



**Dorota Janisio-Pawłowska\***

***Place and time – new forms of sacral architecture  
(examples of chosen structures from Western Pomerania  
– as a determinant of new cultural norms)***

*In order to communicate the message entrusted to His Church by Christ, the Church needs art. Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God. It must therefore translate into meaningful terms that which is in itself ineffable. Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colours, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen<sup>1</sup>.*

John Paul II, the Vatican, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1999: Letter to artists

Sacral architecture of the previous centuries strictly referred to the contemporary style existing in a given cultural area and constituted a typological determinant of a given region and at the same time, it represented the level of ‘culture in architecture’. Social and economic changes and civilisation progress which took place after World War II as well as cultural changes in the territory of Western Pomerania, which resulted from immigration of ‘New Settlers’ to the regained territories, became a determinant for new cultural norms. The factors which undoubtedly influenced the change of sacral structure forms were the Resolutions of the Second Vatican Council, regulations of the ‘Canon Law’ Code and established by the Polish Episcopate Conference on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1973 ‘norms of proceedings in church art issues in the territory of the whole state<sup>2</sup>. First of all, ‘*a principle of originality*’ in the plan formation as well as in the form of the post-council church by applying modern aesthetic conventions was emphasized

there<sup>3</sup> [4]. The established norms in the documents referred not only to the way of erecting new sacral structures and parish buildings as well as utility buildings, but they also specified the rules of an appropriate location choice of a sacral structure in the urban scale. Undoubtedly, the established norms have had their reflection in the character of newly created structures both built in the areas of new city housing estates and in the country.

As a rule, in the period of the Polish People’s Republic dictatorship, the location of sacral structures within the territory of newly built housing estates was not taken into consideration at all.

In spite of this situation, a lot of churches were built. However, it was in political authorities’ interest to hinder any realization of sacral structures in places which were particularly meaningful, which, among other things, resulted in restrictions in the possibilities of exposing aesthetic values of the composition and made artists agree with this situation whose solution was a compromise itself. Unfortunately, this compromise did not always correspond with the artist’s assumptions and images. However, this kind of art gave architects one of the possibilities of individual approach to a particular design and allowed them to cross the limits of typical designing which dominated and was widely spread at that time.

\* West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, Department of Modern Architecture, Design Theory and Methodology, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture.

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II the Vatican, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1999: Letter to artists.

<sup>2</sup> Szymiski A., *Kanon formy architektonicznej w kościele katolickim*, Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Politechniki Szczecińskiej, Szczecin 2000, p. 381. All documents of the Council, see: „The Second Vatican Council: constitutions, decrees, declarations”, Pallotinum, Poznań, 1986, Edition III.

<sup>3</sup> Szymiski A., *Kanon formy architektonicznej...*, op. cit.

The artists could also apply untypical and innovative solutions.

At present, we can observe numerous multi-layer differences between the architect – the creator of the future structure in a new architectural form, the parish priest, i.e. the investor who has his own vision of the church and then his superior, the ordinary of diocese who does not always agree with other persons involved in the investment process. A compromise must be worked out among these persons. Moreover, we must take into account the obvious fact that the church as a cubature structure has to comply with many regulations referring to the construction law as well as it is subject to the assessment of the official body who is a verifier of this law – in this case it is the District Urban Commission, The City Architect who forces his ‘own point of view’ regarding the spatial order. [4, pp. 421–422].

Sacral structures, which were built in the territory of Western Pomerania as well as in the area of Szczecin after the Second Vatican Council, were subjected to an analy-

sis. It should be indicated that after 1971<sup>4</sup> over twenty new structures of religious worship of the Roman-Catholic rite and several parish churches of other rites – which are poorer in the form as well as in the cubature in comparison to the Roman-Catholic equivalents – have been built in the area of this city agglomeration. The aim of the present study is the analysis of the chosen structures from the above mentioned area. Many a time these structures influence the existing architecture in their surroundings in a negative way and this is mainly caused by changes which are introduced without the architect’s knowledge and agreement. The exemplary structures have been chosen from different parts of the city – some of them are situated in the historical area, while the others in the territory of the new housing estates.

<sup>4</sup> In June, 1971 the Parliament adopted the act ‘on the transfer of ownership of some property for the good of the Roman-Catholic Church legal persons as well as some other churches and religious organizations’; this legal act regulated the right to make decisions as to erecting buildings on the particular territories.

### *General presentation of chosen churches in Szczecin and the surroundings*

In the years 1974 – 2000 in the territory of the existing and new districts as well as housing estates of Szczecin, new parish churches were built, respectively: in the area of Pogodno district, Książąt Pomorskich housing estate, Śródmieście district, Słoneczne and Bukowe housing estates. However, in the suburbs and in the country, sacral development consisted mainly in renovating the existing churches and chapels which had been destroyed during the war. Moreover, residential or utility buildings, which temporarily satisfied the need for a place of worship, were adapted too because there were no funds to build new structures. In the country, new churches were built only after 1980 [5, pp. 253–265].

Chosen sacral structures in the territory of Szczecin:

**Holy Cross Church, designed by architect Z. Abrahamowicz 1974, H. Wieniawskiego Street in Szczecin, Pogodno District (Fig. 1).**

The church was built under the pretext of the development of the existing church which was situated in the pre-war villa district and was one of the first realisations after World War II. The new church was based – as the central foundation – on the projection of a circle. The old church was built on the rectangle plan – it now performs the function of the chapel [2, p. 21]. *The architectural composition of the new church, which was based on shaping the form by means of a pavilion roof based on a contrastively different structure of the external walls – integrated totally the forms of the old and new churches. The old church was frontally divided with the wall joined with the new structure and covered with one pavilion roof. Only after entering the courtyard can we see the original southern façade of the old church nave [2].* The external walls at the presbytery and opposite sides are built of columns and they are completely openwork filled with colourful stained-glass. The other walls are full (only with small



Fig. 1. Holy Cross Church, designed by architect Z. Abrahamowicz. Photo by author

windows in the basement) with a clear curve of the roof, which distinguished the church from the nearest surroundings. The structure presents a unique situation of the so called forced location which was overwhelmed by the buildings standing there for years. The design is an individual approach to the church structure whose originality determines a connection with the place, but this does not reflect its character and places it in the row of the street frontage.

**Resurrection of the Lord Church, project – architect A. Szymiski, 1988 (basic structure), Książąt Pomorskich Housing Estate in Szczecin (Fig. 2, Fig. 3 – model).**

The church was traditionally situated on the axis east-west on the outskirts of the new housing estate. A dynamic structure was achieved thanks to inclinations of trapezoid



Fig. 2. View from Przyjaciół Żołnierza Street, Parsonage and Divine Mercy Church. Photo by author



Fig. 3. Model – north-west view of the catechistic-office-residential complex, from collections of A. Szymski – design's author

planes connected with the chapel in the shape of a round 'tent'. The effect of installing the skylight in the ceiling gave southern light directed at the nave while the side skylights collect light from various sides [4, pp.467–471]. Colourful play of lights creates a unique, calm and atmosphere. The church blends in with high blocks of flats of the housing estate and dominates with its interesting architecture. The change from the original Resurrection of the Lord Church into Divine Mercy Church undoubtedly influenced the final appearance of the church structure. The initial concept of the building form was supposed to resemble a cracking rock massif which symbolised the act of resurrection. However, changes of parish priests and their new ideas regarding the final appearance of the structure as well as financial limitations resulted in changes of the original assumptions. In spite of this, a general structure of the church preserved its form. Działoszyński Travertine lining was supposed to be a façade material (with the final effect of golden colour patination) but it was replaced by a trapezoid sheet in red colour, which absolutely does not correspond with the nature of the structure.

Apart from this, the formal idea of the design was not put into effect completely – the whole form of the structure was supposed to grow from irregular granite blocks, which

would give the visual impression of a solid foundation. The development of this church shows lack of understanding of the architect's concept, his architectural assumptions and directives. It should also be mentioned that the original design of the parish building in the proposed arrangement was changed into an 'ordinary' villa-type house with some garages, which was designed by another author; this new form did not correspond to the entire arrangement in any way. It must be said that nothing destroys the architect's work more efficiently than supplementary packaging and the form of 'reflection' which is not always true.

**St. Dominique Church of Dominican Friars, design – architect W. Zaborowski, 1996–2000 (now, the interior is being completed), Ofiar Katynia Square in Szczecin (Fig. 4).**

The complex of sacral development consists of a church and monastery building which belong to Dominican fathers. The church building, which was built on the Greek cross plan with a traditional orientation east – west, is made of brick. A roof with a construction made of wood glued together and covered with copper constitutes a curiosity and rarity for the structures of this type in our times. In spite of changing the previous steel structure, the present structure blends with the church interior in a much better way. The façade was lined with clinker tiles in the tone which corresponded with the monastery building facades. The complex of buildings constitutes an inseparable whole – it creates a united formation with the surrounding residential buildings and has the same form. The whole complex, which was designed and built with relation to the historical tradition, was accepted by the investor who is going to realize the whole complex of sacral structures along with the interior [1, pp. 191–206].



Fig. 4. Dominique Church of Dominican Fathers, Ofiar Katynia Square, Szczecin. Photo by author

**Fatima Mother of Jesus Chapel at Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary Church, design – architect A. Szymski, architect M. Rozwarski, 1987–1988, Słoneczne housing estate in Szczecin (Fig. 5 – model, Fig. 6, 7).**

The Chapel, which is situated by the main exit route from Szczecin, with its concise structure, refers to the ro-



Fig. 5. Model – Fatima Mother of Jesus Chapel and Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Słoneczne housing estate, Szczecin, from collection of A. Szymiski – design's author



Fig. 6. Fatima Mother of Jesus Chapel and Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Słoneczne housing estate, Szczecin.  
Photo by author



Fig. 7. Fatima Mother of Jesus Chapel at Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Słoneczne housing estate, Szczecin.  
Photo by author

tunda which relates to the past as well as to the future (Fig. 5). The use of natural light which enters the interior of the structure from almost each side of the world through stained-glass windows provides interesting light effects. The main building material of the sanctuary is brick and concrete which give the impression of a solid foundation of the whole building. The main entrance, which is situated a little above the ground level, creates the atmosphere of grandness and seriousness, while the undeveloped area around the chapel makes an impression that the foundation is not completed. The chapel interior, which is filled with strange light and warm colour, intensifies the sacrum atmosphere (Fig. 5). The whole foundation (Fig. 5) was

supposed to consist of a complex of sacral buildings but unfortunately, only the chapel was realised out of the presented architect's vision. The sanctuary already by another author (M. Rozwarski) was built some time later and it has a completely different character. It does not refer to the original idea in anything and does not create a compositional entirety with the chapel.

**Jesus Good Shepherd Church, design – architect Anna Zaniewska, Bukowe housing estate, Szczecin (Fig. 8).**

Construction of the church started on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2000. Now, it is totally finished along with the interior details. The structure of the church was accomplished by the tower and the whole structure, which is dubiously founded in the cultural landscape, does not shock with innovative solutions. The main material is brick which connects the past with the tradition. It is easy to guess the function of the building and the structure really performs its role of the house of God very well. The door is a real curiosity – heavy and full of religious symbols – shows the relation between God and man as well as between earthliness and eternity.

One of the churches located in the territory of Western Pomerania:



Fig. 8. Jesus Good Shepherd Church,  
downloaded from: <http://szczecin.kuria.pl/>



Fig. 9. Father Pio Church, Pniewy district, Bukowe housing estate, Szczecin, downloaded from: <http://szczecin.kuria.pl/>

**Father Pio Church, circa 2003, unknown author, Pniewy, Western Pomerania District (Fig. 9).**

The church, which has a very simple structure, was built on the plan similar to the square. The hip roof has a small arcade which underlines the main entrance. The whole church was built according to the traditional technology which is typical of residential buildings, i.e. bricks, clinker lining, roofing tiles. The only element which shows

the character and intended use of the building is the cross which is situated on top of a 'small tower' fixed on the roof. The whole structure blends in perfectly with the existing cultural landscape – scattered residential buildings in a roadside village. However, does it really meet people's expectations at present? Is it perceived as a symbol of sacrum?

According to Professor Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński *In Poland, 97% of all structures, which are built and treated as sacral architecture, presents non-architecture. Ugly churches are built with people's and priests' consent because average of our aesthetic tastes shows that we value richness of forms, decorations and materials above the simplicity which is recommended by The Second Vatican Council*<sup>5</sup>.

The above example makes us aware that not only splendor and wealth but also excessive simplicity may lead to the creation of non-architecture which becomes barely recognizable and although it expresses nothing, it is still desired.

<sup>5</sup> Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński, kierownik Pracowni Architektury Sakralnej na Politechnice Warszawskiej, downloaded 9<sup>th</sup> October 2010 from [http://rp.pl/artykul/2,350242\\_Kościół\\_in\\_style\\_hight\\_tech\\_html](http://rp.pl/artykul/2,350242_Kościół_in_style_hight_tech_html), p. 4.

## Summary

Modern sacral forms are the result of search and respect for differentiated reception of art. Creating one common view which, in fact, constitutes a specific spatial form built in an intended place, is a great challenge for the architect. Sacral buildings, which have been built in the territory of Western Pomerania after World War II, in their majority can be said to be a form of manifestation of individualism. The vision and a certain kind of symbolism were connected with a timeless form and building material as well as with innovative technological possibilities and new materials. Looking for a *connection between place and time with new forms of sacral architecture as a determinant of cultural norms being created* we must state that nowadays sacral buildings do not possess a permanent, typical or established character – every time different forms are created, which depend on time, situation and financial possibilities as well as on the relations of the Church with congregation. *Modern church, at least apparently, gives the architectural environment complete freedom in looking for a new canon in working out a vision of a modern church form. However, a mystery of sacrum (as it is traditionally understood by the church hierarchy in the Roman-Catholic Church) requires from an architect – according to Bishop Marian Duś – not only a talent but also mystical sensitivity and a creative responsibility for introducing the atmosphere which is conducive to concentration and praying* [3, p. 2].

The idea of building a sacral structure gives unlimited possibilities and the cross itself determines the character



Fig. 10. Beginnings of the parish in Dołuje, 2006, downloaded from: <http://szczecin.kuria.pl/>

of such a place. The choice of an architect means the entrance to the creation of the church, however, a question arises – what kind of church?

The time, place and image, which the architect presents by telling a story about God referring in his opinion to our spirituality, give the effect in form of a new sacral architectural structure. However, is there any context of place and time for this type of architecture nowadays or is it only the architect's desire of self-realisation, who does not care about many centuries cultural landscape and goes beyond the accepted 'norms of culture' for this type of structures in a newly created space?

### References

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### ***Miejsce i czas – nowe formy architektury sakralnej (przykłady wybranych obiektów z terenu Pomorza Zachodniego jako wyznacznik tworzących się nowych norm kulturowych)***

Architektura sakralna minionych stuleci ściśle nawiązywała do stylu obowiązującego ówczesnie w danym obszarze kulturowym i była wyznacznikiem typologicznym danego regionu, a jednocześnie świadczyła o poziomie „kultury w architekturze”. Przemiany społeczno-gospodarcze, postęp cywilizacji, który nastąpił po II wojnie światowej, oraz zmiany kulturowe na terenie Pomorza Zachodniego, które były efektem napływu na ziemię odzyskane „Nowych Osadników”, stały się wyznacznikiem dla tworzących się nowych norm kulturowych. Czynnikiem mającym wpływ na kreację form sakralnych były uchwały II Soboru Watykańskiego, przepisy kodeksu ‘Prawa Kanonicznego’ oraz ustalone na Konferencji Episkopatu Polski 25.01.1973 r. „normy

postępowania w sprawach sztuki Kościelnej obowiązujące na terenie całego kraju. Poddając kwerendzie obiekty sakralne na terenie Pomorza Zachodniego i samego miasta Szczecina należy zaznaczyć, iż po II wojnie światowej tylko w granicach tej jednej aglomeracji miejskiej powstało ponad dwadzieścia nowych obiektów kultu religijnego obrzędu rzymskokatolickiego

W pracy omówiono przykłady z różnych terenów Szczecina zarówno usytuowane w historycznym obszarze miasta, jak również na terenie nowo powstałych osiedlach mieszkaniowych. Wskazując na stopień ich powiązania z zastanym krajobrazem kulturowym wraz z oceną spójności pomiędzy zamierzeniem projektowym a faktyczną realizacją.

**Key words:** church, sacral architecture

**Słowa kluczowe:** kościół, architektura sakralna