

Requirements, Qualities and Solutions. Remodelling Liturgical Spaces after Vatican II in Hungary

Requisitos, calidades y soluciones. Remodelación de espacios litúrgicos después del Vaticano II en Hungría

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ABSTRACT

After the Second World War the ecclesiastical property was drastically reduced in Hungary. However, Vatican II gave an intense motivation and impulse to the spiritual-psychical revival for the communities and by this time, the preservation of the religious heritage got some statal, professional attention too. The restoration or reconstruction works were often linked with the acute interior transformations according to Vatican II. Although the Hungarian publication and interpretation of the reforms were relatively slow, still a few essential informative discussions were born. The Venice Charter (1964) also had a significant effect on the monument preservation methodology in this period. Analysing the theoretical approach of the Vatican II Constitution and Instruction a close parallelism can be identified with the architectural aspects of the Venice Charter: respect the old parts with the obviously distinguishable, new supplements, and create modern artworks with high artistic quality. The end of the paper cites some brief case studies to present the practical implementation of the directives.

KEYWORDS

Hungary, Vatican II, Theory vs. Practice, Architectural Methodology, Venice Charter

RESUMEN

Después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la propiedad eclesiástica se redujo drásticamente en Hungría. El Concilio Vaticano II dio una intensa motivación e impulso al avivamiento psíquico-espiritual de las comunidades. La preservación de la herencia religiosa recibió cierta atención profesional y estatal. La investigación arqueológica e histórica comenzó a ser exhaustiva en las capillas e iglesias medievales, y las obras de restauración o reconstrucción a menudo se vincularon con las intensas transformaciones interiores realizadas según el Vaticano II. La Carta de Venecia (1964) tuvo un efecto significativo en la metodología de preservación de monumentos. Analizando el enfoque teórico de la Carta de Venecia, se puede identificar un estrecho paralelismo con los aspectos arquitectónicos de la Constitución y la Instrucción del Vaticano II: respetar las partes antiguas con los nuevos añadidos, obviamente distinguibles, y crear obras de arte modernas con alta calidad artística. El documento examina casos de estudio para presentar similitudes entre la implementación práctica de las directivas y las líneas de actuación.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Hungría, Concilio Vaticano II, teoría versus práctica, metodología arquitectónica, Carta de Venecia

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Fig. 01. The Hungarian translations of the Vatican II documents published as little booklets by St. Stephen's Society, 1966-88.

IMPORTANCE OF THE VATICAN II IN HUNGARY

As a result of the military political situation established by the end of the Second World War and the compromises aiming to resolve conflicts of interest, Hungary had become part of the Soviet sphere of influence by the end of the peace negotiations. Until the change of the regime in 1989, the sovereignty of the country was limited, but its extent changed from time to time as a result of foreign and domestic policy events. Accordingly, the period between 1945 and 1989 can be divided into several characteristically distinct periods. The one-party system, formed by wishes the Soviet sphere of interest, urged the social re-stratification, furthermore it systematically nationalized the fields of culture, science, and education, as well. The tough restrictions experienced under the Rákosi dictatorship in the 1950s eased a bit during the Kádár era, which came after the suppression of the 1956 revolution. By that time the *who is not against us is with us* attitude was typical for the political leadership. The position of Churches, apostrophized as enemies of the established system, has also changed accordingly over the decades. While in the initial period the absolute secularization was the aim, from the mid-1960s, besides finan-

cial constraints, a more permissive and cooperative principle of state power was in place that, however, still aimed to establish an atheist state. As the first element of the easement process, for the Hungarian Church Leaders who had been completely deprived of their former international relations, the Vatican II —started in 1962— provided opportunity for renewed, but still highly controlled contact (Fejérdy 2016). In addition to organizational opening (Entz 1964), the reforms urged by the Council anticipated spiritual renewal for those in oppression. At the same time, to support liturgical reformation, the physical renewal and transformation of liturgical spaces could also become a topical, practical task. In the case of historic churches, which had been highly neglected during the atheist period of state power (Dümmerling et al. 1960), this necessary and urgent transformation provided an opportunity for the sacred building stock to receive more prominent attention as part of the national heritage. Through its central office, the state has entrusted the National Monument Protection Authority —which brought together the best experts of the era— with the reconstruction and internal renovation of the churches.

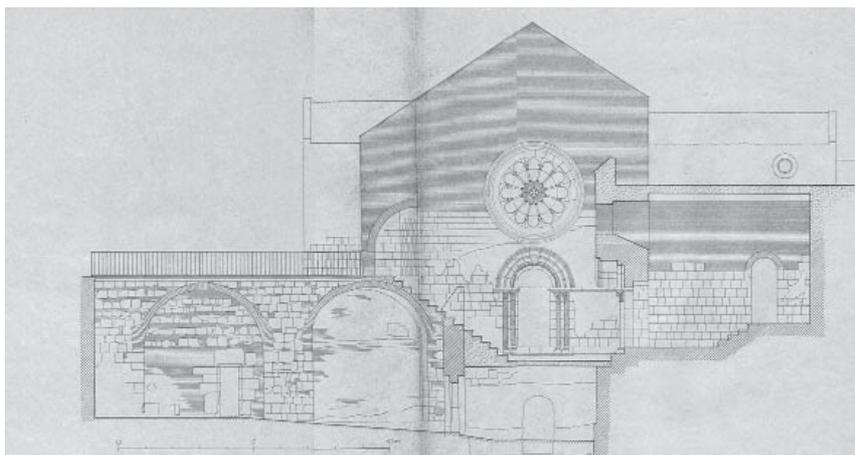
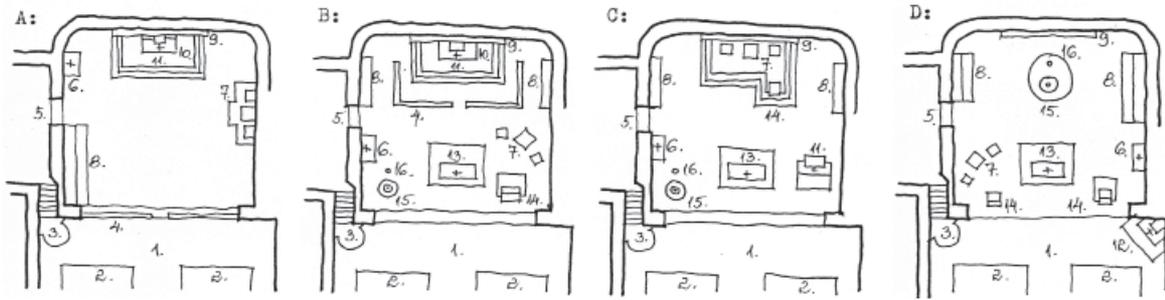
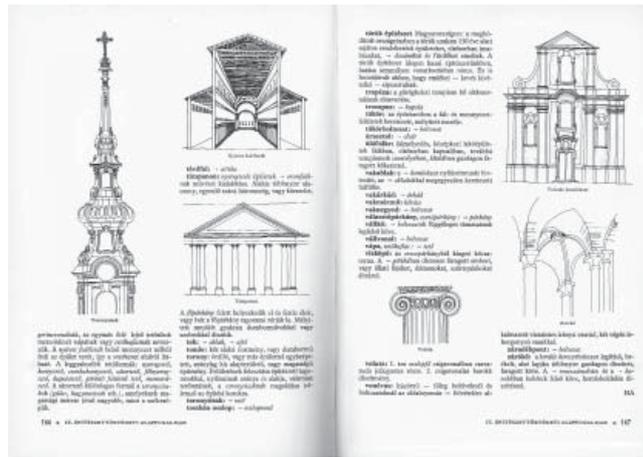
HUNGARIAN PUBLICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE REFORMS

The Archdiocese of Esztergom has already drew attention to the most important points of a council reforms in its circular letter of the 20 March 1965: while the use of own national language is uniformly mandatory in the *Instrukcio* section, in respect of the liturgical space, the use of *versus populum* altar named in the *Constitutio* section, is primarily recommended but not obligatory.¹ Considering the protection of existing values, from the ecclesiastical point of view, the transformation of liturgical spaces should be done only in those cases where the valuable artworks and installations are not damaged by the intervention. The circular cautioned the parish priests against mediocre creations in the spirit of innovation, and highlighted the importance of noble artistic value of the new installations. The Hungarian translation of the central provision of the Vatican II had been completed relatively slow: between 1966 and 1988, the Saint Stephen Society published the documents in Hungary, not all at once but in forms of little booklets (Fig. 01). In addition, interpretive dictionaries and explanatory texts have been published in columns of several Christian journals for a long time.

In 1966, Ödön Dümmerling published his manuscript to support the professional renewal of the sacred heritage. Interpreting the rules, in the introductory part Dümmerling clearly stated the Church's requirements for liturgical spaces, that the Church considers it important to protect valuable old memories, while it also considers it appropriate to formulate new works of art by contemporary means. From an architectural point of view, an essential element of the summary is the interpretation of the spatial impact of liturgical reform on the church space, which is not directly stated in the *Constitutio* though, still it is apparent from the changed usage. Accordingly, in a functional sense, the division of the church space into parts of the sanctuary and the ship was abolished from this time – which, in the case of historical monuments, was visible by the difference in floor level or by their actual separation with a parapet or railing. Dümmerling states that by the *Liturgia Eucharistiae* coming to the centre, the

Catholic church space was getting closer to the space of the Reformed churches. The reform brings down the pulpit from its former high position to the place of the *Liturgia Verbi*. The priestly chair, the *sedile* becomes part of the daily mass, and in connection with this the *legile*, the reading stand is added as a new element. Standing sacrifice is allowed, and while it is recommended but not mandatory to establish a *versus populum* altar, the use of the *sedile*, the *legile* and the *ambo* are absolutely necessary. The rest of the manuscript deals with the detailed analysis of existing or new elements used in the liturgical space, taking into account the characteristics of the historic churches. Each chapter is divided into three main sections: requirements, conditions and solutions. An important element of the manuscript is the presentation of solutions fitting into the constraints of historical insides that might be considered good or at most compromised, which Dümmerling recommends to designers for practical implementation.

As a result of council reforms, efforts to transform existing liturgical spaces throughout the country accelerated. During the initial period, often unprofessional interventions took place, so central, professional support of the architectural-space renewal became essential from both church and monument protection side. Theoretical and practical training of pastors and designers has become very urgent. At the conference held on the 17 March 1967 the Hungarian Bench of Bishops established a three-member bishopric committee for the introduction of the liturgy reform in Hungary. In order to protect historic churches, the committee was in direct contact with the National Monument Inspectorate (*Országos Műemléki Felügyelőség*, OMF). The guidelines of the Vatican II placed great emphasis on ensuring the quality of renewal – the Diocesan Committees for Church Arts and Monuments (*Egyházmegyei Egyházművészeti és Műemléki Bizottság* EEMB) were also established in Hungary. In the same year, the Council of the National Church Art and Monuments (*Országos Egyházművészeti és Műemléki Tanács*, OEMT), consisting of liturgists, pastors, architects, art historians, was also formed. The council primarily assisted the



The first temporary, Hungarian edition of the Roman Missal published in 1969 was a significant step of the liturgical renewal initiated by the Vatican II (Pákozdi 2013) —the second, official edition appeared in 1975.

In 1971, a volume entitled *Preservation of Ecclesiastical Buildings and Works of Art* was published, which focused on not exclusively on the reforms of the Vatican II, yet the synod constitution was a powerful motivator for its compilation (Cserháti-Esze 1971). The manual is the result of the successful cooperation and extensive work of OEMT and OMF in order to provide a useful, pragmatic summary of preserving the ecclesiastical heritage to the priesthood and to practitioners of restorations and transformations. In the case of historical buildings, the book deals with the religious and liturgical aspects according to denominations in a separate chapter. In the introduction, the authors clarify the definition of historic buildings and works of art, and the basic tasks that are essential for their preservation. The second chapter highlights the importance of careful maintenance, furthermore details the challenges of organizing and implementing rehabilitation and conservation work. The third chapter deals in separate divisions with the different phases of the building restoration according to the technical and monument protection aspects. In the second part of the manual, church experts and theologians present their viewpoint on the difficulty of protecting historical church monuments. The book was published relatively late compared to the Council reforms, therefore it already presents sev-

eral realized examples, which could be considered as reference for further restorations. With the help of rich photographic documentation, it represents solutions considered valuable, and tries to professionally support the work of conservationists and designers. The book ends with a chapter explaining the basic concepts of architectural history with graphic illustrations, thus helping to interpret the terminology more precisely for a broader readership whose interest is not restricted to architectural history (Fig. 03).

Tamás Guzsik's work entitled *The Architecture of Christian Liturgy* was published in 1988, of which *The functional analysis of Sacred Architectural Spaces I-III* work is essentially an extended form. By analyzing the evolution of the architectural space of Christian liturgy, the purpose is to present the function and operation of the sacred building in detail. The writing, as a summary of essential knowledge for architects involved in church design, conversion and renovation, has become an important material in academic architectural education as well. Guzsik demonstrated the spatial and formal development of the social changes of historical eras primarily on conceptual floor plans, he aimed not to analyze specific examples of particular eras (Fig. 04). He devoted a separate chapter for the transformation of the liturgical space requirements of the Catholic rite, used since 1570 as a result of the Vatican II. After presenting the Council's reform efforts and then the new liturgy, he dealt with liturgical space needs, separately discussing the transformation of existing liturgical spaces and designing new ones.

THE HUNGARIAN ANTECEDENTS OF THE VENICE CHARTER, ITS IMPACT ON SACRED SPACES

There are many Hungarian examples of the practice of nineteenth-century conservation movements —that have become professionally challenged over time— which are primarily structure-based and in urge for unity of style (as in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic church in Buda or the Inner City Church in Pest). On the other hand, the architectural practice for the protection of monuments that respect the later construction periods of

Fig. 03. The manual entitled *Preservation of Ecclesiastical Buildings and Works of Art*. Cover and details from the book.

Fig. 04. Variations of transforming an existing liturgical space: a) The liturgical space to be transformed; b) Transformation retaining the retabulum altar as a sanctuary, repositioning the shrine grid; c) Transformation with the formation of sedes and ambo in front of the retabulum, with a separate tabernaculum; d) Transformation with the formation of baptismal space in front of the retabulum, with double ambo, with the tabernacle placed on the triumphal arch.

Fig. 05. Entrance to the Esztergom Castle Chapel, Esztergom (Hungary).



Fig. 06. Foundation walls of the excavated basilica, ruin garden, Székesfehérvár (Hungary), 1936.
Fig. 07. János Sedlmayer, St. Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church, Tar (Hungary), 1978-84; reconstruction.

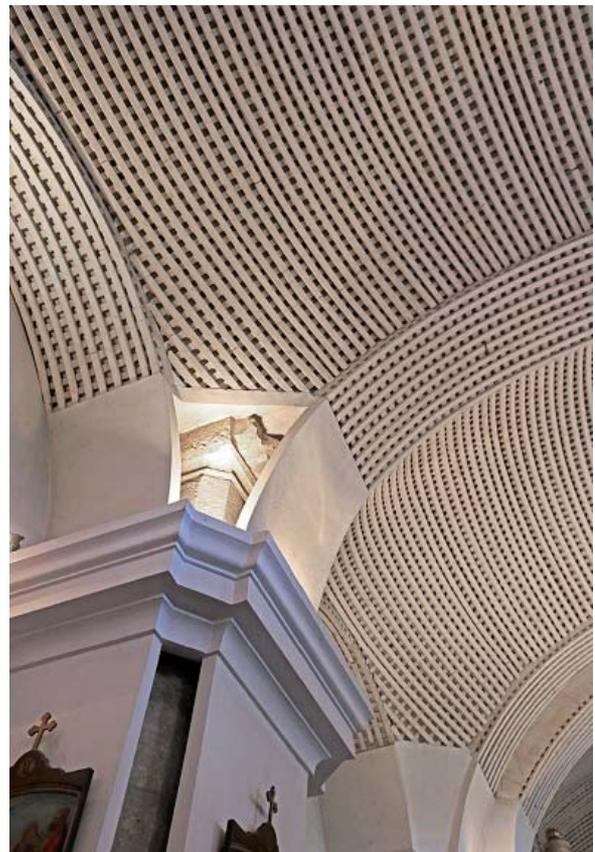
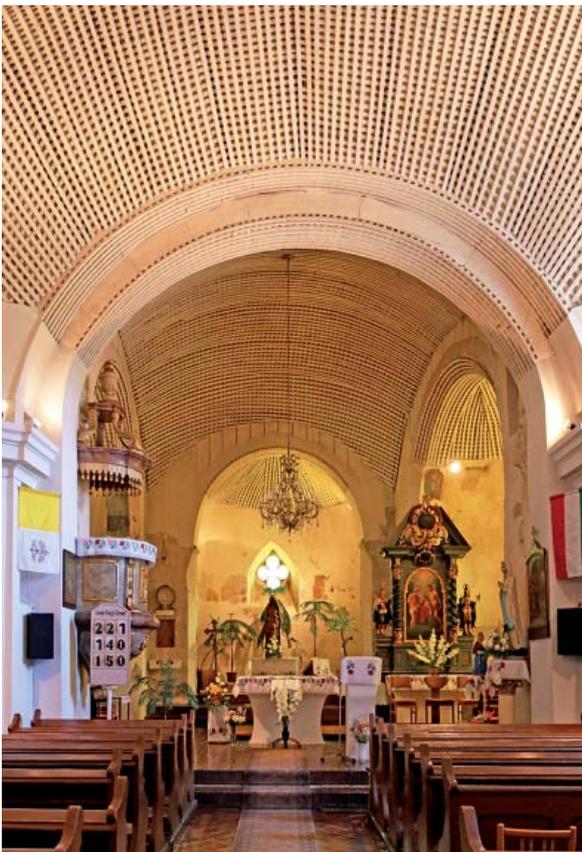




Fig. 08. Major monument protection and architectural journals and periodicals of the Roman Catholic Church.

buildings and strive for distinctive character in subsequent additions was uniformly positively judged in the period between the two world wars (Marosi 2019). The archaeological research and reconstruction of great national importance (in Esztergom and Székesfehérvár), scheduled already for the *double holy year* of 1938, far advanced the professional aspects of the later Venice Charter (Fig. 05–06). Based on this, the embeddedness of the charter in Hungarian practice was well justified before its establishment. The protection of 20th century monuments was defined by charters that sought to have a unified, international impact. The Venice Charter in Hungary essentially confirmed the high-quality domestic practice between the two World Wars. Over time, however, the modernity of the charter has become inseparably linked with distinctiveness and often to the pursuit of architectural didactics (Zsembery 2015). In the second half of the 20th century, most of the restorations, structural and spatial reconstructions —affecting also historic sacred buildings— considered the spirit of the charter as a general reference (Fig. 07).

APPLYING LITURGICAL REFORM IN THE PRACTICE BEFORE THE CHANGE OF REGIME

The Liturgical Movement, evolving from cooperation between theologian Romano Guardini and architect Rudolf Schwarz, helped greatly the formulation of reform efforts on sacred spaces of the Vatican II. The spirituality of the Liturgical Movement obtained the architectural expression in the design of the Knights Hall of Rothenfels Castle. However, the visual appearance and content of the space created as a result of the common thinking of Guardini and Schwarz —hundreds of black painted cube stools and uniformly whitewashed walls— make it difficult to reconcile with the details of the historic spaces with antiquities that need to be protected and preserved. The Rothenfels experience not only influenced the architectural design of old and new sacred spaces, but also eventually became part of the architecture theory canon. The Knights Hall is an often cited, internationally widely known and admitted example, which is a fundamental reference point in the Hungarian professionals' arguments up until the present day



Fig. 09. St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church, Nagybörzsöny (Hungary). Architectural restoration plans: Ferenc Erdei, Zsuzsa Sedlmayrné Beck, 1966-67; archaeologist: Ida Romhányiné Ratkai.

(Somorjay 2019). It is important to note, however, that already in 1918 Guardini warned the proponents of liturgical renewal that the purpose is not the new aesthetic, but the renewal of the spirit with the help of the new aesthetic (Guardini 1997).²

Pope Paul VI in his speech of 1963 addressed the church artists of the time as follows: «We now address you, artists, who are taken up with beauty and work for it: poets and literary men, painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, men devoted to the theatre and the cinema. To all of you, the Church of the council declares to you through our voice: if you are friends of genuine art, you are our friends ... It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to the heart of man and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations and makes them share things in admiration. And all of this is through your hands. May these hands be pure and disinterested. Remember that you are the guardians of beauty in the world. May that suffice to free you from tastes which are passing and have no genuine value, to free you from the search after strange or

unbecoming expressions. Be always and everywhere worthy of your ideals and you will be worthy of the Church which, by our voice, addresses to you today her message of friendship, salvation, grace and benediction...» (Cserháti-Esze 1971, 105).

In the spirit of the Vatican II, from the second half of the 1960s, there were unprecedented experiments both in the proper repositioning of the installations of the liturgical space and in the artistic design of the new furnishings (Katona and Vukoszávlyev 2012; Vukoszávlyev 2015; Urbán 2017). Since the publication of the first instruction in support of the Council's reform, there have been many cases of adverse changes from both liturgical and monument preservation aspect. According to the legal environment of Hungarian monument protection practice, the protection applies to the whole building, including accessories and furnishings, still in most cases these additional, easily movable elements have been the victims of inconsiderate renovations. The *Instructio* had given wide enough room for individual design initiatives, but in order to protect existing values may



Fig. 10. Roman Catholic Church of the Sorrowful Virgin, Nagybörzsöny (Hungary). Architectural restoration plans: Zsuzsa Sedlmayrné Beck, 1966-67; archaeologist: Ida Romhányiné Ratkai.

not brought enough attention to limit the amount of interventions. In Hungary, between August and December 1965, the first facing altars were already established (Budapest, Rákosfalva, Boncfölde), however, due to the limited financial resources of the parishes, major transformations were delayed to later years. The 1960s and 1970s also marked the revival of architectural modernism, thus, the design of the new liturgical furnishings of the shrines was essentially carried out along modernist principles.

Due to the easing of political pressure on churches, more articles on sacred buildings and historical restoration plans were published in architectural and monument protection journals compared to those of the 1970s and 1980s (Fig. 08). In addition to summarizing and interpretive works, several shorter case study articles have appeared, and some exemplary restoration work has been published also by the Catholic press. In connection with practical implementation, it is important to remember the Hungarian translation of Dambeck, Franz's article published in *Christliche Kunstblätter* journal in 1960, the remarks

of which were basically taken over by the Hungarian monument protection, and even the Catholic press widely popularized the writing. The approach change of the organizational system of monument protection—being under reorganization since the 1960s—also contributed to the successful restorations. In addition to institutional reorganization, general regional research programs were launched to support archaeological research on sacred relics of medieval origin, and typically, they supported the restoration of historic monuments in connection with these – already with a liturgical space formed in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

In addition to the books and guides edited by the Churches and architects to help interpret the reforms, it is also important to commemorate the work of those designers who implemented the council's requirements in practice. Discovering and publishing creative approaches to spatial transformation and liturgical design has also contributed to a wider range of good practices. The Council's recommendation was easier to adopt to the space organization

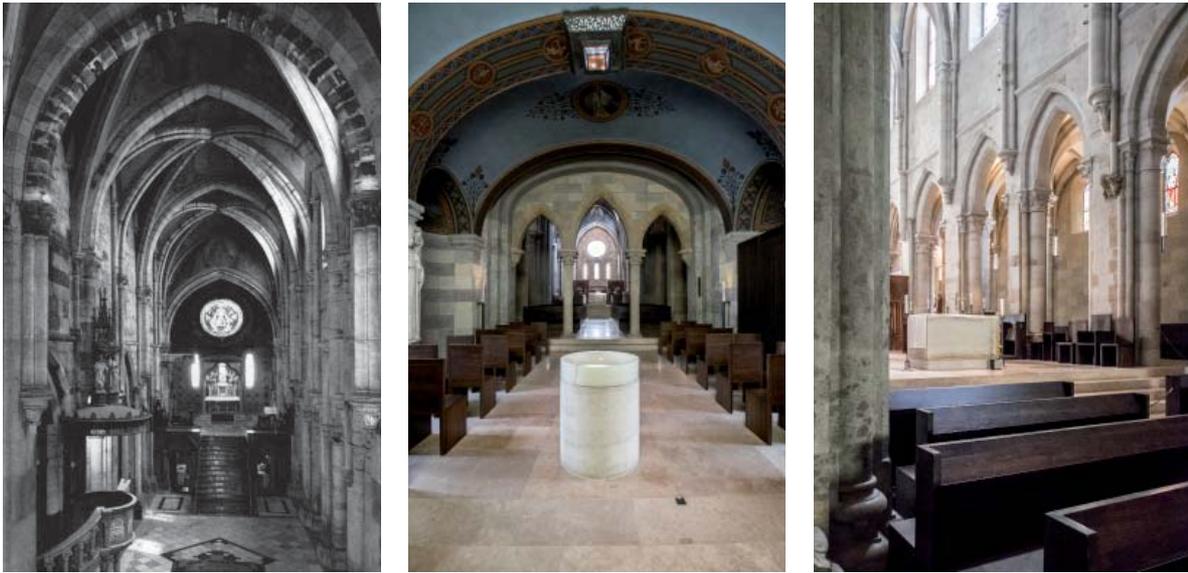


Fig. 11. John Pawson, St. Martin's basilica, Pannonhalma (Hungary); transformation, 2008-12; restoration, 2015.

of medieval churches. By contrast, the conversion of Baroque churches caused a greater problem, as the installations and furnishings were so integral to the church space that their removal would significantly damage the essence of the architectural work. In the 1960s Nagybörzsöny was an important site for OMF, where two mediaeval churches were fully restored (Klaniczay 2019). Inside the interior of St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church restored according to the plans of Ferenc Erdei and Zsuzsa Sedlmayrné Beck, the raw stone masonry provides the architectural framework for the new liturgical installations (Fig. 09). The sanctuary was raised by a staircase relative to the church nave, and the altar table, prepared using an old tombstone, was centered to this. The later choir was also rebuilt in a stylized form. In the case of the other mediaeval church in Nagybörzsöny, the Church of the Sorrowful Virgin (Mining Church), major structural interventions were already required. Subsequent extensions and attachments were demolished, a new roof and slabs were created and the medieval openings were explored (Horler 1968). The new liturgical space was designed according to the

recommendations of the Vatican II —instead of a mediaeval sacrament in the wall, a new pastophorium was created to facilitate better visibility. The restoration of the building was rewarded by a professional award of excellence in the era (Fig. 10).

It has become a common practice in the era to distinguish old and new parts by different surface finishes of the same material (mediaeval original elements made of rustic raw stone and contemporary additions carved from fine polished new stone). This quasi type-solution could have provided a model for the transformation of more complex forms of space (such as Baroque church spaces); however, those were typically not so spectacular, conceptually guided implementations. On the whole it can be still stated that the spirit of the Venice Charter was strongly in parallel with the Vatican II's value approach, and these two documents seem to be in line from a monument protectional aspect (at least in terms of aesthetic appearance).

AFTERMATH OF THE VATICAN II

By the end of the 1980s, the liturgical space transformations of the historic churches in Hungary were completed almost everywhere. In spite of the fact that a detailed objective was available, the professional toolkit for the protection of monuments was not clear and given to achieve this. Professional books and guides supporting the practice were not always available for those affected. In the second half of the 20th century, the *Instructio* section of the Council contributed truly to the symbolic renewal of the spatial concept of church architecture. It is important to emphasize that although the Council document treated certain terms related to liturgical reform as a non-mandatory standard (such as the priest's *versus populum* position), in practice, however, they have emerged as a fundamental need for change, even for historic buildings. The centralized position of the Lord's Table (positioned at the centre of the community) became expedient and necessary: the centralized position marked, however, not necessarily the centre of the floor plan, it rather intended to indicate a kind of intellectual focal point (Bouyer 2000).

The current reassessment of the Council reforms is still relevant and necessary from the heritage protection point of view (Kránitz 2002; Schloeder 1998). Recently, broader professional discourse on the status of church monuments occurred only in relation of certain memories. The care for church buildings, more specifically for sacred buildings, has not been the subject of extensive debate in a broader sense and methodologically. The restrained purity of the Rothenfels Knights Hall is still a strong basis for shaping contemporary sacred spaces in Hungary — by creating completely new buildings or just remodelling old ones. The restoration of St. Martin's basilica in Pannonhalma and the transformation of its liturgical space — considered to be one of the flagships of Christian history of architecture in Hungary — is an illustrative example of the above-mentioned monument protection-architectural-theological-liturgical circle of conflict. For the spiritual preparation of the renovation of the Pannonhalma basilica, the Benedictine community that maintained the church created the so-called *Basilica Workshop*, whose task

was to carefully prepare the liturgical, theological and monastic aspects of the transformation work. The monastic community wanted to create a space appropriate to the spirituality of its age, and the Rothenfels experience was considered a strong point of reference (Fehérváry 2008). Following the transformation, similarly to the layout of the traditional monastic liturgical spaces, a two-focus solution was created, which in principle can be understood as a quasi-central (*communio*) community space (Katona 2017). In terms of material use and shape, elements of simple geometry, but noble material have appeared in space, characteristically different from historical parts (Vukoszávlyev and Urbán 2014). The strictly geometric furnishing of the space is almost completely separated from its immediate physical environment: it gives the impression that the historical church space is considered as a single frame, but does not attach importance to the dialogue with it because it focuses exclusively on the spiritual inner centre (Vukoszávlyev 2012). The most concentrated point of the interior is the apse, where the horizontal axis of liturgical objects intersects the invisible vertical axis, the *axis mundi*, which connects the Earth and Heaven. The sanctuary space is completely empty, showing only the entry point of light during the liturgy, which counts as the counterpoint of the foreground under the western tower (Fig. 11).

During the more than two thousand years of the development of Christian liturgy, the basic elements of the early rites, such as the table community and preaching, have remained throughout all liturgies over time. The additional ceremonies attached to them were sought to be unified in the West. The pastors maintaining historic churches and architects planning the renovations have moved towards unification also in case of non-mandatory, just recommended reform efforts. The Church, in every age, allowed and supported development in accordance with the change of preferences throughout the ages, and accordingly wished to present the art of the current age freely within the Church. *Modernity* has become a universal requirement and, with the use of contemporary forms and materials in historical spaces, the reference to council reform is still relevant

today. The purist and later didactically explanatory approach of the former monument protection practice was replaced by the reductive tendency of the present day: the pursuit of formal simplicity and simplification that has become commonplace in architecture has also reached the transformation of these historic church spaces. The strong opposition between the arguments of the art historians, architects and the circle of users is still determined by the fundamental contradiction between the criteria of historical value and the use value.

However, it is important to emphasize the common ground behind the different viewpoints (Hardy 2011): both heritage protection and Church rejects archaizing and hypothetical purism, preserves and inherits tradition, yet recognizes and supports the potential for development. Beyond the desire to protect existing historical values, there is a fundamental parallel between the need for *modernity* readable in the Venice Charter and the reform efforts aiming to be adequate for the age of the Vatican II. In both documents, we can talk about theoretical pursuits, and there is no mention of realization in practice or feasibility. The visual and aesthetic appearance created after the actual transformation of historic sacred spaces (and the range of architectural tools and materials to be used for achieving it) was determined by the professional skills and decisions of the designer as an architectural history expert and artist-engineer. Due to the well-functioning institutional and organizational structure, effective transformations could be and can be achieved only through efficient professional and church communication with the help of well-trained experts (Urbán 2019).³

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NOTES

1. Five instructions issued so far in connection with the Vatican II: *Inter Oecumenici* (September 26, 1964); subsequently: *Tres abhinc annos* (May 4, 1967), *Liturgicae instaurationes* (September 5, 1970), *Varietates legitimae* (January 25, 1994) and *Liturgiam authenticam* (March 29, 2001).

2. The determining theoretical work was first published in German in 1918 and in English in 1930.

3. In February 2019, the conference organized by the Association of Old Building Researchers (Régi Épületek Kutatóinak Egyesülete = RÉKE) focused on the process of sacred and architectural renewal of liturgical spaces (Bardoly and Haris 2019). The volume of studies compiled from the lectures presented at the conference was entitled *Transformations – Liturgical Spaces and Monuments*. It is also clear from the presentations that the Synod does not provide a clearly applicable set of rules from the aspect of monument protection, even in a 21th century interpretation.

SOURCE OF IMAGES

Fig. 01. St. Stephen's Society, 1966-88.

Fig. 02. OEMT, 1968.

Fig. 03, 09a, 10a, 11a. Cserháti-Esze, 1971.

Fig. 04. Guzsik, 1987.

Fig. 05a. Survey and Reconstruction Plan, 1934.

Fig. 05b, 08. Author's archive.

Fig. 06. Fortepan, Tibor Somlai.

Fig. 07, 09b, 10b, 11b. Erzsébet Urbán, 2016-19.