


# The collaboration between client and architects on the construction of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Zagreb, Croatia

*La colaboración entre cliente y arquitectos en la construcción de la iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes en Zagreb, Croacia*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper intends to enlighten the relationship between the architect and the client on the example of the construction of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Zagreb whose construction started in 1934 and today is almost finished. The project is a result of continuous cooperation between the architects Zorana Sokol-Gojnik and Igor Gojnik and the representative of the Franciscan Province, liturgist Ante Crncevic, who was in charge of the liturgical program, and Ivan Maletic, who was in charge of organizing the construction and financing.

In this project, every architectural gesture and every place in the space has been carefully considered in an open and confidential dialogue between the architect and the liturgical theologian, in real mutual trust, humility, and teachability. The role of the architect is that of a conductor or director who must constantly keep the entire space under control and bring the parts into harmonious relationships.

## KEYWORDS

Zagreb, sacred architecture, liturgy, Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Siloueta Architecture.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende iluminar la relación entre el arquitecto y el cliente a partir del ejemplo de la construcción de la iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes en Zagreb, cuya construcción se inició en 1934 y hoy está casi terminada. El proyecto es el resultado de la colaboración continua entre los arquitectos Zorana Sokol-Gojnik e Igor Gojnik y el liturgista representante de la provincia franciscana Ante Crncevic, que estuvo a cargo del programa litúrgico, e Ivan Maletic, que estuvo a cargo de la organización de la construcción y financiación.

En este proyecto, cada gesto arquitectónico y cada lugar del espacio ha sido cuidadosamente considerado en un diálogo abierto y confidencial entre el arquitecto y el teólogo litúrgico, en una verdadera confianza mutua, humildad y mútua apertura. El papel del arquitecto es el de un conductor o director que debe mantener constantemente bajo control todo el espacio y lograr que las partes establezcan relaciones armoniosas.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Zagreb, arquitectura sacra, liturgia, iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes, Siloueta Architecture.

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## INTRODUCTION

The construction of the large complex of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Zagreb began on the initiative of the Franciscan Province of the Most Holy Redeemer in 1935, which commissioned the project from a famous Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik (Krecic 1992, Prelovšek 1992). From Plečnik's idea for the entire complex, which was conceived as a church with a crypt, a bell tower, and a *biblical garden*, only the crypt was built. Construction works were interrupted due to war circumstances. In 1970, the construction of the church above the crypt continued according to the project of architect Zvonimir Vrkljan.<sup>1</sup> A new volume was built in the late modernist architectural style, and it remained unfinished. There was no project of the interior regarding the main liturgical places and the ritual dynamics of the liturgical celebration. In the 1990s, there were few attempts to complete the project but all architectural solutions were not accepted because, from the clients' point of view, they did not include the theological-liturgical aspects of liturgical architecture, but mostly followed a formalistic approach (Sokol-Gojnik 2017).

The project to complete the church began in 2014 and it is not finished yet. The project approach was complex from the beginning with a continuous and very close collaboration between an architect and a theologian-liturgist, including consultations with financial and organizational engineering. Architects Igor Gojnik and Zorana Sokol-Gojnik from the architectural office Siloueta from Zagreb participated in this project together with theologian-liturgist Father Ante Crncevic and Father Ivan Maletic, who was responsible for securing finances and organizing the construction. The cooperation was continuous, daily, with equal enthusiasm of all participants, and based on long conversations about the architectural expressions of Christian liturgy, its ritual dimension, theology, and spirituality.

This paper aims to present the process of the development of the architectural idea in the project of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in the context of historical circumstances and the gradual maturation of the idea of the need for cooperation between

theologians and architects, which was absent in numerous Croatian projects. By analyzing the architectural design solutions, the paper will reveal the basic theological framework and basic iconographic program that guided the architects in their work. The paper will use the method of analysis, description, and synthesis.

## CROATIAN EXPERIENCE OF DESIGNING LITURGICAL BUILDINGS IN PERIOD FROM 1945 TO 2020

In Croatia, the construction of churches was largely interrupted during the fifty-five-year period of communism (1945-90). What was built was mostly done in secret, without permits, and without serious and well-reflected architectural projects. With the fall of communism in 1990, there was a great and sudden surge in the construction of liturgical buildings. However, the Catholic Church was not prepared for those sudden changes and architects were not sufficiently trained for that unique and challenging typology. Meanwhile, the wave of the Liturgical Movement of the first half of the 20th century and renewal ideas of the Second Vatican Council resulted in big changes within the Church in terms of the theological understanding of the liturgy, giving a strong emphasis on the place and role of the Church as a community in the celebration of holy acts, preserving the primacy of the *katabatic* (descending) liturgy dimension over the *anabatic* ascending.<sup>2</sup>

In those circumstances, unfavorable to Christian art, the approach to the construction of liturgical buildings was twofold. In the first case, the project and the construction were left to inadequately prepared and inadequately educated priests who struggled with a complex task, in collaboration with often inadequately educated architects (or construction engineers! who took over the architects' task). The result was a *speechless* architecture, using quotations from the past without authenticity, far from modernity and the spirit of the renewed liturgy.

In the second case, projects were selected through an architectural competition based on the criteria of architectural excellence, but they often resulted in a formalistic approach that almost always lacked

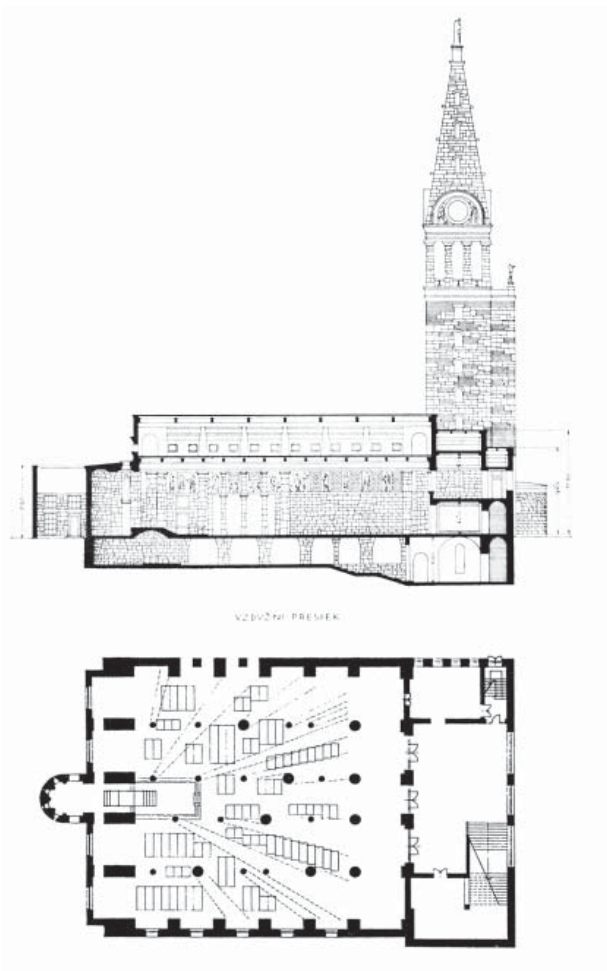


Fig. 01. Jože Plečnik, Our Lady of Lourdes, Zagreb (Croatia), 1934-36; unfinished.

a deeper consideration of the liturgical space from a theological perspective and from the experience of the Church-community celebrating the event of Salvation. It sometimes happened for some churches that a formal liturgical program was created. Even this was insufficient because without the intense and continuous involvement of theologians-liturgists in the process of architectural design, the maturation and growth of the project were prevented. An architect was left to the measure of his personal religiosity, without sufficient sensitivity to liturgical spirituality, which was the spirituality of the Church.

### THE DESIGN PROCESS OF THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

In this light, the project of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Zagreb demonstrated the necessity and usefulness of continuous and thorough collaboration between architects and liturgical theologians in the design of liturgical space. It demonstrated also the importance of the client's understanding of the time and financial resources required, which significantly exceeded usual allocations for spaces of other uses. In this example, the collaboration showed the full complexity of the process and opened the view to a new model of liturgical space design, which was almost completely absent in Croatia.

During the design process, it became clear to the client that both ways in which liturgical buildings had been built so far did not provide satisfactory results, either aesthetically or pastorally. Our collaboration with liturgist Professor Crncevic began with the design of liturgical buildings for liturgical celebrations during Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic visit to Croatia in 2011. During the designing process of those small and *temporary* projects, it became clear how important the permeation of architectural and theological-liturgical points of view was. Our collaboration on the project of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes, which began in 2014, resulted in a possible model for designing the liturgical space by considering basic liturgical postulates, the theology of liturgical celebration, the theology of liturgical space and liturgical time, the pastoral needs of the regular parish community with its particularities and specificities.

We have recognized that by hiring an architect, the client should by no means expect a finished project, but rather allow the theological and architectural professions to work together in openness to the long and complex process of creating the project. The construction of liturgical buildings requires time, time for the creation and maturation of ideas that become architecture that *translates* the language and thought of theology and spirituality into the eloquent language of architecture. In this process, a permeation of knowledge takes place: the liturgist opens the world of theology to the architect, which becomes a guiding thread of architecture, and the architect sensitizes the liturgist to the language and expression of contemporary architecture. The language of contemporary architecture will be theologically and christianly eloquent only if it adopts its inner meaning from contemporary theology and spirituality. On the contrary, stylistic anachronisms appear, manifesting themselves in the juxtaposition of the architectural language and its use. These contradictions often lead to even deeper misunderstandings.

### RELATION TO THE REALITY ENCOUNTERED

Since the project for the completion of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes is burdened with architectural thoughts of previous interventions, the research focused on the reflection of the present moment in dialogue with encountered layers. The *background music* of the entire project was the thoughts of the previous architects, which became the architectural frame of our intervention.

Architect Jože Plecnik gave the first formative impulse to the building with an architectural language on the border between historicism and proto-modern architecture. The crypt was built (1936-41) according to the project of Plecnik (Fig. 01). With his project, he testified to the awareness of the symbolic significance of the Christian liturgical space. His projects tended to create a network of symbols that orchestrated pre-conciliar liturgical needs (Sokol-Gojnik 2017). However, there was a very visible step forward in the research for a new expression, following ideas on liturgical renewal at that time. Plecnik's



Fig. 02. Zvonimir Vrkljan, Our Lady of Lourdes, Zagreb (Croatia), 1970-71.

project was complete, but not completed. A church was supposed to be built above the crypt, with the bell tower. At the east side of the complex, arcades were supposed to be built facing the street, creating space for the imagined *biblical garden*, and separating it from the street. Unfortunately, due to wartime circumstances, only the crypt was built (Malekovic 2000). After the Second World War, the communist authorities took away free parts of the land from the monastery, which made it impossible to realize the idea of a church with a square and a garden.

Architect Zvonimir Vrkljan continued work on Plecnik's building. The church was built over the crypt in 1970-71. The project was not elaborated, and the preserved documentation does not even show the position of the altar, except for a freehand sketch, which shows that the design was not rooted in the liturgy. The built space was in fact a *cuboid* (almost a cube), a kind of *box* whose only architectural gesture was the vertical rows of windows on the north wall, protected by cross-shaped perforations, and several of them on the south wall (Fig. 02). Due to new urban planning constraints, Vrkljan's church was designed with two opposite entrances, which significantly disturbs the natural orientation of the church, as well as the symbolism of the path, the threshold, the entrance and the center of the space, i.e., the destination of the *pilgrimage*.

The encountered architectural and urban layers of the church required a review of the entire complex, including clearly formulated starting points of liturgical architecture, as well as all the needs of the parish, which over the decades has become a recognizable Marian sanctuary of the city of Zagreb. Within the framework of these considerations, decisions were made on a new project for the interior of the church, the design of the entrance space of the church and crypt, and the creation of a new square on the east side with its own entrance. The new project is thus based on and respects and preserves earlier ideas developed in Plecnik's and Vrkljan's projects.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARCHITECT AND LITURGIST IN THE DESIGN OF THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

### Theological framework

During the collaboration between architects and theologian-liturgist, several fundamental starting points emerged that formed the framework for the architectural work.

#### a) *Modernity, beauty*

The present moment is determined by the needs of contemporary man, his sensibility towards spirituality and aesthetics. Contemporary aesthetics in

the context of the Christian *kerygma* acquires a specific tonality in the scale that weave the fabric of Church history. It is rooted in the revelation of the Good News, which is always actualized in a new and unique way. The material expression of the Christian spirit should offer a foretaste of the hope that smolders and persists in the Christian lives of this time and space. By beauty, a concept understood as the harmonious reality of the inextricable connection between the good and the true (genuine), and which is often intentionally avoided in contemporary aesthetics, the Good News permeates and performs this world (Ratzinger 2005). This is the task of Christian art and architecture. Without accepting this mission and task, they should not be called Christian. The escape of contemporary expression from the concept of beauty (as an outmoded and outdated category) is an indicator of a radical departure from the truth and, if you permit us, from the Truth, written with a capital T (Crncevic & Šaško 2009).

*b) The altar, center and origin of the liturgical space*

The Incarnation, the mystery of God becoming man, is the basic and fundamental truth of Christianity. In contrast to other religions, in which the thought of the sacred and divine is directed to an absolutely transcendent reality that only touches this world and reveals itself to prophets (e.g. Islam, Judaism), or pantheistical understood of transcendent that pulsates through this world in cycles of birth and death (Far Eastern religions), Christian thinking is based on the concept of incarnation. In the spaces of Islam, for example, light is used as an image for understanding Allah, and light enters the space through the curtain of fractal openings, but never illuminates it in its entirety. In the destroyed Jewish temple, the presence of Yahweh was hidden in the Holy of Holies (*Kodesh HaKodashim*), which was accessible only to the High Priest, and only once a year (on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement). The spaces of the Eastern religions open outward so the prayer space and nature penetrate because the process (*Tao*) flows through both (Sokol-Gojnik and Gojnik 2021).

But the Christian God came into humanity, into the human body, into this-worldly reality, and became temporal and spatial. God became close, tangible, and not only recognizable but also experienceable with our human senses. Therefore, for Christians, salvation does not take place outside of this time (in some imagined protological or eschatological moment), but now, in time. This radically shapes and changes the approach to the design of the Christian liturgical space (Longhi 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to speak of a uniquely Christian liturgical architecture and not allow it to be smothered in vague and general notions of sacred architecture in which the *sacrum* bears no identity or confessional sign.

The place (*ubi*) of the Christian celebration of the faith is not limited by space. Space becomes a place of presence only if it is determined by Christ who is alive, present in the assembled community of believers. Therefore, the liturgical space is not separable from the liturgical act, and only liturgy can make it liturgical (López-Arias 2016).

The Christian worship space is thus structured from its focus: the altar, the place where the salvific event given of the salvific event of the mystery of the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ is commemorated and actualized (Segura 2011; Schwarz 1999). In openness to this experience of salvation and communion with God, in striving for an experience that is not our achievement but a gift of grace (from above), Christianity, therefore, structures the space of celebration intentionally *separating* it from *the world*. In that way, Christian space shows the gift as difference and creates through architectural elements the *new space* (Sokol-Gojnik and Gojnik 2021), the space in which a bridge between the everyday space of the world and the *eschaton* occurs in the Eucharist. In this way, a space for the vastness of God, for the encounter with God is created. The Christian liturgy and its space not only offer a place for God but enable man to have a place in God.

Christian space is thus, even in historical examples, separated from external space, and the frequent appearance of domes over the sanctuary (or over the altar) is in a function of the vertical dimension, of elevation to *eschatological space*, to the experience

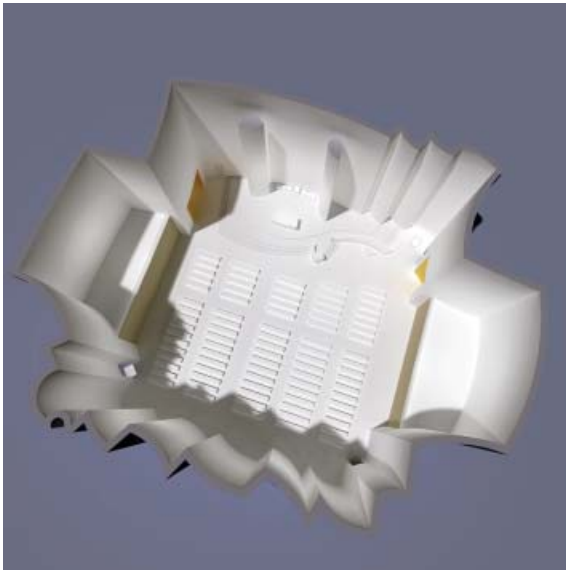


Fig. 03. Siloueta Architecture, Our Lady of Lourdes, Zagreb (Croatia), 2014-23; concept of the new space.

Fig. 04. New space within existing space.

of eternity. Eternity is not a space, because space is a limitation, but liturgical space, with the power of the liturgical event, makes it possible to experience a foretaste of this gift: in the *moments* of our time and our places of being in this world. The dynamic of the *new space* of Christian liturgical architecture is rooted in the memorial of the redemption of Christ, present in liturgical celebration, and creates a new space of *fullness* (Sokol-Gojnik and Gojnik 2021), a gift of love from a transcendent God.

Since in the liturgy the altar is the center of expressing praise to God and the Eucharist is the goal towards which every liturgical celebration strives, the altar is seen as Christ. To venerate the altar means to honor Christ (Valenziano 1995). The altar is therefore formed as the origin and center of the entire space. All spatial coordinates derive from it because it has the meaning and function of *ex-center*, the center from which all space originates (Messner 2003, Crncevic 2005).

### c) A Network of Symbols

The complexity of designing a liturgical space is not the mere superficial application of biblical and Christian symbols, because a symbol is effective only when it is experienced as an act, an event that brings

us into a life experience with its meaning. Thus, the symbol differs radically from the function of the sign. The sign informs us about the meaning, and the symbol performs us with the meaning that happens. Therefore, space itself is the symbol because it is the active bearer of the meaning of a sacred event, of a liturgical act. Liturgical space elements are not only ritually functional architectural forms but are strong symbolic places, places that offer the experience of encounter with God, even if there is no celebration in that space. In the architectural design of space, this can only be achieved if the design results from the theological reflection of the liturgy and from the liturgical reflection of the space (García-Lozano 2011). Space, understood as such a reality, or as its indispensable part, becomes itself a symbol, the meeting point of two realities, the material and the spiritual. The space thus understood introduces a believer and a community to the mystery of God's presence and leads them to the experience of the Mystery of salvation.

### Iconographic program

In the architectural design of the church, we were guided by the idea that iconography is an inseparable part of the space, both in the symbolic and the real

sense of the word. In order to confirm this inseparability, the mosaic technique was chosen for the iconographic elements, which become *part of the wall*, shaping the space. Iconographic elements are not a subsequent decoration of the space, but shape and define the space. Iconographic elements are partly realized until now.

The church was conceived and built on the ideas of the *theology of the garden*, which relies mainly on the Gospel according to John (Kramp 2017). Evangelist John in his Gospel mentions three gardens: the garden where Jesus was arrested before his passion (John 18,1); the garden where Jesus was buried (John 19,41); the garden/gardener that appeared after Jesus' resurrection when Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus thinking that he is the gardener (John 20,15). The garden of Creation is also attached to that series. The series of four gardens describes the History of Salvation, from the creation of man to his redemption through Christ, whom patristic tradition called the *divine gardener* who man, from the desert where he was exiled, returns him to the *garden* of communion with the Creator.

The central motif, on the apsidal wall behind the altar, represents the goal of the earthly pilgrimage: participation in Christ's glory. That is why this mosaic represents the coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## A NEW IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES: ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

The new identity of the church of Our Lady of Lourdes was created from the previously established theoretical framework and iconographic program. In this paper, it is possible to present only a few following main ideas.

The first symbol that gives identity to a liturgical space is the title of the church. This is the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a little girl Bernadette in a cave in Lourdes (France) and revealed herself as the Immaculate Conception, manifesting God's favor to humanity. The Grotto in Lourdes became a place of great pilgrimage and strong devotion, especially in connection with prayer for healing, so that the spirit

of Lourdes's devotion was transferred to the many churches with Marian (Lourdes) titles built around the world. A lively and strong devotion to Lourdes developed especially in the crypt of this church in Zagreb.

The rigid cube of raw *béton brut* of the upper church was to become the church of Our Lady of Lourdes: Mary, Mother of Health, Healer of the Sick, Refuge of Sinners... The task was not at all simple.

The encounter with the unexpected and largely unfinished building very quickly imposed itself upon us as the image of Our Lady in the Grotto of Lourdes. And so we decided that Our Lady will enter her Grotto here in Zagreb through a space that will evoke her gentleness, tenderness, and motherly embrace as a reflection of the feeling Bernadette experienced during the apparition. So, the project was approached in such a way as to create a new space within the existing space (Fig. 03).

The design approach contrasts with the found architecture. The idea of Mary's maternal closeness is architecturally expressed by a soft envelope that *gently* delimits the space of the sacred encounter with the mystery of closeness. In the contrast between the exterior and the interior, one can experience the unexpected, the surprise effect, and the encounter with the otherness (Fig. 04).

The idea of a *soft* design of the interior was inspired by the idea of a mantle (Latin *cappa* or *cappa magna*), an image very close to the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary so in iconography, she is sometimes called Lady of Mantle. The mantle speaks of her protective closeness, under whose arms (skirts) the faithful find comfort and peace. The architectural development of the mantle (*cappa magna*) allowed the creation of two separate smaller spaces called chapels (Latin *cappella*, diminutive of *cappa*, literally meaning *little mantle* or *part of the mantle*). These *cappellae*, as sacred places under the mantle of the mystery of God's nearness, formed with their intimacy a space for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation (space for confessionals) and the adoration of the Holy Sacrament of the Altar (chapel of the tabernacle). Chapels are separate spaces, but they are in close and clear connection with the central space of the liturgical community. The gentle folds of the wall covering have also created





Fig. 05. Siloueta Architecture, Our Lady of Lourdes, Zagreb (Croatia), 2014-23; ceiling above the sanctuary as a symbolic place.

Fig. 06. Emphasizing the focus of a space that with its geometry has no authority of direction.

Fig. 07. The columns that never touch the ceiling.

several niches that are not separated from the central space, but highlight and create suitable places: for the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes; for the stations of the Way of the Cross (*Via Crucis*) with a special niche where the Cross of Christ and the tomb of Christ are venerated; for the veneration of the Servant of God, Father Ante Antic, whose sarcophagus, located in the crypt, is visually connected by a glass lunette in the floor of the church.

In the design of the central space of the celebration, guided by the idea of the centrality of the altar, zenithal natural light was introduced above the altar space. The zenith lighting is hidden, meaning it is not directly visible from the nave, which defines the orientation of the entrance to the sanctuary and the altar. The zenith lighting makes the ceiling above the sanctuary a symbolic place (Fig. 05). The golden *heaven* above the sanctuary is a striking expression of eschatological reality and divine life that *like the dew of the Holy Spirit* graciously descends upon the altar and the community gathered around the Christ-altar. The linear space of the sanctuary consists of a sequence of liturgical elements such as the altar, the ambo, the paschal candle stand, the aqueduct, and the baptismal font. The gold of *heaven*, given to the Church through the power of the liturgical mystery, is graciously poured out with simply accented golden lines connecting the altar, the ambo, the stand for the paschal candle, and the baptismal font. The altar, as the place of origin and meeting point of all the forces of the liturgical space, stands in the center of the installation of two columns. The space, which by its form had no focal point, was given a focal point by the introduction of the zenith light and then by the installation of two *columns* with the altar between them (Fig. 06).

The *columns* paraphrase the historical motif of the ciborium or baldachin, which has appeared in Christian churches since early Christian times and throughout the history of Christian liturgical architecture. The columns rise toward the golden *heaven* but never touch it, indicating a reality in which the earthly rises and longs for the heavenly (Fig. 07). The columns thus formed also underscore the descending (*katabatic*) dimension of the liturgy of the Church

and emphasize the truth that the liturgy is a gift above all. The columns not only center the altar, but also have their liturgical functions: in one, there is a niche for the processional cross, and a place for evangelary in the other, which is placed there after the proclamation of the Word of God. An *credenza*, a table for eucharistic gifts, is also hidden in one of the columns.

The ambo area has a strong relationship with the golden ceiling. Above the ambo, there is the starting point of the ceiling, which outlines a dove with its shape, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The ambo is composed of two types of stone, *travertino romano* and Brazilian *bianco neve*, which represent the scene from the open tomb of Christ and define the ambo as a *monumentum resurrectionis* in fidelity to the ancient Christian tradition (Fig. 08).

In its horizontality, the ambo is related to the baptismary. In fact, the ambo and the baptismal font form a complete spatial complex conceived with an integrative architectural thought. The connection between the two poles of the ambo and the baptismal font is the aqueduct, whose origin is a paschal candle stand, a powerful sign of the resurrection. The water of the baptismal font springs from the *joy* of the resurrection, from the paschal candle stand, flows over the surface of the aqueduct and visibly pours into the baptismal font. Behind the baptismal font, there is the stained glass window, the only colored light, which emphasizes that water and light are the two basic building materials of the baptismal font (Fig. 09).

In the complete disposition of functions in the church space, it is important to emphasize the connection of the sacrament of penance with the place of baptism. Penance (reconciliation) is understood as a *second baptism*, a renewal of the believer's baptismal dignity. The chapel for the sacrament of reconciliation is entered from the entrance space of the church (*narthex*) (not finished yet). After confession, which is an act of *reconciliation with God and the Church*, one enters the church premises through a specially designed entrance corresponding to the baptismal font. Thus, the space clarifies the relationship between the sacraments of baptism and penance and their orientation towards the summit and the center: towards the altar and the celebration of the eucharist,



Fig. 08-09. Siloueta Architecture, Our Lady of Lourdes, Zagreb (Croatia), 2014-23; the ambo area.



which is «the summit and the source of the entire Christian life» (*Lumen gentium*, 11). The internal dynamics of the space, which provides a place, paths, and relationships for various forms of celebration and devotion, shows that the liturgy, centered in the Eucharist, «is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows» (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The same principle defined the chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament (Fig. 10).

That the whole space was intended by the liturgy for the liturgy is shown by an architecturally simple but symbolically powerful detail: in a special niche in the wall there is a special bell that sounds only twice a year: when the priest intones the hymn *Glory to God in the highest* in the Easter Vigil, and in the Mass during the Night at Christmas. In this way, the architecture connects space with time, such an important element of the Christian liturgy.

In the architectural design of the space, there was always present a thought of an iconographic program that would accompany and emphasize certain focal points of celebration and devotion, thus not competing with the space but respecting the space, so that iconographic elements would not seem like an addition to space. The iconographic program is not completely realized yet.

The approach we took in designing the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Zagreb is guided by the idea that the liturgy, like the Church itself, is a communion (*communio*) in itself, so it is necessary that this connection is manifested in all spatial and iconographic elements (Fig. 12). This enables the church building to truly be a *gesamtkunstwerk*, a synthesis of all forms and expressions, a work of art entirely formed from the same thought and with the same goal.

## CONCLUSION

With this brief presentation, we have tried to show how complex the design of the Christian liturgical space can be and, moreover, how important the continued collaboration between an architect and a theologian-liturgist is.

In this project, every architectural gesture and every place in the space has been carefully considered in an open and confidential dialogue between the architects and the liturgical theologian, in real mutual trust, humility, and teachability. Liturgy, in which the unattainable is graciously given to humanity, is a unique school of humble learning and learning humility, for all participants in the liturgy and for all participants in the design of the space that becomes part of a liturgical event. The role of the architect is that of a conductor or director who must constantly keep the entire space under control and bring the parts into harmonious relationships.

However, liturgical space is not formed by mere elements of a particular liturgical function arranged in a previously defined space, but by structural, formative, and symbolic components of space that become a complete organism by architecture (Fernández-Cobián 2007). In order to grasp this dimension of the reflection of spatial elements, close collaboration and the daily involvement of theologians and liturgists in the design process is necessary. Only in such a dynamic exchange of thoughts and viewpoints, it is possible to weave a network of symbols and create a *new space* that is brought to life by the Eucharist, the center and link of all elements and places in sacred space.

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Fig. 10-11. Silueta  
Architecture, Our Lady of  
Lourdes, Zagreb (Croatia),  
2014-23; chapel of the Most  
Holy Sacrament.  
Fig. 12. Nave.

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## NOTES

1. The upper church was built during the communist era when it was not allowed to build, and when the regime's politics significantly limited the recognition of Christian architecture. Therefore, there was no time for complex reflections on a liturgical space and the postulates of new liturgical renewal, so the design of the building was the expression of the urgency of the construction. The project did not refer to Plečnik's project of the church.

2. These changes in emphasis and perspective gave primacy to the liturgical event as a celebration of faith and a way of actualization the Mystery of Christ, rather than merely as an act of personal or communal devoutness of the faithful. In this sense, the church building should be understood not as a space for a sacred act, but as a factor of a sacred act entrusted to the language of architecture. Such approaches, which required a period of theological and spiritual maturation even in the church communities themselves, also demanded a new response in the architectural design of the space for the liturgy conceived in this way. It can be noticed that those big changes and demands for the features of the new Christian liturgical architecture were not accompanied by serious and systematic reflection in either architectural or theological colleges or universities. In the communist and now post-communist countries, where the half-century-long radical break in the dialogue between art and theology has taken place, consequences are even more obvious than in countries where there was at least some openness to cooperation.

## SOURCE OF IMAGES

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