

0. INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that today's temples, just like those created throughout the various historical times, should provide a response to the specific persons it tries to serve, to their experience of faith and to the expression of the communion with God and with people. Focusing on nowadays, the temple is determined from some specific theological concepts and categories serving as its bases. Therefore, we intend to explain, reflect upon and relate various aspects resulting from the analysis and study of what constitutes the identity of contemporary religious architecture from the theological principles behind it and supporting it.

1. RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AS A THEOLOGICAL PLACE

Catholic temples, specifically, contemporary temples, exist for a Christian community. This entails the consideration of this kind of architecture as a theological place, given that it exists and it is expressed simultaneously from a double Christological and ecclesiastic foundation which are mutually related, by virtue of Jesus Christ and his body, i.e., the Church. This entails that Catholic temples exist because the Church (ecclesiology) gathers so as to celebrate Christ's mysteries (Christology). Therefore, we may state that there are two theological realities basing the existence of that architecture: Christology and ecclesiology.

Having made this foundation, we may consider that religious architecture is manifested by means of theology in their concept of people and the Church, as well as their way of comprehending God. Therefore, we affirm that there is a link between theology and religious architecture, although this reality has not always been so. In fact, we know that, either due to a lack of freedom of artists and architects or due to the Church's incapability to respond to its times, theology and its artistic representations have not walked hand in hand at certain points in time. That is the reason why we must affirm that both disciplines need to relate to each other so that there is an effective complementary relation between them.

Thus, the statement that artistic and architectural works must be theologically founded leads us to explain the double theological foundation of contemporary religious architecture in Christology and ecclesiology.

2. CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The Christian God is Father, Son and Holy Ghost. He is Triune and was revealed in Jesus Christ as a personal God and the mystery of communion. God's essence is the communion by which the Father generates the love for the Son and with the Son is the Holy Ghost delivered. Based on this communion ontology, people are called to the perfect communion with their creator, just as the Church is: essentially the mystery

of the communion between people with and for Jesus Christ by virtue of the Holy Ghost¹.

The Access by the Church and by people to the being of God comes from God's self-revelation to people by means of Jesus Christ. God talks about himself and manifests himself. From this perspective, God also manifests himself in the beauty created by people as a reflection and anticipation of the beauty of that which was made by God. That is why the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who claimed that beauty is one of the highest forms in which God reveals himself, has pointed out that he is revealed in a kind of beauty which is equally good and truth, which is God's glory in Christ. Thus, we may state that Christ is God's main «work of art»².

Contemporary religious architecture is not alien to beauty, moreover, its calling is being the scope of God's beauty. As already mentioned, temples throughout history, including contemporary ones, have been arranged as the «conjunction of people's space and divinity's space, the space of Heaven and Earth. In the case of Christianity, Jesus Christ was precisely that conjunction, that threshold where men start to be God and God starts to be men. The temple tries to be precisely that spatial representation of Jesus Christ, being simultaneously man and God»³.

Therefore, the actual temple of God is not spatial for Christians, but personal: Jesus Christ, God's Son. Because of his humanity and embodiment, he is the real temple of God. When he is worshipped, God is worshipped. His body is the final place of worship, that is why Jerusalem's temple was abolished⁴. Now we may understand John's Gospel excerpt (cf. Jn 2, 14-22), where the text explains in verse 21: «But he was talking about the temple of his body». Jesus' words were understood later on, in the light of his resurrection, when his disciples comprehended that Jesus himself was the new and actual temple of the new people of God, by virtue of his humanity, specifically, of his corporality⁵.

The meaning scope of Jewish religion was in Jesus' times, and still remains, one God, one people of God, one place for his presence. However, with Jesus Christ, «Jerusalem's temple should give way to the new temple, which is no longer a physical place, not even a building gifted with a unique presence of God, but one Man, or, more accurately, the humanity of the God turned into man, Jesus Christ the Man»⁶. The replacement of Jerusalem's temple with Jesus Christ himself is not deprecating

¹ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* about ecumenism, 2.

² Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, «Verbum Caro», *Cristiandad*, Madrid, 2001; p. 103-135. See in the same line Maria Antonietta Crippa, «Renovação do concilio Vaticano II, suas consequências para arquitectura e para a arte», en VVAA, «Novas igrejas de vários tempos», Rey dos Livros, Lisboa, 1998; p. 33.

³ Jesús María Aparicio Guisado, «Iglesia en Andalucía»; lecture in the series of conferences organized by the Foundation Félix Granda «La arquitectura sacra en el siglo XXI. Diálogo-creación-finalidad» (Alcalá de Henares, 15-17 November 2001); unpublished.

⁴ Cf. Yves-Maria Congar, «El misterio del templo», Estela, Barcelona, 1967; p. 156-162.

⁵ Cf. *Ibidem.*; p. 162-174.

⁶ Pedro Rodríguez García, «¿Qué es propiamente un templo católico», en VVAA, «Templo cristiano y espacio litúrgico», Fundación Félix Granda, Madrid, 2003; p. 23.

towards the temple, but overcoming it⁷. In God's plans, it is humankind itself in the Verb's person who is the new temple of God. This is thanks to the mystery of incarnation. According to the prologue to Saint John's Gospel (cf. Jn 1, 14), Christ dwelt among us, he set up his tent in the midst of men. This image is taken from the experience of God's people in the desert, who continuously mounted and collected their tents, and it explains our comprehension of contemporary temples⁸. God comes to dwell among people and, for that purpose, he sends his son to live the life of men. Thus, God does not walk into human history in a spiritualistic way, but from human wholeness, from the most tangible part, his own embodiment, his becoming a man. The verb turned into a man, Jesus, and he identified himself with God's definitive abode among men⁹.

3. ECCLESIOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Having focused on the study of Christ as the real temple of God, let us now analyze the temple integrated by the Christian community. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle wrote: (1Cor 3,16): «you are the building of God». Christ appears in this text as the foundations of the building in which the construction raises, made of «living stones». Therefore, the building is founded upon Christ and the Christians rise on him. The same thing is narrated in 1Cor 3,9-11, as well as in 1Pe 2,4-5, where Peter is the architect of the new God's people built in human history. 2Cor 6,16 repeats the idea that the Christians are the temple of the living God.

As we have mentioned in the previous section that Jesus was God's temple, now we state that the temple remains the same body of Jesus, though now that body is integrated by the Christians. The step from one statement to the next one comes from Jn 12,32: «And I, if I be lifted up from the Earth, will draw every man unto me». Christ's exalted and glorious body has an attractive capacity, that of «magnetizing» humanity towards God, turning it into his body. The salvation granted by Jesus Christ transforms the baptized person, so that they belong to the Church, i.e., to Christ's body¹⁰. Being and living as Christians turns people into the real temple of God.

According to that, God's temple is not linked to any place, but it is everywhere, wherever the Christians are, and the type of cult sought by God is one in spirit and truth. A proof of that lies in the Samaritan's text of the Gospel (cf. Jn 4, 19-24), where Jesus himself asks for worshipping God in spirit and truth. This worship cannot be locked up in one place, but should happen everywhere because Christ, who is the real temple, makes us parts of his body, thus making us take part in his own adoration, so that we worship the Father together with him.

Given that the temple was in the various religions, and more specifically in Ju-

⁷ Jesus did not despise the temple. We read it in Lc 2, 40-52, telling the episode where he stayed at the temple listening to the masters of Law or when he says about the temple: «my Father's house» or «my house is a house of prayer», in Mt 21, 13.

⁸ Cf. Pedro Rodríguez García, «¿Qué es propiamente un templo católico», op. cit.; p. 25.

⁹ Cf. CIC §586.

¹⁰ Cf. Pedro Rodríguez García, «¿Qué es propiamente un templo católico», op. cit.; p. 28.

daism, the place of God's presence and people's adoration, the place of God's worship in the New Testament is a person, Jesus Christ. However, the temple is also made of every Christian, given that he or she is accepted by Christ and made part of his body, thus constituting the Church. So, each and every event in History is a place for God's worship. Therefore, the temple is everywhere.

Having settled these foundations, we may now clear the field of contemporary temples, given that, as already mentioned, while the Church wanders through History, it builds places for community gathering and for celebrating the mysteries of faith. This does not tumble down the statement that the temple is everywhere, but, precisely because of that, the Church has always required some spaces for that purpose. Some visible sacred buildings are needed, acting as unique signs of the pilgrim Church on Earth and earthly image of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Since they are built as constructions devoted permanently and exclusively to gather God's people in order to celebrate the sacred mysteries, dedicating them to the Lord was deemed fit. In particular, it is at Catholic temples where the community can find God, the places where the Church grows as the mystical body, because the temple is the significant symbol of Christ's body where the union between God and his people is anticipated until the end of times. The temple will only be Christ himself in the Church's scatological culmination¹¹. All of these elements must be born in mind when building a temple, so that it appears as a really beautiful, meaningful building, a supernaturally functional one¹².

4. APPROACH TO THE IDENTITY OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

The specificity of contemporary religious architecture lies in the characteristics granted to this kind of architecture by contemporary times. Certainly, the mark of times, together with the various theological concepts, are the areas determining the different concepts of liturgical architecture.

Nevertheless, there are other determining factors, apart from the temporal and theological ones, when talking specifically about contemporary religious architecture. Among many others, we highlight the following ones: the individual anthropological self-concept, the community sense of assembly and the degree of intersubjective relationship, the referential and iconic capacity of the church with regard to the parish, its contextual location in the environment, the mere materiality of the temple, the social-economic circumstances available at the time of construction, the comprehension of architecture itself, the tension between functionality and symbolism of the temple, the architectural form of expression in particular shapes and volumes, etc. The combination of all these elements, which are universal in any time, results in a particular religious architectural typology.

Undoubtedly, the most relevant factors giving rise to the appearance and consolidation of the contemporary religious typology are mainly the architectural evolution and the theological renovation. Apart from having an almost simultaneous origin, they have developed in parallel and have constantly influenced each other.

¹¹ Cf. Yves-Maria Congar, «El misterio del templo», op. cit.; p. 254.

¹² Cf. Angel Sancho Campo, «Editorial», *Ars Sacra* 7 (1998); p. 3.

If we now focus on the development experienced by architecture in the 20th century, we will notice that a new and more rational mentality has arisen, together with the experimentation and achievement of some new and more versatile materials, having greater constructive possibilities, apart from the key influence of Central-European trends. All of this coincided in Spain with a generation of young architects who broke with the tradition and the education received and who fully embraced these new trends, in the face of the trite monumentalism and typical Castilian style frequent during Franco's regime. A new projection, following a well-ordered program and a proper re-structuring of spaces were linked to the suggestion of the rational principles of simplicity and sincerity of materials and shapes. Mies van der Rohe's famous saying that «less is more» soon expanded to the whole architectural scenario and was put into practice. This trend towards architectural essentials and formal authenticity fitted perfectly the concreteness resulting from the renovation of theological thinking.

Certainly, Patristic studies blossomed, as well as Bible ones; the innovative liturgical movement established itself on purely theological bases, as a truly Christ centric spirituality was fostered¹³. However, all of this is based on a realization of the truly nuclear phenomenon of theological renovation, from which a new ecclesiology followed. In the past, there was a strongly social church-centric approach, while now the Church finds itself in its deepest mysterious roots, branching out into God's salvation plan. The fundamental equality among all Christians by virtue of baptism and their call to sanctity turned the categories of God's people and communion into a deep ecclesiological alternative. The Bishops' collegiality, the relevance of local churches and the centrality of sacrology opened new expectations for Christians¹⁴.

Particular realizations followed for the new religious architecture from those theological keys¹⁵. The central role of Christ as theological basis of contemporary religious architecture is eloquently exemplified in the centralized plan¹⁶, that is, in the centrality of the altar. Johannes van Acken developed in his theological discourse in the early 20th century the prominent relevance of Christ in temples, which is best reflected, according to him, in the centralized plan¹⁷. The circular arrangement of the faithful around the altar wonderfully highlights the already mentioned Christ-centric approach. It is not just about building a circular temple plan, but the key lies in the concentric arrangement of the believers, focusing

¹³ Cf. Eloy Bueno de la Fuente, «Eclesiología», BAC, Madrid, 1998; p. 15.

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*; p. 16.

¹⁵ It must be remarked that this deep and necessary link should exist between both realities. Undoubtedly, a good applied theology is capable of giving rise to a good religious architecture, as we have seen. Therefore, we may state that a missing link between them means «there is a lack of modern culture in Catholic religion; until it exists, there is no real desire for a new and true religious architecture, neither in the clergy nor in people» (Esteban Fernández Cobián, «Redescubriendo el templo», *Arquitectos* 163 (2002); p. 51).

¹⁶ Paloma Gil Giménez widely discusses the topic of the Christ-centric temple on Dominikus Böhm in her book «El templo del siglo XX» (Ediciones del Serbal, Barcelona 1999). She also studies in depth the variations of the central space, as well as some alternatives to the axial direction of contemporary temples (cf. págs. 74-80, 85-91 y 120-125).

¹⁷ Johannes Van Acken, «Christozentrische Kirchenkunst. Ein Entwurf zum liturgischen Gesamtkunstwerk», Theben, Gladbeck 1923.

their eyes on the altar and other liturgical foci: the pulpit and the see. The Christological foundation is thus highlighted in religious architecture.

It was equally necessary to show architecturally the ministerial nature of Christians. The temple is distributed according to specific spaces, materializing the hierarchy of spaces and having the participation of the whole assembly as the main goal. There is a trend towards the liturgical functionality of the temple, without disregarding the importance of symbolism. Beauty is not the opposite of sobriety or simplicity in the comprehension of space and order; it is rather that they make beauty possible¹⁸. Nobility, decorum, simplicity, truth and authenticity are complementary with aesthetics, in order to make it possible to resort to suggestion as the main artistic principle¹⁹. «The expression of certain religious spiritual values (...) cannot be complex and (...) the language used by the architect must be fundamentally based on those forms required to serve those functions»²⁰.

Based on those principles, the means to foster the participation of the faithful in the mystery and the experience of sensitive and beautiful spaces were achieved in the mid 20th century, in order to facilitate their feeling of the Triune God. This is how the widely echoed doubt about whether the new architecture responded and still responds to today's needs was solved²¹. The recurring question of whether the new churches were profane or Protestant²² showed a hesitation with regard to the new shapes and what would come next²³. Miguel Fisac acknowledged that certain religious

¹⁸ In this regard, architect Javier Carvajal said the following: «Faced with the stifling show of consumerism, insulting wealth and Money, which are offered as the only value that is allegedly accepted, the Christians, in our architecture and art, should deal with sobriety and simplicity. These are not the opposite of the beauty that people need, as proven by their overwhelming presence in God's work addressed only to people» (Eduardo Delgado Orusco, «Porque vivir es difícil. Conversaciones con Javier Carvajal Ferrer», Universidad Camilo José Cela, Madrid, 2002; p. 79).

¹⁹ «There is a certain simplicity which expresses maturity (...) The highest tension of spirit, the highest purification, the highest maturity generate authentic simplicity» (Joseph Ratzinger, «La festa della fede», Jaca Book, Milán, 1983; p. 98). See also an implementation of this in Josep Maria Masramón de Ventós, «Art litúrgic», en VVAA, «Art Sacré», Diputació Provincial de Girona y COACB, Girona, 1965; p. 58-67.

²⁰ Gerardo Cuadra Rodríguez, «La experiencia de la Liturgia en el artista», in José María Fernández Catón (coord.), «Arte Sacro y Concilio Vaticano II» (Papers and communications of the II Semana Nacional de Arte Sacro), Junta Nacional Asesora de Arte Sacro y Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, León, 1965; p. 392.

²¹ Javier Carvajal answered that question with the following words: «Do not repeat before me that modern art is no good for serving God, (...) [that] it is no good for expressing the meeting of our times through emotion with the Lord of times (...) because this is neither intelligent nor truthful or Christian» (Eduardo Delgado Orusco, «Porque vivir es difícil», op. cit.; p. 71-72). He also states that only sacred contemporary architecture may convey the mystery, provided that it bears in mind the service will to the addressee of architecture, people. Cf. Ignacio Vicens Hualde y Rafael Llano Sánchez, «La arquitectura debe recuperar el misterio», Nueva Revista 58 (1998); p. 19. See also the «Editorial» corresponding to Arquitectura 147 (1971); p. 1.

²² This question was explicitly picked up and answered by two of the main researchers in the topic, from theoretical reflection to practice, that is: Arsenio Fernandez Arenas, «Iglesias nuevas en España», La Polígrafa, Barcelona, 1963; p. 103-105 y Juan Plazaola Artola, «El arte sacro actual», BAC, Madrid, 1965; p. 284-289.

²³ The new concerns, such as the desire for a community, the desire for truth and authenticity, the move from shallowness to the essential, the nostalgia of silence and peace, etc., highlighted

architecture trends responded to different concepts about religious reality, and he put forward what he deemed to be the most appropriate. According to that architect, one position would entail «recovering the supernatural sense of Christian life with the vision of our current sense of life. This is a consequence of re-reading the Gospel and the liturgy ...). When this position is architecturally expressed (not being an aesthetic but a deeply and truly religious position), then a totally different architecture arises: it is neither old nor modern, but new; a church is not a place with an altarpiece and an altar, but a space where the faithful gather for prayer, in order to celebrate the Holy Mass, or to worship the Eucharist (...). A church which is conceived that way requires piety, not just aesthetic property»²⁴. Fisac ends up by saying that contemporary churches should care for cleanliness and simplicity so as to get closer to God. This can either be effectively materialized or simply remain a failed attempt.

The consideration of the various achievements of contemporary religious architecture created in the last 50 years end up by proving effectively that, both their conception as liturgical spaces and their materiality as contemporary buildings are rooted in an effective sociological, artistic, historical and, obviously, architectural issue. However, they are basically supported by a theological foundation which radically bases them and constitutes their identity.

the already mentioned new principles. Cf. Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Conference of Fulda-Germany, «Directrices para la construcción de iglesias según el espíritu de la Liturgia Romana», en Juan Plazaola Artola, «El arte sacro actual», op. cit.; p. 570. See also Loc. cit.; p. 298, and those explained in José Manuel de Aguilar Otermín, «Esquema de una conferencia en el ciclo de arte sacro palabra-altar-eucaristía-penitencia», en VVAA, «Art Sacré», Diputación Provincial de Gerona y COACB, Gerona, 1965; p. 46-56.

²⁴ Miguel Fisac Serna, «El futuro de la arquitectura religiosa», Seminarios 16 (1962); p. 102.