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Post-conciliar sacred architecture: between theory and practice – a case study

Abstract

The post-conciliar sacred architecture in Poland remains a field of research requiring further investigation from the perspectives of both the history and theory of architecture and the theological and liturgical reflection. The aim of this article was to identify the fundamental urban planning and architectural principles derived from the documents of the Catholic Church relating directly or indirectly to the sacred architecture and to examine their application through the case study of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok, designed by the architect Andrzej Nowakowski. The research was conducted within two paths: first – using the critical analysis of the Church documents and the second – the architectural analysis of the chosen building. The study examined, among other aspects, the church's location, orientation, the form, bell towers, the portal and the entrance zone, materials, lighting, acoustics, and accessibility. The analysis demonstrates that the building fulfils a lot of the recommendations associated with the post-conciliar sacred architecture, particularly with regard to liturgical functionality, accessibility, and the hierarchical organization of the space, retaining numerous references to traditional forms of church architecture. The church thus represents an example of the search for a balance between the contemporary liturgical requirements and the historical heritage of ecclesiastical architecture.

Key words: sacred architecture, sacred space, architectural theory, post-conciliar architecture

Introduction

The post-conciliar sacred architecture of the Catholic Church in Poland constitutes an important yet still insufficiently explored field of research, both from the perspective of the history and theory of architecture and from that of theological and liturgical reflection. From a normative perspective, the space of a church or chapel should, through its architectural and structural solutions, express theological content and semiotic meanings while at the same time remaining functionally subordinated to the requirements of the liturgy.

The liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council introduced fundamental changes in the understanding of the

space of celebration, confronting architects with new challenges related both to the design of new buildings and to the adaptation of existing structures to reformed norms (Schloeder 1998). One of the key issues was the absence of a single, systematically developed body of technical and architectural guidelines analogous to the post-Tridentine treatise *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae*, prepared at the initiative of Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (Krasny, Kurzej 2013, 2021; Nadrowski 2000, 60). Attempts by local Churches to develop such norms did not result in the establishment of universally binding principles.

The aim of this article is to identify the fundamental urban planning, architectural, and theological-liturgical principles shaping post-conciliar sacred architecture and to confront them with design practice through a case study of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok. The study therefore addresses the relationship between the normative theory of sacred architecture, as derived from Church documents, and its concrete architectural realization.

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State of research

Contemporary Church documents primarily formulate theological and liturgical principles, leaving considerable scope for interpretation regarding formal and stylistic solutions (Giles 1999, 18).

Consequently, no uniform stylistic canon of sacred architecture emerged after the Second Vatican Council. This phenomenon is reflected in the considerable diversity of architectural realizations, ranging from modernist and minimalist approaches to designs that consciously reinterpret historical models of sacred space.

In the Polish context, a noteworthy contribution to the study of sacred architecture is *Architektura VII Dnia* [Seventh-Day Architecture] (Cichońska, Popera and Snopek 2016), which analyzes Catholic sacred buildings erected during the period of the Polish People's Republic (PRL). Another important contribution to the research on the contemporary sacred architecture is Cezary Wąs's monograph *Antynomie współczesnej architektury sakralnej* [Antinomies of Contemporary Sacred Architecture] (Wąs 2016), which addresses tensions between tradition and modernity while highlights the complexity of contemporary formal and conceptual explorations in church architecture.

However, a significant research gap appears to concern the later period of the development of Polish sacred architecture, particularly from an architectural-theological perspective. The present study addresses this gap through an analysis of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok (1999–2011), designed by Andrzej Nowakowski. To date, this church has not been the subject of a comprehensive theological and architectural study.

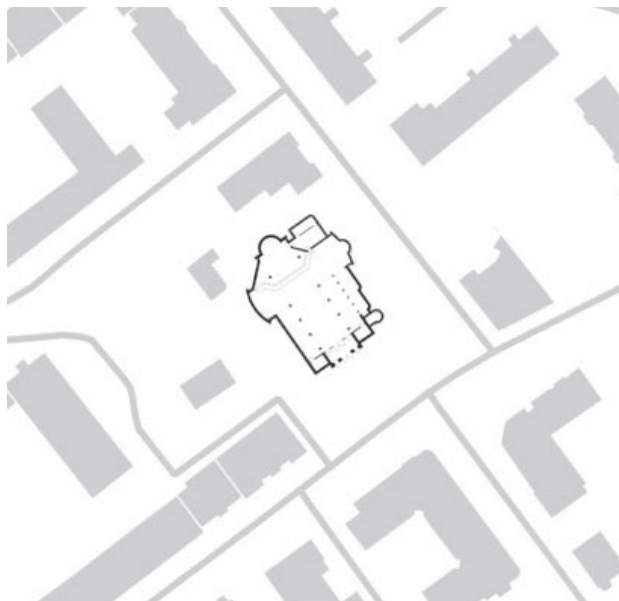


Fig. 1. The church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok: urban context

(elaborated by K. Fuszara-Matyszewska, 2026)

II. 1. Kościół pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej w Białymstoku, kontekst urbanistyczny (oprac. K. Fuszara-Matyszewska, 2026)

Methods

An in-depth analysis of documents of the Catholic Church (relating directly and indirectly to the sacred architecture) was conducted, using the method of critical source analysis and a hermeneutical approach, taking into account their theological and liturgical context. The analysis emphasizes the possibility to identify and systematize the fundamental principles of an urban, architectural, and theological nature. Subsequently, using comparative and interpretative analysis, an attempt was made to identify the application of these principles within a specific architectural design solution.

Results

The analysis covers the identification of ways in which the fundamental urban planning, architectural, and theological-liturgical principles are reflected in a specific design solution. The results are presented with reference to the successive elements shaping the architecture of the church under study, taking into account both their functional and compositional dimensions, as well as their symbolic significance and relationship to the tradition of the sacred architecture.

Location

The primary criterion for selecting the location of a Catholic church is its accessibility to the community of the faithful, understood as the principle of “communal centrality” (Codex, canons 1214–1215). This principle implies locating a place of worship within the compact structure of a residential area and ensuring the pedestrian accessibility while avoiding its spatial isolation (Bergamo, Elberti and Los 1994).

The Bojary district of Białystok, where the church under study is located, is characterized by a diverse urban structure comprising both historic and contemporary development. The church is situated in its central part, which corresponds to the principle of accessibility. At the same time, however, its relationship with the surrounding environment reveals significant limitations in terms of the urban the composition (Fig. 1).

The building is not connected to clearly defined visual axes or directional systems within the public space. There is also no clearly defined forecourt or square that would organize the perception of the church and integrate it into the urban structure of the district as an element of public and symbolic significance. Consequently, the church does not function as a spatial landmark; its visual impact is limited to its immediate surroundings, and its visibility within more distant visual relationships remains restricted.

From the perspective of the criteria derived from the Church documents and the tradition of locating churches within their urban context, this situation may be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, the principle of accessibility and integration within the structure of the local community has been fulfilled. On the other hand, the lack of clear spatial and symbolic distinction weakens the church's function as a sign of the presence of the sacred within the

urban environment. This may indicate both limitations resulting from planning conditions and the existing urban fabric, as well as a deliberate departure from the model of the church as a dominant urban landmark in favor of a more “inclusive” approach, integrated into its spatial context.

In this sense, the church under study may be situated at the intersection of two paradigms: the traditional one, in which the church constitutes a clearly identifiable landmark within the structure of the city, and the post-conciliar one, which emphasizes its integration with the everyday living space of the community.

Orientation of the church

The orientation of a church is one of the classical issues in the sacred architecture, rooted both in the theological tradition and building practice. Historically, the prevailing principle was *ad orientem*, according to which a sanctuary was located on the eastern side, facing the rising sun—a symbol of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Parousia. Although the documents of the Second Vatican Council do not establish explicit norms regarding the geographical orientation of a church, neither do they abolish this tradition, leaving it within the sphere of recommendations of symbolic and cultural significance (Hani 1994, 45).

In the post-conciliar approach, the emphasis shifted from cosmic orientation to congregational orientation, understood as the organization of space around the liturgical assembly and the altar as its focal point (Ogólne wprowadzenie 2004, no. 299). Consequently, the significance of geographical orientation became secondary to the clarity of the functional and liturgical arrangement and the active participation of the faithful (Ratzinger 2012, 69).

The church under study does not unambiguously follow the principle of *ad orientem*. As a consequence of the surrounding street layout, the church is oriented along an axis running approximately from northwest to southeast. This means that the sanctuary faces roughly southeast rather than due east. It may therefore be said that the church is not oriented in the strict, classical sense, although its sanctuary is partially directed towards the east. This arrangement reflects a broader tendency in the contemporary sacred architecture to subordinate the spatial organization to urban and functional conditions. The compositional axis of the building results primarily from the geometry of the site and its relationship with the surrounding development rather than from a symbolic orientation towards cardinal points.

From the theoretical perspective, this situation may be interpreted as a manifestation of a transition from a symbolic-cosmic model to a communal-liturgical one. Whereas in the traditional approach orientation served as a vehicle for theological meanings rooted in Christian cosmology, in the post-conciliar architecture its role is partly assumed by a spatial arrangement centered on the altar and by relationships between the celebrant and the assembly.

This does not, however, imply a complete loss of significance for orientation. In the case under study, the absence of a clearly defined orientation may be interpreted as weakening of the symbolic dimension of space, particularly in the context of the tradition of the sacred architecture. At the

same time, local site conditions must be considered, as they often determine, in architectural practice, a departure from canonical orientation.

Consequently, orientation should be regarded as a complementary category rather than an absolute design principle: as a potential bearer of meaning whose presence or absence influences the perception and interpretation of sacred space.

Form

The analysis of the church's form can be further developed by referring to the classical typologies of the sacred architecture, among which the longitudinal (axial) and central plans are of fundamental importance. The former is based on an axial and directional organization of space, leading from the entrance towards the sanctuary and thereby emphasizing the processional dimension of the liturgy. The latter, by contrast, organizes space around a single central point—most commonly the altar—thus emphasizing the communal and assembly-oriented character of the celebration (Kieckhefer 2004, 84).

This principle is further reinforced by *Inter Oecumenici*, which states that, in the construction of new churches and the adaptation of existing ones, the consideration should be given to their suitability for the celebration of liturgical rites and to enabling the active participation of the faithful (Święta Kongregacja Obrzędów 1964, no. 90).

The Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok does not represent a pure realization of either of these models. Built on a Latin-cross plan, the church has a three-aisled pseudo-basilican layout with side chapels (Fig. 2). On the one hand, a clearly defined directional axis organizes the movement of the faithful and the relationship between the entrance and the sanctuary, thereby placing the building within the basilican tradition. On the other hand, the expansion of the space at the intersection of the nave and transept, together with the emphasis on the assembly gathered around the



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok (photo by Padre, source: <https://mbfatimskiej.archibial.pl/galeria/5-budynek-kosciola-z-nbsp-gory>; accessed: September 5, 2026)

Il. 2. Kościół pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej – widok z lotu ptaka (fot. Padre, źródło: <https://mbfatimskiej.archibial.pl/galeria/5-budynek-kosciola-z-nbsp-gory>; data dostępu: 5 września 2026)

altar, indicates an attempt to achieve a partial centralization of the spatial arrangement.

The external form, however, does not clearly express this typological duality. The absence of a readily legible correspondence between the internal layout and the external form means that an observer receives no clear indication of the organization of the liturgical space. Unlike traditional basilicas, in which the external form distinctly articulates the division between the central nave and the side aisles, or centrally planned churches, characterized by a compact and symmetrical form, the building under study employs a more complex and heterogeneous composition of volumes.

From the critical perspective, this hybrid arrangement may be interpreted as an attempt to reconcile two paradigms: the traditional model, based on axuality and spatial hierarchy, and the post-conciliar model, emphasizing the communal character of the liturgy and the congregation's focus around the altar. This solution potentially provides greater functional flexibility and a richer spatial experience; however, it also carries the risk of losing compositional clarity and weakening symbolic legibility.

In the case under study, hybridity does not result in a complete typological synthesis but rather in the coexistence of two spatial orders that do not always remain in a harmonious relationship. Consequently, the church's form

may be described as transitional, reflecting broader tendencies in the sacred architecture at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, which sought to strike a balance between the heritage of tradition and requirements of contemporary liturgy.

Bell towers

The bell tower is one of the most recognizable elements of the sacred architecture, serving both functional and symbolic purposes. In the ecclesiastical tradition, the tower has carried vertical symbolic meanings, pointing towards transcendence while also functioning as a landmark within the urban structure. At the same time, the function of bells, associated with the rhythm of liturgical and social life, endowed the tower with a communicative dimension (Hani 1994, 73).

In the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok, the function of bell towers is performed by two symmetrical towers flanking the façade (Fig. 3). This solution refers to the traditional scheme of a twin-towered façade found in Western European architecture, although it has been reinterpreted through a simplified formal language.

In their lower sections, the church towers are rectangular in plan, while their upper sections transition into octagonal prisms. Their walls are pierced by rectangular openings with semicircular arches. The towers are crowned with decorative domes and lanterns, whose stylistic form clearly—albeit in a simplified manner—refers to late Renaissance or Baroque solutions. The proportions of the towers emphasize verticality, thereby reinforcing the symbolic dimension of “ascending”. At the same time, the use of brick as the primary material integrates them into the coherent architectural language of the entire building, reducing formal contrast.

From the urban perspective, the role of the bell towers as spatial landmarks remains limited. Despite their height and prominent compositional position alongside the façade, their visual impact is constrained by the surrounding development and the absence of connections with major visual axes. Consequently, their function as orienting elements within the urban space is weakened.

From the typological perspective, the use of a twin-tower arrangement may be interpreted as a deliberate reference to tradition, intended to reinforce the building's recognizability as a church. At the same time, the reduction of a decorative detail and the simplification of form correspond to the post-conciliar tendency towards a more synthetic use of architectural expression.

The evaluation of this solution remains ambiguous. On the one hand, the bell towers effectively establish a vertical accent and introduce a symbolic element into the composition of the building. On the other hand, their limited urban visibility and the lack of a stronger relationship with public space mean that their potential as landmarks and signs of the sacred is not fully realized.

Consequently, the bell towers of the church under study may be regarded as elements that are formally and symbolically justified, yet whose impact is partially neutralized by the spatial context and the manner in which they are integrated into the surrounding urban structure.



Fig. 3. Twin-towered façade of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok (photo by M. Nowakowski, 2026)

Il. 3. Dwuwieżowa fasada kościoła pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej w Białymstoku (fot. M. Nowakowski, 2026)

Portal

The church portal constitutes an important element of the architectural composition, serving both functional and symbolic purposes. In the tradition of the sacred architecture, the entrance to a church has been interpreted as a threshold (*limen*) between the realms of the profane and the sacred, an understanding reflected in its distinctive formal and iconographic articulation (Hani 1994, 87; Wawrzyniak 1996, 70).

Although the Church documents do not formulate detailed regulations concerning the design of portals, they emphasize the significance of the entrance area as a place of preparation for participation in the liturgy. The portal, together with a possible vestibule or narthex, functions as a transitional zone, enabling a shift in the perception of space and introducing the faithful into the sacred realm (McNamara 2009, 39–50).

In the church under study, the portal is clearly distinguished as a dominant compositional element of the building, although not as emphatically as in the historical styles of the sacred architecture. The entrance to the church is distinctly emphasized within the structure of the façade, ensuring its legibility at both the architectural and urban scales. The emphasis on the entrance axis, together with the forecourt and the entrance zone, gives the act of crossing the threshold a certain symbolic potential, although this potential does not appear to have been fully developed, possibly for economic reasons.

From the compositional perspective, the portal does not play a decisive role in organizing the perception of the building, nor does it constitute a clear culmination of the approach axis. Unlike historical solutions, in which the entrance was often strongly articulated through form, scale, and detail, its expression in the church under study remains restrained and subordinate to the overall composition of the building.

The evaluation of this solution may therefore be ambiguous. On the one hand, the reduced expressiveness of the portal corresponds to the post-conciliar tendency towards the reduction of formal hierarchies and the greater integration of sacred space with its surroundings. On the other hand, weakening the visual prominence of the entrance may contribute to the loss of a clearly articulated boundary between the secular and the sacred space, a distinction that traditionally possessed considerable symbolic and functional significance in church architecture.

Consequently, the portal of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima may be interpreted as an element characterized by a minimalist semantic expression, serving a predominantly functional rather than symbolic role associated with the idea of transition and entry into the realm of the sacred.

Entrance zone

In the tradition of sacred architecture, the relationship between a church and its surrounding space has played an important role, including its relationship with the cemetery as a place of remembrance and of continuity within the community of the faithful. Historically, such space constituted an

integral element of the sacred complex, forming a transitional zone between the profane and the sacred (Rabiej 2018).

In the case under study, the absence of a direct relationship between a church and a cemetery reflects contemporary practice, largely determined by sanitary regulations, which separates liturgical and funerary functions. The role of the transitional zone is assumed by the space in front of the church entrance, formed at the ground level.

The location of the church entrance at the ground level promotes accessibility and the ease of movement, responding to contemporary functional requirements and the principle of inclusivity. At the same time, however, it limits the symbolic potential associated with the sequence of entry, reducing the experience of a gradual transition from secular to sacred space.

Consequently, the entrance zone is primarily functional in character, while its symbolic significance remains reduced in comparison with traditional solutions, in which the process of approaching the church constituted an important element of the spatial composition and the liturgical experience.

In addition to liturgical and symbolic requirements, contemporary sacred architecture should also take into account functional aspects related to accessibility and circulation. Although the Church documents do not formulate detailed design standards in this respect, the principle of universal accessibility to places of worship follows from the pastoral character of the church as a space intended for the entire community of the faithful.

An important element of site development is the provision of an adequate number of parking spaces to ensure the efficient accommodation of participants in liturgical celebrations and parish events. The location of parking facilities should reconcile functional requirements with the need to preserve the dignity and legibility of the sacred space, so that transport infrastructure does not dominate the architectural and symbolic character of the complex.

The location of the parking area in the immediate vicinity of the church ensures efficient access to the building; however, the limited size of the site has resulted in a reduced number of parking spaces. This solution is sufficient for the everyday functioning of the parish, as a significant proportion of the faithful reach the church on foot from the surrounding residential area. The limitations of the parking system become apparent during events attracting larger numbers of participants, particularly funerals, when demand for parking spaces exceeds the capacity of the site. Consequently, the functional organization of access and parking may be assessed as adequate at the local scale but insufficient during periods of increased demand.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities also constitutes an important criterion of evaluation. The contemporary design standards require the elimination of architectural barriers through the appropriate design of access routes, ramps, and entrances. In the building under study, the entrance to the church is located at the ground level, facilitating the access for persons with reduced mobility and corresponding to the principles of universal design.

From the functional perspective, these solutions should be assessed positively. They fulfil the principle of univer-

sal accessibility to sacred space without compromising its fundamental compositional and symbolic values. Consequently, both the organization of parking facilities and the provision of accessibility for persons with specific needs constitute important elements of the contemporary understanding of the sacred architecture as a space open to the entire community of the faithful.

Materials

The selection of materials in the sacred architecture of the Catholic Church constitutes an important component of architectural expression, closely related to the liturgical function and symbolic significance of space. In the post-conciliar approach, materials do not serve merely structural and aesthetic purposes but also participate in communicating theological content and shaping the perception of the sacred.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council emphasize the need to preserve “noble beauty” (*nobilis pulchritudo*) rather than mere sumptuousness or decorative excess (Sacrosanctum Concilium 2002, no. 124). This implies a preference for authentic, durable materials whose inherent qualities and structural properties remain legible. Such an ap-

proach involves leaving imitation in favor of revealing the properties of matter—its texture, weight, and the way it changes over time. This principle has been applied in the Church of Our Lady of Fatima both in its external form and in its interior.

In the tradition of the sacred architecture, particular significance has been attributed to materials such as stone, wood, and brick, which, owing to their durability and natural origin, symbolize stability, rootedness, and the relationship between creation and the Creator. Stone, present in biblical symbolism (Pismo Święte, 1 Pet. 2:5), may be interpreted as a sign of the permanence of the Church. Wood, through its associations with the Old Testament Tree of Life (Pismo Święte, Gen. 3:22), the Ark of the Covenant (Pismo Święte, Exod. 25:10–22), and above all the Cross, carries Paschal connotations fulfilled in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the building under study, traditional materials constitute a fundamental component of the architectural composition. The external form of the church is constructed primarily of brick, while the interior is finished in neutral plaster. At the symbolic level, an important role is played by white Carrara marble, used in the sculptural elements of the sanctuary, the chapels terminating the transept, and the Stations of the Cross, thereby reinforcing the semantic hierarchy of the space.

From the liturgical perspective, the differentiation of materials between particular zones of the interior is especially significant. The sanctuary is distinguished both by an elevated floor level and by the use of materials characterized by different colors and a higher degree of refinement—namely, marble flooring contrasting with that of the nave and gold mosaic, deeply rooted in Christian symbolism (Fig. 4). This treatment corresponds to the principle of a clearly articulated hierarchy within liturgical space (Ogólne wprowadzenie 2004, no. 295).

In the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, however, a certain tension can be observed between the aspiration towards material authenticity and formal expression. On the one hand, the materials employed remain legible and consistent with the principle of the “truthfulness of materials”. On the other hand, their juxtaposition and manner of application occasionally produce effects of considerable formal intensity that do not always fully correspond to the ideal of “noble beauty”.

Consequently, the selection of materials should be interpreted not merely in technological or aesthetic terms, but as an integral element of the theological and liturgical composition, co-shaping the experience of the sacred space and the manner in which it is perceived by the community of the faithful.

Windows and natural and artificial light

Light is one of the fundamental means of shaping the sacred space, serving both functional and symbolic purposes. In the Christian tradition, it has been interpreted as a sign of the presence of God, truth, and transcendent reality (Barrie 2016; Wierzbicka 2026, 13). Although the Church documents do not establish detailed norms regarding the form and placement of windows, they emphasize the need to cre-



Fig. 4. The interior of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok, view towards the sanctuary (photo by M. Nowakowski, 2026)

Il. 4. Wnętrze kościoła pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej w Białymstoku – widok w kierunku prezbiterium (fot. M. Nowakowski, 2026)

ate a space conducive to prayer and liturgical celebration (Sacrosanctum Concilium 2002, no. 124).

In the church under study, the system of window openings is subordinated to the overall composition of the building. The windows are relatively modest in size and arranged rhythmically in the upper sections of the walls, allowing for an even distribution of daylight without excessively opening the interior to its surroundings. This solution promotes concentration on the liturgy and reinforces the sense of the sacred space as distinct from the external world.

The particular importance is attached to the natural light reaching the sanctuary. The appropriate direction and intensification of illumination in this part of the interior reinforce its liturgical significance and contribute to the spatial hierarchy. In this case, light functions not only as a practical necessity but also as an element that generates symbolic meaning (Figs. 5, 6).

Artificial lighting performs a complementary role in relation to natural illumination. Its purpose is to provide appropriate conditions for the celebration of the liturgy and to emphasize the most important elements of the liturgical furnishings, such as the altar, ambo, and tabernacle. In the building under study, artificial lighting does not dominate the space but contributes to its atmosphere by accentuating selected functional zones.

From the compositional perspective, the solutions employed correspond to the post-conciliar understanding of the sacred architecture, in which light is treated as an integral element in the formation of the liturgical space. At the same time, the relatively restrained use of glazing distinguishes the church under study from many contemporary examples in which light becomes the dominant means of architectural expression.

Consequently, the system of natural and artificial lighting contributes to a clearly articulated structure of the sacred space, reinforcing its liturgical and symbolic functions without allowing formal effects to become excessively dominant.

Acoustics

Acoustics constitutes one of the fundamental, though often underestimated, elements of the sacred architecture. Its importance arises directly from the requirements of the liturgy, in which spoken word, singing, and music play an essential role in communicating religious content and fostering the communal character of celebration (Telatycka 2025, 639). The contemporary Church documents emphasize the need to provide conditions that enable the full and conscious participation of the faithful in the liturgy, which



Fig. 5. The church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok: side chapel on the southern axis of the transept (photo by M. Nowakowski, 2026)

Il. 5. Kościół pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej w Białymstoku – kaplica boczna w osi południowej transeptu (fot. M. Nowakowski, 2026)

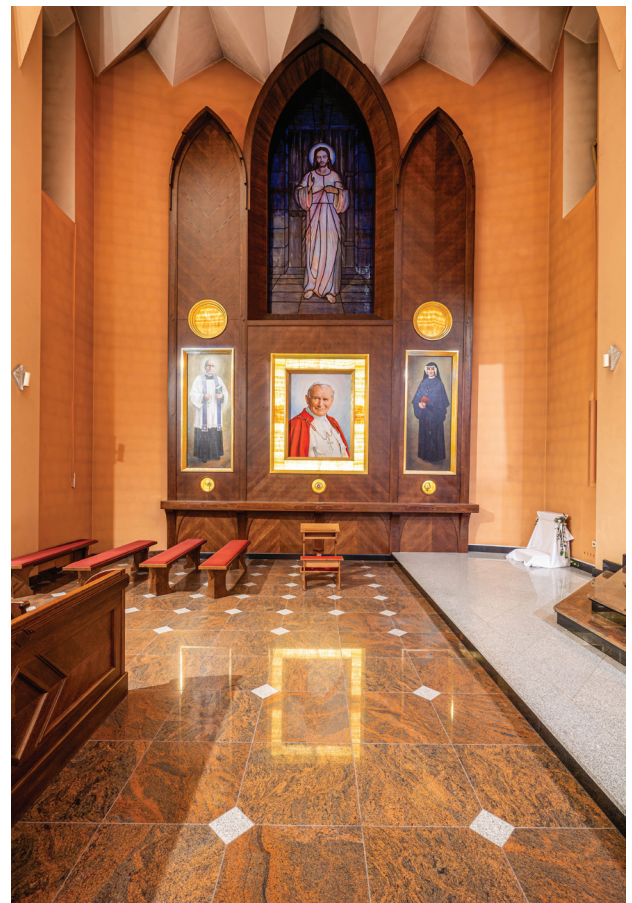


Fig. 6. The church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok: side chapel on the northern axis of the transept (photo by M. Nowakowski, 2026)

Il. 6. Kościół pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej w Białymstoku – kaplica boczna w osi północnej transeptu (fot. M. Nowakowski, 2026)

also includes adequate intelligibility of spoken texts and music (Sacrosanctum Concilium 2002, nos. 20 and 121).

In the sacred architecture, acoustic properties are shaped by the geometry and volume of the interior, as well as by the finishing materials employed. Traditional masonry churches, characterized by large volumes and a significant proportion of sound-reflecting surfaces, were conducive to choral and organ music but often impaired speech intelligibility. The liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, emphasizing the importance of the Liturgy of the Word, increased the requirements concerning the clarity of acoustic communication.

In the church under study in Białystok, material solutions typical of contemporary the sacred architecture are utilized. The extensive use of plastered surfaces, brick, and stone promotes the reflection of sound waves and contributes to an appropriate degree of reverberation. At the same time, the large volume of the interior requires a properly designed sound reinforcement system to ensure the intelligibility of liturgical texts throughout the entire church.

From the liturgical perspective, it is essential to maintain a balance between reverberation conducive to sacred music and the clarity of spoken communication. In the building under study, the acoustic environment appears to be precisely subordinated to this objective, responding to the contemporary requirements of the liturgical celebration.

Consequently, acoustic solutions should be regarded as an integral element of the architectural composition, contributing to the functionality of the sacred space and to the quality of the faithful's participation in the liturgy.

Conclusions

The analysis of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok demonstrates that the building constitutes an interesting example of the contemporary sacred architecture in which the principles arising from post-conciliar liturgical reflection have been reconciled with numerous references to traditional forms of church architecture.

With regard to its location, the church fulfils the principles of accessibility and "communal centrality", derived from the pastoral understanding of the church as a place of assembly for the faithful. Its location within the urban structure of the Bojary district ensures accessibility for the local community; however, its limited urban visibility, together with the absence of a clearly defined forecourt and axial relationships, weakens its role as the spatial landmark and as the sign of the presence of the sacred within the structure of the city.

With regard to orientation, the church under study does not follow the classical principle of *ad orientem*. The direction of its principal axis has been largely determined by the conditions of the site, the street layout, and the existing urban fabric. At the same time, the sanctuary is partially oriented towards the east. This solution reflects the characteristic shift in post-conciliar architecture from geographical orientation towards congregational orientation, centred on the relationship between the community of the faithful and the altar. This does not imply a complete loss of the symbolic significance of orientation, but rather its relativization in relation to the functional and urban conditions.

The analysis of the building's form revealed its hybrid character. The church combines features of the traditional longitudinal arrangement, derived from its Latin-cross plan and the basilican character of the nave, with centralizing tendencies associated with the concentration of space around the altar and the liturgical assembly. This solution may be interpreted as an attempt to reconcile the historical continuity of form with the requirements of contemporary liturgy. At the same time, the lack of complete correspondence between the organization of the interior and the external composition of the building limits its typological and symbolic clarity.

The important element of the façade composition consists of the two bell towers, which constitute a clear reference to the traditional model of the church architecture. Their vertical proportions and simplified forms, drawing on historical solutions, reinforce the recognizability of the building as a church. At the same time, the limited visibility of the building within the urban structure means that the potential of the bell towers as spatial landmarks and orienting elements remains only partially realized. They may therefore be regarded as an example of the deliberate use of a traditional motif within the simplified formal language of contemporary architecture.

The portal and entrance zone primarily fulfil a communicative function, although they retain the potential to symbolically mark the transition between secular and sacred space. The portal has been clearly distinguished within the structure of the façade, while the entrance forecourt forms a basic sequence leading towards the interior of the church. Its form, however, remains relatively restrained in comparison with historical solutions in the church architecture. Consequently, the symbolism of the threshold and the transition into the sacred space is present but has not been fully developed through architectural means.

With regard to accessibility and the organization of the entrance zone, the functional solutions should be assessed positively. The entrance, located at the ground level, minimizes architectural barriers and corresponds to contemporary principles of universal design. The location of the parking area in the immediate vicinity of the church provides basic vehicular access; however, the limited size of the site results in an insufficient number of parking spaces during celebrations attended by larger numbers of worshippers. The functional capacity of the complex is therefore adequate for everyday use but limited during periods of increased demand.

The analysis of materials confirmed the important role of architectural materiality in shaping the identity of the church. The use of brick in the external form, together with marble and mosaic within the liturgical space, corresponds to the principles of material authenticity and "noble beauty". The differentiation of materials also contributes to the spatial hierarchy, particularly within the sanctuary. At the same time, the intensity of certain material juxtapositions and their formal expressiveness reveal a tension between the ideal of restraint and the desire for a more distinctive articulation of the sacred space.

Natural and artificial light are subordinated both to functional requirements and to the hierarchical organization of liturgical space. The relatively limited size of the window

openings helps maintain visual concentration within the interior, while the illumination of the sanctuary reinforces its significance within the spatial structure of the church. Artificial lighting complements natural light and makes it possible to emphasize the most important elements of the liturgical furnishings. These solutions confirm that light is treated as an integral means of shaping liturgical space rather than merely as a functional factor.

With regard to acoustics, the spatial and material solutions are subordinated to the need to maintain a balance between an appropriate degree of reverberation, conducive to sacred music, and the intelligibility of the liturgical word. The considerable volume of the interior and the presence of sound-reflecting surfaces create conditions favorable to an appropriate acoustic atmosphere, while at the same time requiring a properly designed sound reinforcement system. Acoustics therefore constitutes an integral element of the functional and liturgical shaping of the space.

The overall analysis confirms that the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Białystok represents neither a direct continuation of historical models of sacred architecture nor

a radical break with tradition. It does constitute the example of the synthesis of two approaches: the traditional one, based on axiality, verticality, hierarchy, and the symbolism of architectural forms, and the post-conciliar one, emphasizing the communal character of the liturgy, functionality, accessibility, and the concentration of space around the altar.

The case study therefore indicates that the relationship between theory and practice in the post-conciliar sacred architecture cannot be understood as a straightforward application of norms to a specific architectural design. It rather appears to be a process of interpretation in which theological and liturgical principles are confronted with urban, functional, structural, and aesthetic conditions. The example of this church demonstrates that contemporary sacred architecture can maintain continuity with tradition while simultaneously reinterpreting its forms in the light of the liturgical requirements that emerged following the Second Vatican Council.

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Streszczenie

Posoborowa architektura sakralna: między teorią a praktyką – studium przypadku

Posoborowa architektura sakralna w Polsce pozostaje obszarem badań wymagającym dalszego rozpoznania zarówno z perspektywy historii i teorii architektury, jak i refleksji teologiczno-liturgicznej. Celem artykułu była identyfikacja podstawowych zasad urbanistycznych i architektonicznych wynikających z dokumentów Kościoła katolickiego odnoszących się bezpośrednio lub pośrednio do budownictwa sakralnego oraz ich weryfikacja na przykładzie kościoła pw. Matki Bożej Fatimskiej w Białymstoku, zaprojektowanego przez architekta Andrzeja Nowakowskiego. Badania przeprowa-

dzono metodą krytycznej analizy źródeł kościelnych oraz analizy architektonicznej wybranego obiektu. Ocenie poddano m.in. lokalizację, orientację, bryłę, dzwonnice, portal i strefę wejściową, materiały, oświetlenie i akustykę, a także dostępność komunikacyjną świątyni. Dzięki przeprowadzonej analizie wykazano, że obiekt spełnia wiele postulatów architektury posoborowej, zwłaszcza w zakresie funkcjonalności liturgicznej, dostępności i hierarchizacji przestrzeni, zachowując jednocześnie liczne odniesienia do tradycyjnych form budownictwa sakralnego. Kościół stanowi przykład poszukiwania równowagi pomiędzy współczesnymi wymaganiami liturgicznymi a historycznym dziedzictwem architektury kościelnej.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura sakralna, przestrzeń sakralna, teoria architektury, architektura posoborowa