

THE CONCEPTS AND IDENTITY OF THE NEW SERBIAN ORTHODOX ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE  
(1990-2009)

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During the period between 1945 and 1990, in time of the repressive, mono-party communistic system of the former Yugoslavia, the construction of the new church buildings, which should have met demands of the Serbian Orthodox Church, has been systematically obstructed and hindered. Communistic Authorities, widely known for its Atheism, did not show any understanding for needings of millions of Orthodox Christians in the multinational State, expressing at the same time, fear of the social influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Constantly expressing fear of the Serbian national feelings, as well as being afraid of decline, of its own ideological influence, the Communistic Authorities of the former Yugoslavia treated the building of the new churches as a big danger for the system of pseudoegalitarian social relations. On the other hand, thanks to Serbian patriotic emigrants and their traditional warm feelings for their country, construction of the new church buildings was continued in some areas of the former Yugoslavia, but much bigger and more ambitious projects were undertaken in the abroad, especially in the countries with the huge Serbian Diaspora, such as the USA, Canada and Australia.

In the period between two world wars, the Orthodox church architecture was creatively so fruitful, stylistically and artistically very inspirational, but between 1945 and the middle of the 80s of the last century, it has been showing constant and evident stagnation. The time of representative and monumental church temples, because of multi unfavorable social and financial circumstances, has been definitely gone, without visible hope that it might be back some day. At the same time, many experts in the former Yugoslavia, considered church architecture as totally outdated and irrelevant. The lecturing in church architecture, which once used to be an important part of education, at the Faculty of Architecture of the Belgrade University, was abolished. Except for this reason (totalitarian blockade of the mono-party political establishment), another reason that caused stagnation of the church architecture, was a predominance and long reign of the ideology of Architectural Modernism, favored and popularized by the official regime, as a sort of the State Architecture, whose protagonists expressed open and unhidden animosity towards Orthodox church building.

The general condition began to show signs of relaxation during the 1980s of the last century, when ideological and bureaucratic discipline within the State started to decline. Of crucial importance was the death of the long-time dictator Josip Broz Tito (he died in 1980), as well as the evident appearances of political pluralism. Though, the most significant occurrence, which meant the turning point in State policy towards the Serbian Orthodox Church, was the permission to finish the construction of the Saint Sava Temple in Vracar district in the capital of Belgrade. The permission has been given on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1984, after 88 official appeals of the Patriarch German, directed to the State Authorities. Obstructed by decades, the construction of the greatest Orthodox Temple in the whole region became priority and

mission of the exceptional importance. All in all, late post-modernism in the Serbian culture, as same as variety of the historical and regional artistic theories, gave new stimulus to the renewal of the religious conscience and concepts of the Church Architecture. The construction of the Orthodox Temples experienced a new renaissance (at the end of the 80s), thanks to declining of the totalitarian political system, what consequently caused an awakening of the Serbian national conscience, the strengthening of the church social role, and more visible readiness to donate and make foundations for the construction of the church temples. Since then, a few hundreds of Orthodox churches, various in its type and structure, has been built in the whole area of the former Yugoslavia, while at the same time a significant amount of unfinished and devastated churches has been reconstructed. After five decades of systematic negligence, church-building experienced a new rebirth, and became glorified and popularized in media. Moreover, this trend gained new momentum, not only in Serbia, but in other regions of that time Yugoslavia as well.

After years of oppression, the church, its founders and constructors did manage to find their lost dignity, what consequently produced a huge number of specialized architectural bureaus, which on the other hand, brought to light new experts, whose main interest was to explore and further develop sacral architecture. As to that, though it did not develop any original, ideological and theological matrix of the new building style, rather than that, an inspiration was being found in the past-in tradition, church canons, author predilections, taste of clergy and ordinary, every day believers. Architectural historiography began to be much more interested in protagonists of the new Serbian church architecture between 1870 and 1941 - Ivackovic, Ilkic, Zivanovic, Ruvodic, Korunovic, Popovic, Deroko, Samojlov and Androsov. Thanks to huge range of monographies and exhibitions, their creation, inspirational for modern architects, began to be deeply and seriously studied. Of the great importance for scientific revival of that, once neglected historical issue, as well as for clarifying of the essential concepts of the new church architecture, was the meeting titled "Tradition and Modern Serbian Church Architecture" held in Belgrade Museum of Applied Arts (1994). Of special significance for further development of sacral art, was the Exhibition held in the same Museum in 1995, titled "Modern Serbian Orthodox Art", whose author was curator Dusan Milovanovic. During that special event, an official attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch, Mr. Pavle, has been proclaimed. His attitude, was probably strongly influenced by a long-time identity crisis of the Serbian Orthodox Church, that larpurlatism and widely-spread original arbitrariness in church-projecting were not welcome. He stressed an importance of authors modesty and anonymity, and appeal to them to act in a passive and humble way, and to understand and practice religious canons in their professional work and personal life. He also stressed, that it was much better to build churches in accordance with the most famous monuments of the Serbian medieval architecture, such as Gracanica, Kalenic or Lazarica "until the new and for Orthodoxy acceptable, building-style was invented."

Unfortunately, alongside of that for the Serbian Orthodox Church very important and epochal process, in which SOC made huge efforts to compensate its long-time lack of cultural influence, to regain its identity and increase its spatial capacities, in order to make them fitting for needs of ordinary religious people, the bloody Civil War in the area of once multinational State, has been already going on (1991-

1995,1998-1999). In that war conflicted nations tried to achieve their "national" goals by sheer violence and force. It was not only war for territory and political domination (most frequently specified by ethnic cleansing), but it also was "silent" confessional impact, in which conflicted nations desecrated each others religious objects. After that first wave of terrible destruction, never seen before, the whole process, unfortunately, has its continuation in the area of Kosovo and Metohija (1999-2004).

On the other side, structural and morphological concept of the new Serbian church architecture since 1990s, was primarily directed towards regaining of the, for long time neglected, Serbian national identity. That was the reason, for the newly built church temples, to get clearly distinctive national and geopolitical character, visible in silhouettes, but as well in compositions and details. That multi-layered confessional renaissance was not unilateral and haste, as it might look like at first sight, neither it was supported by political authorities in every single area of former State, moreover it was primarily channeled within narrow church, cultural and intellectual circles. Except for defining of its own territories, as well as confirmation of its national rights, church-building during the war time, had significant nationalistic ideological dimension. In terms of its programmatic sense, it represented continuity with the past epochs of the Serbian Architecture, while stylistically in some examples, it showed a big step forward towards contemporarity, in which it was being built. Each church-district was characterized by different concept, which was highly dependent on needs of the clergy, aspirations of church trustees, as well as agile church and monastery curators. Contextualism and tradition have been popularized, very similar to those between two WWs, when hundreds of temples have been built, as well as eclectically expressed medieval Serbian concept. Unlike that prosperous period, more various post-modern historicism was evocatively developed, supported by influx of new materials and technical instruments. In many ways anti-globalistically oriented, new Serbian historicism, together with the monuments of the so called Rascian school (the end of the 12<sup>th</sup>-the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> c.), some examples of the Serbo-Byzantine style of monasteries located primarily in Kosovo and Metohija(the14<sup>th</sup> c.), mostly evoked architectural forms of Moravian school temples (the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c.). In terms of space solutions, the church-building was deeply rooted into Byzantine and Serbian tradition, which did not change a lot regarding its structure (church interior, space around altar, chapels and sometimes bell-tower on the west side),but as to church-service its transformation began by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, what caused its gradual modernization. The main exemplars, as it was previously mentioned, were being found in representative forms of medieval and more modern (between WWs) architecture, while some more ambitious builders and representatives of the church-clergy, expressed disposition towards more liberal concepts of the external architecture, unlike internal, which was strongly under control of traditional canons.

Academy for Art and Conservation, established by the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose lecturers creatively elaborated program for artistic treatment of the new church internal spaces, gave its considerable contribution to the whole process. Enriched by knowledge, leaders of the modern Serbian church architecture - Predrag Ristic, Miladin Lukic, Mihajlo Mitrovic, Branko Pesic, Zoran Bundalo, Ljubica Bosnjak, Ljubisa Folic, Radoslav Prokic, Branislav Mitrovic, Sasa Budjevac, Spasoje

Krunić, Miodrag Mladenović and others, managed to reach morphologically various stream of ecclesiastic architecture, acceptable to church as same as to strict artistic reviewers.

Placed on the highest peak of the Vračar plateau, already noticed Belgrade *St. Sava temple* stands out as a dominant motive in the visual presentation of the city (see Fig. 01). Technically and from the performing point of view it represents a complex megastructure, where as symbolically it has grown in to a spiritual and cultural center of the Serbian nation, and bastion of continuity of the centuries long Byzantine-Serbian building tradition, as well as modern, retrospectively aimed national culture. Having arisen by a fusion of two competitive bidding projects from 1926 (architects *Bogdan Nestorović* and *Aleksandar Deroko*), it represents a synthesis of the Constantinople Saint Sophia and a Serbo-Byzantine style from the 14th century. The construction work, which began in 1985 still continues (the managers are arch. *Branko Pešić* and *Vojislav Milovanović*, now). Pešić has decided to use a reinforced concrete construction, having neutralized the formerly build areas with bricks, covering them with modern, flatly profiled facade areas coated with white marble. Keeping the authentic Serbian-Byzantine form, he introduces a modern treatment of the facade and volume, preserving the essential identity of the Orthodox church.

With the *St. Basil of Ostrog church* (1996-2002) in Bezanijska kosa (a suburb of New Belgrade) a leading author of the older generation *Mihajlo Mitrović* has successfully tried his skill at the area of modern sacral architecture (Fig. 02). He has chosen a simple space solution where a dense plastics of a massive circular church has been emphasized. The church has a shape of a rotunda followed by lower annexes a porch and belfry on the west and a trefoil altar apse on the east side. The centrally performed circular area is unbounded by supportive elements. Above the widely spread niche of the decorative portal, in a slightly forward position, there is a major compositionally-decorative motif- a one legged Greek cross in oculus. Although a daily criticism has found fault with a proportional subordination of the rotunda's dome shaped extension to the structure of a basic volume, as well as giving too much accent to detail, there is a realized multi layer dialogue with the few, but effective circular churches built in Belgrade and Sarajevo between the two World Wars, as well as those on the east Adriatic coast built in the Middle Ages.

*St. Apostle Lucas Church* built in the Film Town settlement in the outskirts of Belgrade (1995-2003; Fig. 03), by a conservationist and architect *Miladin Lukić*, the winner of a great competition of experts, represents a unique example of the Raska School Style, the oldest and essentially fundamental for the complete development of the Serbian Middle Age church construction. In its space concept, exterior treatment, general composition and powerful silhouette, the church evokes the whole epoch of the Rascian Style group of the ancient monuments, especially the most distinguished ones from the 13th century, like the monastery churches in Zica, Sopocani and Gradac, characteristic by its unique Roman-Byzantine morphological synthesis. A recognizable Middle Age pattern, evocatively and associatively emphasized, has been successfully added onto by the original composition solution and effective details. The whole of it hasn't been eclectically planned, because the original elements were prestylized and transformed by the language of the postmodern architecture at the end of the 20th century. A longitudinal contour of the mononave and monodome church

has been effectively integrated in the corpus of the high belfry on the west side-compatible in style to the basic entirety, visually made lighter with the open lighthouse. Traditional significance of the head dome over naos has been preserved, despite the emphasizing of the lower small domes and with gable pointed walls of the lateral annexes, which effectively cuts through the pseudo-three nave shape of the church's basic mass (Fig. 04). Inspired by the Sopocani pseudo-basilica silhouette of the head corpus, as well as the figure of a tall belfry and arch segment that connects them, the author has formed noticeably new, transposed shapes. By combining the stylized cross-shaped and semicircular openings, he has effectively revived the facades of the traditional and closed church.

Built in smaller size than it had been planned, with partially realized urban solution, the church in the Film Town settlement has significantly aroused deviation from the set compositional rules, in favor of free individually colored approach. Great conservationist experience of its architect, together with his erudite knowledge of the ancient standards, have enabled a concise work of a great, but incomplete evocative capacity characteristic for its unique artistic purity, visual clarity and powerful expressionism, without an equal in the contemporary Serbian architecture.

A historical significance of *St. Demetrius Church in New Belgrade* (built in 1998-2001; Fig. 05) is seen in the fact that it is the first to have been constructed in a modernistically consistent plan of an architecturally-urban entirety, famous for numerous blocks of flats, administrative, solicitous and business structures. The building has followed a bidding with several original solutions. The work of an architect Nebojsa Popovic was chosen, being considered desirable from the functional view and completing the environmental entirety. Its centrally planned space concept, emphasized by its facade with blocks, has no respectable rival in the modern Serbian architecture. The object represents a plastic segmented, sharply divided, geometrical entirety with distinctly rustic smooth facades. With the simplified composition of modern-shaped cubist masses, centrally grouped and pyramid-graded, finished with ``Serbian`` domes of the church and belfry, the church has almost fitted into a modern urban surroundings of New Belgrade, whose central zone was planned according to the administrative center of Brasilia at the end of the sixth decade of the 20th century. Because of the respect for the traditional orientation of the altar to the east, it was impossible to enable direct approach to its head entrance from the main road, which somehow lessened its significance in its urban surroundings. Likewise, too powerful a contrast between modern and traditional forms, noticeable in the church's silhouette and plastic presentation, additionally reduces its, mainly functional quality.

Already established as a builder of a number of churches in Serbian diaspora and homecountry, during the communist rule Yugoslavia, architect *Predrag Ristic* has freely developed his ventures since 1990. Very enthusiastically he joined the new courses of the sacral architecture, standing as its leader and an expert in the old standards and techniques. He has developed a literal evocative historicism, desirable for the traditionalists, but in many segments acceptable for the public interested in innovation. Individually colored, deeply rooted in Serbo-Byzantine tradition, his style is geopolitically noticeably national. Apart from his monumental town churches (Podgorica, Ub, Trebinje, Krnjaca, Apatin), he built a number of chap-

els and parish homes in the last twenty years. During the Civil War, 14 of his churches were destroyed in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the *Church of Christ's Assumption in Ub* (Fig. 06) Ristic insists on the literal reminiscence of the whole Serbian-Byzantium style in the 14th century architecture, combining the elements of most representative monuments of his, built in Kosovo and Metohija. The ground plan was made according to the five domed three nave space of the monastery church of the Holy Archangels near Prizren (1343-1352) with the inscribed developed flat-legged cross and whose founder was the Serbian Emperor Dusan. Author's ideal reconstruction of the torn down Dusan's mausoleum, which he advocated for years in expert circles, served as a structural - morphological foundation of the church in Ub. Ristic also adds a two - floor belfry above the nártex according to the west part of the five nave and five domed church of the Ljeviska Mother of God in Prizren (from 1306-1310). This enabled the additional space in the interior of the nártex for one lateral annex on the southern side, above nártex the space for the choir gallery, which opens towards the naos in the interior. The evocation of Serbo-Byzantine style prevails in the facades, whereas the church has been completely built in accordance with the modern techniques. It has been completely cast in the reinforced concrete, outside coated with a deposit of crystalline calcium carbonate and decorative bricks with colorful dance of decorative forms managed by combination of these two materials. The dome was made of two layers and two reinforced concrete sectors, placed on the tambour and joined.

The *Holy Archangel Michael's Church in Jabucje* (from the last decade of 20th cent.), stands out in the sacral opus of the architect *Zoran Bundalo* and represents a complex, postmodern historical evocation of all schools of Serbian Middle Age architecture (Fig. 07). It is unusual for its two - belfry silhouette of its front corpus, which corresponds to the pyramid layer structure of the church's central body, whose massive gable walls have been perforated with the effective new - Morava's Style rosettes.

As an architect and interpreter of the ancient architecture, *Ljubisa Folic* also tries to modernize the established concepts of the traditional Serbian architecture in his work (churches in Zarkovo, Piskote, Zapska, Near Pozega and Leposavic in Serbia, and Ljubinje in the Republic of Srpska). By applying new materials, techniques and structures, he has succeeded in it on a number of buildings, developing a more literal evocative historicism, founded on the original study of the spherical and arch elements. Some of his monumental churches, built in Kosovo and Metohija, have been systematically demolished by the Albanian extremists. Thus, for example in the place where the Church of Holy Trinity in Djakovica (Fig. 08) had been built (1999), after years of total destroying, there is a park today.

With the *Chapel in Bujanj* (2002-2003; Fig. 09) above Nis, built as a part of the existing memorial center, the architect *Sasa Budjevac* has initiated a radically de-historized course of the sacral architecture in Serbia. With the abstract construction in the shape of a glass cube, he established a plastic language of meta-form, enriched by a distinguished, but simplified Christian symbolism. His open, non-hierarchy structure, totally distanced from any kind of Middle Age patterns, has been perforated with the openings in the shape of a cross, creating a spiritual con-

templation milieu, short of a didactic narration and historical imposing reduced to a sign in its identity.

The most significant and distinguished active Serbian architect in the last two decades *Branislav Mitrovic*, with his small church in Stipina near Knjaževac (2003-2005, eastern Serbia) has successfully joined the courses of new sacral architecture (Fig. 10). As well as in different fields of profane architecture he has acquired a unique individual expression, moving ahead of time and taste of his surroundings, for which he has been awarded with high expert recognition. Compositionally compact, small longitudinal church, neomodernistically planned (the interior, lateral and altar facades) is characterized by a formal purity, simplicity and effective symbolism of a distinguished cross construction in the front. An impression of spirituality and not intrusive modesty of this church, above all, comes from the combination of the abstract and expressive forms. As a result of this innovative approach, we shall wait for the further ambitious and liberal attempts.

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Fig. 01



Fig. 02



Fig. 03



Fig. 04

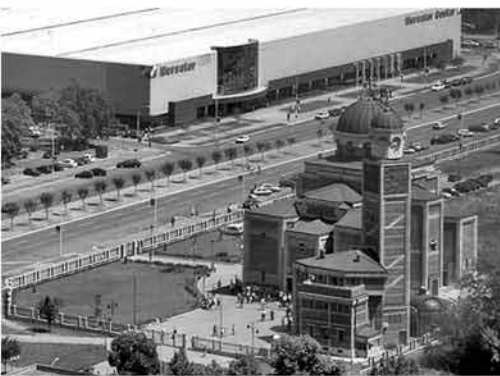


Fig. 05



Fig. 06



Fig. 07



The Cathedral before complete destruction



The church after destruction

Fig. 08

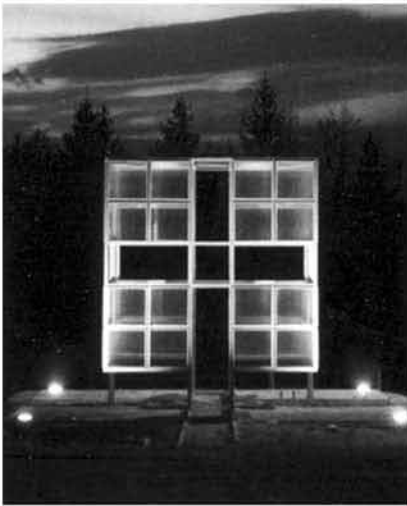


Fig. 09



Fig. 10