


Dümmerling's Guiding Manual for Transformation of Sacred Spaces. A Central-East-European Approach in an Atheistic Political Environment after WW2

El manual-guía de Dümmerling para la transformación de espacios sagrados. Un enfoque desde la Europa Central-Oriental en un ambiente político ateo tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial

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ABSTRACT

The *Sancrosanctum Concilium* approaches the artistic aspects of architecture from the liturgy, while the Charter of Venice approaches the architectural space from the principles of heritage protection. Both emphasized simplicity, functionality and readability. The significance and the combined effect of the two documents in the practice of church construction in Eastern Europe can be considered significant, since the possibility of redesigning the liturgical space arose mainly in the context of the renovation of historic buildings in the atheist political environment. The proof of this statement is presented in the manuscript of the architect Ödön Dümmerling. The architect - a practitioner of monument restorations and an admirer of the spirit of modern architecture - was called upon to draw up design guide after the Second Vatican Council was closed, making recommendations for new equipment for liturgical spaces.

KEYWORDS

Dümmerling, Hungary, Design Manual, Simplicity, Functionality

RESUMEN

La *Sancrosanctum Concilium* aborda los aspectos artísticos de la arquitectura desde la liturgia, mientras que la Carta de Venecia aborda el espacio arquitectónico desde los principios de protección del patrimonio. Ambos enfatizaron la simplicidad, la funcionalidad y la legibilidad. La importancia y el efecto combinado de los dos documentos en la práctica de la construcción de iglesias en Europa del Este pueden considerarse significativos, ya que la posibilidad de rediseñar el espacio litúrgico surgió principalmente en el contexto de la renovación de edificios históricos en el entorno político ateo. Una prueba de esto se presenta en el manuscrito del arquitecto Ödön Dümmerling. Este arquitecto, restaurador de monumentos y admirador del espíritu de la arquitectura moderna, fue llamado a elaborar una guía de diseño después de la clausura del Concilio Vaticano II, que hiciera recomendaciones para nuevos equipos en espacios litúrgicos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Dümmerling, Hungría, manual de diseño, simplicidad, funcionalidad

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PREFACE

In the late 1950s, a special architectural solution was used to restore the Lutheran church in Lovászpatona. Historic forms, the gothic openings known from the excavation, were expanded and a new large window was opened on the side wall of the temple. With this solution, the historical, old age was discovered, significantly influencing the appearance of the church space. The solution used did not disturb the architectural use, nor the rational use of the liturgical space. This is not why we find it interesting at a conference on the transformation of Catholic liturgical spaces. The solution used an era-specific design methodology, civil-based legislation on the aesthetic requirements of architecture, which can be identified in the document of the Venice Charter published a few years later (ICOMOS 1964).

Our statement is that around 1964 two decisive documents were published in which the *spirit of the age* was emphasized (Daelemans 2015; Urbán and Vukoszávlyev 2016). While the *Sancrosanctum Concilium* approaches the artistic aspects of architecture from the liturgy, and the Charter of Venice approaches the architectural space from the principles of heritage protection, both emphasized simplicity, functionality, and readability (Hardy 2011). The proof of the statement is introduced with a pivotal manuscript by an architect, Ödön Dümmerling (Dümmerling 1966). The document makes a recommendation on the equipment of the new sacred spaces: it interprets the new spatial concept according to the Vatican II decisions in accordance with the liturgy and at the same time represents the aesthetic world of modern architecture. Along the way, we examine the Hungarian architectural practice, which is special in comparison with the many examples presented at the conference because of the atheist political power in the country in the 1960s. While it was not possible to build new churches during this period (with some representative exceptions), the restoration of historic buildings under State control has yielded significant results, among which, thanks to cultural policy, church buildings represented a surprisingly high proportion of their overall art value (Fig. 01).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the years following World War II, the primary task was to restore damaged buildings. Until the mid-1950s, some new churches were built, designed primarily by modern grandmasters. The decade following 1945 was a transitional period: the political turnaround at the end of the 1940s had a significant impact not only on the role of the Church but also on its religiousness. In earlier decades, the State and Church were closely linked, but the period beginning in the 1950s has new features. Eastern Europe came under the sphere of Soviet power, the State treated the Church as an enemy, not only trying to break its power, but basically wanting to abolish it. Due to the rapid social and political transformation that took place in these years, State power was sometimes stronger, sometimes more permissive, but in any case its anticlerical attitude not only determined the functioning of the Church, but also influenced the daily lives of believers. Through the example of Hungary, we can learn about the processes of the socialist atheist state: the characteristics by which power was compared to churches. All states in Eastern Europe have followed the same process, some features may have differed for a few years in local processes, but they have used the same means of State power in neighboring countries. The presentation of the specialties can also contribute to an appreciation of the potential of the Catholic Church in the more complete region and an understanding of its eastern policies.

This process is characterized by a number of internal eras: governmental regulations that challenge the existence of churches (nationalization of land and other properties), measures that undermine real estate and operating fundamentals (abolition of ecclesiastical schools and hospitals), the establishment of a system that limits and monitors organizational activity (ministry office controlling ecclesiastical activities), or atrocities against priests and believers (Fiamová-Jakubèin 2010, Stan-Turcescu 2012). These processes fit into the political order of State power - the communist government wanted to supervise everything, not only restricting access to the temple, but also supervising the restoration

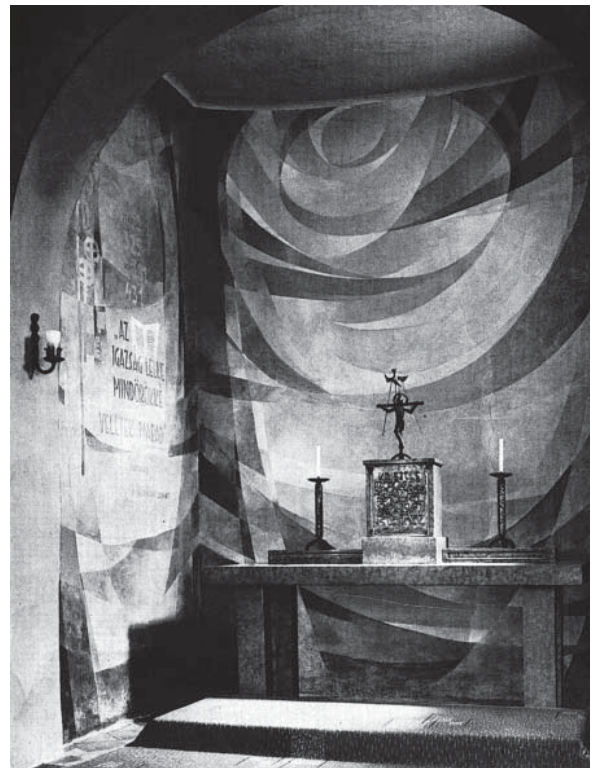


Fig. 01. Sikiócs (Hungary), remodelling gothic interior; Pilisszentlélek (Hungary), remodelling baroque interior, 1960 ca.

of buildings, often blocking it by administrative means. At the same time, after the 1956 Revolution, the method of political power changed, and the Great Political Amnesty of 1963 and the opening of international politics also marked a major breakthrough in the relationship between the State and the Church (Vukoszávlyev 2015).

During this anti-clerical period, sacral architecture was able to survive, although only a few new buildings were built, but the renovations have greatly contributed to the architectural work of these years. Churches of historical value were subject to a different evaluation: the State considered them to be national heritage and therefore set up a renovation program. The program ensured the renewal of the most important memories in the short term. In addition to the renovation of the largest cathedrals,

the State sought to explore the history of the Middle Ages, which is of major importance for cultural policy. This period is thus a period of continuous renewal of small village churches of medieval origin. The number of renovations was steadily increasing since the mid-1960s — its background is very simple: while the state made a deal with smaller churches in early 50ies, the agreement between the Socialist atheist State and the most resistant Roman Catholic Church was only made in 1964. The Council, which began in 1962, urged the agreement which could have meant the end of a dark period. The practice of liturgical interior design proposed by the Vatican Council II had a significant impact on this political and spiritual development. Thus, the achievements of Hungarian architecture in the specific cultural and social environment simultaneously appeared

in the ecclesiastical architecture, which led to the functional renewal of the spaces. This development is in line with international trends, as the 1960s and 1970s were about the modesty of sacred spaces (Vukoszavlyev-Baku-Urbán 2017).

DESIGN MANUAL FOR NEW LITURGICAL SPACES

The *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was designated on December 4, 1963. A partial agreement was reached between the Hungarian State and the Vatican in Budapest on September 15, 1964, that settled the conditions for the functioning of the Catholic Church in a socialist political environment that was atheist (Müller and Neundorf 2012; Urbán and Vukoszavlyev 2016). Thanks to the agreement, the Hungarian Catholic Church was fully represented at subsequent meetings of the council and could be informed more directly of the results of the working groups. The texts of the Council were continuously translated, but only in December 1969 was the full material of the Council and the corresponding instructions published in Hungary. Evaluation of results and practical guides could only be completed slowly, but among the first interpretations there was the one on terms of architecture. Having reputation in the operation of the Catholic Church, but also experienced in the restoration of historic buildings, Dümmerling had compiled a design manual for the collaboration between the State and the Church, the so-called National Council for Church Art and Monuments.

Architect Ödön Dümmerling (1907-76) completed his studies in the Department of Architecture at the Royal Joseph University of Nádor, December 1930. He also worked in the office of Virgil Bierbauer, a prominent modern architectural theorist of the time (chief editor of modernist Hungarian journal «Tér és Forma»), and later became a private designer. Between 1944 and 1949 he was an assistant lecturer at the Department of Architectural History of the Royal Joseph University. He was involved in the establishment of the National Monument Inspectorate until his retirement. Already during his university work, he dealt extensively with historical

architectural monuments. He was a founding member of the National Council for the Preservation of Church Monuments and was one of its initiators. Thanks to the council, cooperation between the OMF and the Church High Authority was resolved during a very difficult period. As an expert on the restoration of monuments (who is also familiar with the functioning of Catholic Church), he was invited to compose a manuscript in 1968 entitled *The Art of Liturgical Equipments and Instruments*. The work became a leading manual for redesigning the church interior. For many years no other manuscript had been helping architects, theoreticians, theologians and priests in their work of implementing the idea and vision of Vatican Council II.

The manuscript made design suggestions for new liturgical equipment and tools. It is based on articles 122 through 124 of Chapter 7 of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which formulate the expectations of works of art. The aesthetic conceptions of Dümmerling, by virtue of their own upbringing, are essentially paralleled with the principles of modernist thinking.¹ According to the typical practice of the time, the restoration of buildings in accordance with the modernist approach required distinctive, period-specific works following the principles of modernity.² Dümmerling's recommendations show an aesthetic dimension that adds a new quality to the modernist approach, but of course recognizes - as he writes - the importance of preserving existing historical relics.

Let's just look at the highlights of words and sentences: true art, professionalism, materiality, loyalty to function, materiality, simplest form. And Dümmerling quotes:

The Liturgical Constitution of the Vatican Council II devotes a separate chapter to sacred [liturgical] art (Chapter VII). Let's quote his most important statements: 'The Church has always been a friendly supporter of the fine arts. Especially when he strives for objects of worship to be worthy, ornate, and beautiful, to have true signs and images of supernatural things'. (Dümmerling 1968, 1-4)

We can see a holistic approach in his argumentation. Dümmerling's interpretations, on the one hand,

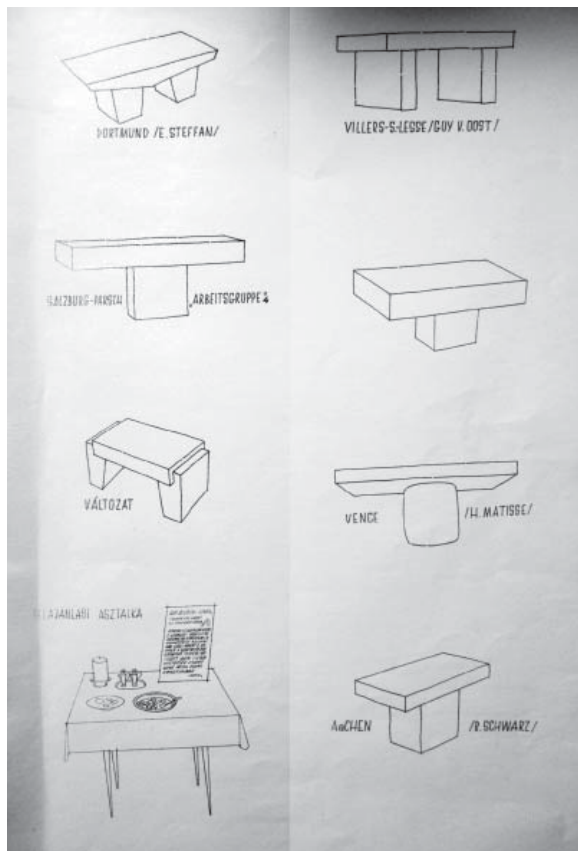
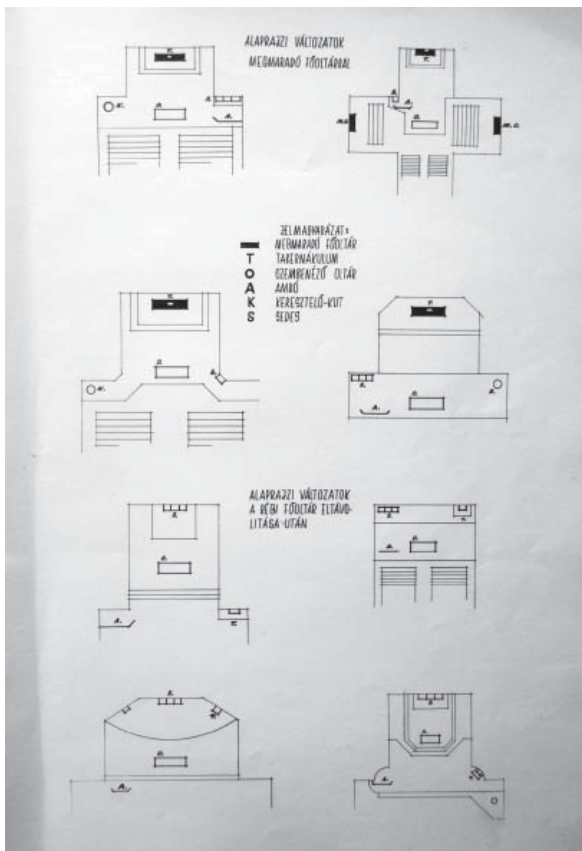


Fig. 02a. Samples of the manual of Dummerling, 1966.

are purely liturgical considerations, but the suggestions he make are emphasized along aesthetic considerations. In this way the document and its design suggestions are applicable by the Church and by the state-owned architectural offices, too. Dümmerling’s vision combines the spirit of the Council documents with the modern architectural principles used by the architects at monument preservations.

As an attachment to a few pages of writing, a 14-page document containing drawing and recommendations in charts was also produced. In this, Dümmerling offers suggestions for altar (*mensa*), ambo, sedes, and even the use of benches by worshippers (Fig. 02). It also deals with the design of

liturgical objects (chalice, patina, candlestick) as well as liturgical clothing. In connection with the 13 pages with the drawings, on page 14 he made a recommendation for his exemplary works and his own designs. It is interesting to note the names of the architects whose work (though taken from their whole environment) he himself takes as an example: Dominikus Böhm, Le Corbusier, Emil Steffan, Rudolf Schwarz, Henri Matisse, Hugo Schädel, Martin Weber.

Sketches showing the transformation of old churches begin with a unified collection of drawings. Dümmerling recognizes the potential of a political environment in power, as during this period it was not the question of building new churches, but

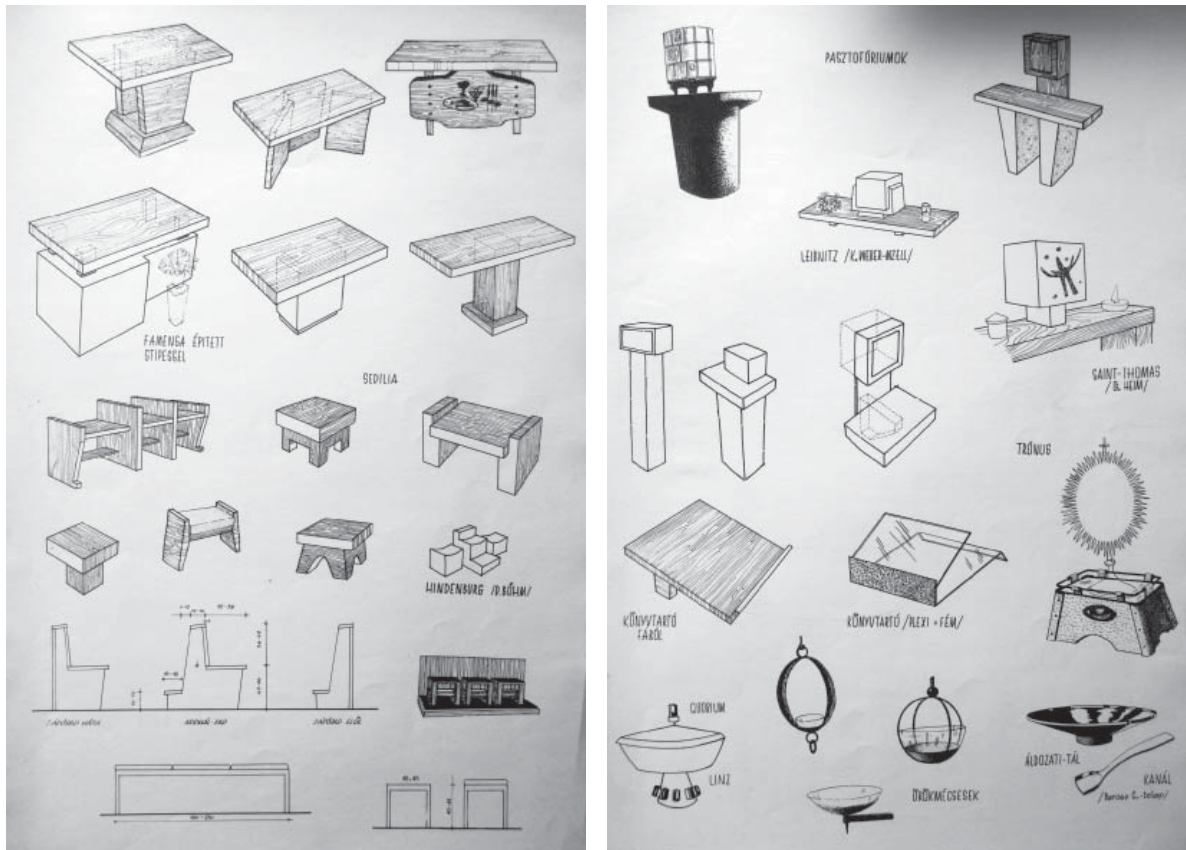


Fig. 02b. Samples of the manual of Dummerling, 1966.

the focus was (first) on renovating old churches (Fejérdy 2016; Urbán and Vukoszávlyev 2016; Sokol-Gojnik 2019). In some sketchy floor plans, he expects to keep existing valuable altars and ancillary equipment, but the proposal states that where they are of no value, efforts should be made to create completely new equipment and worthless works should not be retained. The hierarchical system of the relationship between old and new equipment follows the principles of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, too: it is only acceptable for a valuable altar to keep the sacrament in the axis of the sacred space, at the end wall. At the same time, the creation of the new altar (*mensa*) creates an object suitable

for holding the Mass of Mass toward the faithful. Typically, the altar is located near the faithful in the nave. These drawings are of great importance - no such concerted work or recommendation is known, and it is only summarized in an analytical book published in the decade preceding the change of regime (Cserhádi and Esze 1971; Arató 1975; Guzik 1988). Thus, according to Dummerling's recommendations, the liturgical spatial formations of the new spirit were essentially realized in significant works: these principles have been applied to the restoration of monuments since the mid-1960s, and since the mid-'70s, these guidelines have been increasingly used to build new temples.



Fig. 03. Ilona Schönerné Pusztai, Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady, Nógrádsáp (Hungary), 1965-70; renovation.

CASE STUDIES FOR RENOVATION AND RECONFIGURING SACRED SPACE

Our statement is therefore that the Council's decisions and recommendations that determine the functioning of a modern church can be paralleled with the design principles applied at that time, with the recommendations of the Charter of Venice, in terms of the formation of the liturgical space. With just a few excerpts from the documents, we can see that his symbolism clearly sees the creation of a Christ-centered image through works of noble simplicity, a thought which is paralleled by the aesthetic principles of the Venice Charter.³ I would essentially illustrate this statement with examples from the second half of the 1960s.

Due to the size constraints, detailed description of the projects is overlooked. Therefore we give an accurate bibliography of each project, where the scientific background and architectural solutions of the works are presented.

The example at Becsehely was work in progress at the time of the creation of the documents, the principles of the *Constitutio* have not yet been validated, and we are actually seeing a classic monument-restoration of the liturgical space not detaching the original formation of altar and the benches (Valter 1970). Architectural intervention clearly follows modernist principles. Built in the 13th century, the church had been expanded over several periods, retaining its original apse and the nave, doubled in the Baroque period in two phases. During the restoration of the church, the various construction periods were marked on the facades with several different shapes and the Romanesque openings under the plaster were come to light. Inside, the original Baroque altar furniture was retained. A conventional method of restoration apparently undertook to show various valuable periods and not touching the existing liturgical layout.

At the church of Nógrádsáp, the familiar *Constitutio* guidelines and the renovation-principles brought the integrated Baroque altar into silence, with the restoration of medieval frescoes and a new altar table with noble simplicity (Schönerné Pusztai 1970) (Fig. 03). The building did not suffer any major extensions. Its original form is in fact a 14th-century Gothic form. The designers sought to reconstruct this form by removing the embellishments inside, opening the forgotten, bricked windows and opening the southern gate. Almost once, it was possible to reconstruct the church in style. This effect was reinforced by the Gothic frescoes found under the whitewashed walls of the sanctuary. However, the late 18th century pilgrimage altar structure has not been dismantled and serves the liturgy along with the new mensa altar which is a piece of modern design in this rich ancient interior.

In the church of Mecseknádasd, after the removal of the non-valuable altar, an altar was created that was nicely adapted to the nature of the medieval space and used for its simplicity (Schönerné Pusztai

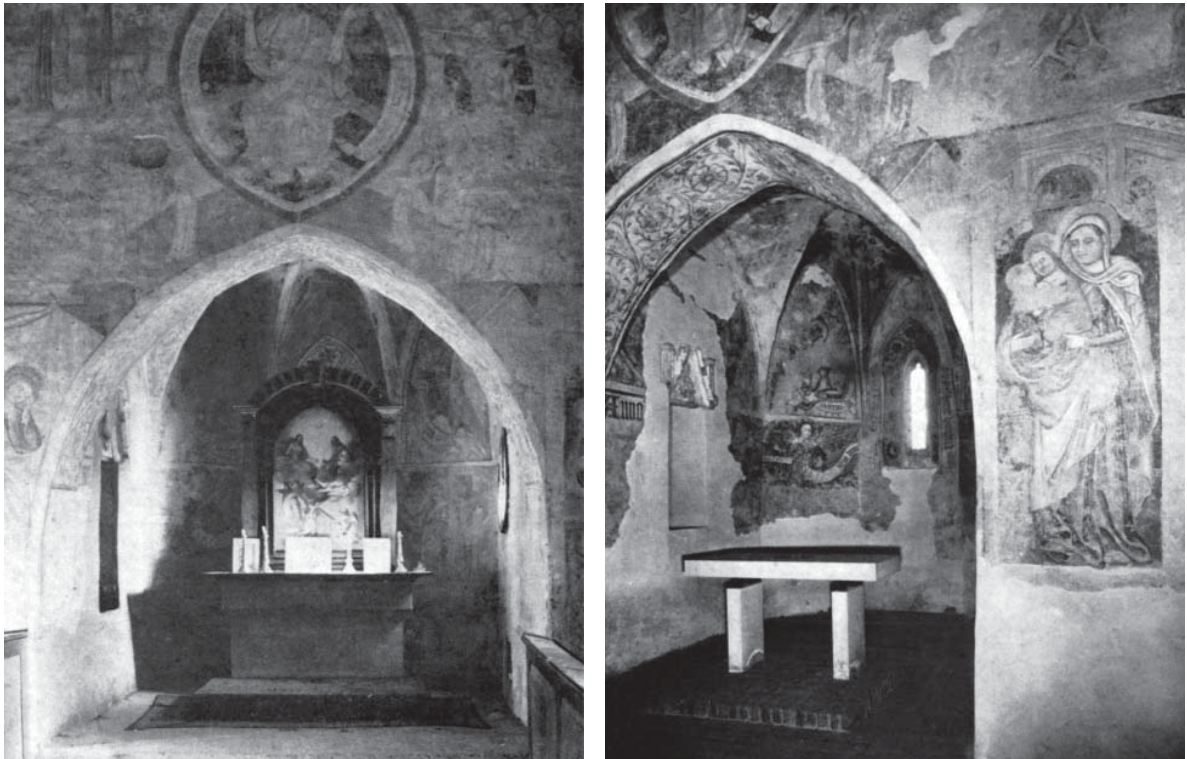


Fig. 04. Roman Catholic Church of Holy Trinity, Velemér (Hungary), 1963-70; before and after renovation.

1974). The Romanesque church was expanded several times, but over the centuries its destruction also left its mark in the volume of the building. Here the documents of the council and the principles of the Charter are clearly applicable. All subsequent additions to the interior were removed and a uniform interior design with very simple forms was applied. The furniture appears as simple carpentry work, the floor is homogenic brick, solid wood beams are palced on the remains of the 14th-century altare, and the crucifix was also assembled from oak beams. The real value of the building are the frescoes of the triumphal arc, which is a historical memorial to the interior of the whitewashed sacred space.

At Velemér's Romanesque church, a solution was created that allowed the appearance of valuable medieval paintings and the possibility of spatial com-

position of the Gothic-style east window (Ambrusné Kozák 1974) (Fig. 04). Thanks to the work of the painters and restorers, the multi-part fresco cycle should be fully enjoyed. This beautiful sacred work of art is highlighted by liturgical objects created with very simple shapes and simple but valuable stone materials. Worthless equipment was not retained because it would only have diminished the value of truly valuable historical works of art. By creating the new liturgical objects the spirit of the documents of the Sacrosanctum Concilium and the leading ideas of the expectations of the Venice Charter could be fully realized at the same time.

In the Roman Catholic Church of Zalaszentmihályfa the designer used several periods known from the excavations. This solution occupies a special place in the concept of liturgical spaces, where

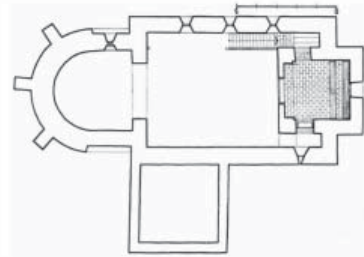
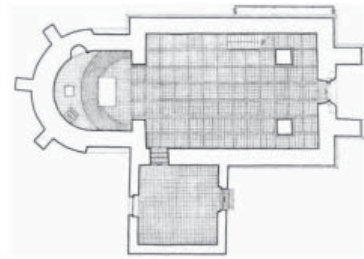
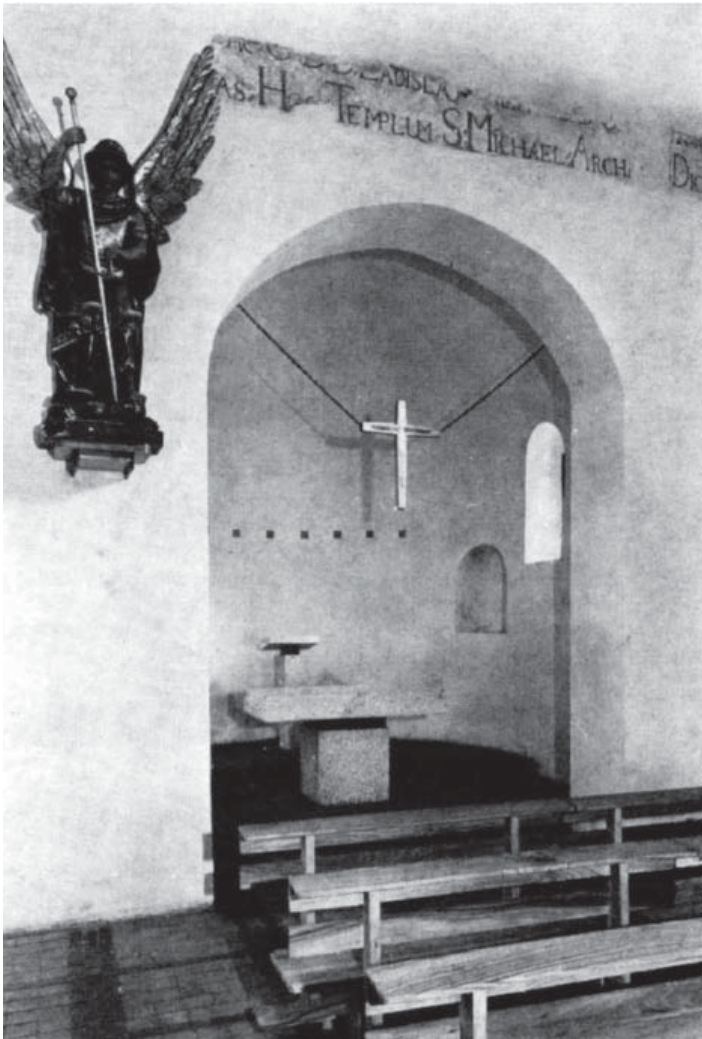


Fig. 05. Ágnes Vladár, Roman Catholic Church of St. Michael the Archangel, Zalaszentmihályfa (Hungary), 1966-71; renovation.

the new altar table is placed within the line of the altar space of the first church, and the ambo is raised on the pedestal behind the altar in today's expanded version (Vladár 1974) (Fig. 05).

CONCLUSION

The examples illustrate the aesthetic quality of liturgical space arrangements in an atheist coun-

try following the recommendations of the Vatican Council, which meets the design principles of another major document of the era. The aesthetic dimensions of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Charter of Venice aim to truly portray a modern world (Dercsényi 1960 and Horler 1972) (Fig. 06). With noble materials, simplicity, functionality, with readability appearing – displaying an immanent value.

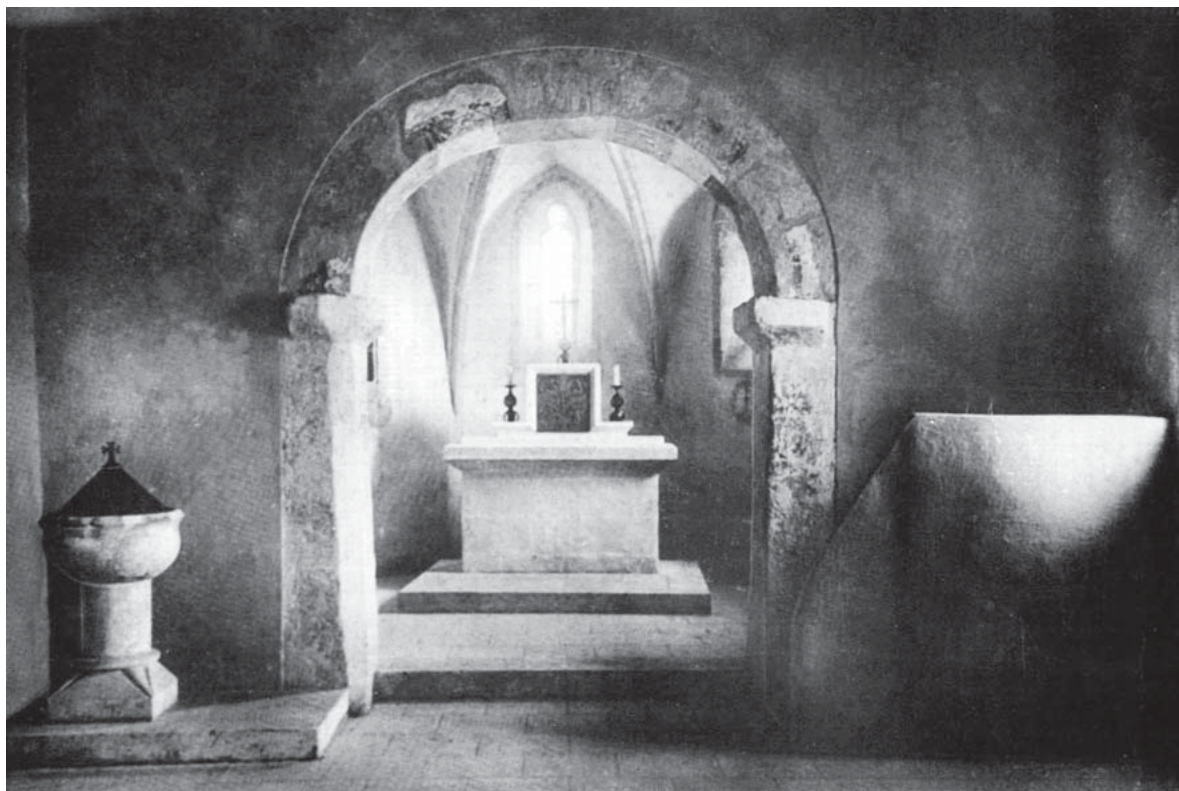


Fig. 06. Ágnes Vladár. Roman Catholic Church of Mary Magdalene, Sopronbánfalva (Hungary), 1969; renovation.

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NOTES

1. On the aesthetics of modern church design of the mid-century, see as reference the work of Rudolf Schwarz (Zahner 2018).

2. See the Charter of Athens origin from 1931. On monument preservation methods following the Charter of Venice origin from 1964: Horler 1972.

3. For an international overview of design methods of the time: Fernández-Cobián 2018; see overview in Hungary: Katona and Vukoszávlyev 2012; Vukoszávlyev 2014; and samples of reconstructions in Hungary: Urbán 2019.

SOURCE OF IMAGES

Fig. 01. Cserháti-Esze 1971.

Fig. 02. Dümmerling 1966.

Fig. 03. Schönerné Pusztai 1970.

Fig. 04. Kozák 1974; Schönerné Pusztai 1974.

Fig. 05. Vladár 1974.

Fig. 06. Archive Zorán Vukoszávlyev.