


# Conditioning Factors in Simplification of Catholic Temples after Vatican II in Brazil Case Analysis of the Santa Maria de Campos Parish Church

*Factores condicionantes en la simplificación de los templos católicos después del Vaticano II en Brasil.  
Análisis de la iglesia parroquial de Santa María de Campos*

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## ABSTRACT

Under the influence of the liturgical reform promoted in the 20th century, Catholic temples assumed very simple characteristics, especially after the determinations of the Second Vatican Council. This simplification can be observed both in the construction of new temples and in the adaptation of others built before the period in question, causing the loss of its identity. In order to understand the simplification of these sacred spaces, we chose the case study: the renovation of Santa Maria de Campos dos Goytacazes Parish Church, located in the North of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In the architectural intervention of this sacred space, conditioning factors were identified as: impositions of the local community; priests who are unaware of ecclesiastical determinations for liturgical space; and the scarcity of architects familiar with liturgical practices and conciliar guidelines. It is necessary to consider new proposals for the use of space, particularly in the rehabilitation of sacred spaces after the Second Vatican Council.

## KEYWORDS

Architecture, Reformation, Temples, Catholic Temples, Ecclesiastical Norms.

## RESUMEN

Bajo la influencia de la reforma litúrgica promovida en el siglo XX, los templos católicos asumieron características muy simples, especialmente después de las determinaciones del Concilio Vaticano II. Esta simplificación se puede observar tanto en la construcción de nuevos templos como en la adaptación de otros construidos antes del período en cuestión, causando la pérdida de su identidad. Para comprender la simplificación de estos espacios sagrados, elegimos un estudio de caso: la renovación de la iglesia parroquial de Santa María de Campos dos Goytacazes, ubicada en el norte del estado de Río de Janeiro, Brasil. En la intervención arquitectónica de este espacio sagrado, se identificaron como factores condicionantes imposiciones de la comunidad local; sacerdotes que desconocen las determinaciones eclesiásticas para el espacio litúrgico; y la escasez de arquitectos familiarizados con las prácticas litúrgicas y las directrices conciliares. Es necesario considerar las nuevas propuestas para el uso del espacio, particularmente en la rehabilitación de espacios sagrados después del Concilio Vaticano II.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Arquitectura, reforma, templos, templos católicos, normas eclesiásticas.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, as well as around the world, many Catholic temples were designed, built or renovated in the second half of the twentieth century, many of them after the Second Vatican Council. Analyzing some temples, observing their formal compositional conditions and design, both exterior and interior, designed and built mainly from the 1970s, it is clear that concerns rise about the compliance with rules, parameters and norms regarding functional and good quality of religious architecture. It is also believed that possibly, even with the recent promulgation of the conciliar constitution, both the parish priests and the local communities did not pay attention to the due importance that should be given to the temples and sacred spaces, a situation that gradually worsens as it penetrates the corners of the Brazilian ground.

It was adopted as object of study the parish church of Santa Maria, located in the district of the same name, belonging to Campos dos Goytacazes, Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil, is an example of a Catholic temple that, under architectural design by a civil engineer, was built in the 1970s, more precisely in the year 1976, having its works completed on November 13 of the same year.

Analyzing the façades and the interior of the temple in question (Fig. 01-02), one notices the lack of concern or design referring to the Catholic tradition, as well as the proper conciliar orientations, established in the previous decade. So it is noticeable that at the time, both the engineer and the parish priest did not pay attention to the fact of the drawing, the beauty, the tradition and the conciliar dictates already in force. On the other hand, the conflicting participation of the community also influenced the final result of the work.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MAIN PARISH OF SANTA MARIA DE CAMPOS DOS GOYTACAZES

During its 40 years of existence, between 1976 and 2016, the church underwent two significant renovations. The first of them was already in the 1980s. On this occasion the temple was completely repainted and the presbytery received a new configuration with the application of plaster boards (Fig. 02). A photo-

graph taken during the execution of the second reformation revealed that the original presbytery did not have all that upper arrangement made of plaster. After the demolition of some parts, traces of blue paint were found, linking the liturgical space to the Virgin Mary's cloak and, on the altarpiece, the inscription: Finally, my immaculate heart will triumph (Fig. 03). According to information gathered through interviews with parishioners, such a blue coating and the Marian inscription, discovered after the demolition of the previous plaster coating, were imposed by the local community.

In view of the facts previously narrated, it is clear that the parish temple was conceived in simplistic molds. This can be justified by a possible inability of the engineer, author of the original project, as well as by devotional practices to the detriment of liturgical decorum. In addition to these factors, one realizes that the parish priest was not properly instructed according to the conciliar dictates, and may also have omitted, or in the last instance, lack even sensitivity to aesthetics. In short, and in accordance with Baxandall's theory when analyzing painting and social experience in Renaissance Italy (Baxandall 1991), what was lacking in the execution of this work was the participation of a principal who knew how to demand the specifications of the order and a builder who had the ability to build. The result was a work devoid of aesthetic sensibility.

## THE MOST RECENT PARISH REFORM

After four decades, on November 13, 2016, the community of the Parish of Santa Maria de Campos held Mass and celebrations to commemorate its fortieth anniversary of the building and also to conclude another renovation. The work began a year earlier, under the leadership of Pastor David Bastos, and most positively surprised the entire local community, not only Catholics, but also all residents of the Santa Maria district, for the success of the difficult church reform effort in the near future deadline. Charismatic, influential and insightful, Pastor David Bastos demonstrated his mastery when he called on the community to embrace the reform project, justified by the celebration of its 40th anniversary and its importance to the local community.



Fig. 01. Santa Maria de Campos, Campos dos Goytacazes (Brazil), 1976-82; façades.  
Fig. 02. Inside.



The work was satisfactorily concluded, the Parish Priest emphasized that the success of the reform was possible due to the commitment of the community and the involvement of neighboring parishes that contributed financial resources. Another important factor was the availability of labor from the community itself, which was duly paid by the Parish. From 5 to 10% of the labor was performed free of charge by local residents (Fig. 04).

The reform of this main parish attracted attention in the neighborhood. The result of the work was well regarded by the local community and even attracted the attention of parishioners from neighboring communities. The short term, but that was enough to make an incisive reform, surprised the inhabitants of the region. The commitment of parishioners, including non-Catholic people and, consequently, not linked to the church, was a surprise. The availability of the local labor force and its engagement in carrying out the work were also surprising.

In relation to the previous reforms, the parish priest at the head of the enterprise carried out in 2016, was more sensitive than the previous ones and managed to manage, with ease and leadership, the imposing trends of the community. Consequently, the result of the work (Fig. 05-07) transformed the liturgical space in accordance with the conciliar determinations, making it more worthy of the sacredness that it houses.

## LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPOSITIONS

It is well known that a group of individuals engaged in a formal or informal institution, be it a company, a residents' association, a sports club, a professional union or even a religious community, will have dynamics concerning the nature of the group. Idiosyncrasies will be normal and even very acceptable to other group members. Within a large society, diffused throughout the earth's surface, there are organized groups involved with themes and causes of their own interests. Not infrequently, one can perceive Catholic Christian communities, in which groups of local people organize themselves in favor of the creed that they confess in common and begin to develop social, political and spiritual dynamics under justification. It is common sense that in every

social group there will be causes, demands, struggles, debates, conflicts and disagreements, as well as cooperation and solidarity for the sake of common cause.

Social groups that form religious communities have common interests in the demands associated with the local church. It is healthy that from within the group comes an individual with a spirit of leadership and who assumes the role of representative of their community. Another important agent is the parish priest who, by the very nature of his priestly office, should be endowed with common sense and aggregating charisma. In this sense, Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott emphasize that values that legitimize charismatic authority define a leader and his mission as being inspired by divine or supernatural powers. A leader is one who heads a social movement and his followers are converted to a new cause. There is a sense of being called to preach the gospel, a sense of rejecting certain inheritances and announcing the future. Devotion to the leader and the conviction that his actions are in keeping with the new ideals adopted are the source of the group's voluntary obedience to the leader's guidance. Charismatic leaders can appear in almost every field of social life, as prophets in religion, as demagogues in politics, and heroes in war (Blau & Scott 1962).

In this reform, community interests were punctual. Regarding the amount of devotional images and what hagiographic representations should be included in the presbytery, the community expressed its intention to place the sculptures of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, Saint Rita and Saint Anthony of Padua, due to the most frequent personal devotions among the faithful from that parish. In order not to displease everyone and to his displeasure, Father David Bastos made the images of personal devotions be installed in side niches, thus dedicating the exclusivity of the retable wall to the Holy Family: the Son, crucified to the center, according to the ecclesiastical dictates; the Mother, St. Mary, as oracle of the parish on the right hand side of the Son; and Saint Joseph, universal patron saint of the Church, on the left, in accordance with the hierarchical disposition established by the Church and in accordance with that established by number 125 of the Conciliar *Sacrosanctum Concilium* Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which says:



Keep the use of exhibiting images in the churches to the worship of the faithful. Be, however, in measured numbers and in proper order, so as not to cause strangeness to the faithful nor to compromise with a less orthodox devotion.

Through dialogue with the community, the parish priest allowed still other sculptures (Fig. 08) to be placed in the baptistery which, according to tradition, must be installed at the entrance of the temple, linking the sacrament of baptism to the door for the other sacraments (Vide 2010, #33). Thus in the presbytery were placed the three altarpieces, according to the guidance of the parish priest. The centered and prominent crucifix, flanked by the sculptures of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, which had already been replaced by the sculpture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is contrary to the conciliar dictates, for the devotional overlap, since a single devotion, in this case, Christ himself, pictured twice in the same altarpiece. Near the main entrance door, six more images were placed, three on each side. On the floor, in front of the altar, a bone fragment was deposited, as a relic of Santa Gema Galgani.

### PASTORS UNAWARE OF ECCLESIASTICAL DETERMINATIONS

Under a closer analysis of the architectural, technical and artistic aspects, the renovation work of the parish of Santa Maria brought the perception that some architecturally important elements for the façade were not considered in the original project. Attention was also drawn to the original internal aspect of the church, which was simply designed, somewhat incompatible with the dignity due to a sacred space. As a result, a question was raised through this research: were the parish priests in the 1970s unaware of ecclesiastical determinations due to the recent promulgation of the Second Vatican Council? In fact, this issue could be the subject of further research because of its seriousness.

Fig. 03. Alessandro de Souza, Santa Maria de Campos, Campos dos Goytacazes (Brazil), 2016; demolitions and internal works.

Fig. 04. Labor.

However, regardless of the inattention related to ecclesiastical determinations, inattention allowed architecture projects that compromised the piety, tradition, catechesis and spirituality conveyed in the facades and other sacred spaces. Parallel to this is a legion of scholars, practitioners, and advocates who preach, and some continue to preach that the dignity and beauty of churches must always be in harmonious dialogue with the Holy Liturgy. Important names like Claudio Pastro and Ivo Porto de Menezes represent the people who militate in favor of the importance of aesthetics combined with the liturgical functions of the Catholic temple. In order to exhort the clergy and also advocating for beauty and good architecture combined with the liturgical functions of a sacred space, Claudio Pastro said that sacred space,

Because it is the place of celebration of the Paschal Mystery, it is above popular divisions, the traditions of the neighborhood and the city. Patron feasts or the patron's place (painting, sculpture ...) should take place in a corner, apart or outside the building. We do not worship the saint or his life, let alone worship a work of art or a piece of gold or silver. Everything converges to the Altar, which is unique, since everything comes from Christ. It is a matter of liturgy, of doctrine, of foundation. Unfortunately, many of the clergy do not know how to celebrate Holy Mass. They confuse Altar with Ambo and Chair or Sedia with faidistroy, or use them interchangeably. The place of celebration (shrine or presbytery) is available at will or at worst, members of the community use and abuse this space. One even places the image of Our Lady on the Altar, sometimes even on the Corporal. There is a clear confusion of values. Missing fundamentals! Many priests say that we must respect the people and their traditions. We ask: shouldn't we first have to respect the Sacred, because it is the Lord's Space? And surely the things of the Lord are best for any people. (Pastro 2010, 293-294)

Possibly many priests and members of the clergy may defend themselves against the claim that parish priests have been or are unaware of ecclesiastical determinations, claiming that the Second Vatican Council and all liturgical reform presented almost

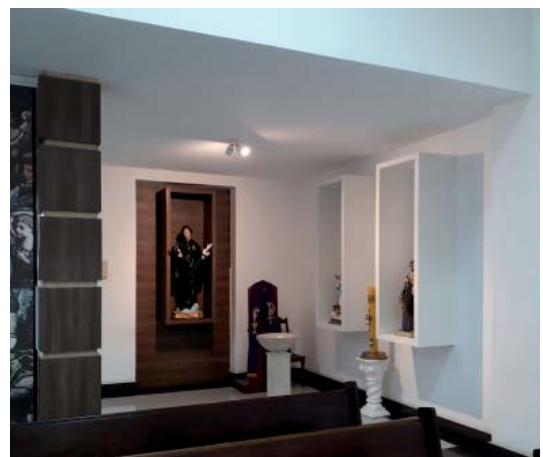


Fig. 05. Alessandro de Souza, Santa Maria de Campos, Campos dos Goytacazes (Brazil), 2016; new main façade.  
Fig. 06. Main façade detail.  
Fig. 07. New presbytery.  
Fig. 08. Chapel with the image of Saint Gema Galgani.

nothing of visual, aesthetic or art parameters. And little has been elucidated about the composition of the physical space delineated by the facades of religious buildings. This can be considered as partially true claim, because when an architect judiciously seeks technical subsidies and ecclesiastical orientations, the content found is healthy to bring to light what the Conciliar Constitution established by revising it.

As soon as possible, together with the liturgical books, as provided in art. 25, the canons and ecclesiastical determinations pertaining to all external things that refer to worship, especially regarding the functional and dignified construction of the sacred buildings, erection and shape of the altars, nobility, disposition and security of the tabernacles, dignity and functionality of the baptistry, convenient arrangement of images, decorations and ornaments. Correct or disappear norms that seem less in accordance with the reform of the Liturgy; maintain and introduce those deemed to be capable of promoting it. (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 128)

And even more,

To be able to cherish and preserve the precious monuments of the Church and to be able to guide the artists in their works, clerics must, during the philosophical and theological course, study the history and evolution of sacred art, as well as principles on which it must be founded. (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 129)

In addition to the conciliar dictates, it is equally salutary to show interested parties the other information published in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal; in the Ordinaries of the Rite of dedication of the Church and the Altar; the Rite of Eucharistic Worship; of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; the Rite of Baptism of children; of the Rite of Penance; in the Introduction to Mass Lectionary and the Code of Canon Law. As the conciliar orientation itself points out, it is up to the principals, members of the clergy and leaders to take responsibility for familiarizing themselves with such additional official documents and information.

## SHORTAGE OF ARCHITECTS FAMILIAR WITH CONCILIAR DICTATES

In a recent survey conducted by CAU/BR — Council of Architecture and Urbanism of Brazil— the number of 154,264 architects and urban planners active throughout the national territory at the end of 2017 was recorded, an increase of 8% over the previous years (Fig. 09). According to data collected by CAU/BR, Brazil, in 2017, had a population of 207.7 million inhabitants, so the average was one architect for every 1,346 inhabitants. The annual growth percentage and the number of professionals are significant, however, there are very few architects dedicated to religious architecture and sacred art. In a population scenario where Catholics are the majority, with built religious heritage and growing numbers converting to Christianity, the demand for church restoration, renovation, enlargement and construction is significant.

For cultural reasons, it is well known that non-Catholic architects, who generally do not master vocabulary, also do not know the documentation generated by the Second Vatican Council. On the other hand, Catholic architects are more likely to be aware of the referred documentation. But still, they may not be satisfactorily acquainted with the conciliar dictates regarding the rules on religious architecture and sacred art.

The academic background of the architect, still in the undergraduate phase is generalist and superficial. For this reason, it is difficult to find knowledgeable architects in this specific vocabulary. In Brazil there are few free courses or specializations that familiarize architects interested in ecclesiastical heritage. Such courses capable of improving professionals for the job market are percentage-small compared to the number of architecture colleges.

The church needs proper architects to design truly worthy projects in accordance with the sacred tradition of the church. When Ivo Porto de Menezes wrote in 1963 about Sacred Architecture, he was through his literary work, militating in favor of the architectural quality of the churches and where he defended his cause by saying:



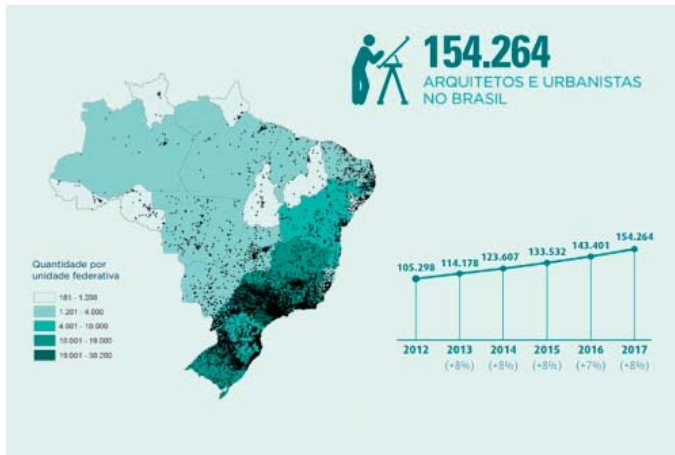


Fig. 09. Architects and urban planners in Brazil (2018).

If we are going to design other buildings, such as theater, cinema or auditoriums, let us hear from expert acoustic technicians. Why aren't we going to hear from you about churches too? Let us remember that a good complete project will depend on the whole building, and this, not only for its beauty, but above all for its comfort or discomfort, may influence the mood of the faithful, leading them to participate or not the liturgy. (Porto de Menezes 1962, 33)

Certainly the path that leads architects to resourcefulness in each specific field is practice and research. Only in this way can these professionals accumulate expertise that will help them in the execution of projects, be they construction, renovation or restoration, building or restoring to the real estate and integrated goods the decorum that is required above them in the sacred.

#### POSITIVE CONDITIONING FACTORS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF CATHOLIC TEMPLES

What was exposed in the last three topics; impositions of the local community; parish priests unaware of ecclesiastical determinations; and the scarcity of architects familiar with liturgical practices and conciliar dictates; indicate that the means to positively transform Catholic temples in this post-Vatican II era are factors such as: non-imposing harmonious communities; parish priests attentive to ecclesiastical determinations; architects familiar with liturgical

practices and conciliar dictates. These factors will always be decisive in ensuring favorable transformations and will promote works of quality.

The Christian community, the parish priest and the architect symbolically form one body

Many regard the religious building and the sacred space merely as objects in their still, static and stable state. This is because by rational understanding, the natural state of architecture is stability and its most powerful quality is the beauty capable of causing commotion. However, many others view it differently, considering religious building from a more dynamic point of view as a process of construction rather symbolic than functional. According to Jean Hani,

for the Christian assembly, the temple represents the Body of Christ, but since the Body of Christ is also the assembly, the latter constitutes the spiritual temple, the Mystical Body of Christ. Finally, the individual soul itself is capable of becoming this temple. (Hani 1998, 49)

This process of symbolic construction intrinsically involves three inseparable agents: the local community that must be harmoniously intertwined with the parish priest, their spiritual leader; the parish priest himself; and the architect. From this point of view it can be said that these three agents must form a Christian assembly, a body capable of assuming

the mission of building, building the habitation of the mystical church, of which the head is Christ. Looking at the shape of the cross and the traditional shape of the temple as a religious building, it is possible to metaphorically consider the local community, the parish priest, and the architect, arranged as parts or members of the same body, who harmoniously and together fulfill the mission for Christ's sake, for the glory of Christ. Since the temple as a religious building does not exist for the glory of the building itself, neither does the Christian community build the temple for the glory of the community, as the parish priest does not evoke to himself the glory of the building of the temple, nor does the architect designs the temple for the glory of their own office, these members, as good and faithful servants of the Lord, must constitute a body capable of designing and building a temple or sacred space exclusively for the glory of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

Elaborating the present communication was a production motivated by the desire to contribute to a greater understanding directly related to Catholic temples and sacred spaces. Discussing aspects of architecture and art in the post-conciliar context is necessary to broaden the horizons internationally, since contemporary religious architectural production has increasingly reached universal territories and fields.

The main results of the research presented in this paper were the identification of conditioning factors that favored the transformation of Catholic temples after Vatican II, especially in the interior regions of Brazil. It was also possible to verify that factors such as ignorance of ecclesiastical norms; impositions of the local community; parish priests unaware of the ecclesiastical determinations related to the reordering of the liturgical space; and the scarcity of experienced architects with liturgical practices remains one of the factors that allow the building of sometimes too simple Catholic temples, and in some cases with dignity and compromised religious meanings.

During the reform of the main parish of Santa Maria de Campos, now taken as a case study, observing its historical progress since its foundation in the

1970s, it was possible to realize that this particular case is a reflection of a reality pertinent to the other parishes. However, it was also possible to see that the harmonious union between communities, parish priests and architects focused on the architectural, artistic and symbolic qualification, resulted in the success of the enterprise. Thus, in order to contribute substantially, it was sought to highlight that it is necessary for the qualification of religious temples, a perfect harmonization between communities that do not have imposing behavior, parish priests attentive to ecclesiastical determinations and architects competent for the craft of arrangement, reordering of religious spaces, taking into consideration the liturgical practices and the conciliar dictates, which jointly act towards the same common goal, which is the Liturgy as anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem and communion of saints.

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## SOURCE OF IMAGES

- Fig. 01-08. Alessandro de Souza Archive.
- Fig. 09. CAU/BR, 2008.