

L'EDIFICIO DI CULTO E GLI ARTISTI
BILANCI E PROSPETTIVE
A 25 anni dal primo Giubileo degli Artisti (2000-2025)

Pontificia Università Gregoriana•Pontificia Università della Santa
Croce

Thursday, 13 February – Friday, 14 February 2025

Marco BENINI

Theologische Fakultät Trier

Liturgy, Assembly and Space in Buildings for Worship from 2000 to 2025

Abstract

Starting from a theological reflection on the relationship between assembly, liturgy and space, we seek criteria for church spaces. We design buildings but then they themselves shape us!

The church building must be suitable for the liturgy. To this end, the principal liturgical spaces are recalled, with their requirements and possibilities, illustrated with modern churches from an international selection, and their liturgical-theological significance is explained: the altar, in its relationship with the ambo, shows the relationship between the Word and the Eucharist. The ambo is the place of the risen Christ speaking to his people (SC 7; the ambo of San Giovanni Rotondo 2004). One wonders how it is possible to design a place of honor for the Sacred Scriptures (outside of liturgical celebration) without removing the centrality of the tabernacle (cf. *Verbum Domini* 68). Even the baptismal font can be placed in various points, either at the entrance (Westerville, Ohio 2005) or visible at the front of the church (Singapore, St Mary of the Angels 2004). The entrance procession, the proclamation of the Gospel, the offertory and communion are not simply functional, but symbolic.

Furthermore, the church building must be suited to the congregation, so as to make visible the unity of the people of God around Christ (the altar as the center) in its hierarchical constitution (the priest's seat) and with the liturgical ministers (the choir etc.). Some churches consciously take up the culture and environment of the place (Munyonyo Martyrs' Shrine, Uganda 2016; St. Marien, Wangerland-Schilling 2012), while others use contrast to accentuate the sacredness of the building (Hartland, WS, USA, 2024).

The recently built churches are different from the new buildings of the second half of the 20th century. One emerging trend is that the church building (influenced by the liturgical movement) was seen more as a secondary and functional space that came to life and color only through the assembly gathered for the liturgy (e.g. gray concrete churches). Today's churches instead use more of an aesthetic that wants to open towards God and their beauty wants to lead to transcendence even outside of the celebration, as shown by the two documents on church construction in the United States (1978 / 2000). Nowadays it is not

primarily the innovative liturgical arrangements (ellipses, arrangement in the sanctuary, etc.), but the innovative architectural forms or the revival of classical forms that seem to serve this purpose. The importance of beauty corresponds to the letter of John Paul II to artists (1999).

Esteban FERNÁNDEZ-COBIÁN

Universidade da Coruña

Catholic Religious Architecture 2000-2025: An Assessment

Abstract

In these last twenty-five years, we have witnessed an acceleration of history. Everything happens at a great speed and it seems the world has become small. Only the Christian atmosphere, during this period there have been three popes, each one with his own particularities, his own scientific interests and unique foci. In the domain of architecture, the exponential growth of information media has contributed to the change construction activity into a global question, where ideas, designs, and buildings are dispersed instantly, without time for assimilation. However, architecture is a slow activity and religious activity is even slower.

A quarter century is enough time to pause and consider: it is necessary to group, discard, link ideas, sever ties, effect a serene exercise in reflection. How is catholic architecture in the twenty-first century? What ideas have pervaded? What territories have been fertile in accomplishments? What buildings can be considered as exemplary? Are paradigms of other periods still valid or are there new models?

While other colleagues will speak of this same theme from differing angles (community, city, liturgy or design), in this paper I will limit myself to architecture understood as the art of building habitable spaces, proceeding in a series of themes that have given shape to the recent spaces dedicated to divine worship. Supporting ourselves on the platforms of global understanding (ArchDaily, Dezeen, Arquitectura Viva, etc.), academic forums for discussion (ACSForum, CIARC), specific awards, the professional architects in religious architecture in countries like Brazil, the Philippines, or South Korea, we will follow the flowering of religious architecture in places what have yet been distant from academic scrutiny, like the renaissance of histrionic architecture in Eastern Europe or the overabundance of churches in Western Europe.

Andrea LONGHI

Politecnico di Torino

Ecclesial Spaces, Community and Urban Dimension, 2000-2025: Assessments

Abstract

The paper proposes some reflections on how research on the theme of designing churches and parish complexes fits into a context of global urbanization, in which the urban dimension has now surpassed, at the beginning of the new millennium, the historicized categories of city, center and periphery.

After a summary of some contextual scenarios useful for framing the theme (ecclesial and geopolitical dynamics, scientific debate on the relationship between urban phenomena and religious phenomena), some consolidated approaches to the church project as an urban project are recalled (rupture or linkage?) and some compositional themes that relate the space of worship, the public space and the urban structures.

Finally, some themes of architectural and urban research are listed, begun in this first quarter century and in the process of development and deepening, referring to different contexts of urbanization and relationships between public space and space of worship (anonymous suburbs, marginal peripheries, depopulated historical centers, etc.), also in a consideration of urban structures and urban landscapes as places of encounter and intertwining between religions.

Maria Vittoria MARINI CLARELLI

Ministero della Cultura

The Artist and Sacred Space, 2000-2025: Assessments and Perspectives

Abstract

This contribution analyzes the relationship between artists and sacred space over the last twenty-five years, distinguishing works created in contemporary architecture from those in historical architecture. Artists specialized exclusively in sacred art have not been considered in order to focus attention on contemporary languages, highlighting three main challenges: the approach to iconography and liturgy in a historical phase where Christianity is no longer an essential part of culture; the often-difficult collaboration with architects and/or curators of cultural patrimony; the ability to evoke the sacred and make the message comprehensible. After providing an anthology of artistic interventions that best allow us to grasp the terms of today's debate, some new perspectives are indicated. Many artists, without renouncing their roots in the present, are rediscovering the figure and/or the symbol, history, are questioning the transcendent and are seeking a new balance between expression and techniques, also in light of the influence of non-Western cultures and the urgency of major themes of global relevance.

Fernando LÓPEZ ARIAS

Pontificia Università della Santa
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From Jubilee to Jubilee, 2000-2025: The New Churches of Rome Put to the Test of Time

Abstract

This research focuses on the evolution of sacred architecture in the Diocese of Rome, starting from the design plan developed for the Holy Year of 2000 up to the present. The study examines a representative sample of nine churches built in the last 25 years, evaluating aspects such as architecture, urban integration, liturgical space, and iconography. Special attention is given to the "test of time," that is, how communities have experienced and transformed these spaces over the years. The research unfolds in three successive phases: description, analysis, and interpretation.

The churches under consideration include:

1. **Dio Padre Misericordioso** (1998-2003) – Richard Meier
2. **Santa Faustina Kowalska** (1999-2002) – Bruno Panieri, Studio Nemesi
3. **San Francesco di Sales** (2003-2005) – Lucrezio Carbonara, Paolo Dattero, Alfredo Re
4. **Santo Volto di Gesù** (2003-2006) – Piero Sartogo, Nathalie Grenon
5. **Santa Maria delle Grazie** (2007-2010) – Garofalo Miura
6. **San Pio da Pietrelcina** (2007-2010) – Anselmi e Associati
7. **San Corbiniano** (2009-2011) – Umberto Riva
8. **San Carlo Borromeo** (2008-2010) – Monestiroli Associati, Carlo Maciachini
9. **Santa Teresa di Calcutta** (2014-2016) – Marco Petreschi

This study aims to provide critical tools useful for ecclesial design, transforming churches into meaningful and vital spaces for contemporary communities. In this way, it will contribute to promoting a new phase of architectural and liturgical design, capable of meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of our time.

Pietro ZANDER

Fabbrica di San Pietro in Vaticano

Contemporary art interventions in Saint Peter at the Vatican

Abstract

The iconography of Saint Peter did not emerge from a unified project but developed over the centuries. Thus, what we now consider Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, or Modern was, at the time of its creation, contemporary. Each era and style find their highest expression in St. Peter's Basilica, and the 20th century also saw the creation of masterpieces of great significance. Once the available space for new artworks inside the basilica was exhausted, new chapels were built in the Vatican Grottoes after the Jubilee of 1950. On the eve of the Jubilee of 2000, a new altar and liturgical furnishings were installed in the central nave, a work by Floriano Bodini. The most significant artistic intervention after the Jubilee of 2000 is

undoubtedly the addition of new statues (each about 5 meters tall and over 20 tons in weight) on the exterior façade of St. Peter's: 18 marble sculptures by 13 different artists (1999-2011). The most recent contemporary art intervention is the statue of Saint Andrew Kim Taegon, created by Korean sculptor Han Jin-Sub (2023). Finally, a new *Via Crucis* is currently being developed for devotional activities in St. Peter's during Lent. The project was awarded to Manuel Andreas Dürr (Switzerland) following a competition that attracted over 1,000 candidates from eighty different countries.

Yvonne Zu DOHNA SCHLOBITTEN

Pontificia Università Gregoriana

Towards a Comparative Epistemology and Phenomenology of the Arts: Interventions of the Popes, from 1999 to 2024

Abstract

The diverse interventions of the popes, that is, the papal magisterium, from the *Letter to Artists* of 1999 – in view of the great Jubilee of 2000 – to the meeting of Pope Francis with artists in 2023, speak in various ways of the *meaning and being* of art and the artist. The key question is how can art help us encounter God?

This paper seeks to propose a *comparative epistemology of art* of the popes and bring out the fundamental elements of the interventions of the popes and compare them with each other, in order to identify similarities and differences, possible points of conflict and of mutual enrichment in the episteme of art. In fact, every reflection on the meaning of sacred art contains and assumes implicit and explicit theoretical assumptions and a comparison between disciplines is useful to bring out criteria, objectives, and issues at stake. What is the common thread and the new *Bildung* that needs to be transmitted today?

Keywords: writings of the popes, comparative epistemology of art, aesthetics, theory of sacred Bildung.

Guendalina SALIMEI

Sapienza Università di Roma

Between Ritual and Threshold: Reflections on the Space of the Church at the Border Between City and Art

Abstract

The importance of the church within the city and its social role is closely linked to its function as a bridge between the divine and the human. The church is a microcosm that reflects the noumenal order, a symbol of harmony and unity, which invites the active and conscious participation of the community of believers.

In its nature as a “gateway” between the human and the divine, a significant aspect is represented by the definition of *litus*, a concept that goes beyond the simple physical dimension to take on a metaphorical and theological value: the design of a contemporary church must necessarily focus on the place of the “threshold” - a limit that does not separate but unites - creating a transition space in which the faithful prepare to enter another dimension. Inside the sacred building, a “threshold” is every crossing point that marks the spiritual path of the faithful, from the entrance to the altar, the heart of the liturgy. In the design of the contemporary church, attention to the definition of the threshold acquires a new value, so that it can become a moment of reflection and transformation, an invitation to cross the boundaries of everyday life to enter the mystery of the sacred. It is precisely in these places that art rediscovers the encounter between its own signifier and the collective signified, serving as an interpretative key for the rite of passage as the only tool for “transformation”: where space changes, man also changes.

The proposed paper intends to analyze these places of transformation in their dual function, spatial and spiritual, and the role that art can play in defining a symbolic language rich in meaning, expressed through architecture, painting, sculpture and decorative arts to achieve a component of “other” in which disciplinary boundaries become blurred.

Matteo MUCCIANTE – Egidio FERRARA

Vatican Museums – Lighting Designer

Illuminating Places of Worship

Abstract

In the Sacred space, light, both natural and artificial, represents a powerful medium with architectural and aesthetic value, but above all a dimension of the soul, a revelation of the Mystery. The design of artificial lighting in places of worship is therefore a topic to be addressed with due respect, whether it involves designing a new church or whether it concerns adaptation according to liturgical reform, revision after a restoration, or the repurposing of an existing one.

Due to profound technological evolution and adjustments imposed by regulations and necessary energy savings, the last decades have seen the proliferation of lighting projects for places of worship often based on purely functional requirements, devoid of due reflection on the theological and liturgical implications. Replacement interventions on existing lighting systems, historic or historicized, have often resulted in a gratuitous exhibition of technological solutions that have diverted light from its proper meaning.

Nonetheless, these years have produced numerous reflections, often translated into guidelines and documents that represent an essential reference for taking up this theme towards a new perspective.

It is therefore necessary to promote a new awareness regarding the cultural, design and technical elements, capable of going beyond the individual cases or needs of the moment,

defining all the actors involved and recognizing each one of their own tasks and responsibilities. The Client is required to have greater sensitivity, to ensure the designer, the contemporary artist, the freedom to express his own language of light. The technician is required to have respect and knowledge of the places and of the functions that the liturgical space imposes, to bring the centrality of the Sacred back to light first of all.

Alejandro BEAUTELL

Beautell Arquitectos, Santa Cruz de Tenerife

The Search for Modernity in the Sacred Space: Atlantic Architecture

Abstract

“The search for modernity led us to discover our antiquity. An unexpected historical lesson that I am not sure everyone has learned: there is a bridge between tradition and modernity. Isolated, traditions petrify and modernities evaporate; in conjunction, one animates the other and the other responds by giving it weight and gravity.” – Octavio Paz

These words of the poet will serve to reflect on the concept of “living tradition” in sacred architecture. I will share my particular search for modernity, through the construction of three churches that we have built in the Canary Islands:

Shrine of San Juan Bautista in Las Puntas, El Hierro.

June 2013 / 830 ft² / €60,000

On the construction of a shrine in an abandoned place, facing a road. An austere hermitage for Saint John the Baptist.

The form, as a matter of faith: silence.

Stella Maris Chapel in El Pris, Tenerife.

November 2016 / 750 ft² / €100,000

On the construction of a chapel in a fishing district, opposite a pier. A chapel to venerate the Virgin of Carmen.

To share wine, raise up a temple.

Church of Nuestra Señora de Candelaria in Alcalá, Tenerife.

October 2020 / 11,840 ft² / €1,600,000

On the construction of a church in a wounded neighborhood. A church between two times under the patronage of the Virgin of Candelaria.

What we are, a new ancient temple.

Keywords: Silence, Light, Modernity, Living tradition, Canary Islands.

Links to the works:

- Shrine of San Juan Bautista in Las Puntas:
<https://divisare.com/projects/322697-alejandro-beautell-saint-john-baptist-chapel>
 - Stella Maris Chapel in El Pris:
<https://divisare.com/projects/337908-alejandro-beautell-stella-maris-chapel>
 - Church of Nuestra Señora de Candelaria in Alcalá:
<https://divisare.com/projects/445662-alejandro-beautell-flavio-dorta-hernandez-church-of-nuestra-senora-de-candelaria-in-alcala>
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Timothy P. O'MALLEY

University of Notre Dame, USA

Participation and Sacrality: Challenges for the Liturgical Space

Abstract

The theological importance of liturgical space has been a point of contention over the last one hundred years. Liturgical historians have argued that liturgical space in the early Church was fundamentally domestic, underlining the non-sacrality of early Christian worship (it was around a table, rather than celebrated on an altar). Many of these histories, particularly in English, tend to ignore the architectural dimension of the Church's worship. At the same time, liturgical theologians since the Council have given little attention to the spatial context of the liturgy. Post-conciliar liturgical theology has privileged text over the aesthetic theology of architecture. Pastorally, liturgical space has become mostly a matter of function: what rites are celebrated in the space? Could they be celebrated elsewhere? This essay re-examines these assumptions, arguing that a more treatment of both history and the theology of architecture from the beginning of the Church underlines the relationship between sacrality and participation. Insofar as the Church celebrates the liturgy in this space, the church building (whether it was once in a home or not) becomes sacred. At the same time, this increasing sacrality leads to a rich sense of participation as involving the senses of each person. Retrieving this historical and theological vision opens new avenues for building and renovating church buildings in the post-conciliar era.

Fernando LÓPEZ-ARIAS

Pontificia Università della Santa Croce

The Space for Liturgy and Devotion: From Conflict to a Common Horizon

Abstract

A key point to explain the phenomenon of the Christian people's disaffection towards a good part of the post-conciliar churches is the gap – not to say fracture – in contemporary religious

architecture between the liturgical and extra-liturgical function of the church building, or between the church as a liturgical space and as a space for non-celebratory prayerful activities, especially popular piety. We think that the reason behind the intolerance towards many of the new places of worship may be due to this separation.

This paper fits into the theme of the conference – *The Building for Worship and Artists: Assessments and Perspectives, 25 Years after the First Jubilee of Artists (2000-2025)* – in two ways. First, because in its first part we will try to show the historical and cultural dynamics that explain the aforementioned gap. In particular, we will make an *assessment* of its repercussions on architecture in the last 25 years. In the second part, one of a synchronic nature, we will try to propose a theoretical horizon that can heal the wounds caused by the conflict between liturgy and extra-liturgical activity in the building of worship, opening up *perspectives* in architecture for the time to come.

João Luís MARQUES

Universidade do Porto

Churches in the Future of Cities

Abstract

This presentation will explore the theme of the Church's place in the city of the future, adopting an architectural-urban perspective. Starting from the built space that the Church aspires to occupy, it will proceed with the deconstruction of some "predefined images of the city of the future" in order to compare them with the different speeds of evolution in the contemporary world.

The analysis will consider how, in many contexts, the role of the Church in the city of tomorrow may align with that of the past, while in other geographical settings, opportunities will emerge to attain new spaces. Concrete examples will be presented, with particular attention given to the experience of the Iberian Peninsula, which is marginal but significant in the European context, as well as cases from other continents that today offer interesting insights for shaping the future.

The goal is to stimulate a debate on how the Church can integrate its presence into the dynamics of global urban environments, adapting to emerging challenges.

Juan REGO

Pontificia Università della Santa Croce

Images for the Liturgy in the Age of Digital Society

Abstract

The present paper is based on the assumption that not all images in places of worship are intended for liturgical use. By focusing exclusively on works created to be integrated into the immersive nature of the liturgy, this paper aims to propose a series of guidelines for artists and commissioners in creating works intended for the liturgy in the coming years. In particular, the themes explored will include the relationship between images and the revelation of God through His Word, the role of typology in the design of iconographic projects, the risks and opportunities offered by immersive spaces, and the iconic function of the apse, along with the need for an appropriate inculturation of stylistic proposals and the different levels of community participation.

The main objective is to prevent images for the liturgy from being assimilated to other forms of cult images and, at the same time, to clarify the mission of artists and commissioners in this field. Liturgical images are called to perform a specifically "indexical" service, which sets them apart from idolatrous images. While the former integrate harmoniously into the "atmospheric play" of the liturgy, the latter tend to impose themselves as absolute objects.

Liturgical images, moreover, aspire to be vessels of presence, not mere tools for the transmission of concepts, as is the case with didactic images. Their vocation is not the result of an exclusively human ability but represents a gift that transcends the claims of creative imagination, rooting itself in a dimension of grace and transcendence.

Anthony LUSVARDI, SJ

Pontificia Università Gregoriana

Real Presence or Virtual Presence: Sacraments on a Screen and Screens in Celebrations

Abstract

The past century has witnessed a revolution in communications technology. Today screens play a role in almost all aspects of our lives, from commerce and entertainment to education and family life. During the Covid pandemic online worship proliferated, though televised liturgies had been around for decades before. In the rush to put Mass online, however, theological reflection on what the use of these new technologies means for sacramental worship often lagged behind. This presentation will reflect upon the unique challenges and limits posed by the technology of screens for sacramental worship, both as they might be used to create a virtual worship space and as they are used to modify existing physical places of worship.

Javier VIVER

Artista

Devotional Images: A Proposal at the Beginning of the Third Millennium

Abstract

This presentation offers the experience of the sculptor and interdisciplinary artist Javier Viver in the creation of imagery of great popular devotion. He will show the cases of the Beautiful Shepherdess made for the Iesu Communio Institute, the Mother of Hakuna for the Hakuna group, or the Mother of Hope for the University of Navarra Clinic, all of them very popular images.

In addition, images of the commission to build the largest Sacred Heart in the world in Boadilla del Monte, Madrid, will be shown. This is a new concept of a Monument that can be visited inside and that will encourage an encounter with the Sacred Heart of Jesus through a sensory experience (as happens in a contemporary installation).

All devotion presupposes the action of the Holy Spirit. Since ancient times, the canonization of an icon was defined by the action of the Holy Spirit in a multitude of faithful, called popular devotion. Although it is risky to delve into the reasons that foster such popularity at the present time, this presentation intends to do so. If we admit that grace presupposes nature, that the divine ordinarily acts through the human, then we could understand the reasons that foster these popular devotions. The human aspects that prepare the action of the Holy Spirit.

Popular Catholic devotion is universal, and has been enculturated at every time and place throughout the centuries. Today, the appearance of photography, cinema and their subsequent globalization in the mass media and social networks has created a new sensibility, a new culture and visual thinking that directly affects the way we look at images and the ways we pray. This new context, far from being an inconvenience, offers a challenge and an opportunity to work with images more effectively in the new evangelization. And this is mainly because Christ, the Logos, has manifested himself in the visible image and the human face of the invisible God. If it is true that the Church grows by attraction, as Pope Francis has expressed on various occasions, it is important to create poles of attraction that offer the world living experiences of the encounter with God. In this mission, art has offered the Church, since its foundation, the natural environment for experiencing the Christian mystery and a prelude to rational knowledge. In the last 25 years, the development of social networks has allowed for an authentic global phenomenon of evangelization without precedent, which allows us more than ever to think about the catholicity of faith and its universal diffusion through images.

Alfredo PIRRI

Artist

Void and Fullness

Abstract

My intervention, through the compositional lens of the relationship between void and fullness, will aim at a dual reflection. Starting from the analysis of competitive experiences that did not have a positive outcome in the field of bids for the construction of new Churches, images of projects that were never realized will be shown (and commented on), investigating in a self-critical way the reasons for their failure and their intrinsic weaknesses.

Subsequently, I will introduce a reasoning about the future that, starting from the experiences shown and the new insights they generate, could lead to a new covenant in the relationship between contemporary art and the Church, based on some positive ideas found precisely within these unrealized projects. First and foremost, a methodological suggestion, that is, the need to overcome those (now canonical) divisions between the main figures involved in the construction of new churches, namely the artist and the architect.

Overcoming this division of roles would lead to a more harmonious effort, one that does not view art as merely a decorative tool nor architecture solely as a contextual device. The churches of the past are often considered more “beautiful” because they were more unified – paradoxically, they were more “installations” than contemporary ones. Today, even by renewing the language and the rules of architectural competitions, the goal should be to achieve greater reconciliation between the figures involved in the construction of churches. This would also involve a more active exchange with the local communities, perhaps even going so far as to organize public conferences and open construction sites that allow the public to better understand the constructive and meaningful purpose of the projects.

This does not mean having to give up the “authorial” dimension of artistic-architectural proposals, nor, even less, making it a demagogically populist practice; on the contrary, we must strive to concretely create a “beauty” that will nestle in the collective heart of the people.

Keywords: self-critique, new covenant, beautiful, unified, installation art

Paola GROSSI GONDI

Artist

Stained Glass: Working with Light and Mystery

Abstract

The art of stained-glass is particularly suitable for religious buildings. Its essential element – capable of making the artist, the faithful and the visitors feel unique emotions and fascination – is sunlight. Wonder, changeability, surprise, chromatic iridescence and luminous variation: no other means of expression has allowed me to get so close - and to bring others so close - to transcendent beauty. I am referring to a thousand-year-old tradition, feeling united with the great masters of the past, who challenge us contemporaries not to imitate them, but to reach them and perhaps surpass them. The religious subject requires a great commitment from the artist, if he wants to "become a channel", to transmit the divine message to people. A deep study of the theme is needed, one which is as honest and sincere as possible, but also

required is a strong personal engagement, which is always very hard to express, regardless of one's faith. The stylistic choice is subjective, and it does not matter if the orientation is figurative or abstract: both, however, can be valid depending on the context, in harmony with the clients and the liturgists. The Sacred, however, always and fundamentally remains a mystery: alive, immaterial but real, unpredictable, fascinating, just like the light that is its metaphor. On the other hand, the stained-glass technique is a metaphor for the life of man touched by Grace; it starts from the opacity of the sketch and the fragility of the small pieces of glass, to reach the transparency and monumentality of the installed work. And when, with the changing of the hours and seasons, that matter transformed into light invades the church in an ever new way, being touched by the divine becomes a collective experience.

Keywords:

Glass, light, wonder, transcendence, continuity and innovation