

**TECHNICAL TRANSACTIONS** | **CZASOPISMO TECHNICZNE**  
ARCHITECTURE | ARCHITEKTURA

9-A/2015

JOANNA GIL-MASTALERCZYK\*

THE GAME OF SPACE – THE ARRANGEMENT  
OF SACRAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS  
AND INTERIOR DECOR IN POST-WAR CHURCHES  
IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CRACOW

GRA W PRZESTRZEŃ – DYSPOZYCJA ELEMENTÓW  
ARCHITEKTONICZNYCH I WYSTROJU  
WNĘTRZ SAKRALNYCH W POWOJENNYCH  
KOŚCIOŁACH ARCHIDIECEZJI KRAKOWSKIEJ

**Abstract**

After 1945, the architecture and decor of sacred buildings were adapted to the function and created in accordance with the needs of their users. At various times during the 20th century, especially in the 70s and 80s, it underwent frequent modifications – according to the program objectives and the needs of the parish. In the game of sacred space, in its artistic expression, a significant role was played by modern architectural solutions, overcoming many iconographic conventions and exploring original compositional approaches.

*Keywords: sacred architecture, sacred space, decor, church*

**Streszczenie**

Po 1945 r. architektura i wystrój wnętrz obiektów sakralnych dostosowywany był do funkcji i tworzony zgodnie z potrzebami użytkowników. W różnych okresach czasowych XX w., a w szczególności w latach 70. i 80., ulegał częstym modyfikacjom – odpowiednio do założeń programowych i potrzeb parafii. W grze przestrzeni sakralnej, jej wyrazie plastycznym, znaczącą rolę odgrywały – nowoczesne rozwiązania architektoniczne, przełamanie wielu konwencji ikonograficznych oraz poszukiwanie oryginalnych ujęć kompozycyjnych.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura sakralna, przestrzeń sakralna, wystrój wnętrz, kościoł*

\* Ph.D. Arch. Joanna Gil-Mastalerczyk, Department of Architecture and Town Planning, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Kielce University of Technology.

The transformation in the shaping of forms of architecture and interior design in Catholic churches which took place between 1945 and 2000 in the Archdiocese of Cracow remains fascinating and unusual. Studies attest that, despite a great crisis in the field of religious architecture, there are a wealth of original and innovative architectural and functional solutions. These were associated with a number of circumstances, among which the prevailing political, economic and social situation in the country undoubtedly exerted an influence [1].

In all public buildings, which includes churches, error-free layout of the space is essential, according to the purpose of the building, i.e. its usefulness.

In religious buildings, interior space is an important element created by the architecture. It arouses specific emotions and creates a space for concentration, revealing at the same time the symbolism of the sacred.

In the years 1945–2000 the architecture and interior design of religious buildings in the Archdiocese of Cracow were adjusted to the functions and created in accordance with the needs of their users. At various times<sup>1</sup>, and especially in the 70s and 80s, they underwent frequent modifications – according to the program objectives and the needs of the parish. In churches of the first period – from 1945–1970 – the architecture and interiors were characterized by conscious architectural composition adapted to the requirements of utility. The organization of the internal space, thanks to the nave, the separation of the chancel from the main nave and isolated side chapels – created a climate conducive to a sense of the sacred and an intimate and prayerful atmosphere. The interiors, after the conciliar year, were distinguished by architectural solutions adapted to the requirements of the renewed liturgy, with a group of individual functions around the central altar.

In buildings of worship of the second period – the 70s and 80s – the organization of the interior space was designed primarily to facilitate a bringing together of all the faithful. Therefore, the interior disposition of most churches is traditionally distinguished by the desire to maximize the amount of space, especially full visibility of the presbytery and the altar. The interior design, as well as the form, is sculptured and monumental, which expresses an emotional content that is easily read by its users, but also harmony and peace. The most common are interiors of symmetrical shape. There are also interiors with varied space, with clearly accentuated asymmetry and irregular composition. This occurs in the Church of St. Queen Jadwiga in Krowdrze in Cracow designed by R. Loegler and J. Czekaj.

The altar, both in central and longitudinal churches, stresses the hierarchical system of the interior. It is placed traditionally, easily visible from the entire space and especially close to the wall closing the presbytery. It is the main and exposed centre, which focuses the attention of all users. The effect of enhancing the altar is especially emphasised in the composition of single-space interiors. This solution was used, among others, at St. Brother Albert in Cracow designed by W. Cęckiewicz. Equally consistently well thought out is the system of a multi-level interior – the Ark of the Lord church in Nowa Huta, designed by W. Pietrzyk, where the main altar – planned at the lowest level of the church, was visible to all the faithful, including from the balconies. Such a composition of the space, combined with the play among individual design elements, creates an atmosphere conducive to prayer and builds the specific nature of the sacred [1].

---

<sup>1</sup> The correctness of the organization and creation of the space shall be given to evaluation for the following generation.

In the special play a significant role is played by the paintings and sculptures – with visible influences of historicism, expressionism, and deconstructivism. This becomes more apparent in the sculpture of the second period. It becomes the dominant component in the artistic expression of the interiors – such as: the Christ Crucified designed by M. Zychowicz in the church in Krowodrza, or the expressive sculpture of “Christ Triumphant” designed by W. Pietrzyk, in the church in Bieńczyce. Both these extremely expressive sculptures distinguish the spaces of these contemporary churches and in various ways draw upon the mystery of the liturgy.

In addition to the sculptures, the game of sacred space includes the Stations of the Cross, often with content that is suggestively both political and patriotic (“Ark of the Lord” in Bieńczyce), as well as iconography, metalwork (St. Jadwiga in Krowodrza), and regional decoration derived from traditional trends (the Church of Our Lady in Olcza, designed by T. Gawłowski) – particularly regenerating in the second period, and mosaics, sgraffito (St. Wojciech in the Bronowickie Estate in Cracow, designed by W. Seruga).

A major role in shaping the interior design, modelling and reading the sacred space is carried by the play of light. The conscious play and creation of this natural parameter brings harmony to the structure, and emphasizes the perfect proportions of forms and articulation of spaces. In many ways it draws attention to the altar, imposes concentration, subjects to strong emotions, and bears the hidden mystery. In most churches, good lighting mostly concentrates on the choir and serves to accentuate the center of the altar. This effect was visualized especially by E. and J. Gyurkovich, and T. Szafer in the Church of St. Peter the Apostle in Wadowice and in the Church of St. Brother Albert in Czyżyny designed by W. Cęckiewicz. The stream of natural light falling into the interior – through hidden skylights – illuminates in an interesting way the presbytery with the altar, and also illuminates the interior of the church. Its mysterious introduction and the conciseness of the symbolism of forms awaken the impression of a hidden, mystical world.

In shaping the church in Wadowice, of particular importance is the play of the double “columns of light” of Christological expression, inextricably linked to the symbolism of the sanctuary. The intersection of the nave and transept has a *four-cornered form*, and is based not on material supports, but on *columns of light* [7, p. 161].

In the Emmaus Church in Zakrzówek in Cracow, designed by D. Kozłowski, W. Stefanski, and M. Misiągiewicz, the light penetrating into the interior brings out the matter of the concrete, its shape and meaning – uncovering at the same time the symbolism of the sacred. It illuminates the space important for the liturgy and brings out the perfect shapes to then extinguish in the gloom. The play of light and darkness gives the space an abstract sanctity and provides experience of the sacred.

Using somewhat different conventions, T. Gawłowski, in the sculptural church in Olcza in Zakopane, through the appropriate indirect flowing of a large amount of natural light, obtained an equally interesting artistic expression, and warm mood in the interior. In the church in Bieńczyce the mystical darkness of the interior and the play of rays penetrating through the stained-glass windows produces a sense of a hidden world and enables the objects introduced to achieve an impenetrable mysterious character.

Contemporary church architecture is characterized not only by modern architectural solutions and new forms of design, but also: *the overcoming of many an iconographic convention, and exploring original compositional approaches* [6, p. 146], as exemplified by the XX. Zmartwychwstańców Complex at Zakrzówek in Cracow.



III. 1. Complex of the XX. Zmartwychwstańców in Cracow, 1985–1993, D. Kozłowski, W. Stefański, M. Misiągiewicz, fragment of the interior “Confession”, photo. author, 2013

The interiors of the entire complex are characterized by spaciousness and irregularity. They operate on a specific theme – a form of vault which appears in the corridors and halls, and in the hall and chapels. The vaults, made as reinforced concrete elements, raw, are contrasted with the simple white plaster and the geometrical arrangement of floors – made of black stone [2, p. 66]. In the single-space center, inside the Emmaus church, a big deconstructed concrete “confession” dominates – open up. On the side wall the choir has been suspended, in the form of a trapezoid cutting into the interior of the nave [III. 1]. On the white wall, the altar was designed, dominated by rectangular window openings – filled with stained glass. By using the play of forms and colours, the creators transmit warm emotions and create a soulful sacred mood in the interior. The idea of composing space, the play of the diversity of textures and the concrete in context with other materials, co-create the mood of sacred space and enable it to be defined as poetry, while her creator is high among the *poets of concrete* [3, p. 47–57].

In church projects from the 70s and 80s the “model of associations of a large-scale nave with side annexes – chapels on an intimate scale” appeared [5, p. 15]. The interior features dispense altogether with the transept, which involves the resignation of the cross system (at St. Brother Albert in Nowa Huta – there is a suggestion of a chapel and transept system [8, p. 320]). At the end of the eighties, in the process of shaping the interior, a return to the traditional longitudinal system, emphasizing an axial alignment, may be noted. There is the desire to separate the presbytery, or arranging the choir to display the main altar. The division and fragmentation of the interior becomes apparent, a return to designing shrines, indication of places for individual meditation, circumventions for the faithful that enrich the overall spatial layout.

The interiors of churches in the second period is multi-level in nature. Most common are two-storey solutions: Main floor – the top with the church, and auxiliary with rooms for catechistic and other functions, usually localized to the lower storey – situated partly below ground level (Church of Our Lady on Olcza, St. Jadwiga in Krowodrza, “Ark of the Lord” in Bieńczyce).

In the finishing of the predominant number of churches, especially in the type of laying floors and interior decorating items, the most traditional materials have been applied, such as: natural stone – of domestic and foreign origin – brick and wood. In the expression of the artistic sacral realization, of crucial importance is raw concrete (reinforced concrete). It is an ideal and versatile architectural material – both in physical and metaphorical terms. The use of the natural fingerprints of formwork and planks, with no smoothing of imperfections and accidental traces of residues revives the concrete surface and gives it its original value. Modern technologies, unlimited design opportunities, material solutions and their availability, especially during the 90’s, enabled – in terms of organising the interior – a highly flexible capacity to process it, and the creation of unlimited structural systems.

In summary, the churches presented in the Archdiocese of Cracow are characterized by skillful composition of space – “the play of geometry, shapes among shapes, decorating the space”, and the play of interior design elements – that mean that they do not lose their specific mood and community character.

I would venture to say that many Artists, when creating these spaces, felt *noble*, “happy and beautiful, just as a spectator – when in contact with art”. These objects reflect the leading ideological and artistic currents and the skills of the artists. In a spiritual sense, they produce a unique atmosphere and the presence of the sacred, because: “Art uses beauty, expressed in

harmony, balance (...), the ratio of the masses, balanced tectonics, geometry, speaking of the power of the intellect, because beauty is perfect (...), and perfection is an attribute of God, hence beauty contains the sacred – a reflection of God – God’s perfection. Architecture and sacred art (...) It seeks to express in some way in human work the infinite divine beauty, and beauty – as Socrates said – is the shape of holiness, so that the talent of the artist contributes significantly to the sanctification of beauty, and the material and artistic splendour of the church is intended to facilitate the believer in achieving mystical union” [9].

In conclusion, we can leave with the words of Mary Misiągiewicz, who wrote that “whether there arises an ordinary work, an exceptional work, or an immortal work depends on the talent of the author” [4, p. 452].

## References

- [1] Gil-Mastalerczyk J., *O przemianach architektury sakralnej Archidiecezji Krakowskiej w latach 1945–2000*, doctor al dissertation, doctor al supervisor dr hab. inż. arch. Andrzej Bialkiewicz, prof. PK, Kraków 2013.
- [2] Kozłowski D., *Projekty i budynki 1982–1992. Figuracywność i rozpad formy w architekturze doby postfunkcjonalnej*, Kraków 1992.
- [3] Kucza-Kuczyński K., *Sakralizacja betonu*, [in:] *Architektura betonowa*, Dariusz Kozłowski, (ed.), Kraków 2001.
- [4] Misiągiewicz M., *Punkt widzenia. Rozmowa ze studentami: architektoniczne tworzywo* [in:] *Czasopismo Techniczne, Architektura*, z. 9-A/2006, year 103, special no.; *Definiowanie Przestrzeni Architektonicznej, Architektoniczne Tworzywo*, Wyd. PK, Kraków 2006.
- [5] Mroczek A., Kucza-Kuczyński K., *Nowe Kościoły w Polsce*, Warszawa 1991.
- [6] Olszewski A. K., *Dzieje sztuki polskiej 1890–1980*, Warszawa 1988.
- [7] Szafer T. P., *Sacrum Wadowickie*, [in:] *Udział pracowników Politechniki Krakowskiej w życiu Kościoła katolickiego za pontyfikatu Jana Pawła II*, Flaga K., Paluch M., Pawlicki B.M., (ed.), Kraków 1998.
- [8] Wroński J. Sz., *Kościoły Krakowa zbudowane w latach 1945–1989, jako wyraz przemian architektury sakralnej w Polsce na tle rozwoju architektury na świecie*, Kraków 2010.
- [9] Wroński J. Sz., *Pojęcie i znaczenie sacrum w architekturze*, [in:] [www.sztukasakralna.pl](http://www.sztukasakralna.pl), [7.06.2009]