Glauco Gresleri, «Lo spazio architettonico per l'assemblea liturgica: Ascoli Piceno 1966», *Chiesa e Quartiere* 42 (1967): 42-57; Glauco Gresleri, «Cattolica e Ravenna 67», *Chiesa e Quartiere* 45 (1968): 40-54.

(8) Michele Pellegrino, «Arte, cultura e liturgia», *Chiesa e Quartiere* 42 (1967): 6.

(9) Art. 124 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: «Ordinaries, by the encouragement and favor they show to art which is truly sacred, should strive after noble beauty rather than mere sumptuous display. This principle is to apply also in the matter of sacred vestments and ornaments».

(10) Giacomo Lercaro, «Posizione attuale del architetto di fronte al tema del sacro», *Chiesa e Quartiere* 2 (1957): 28-29.