


# Giacomo Lercaro in Bologna. An influential and paradigmatic event between 'Experiences, hopes, defeats'

*Giacomo Lercaro en Bolonia. Un evento influyente y paradigmático entre 'experiencias, esperanzas, derrotas'*

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## ABSTRACT

Facing the emergency of building new churches, while Bologna was living a demographic boom in the fifties, Giacomo Lercaro chose to create an integrate system of progress. The ritual form of faith is spatially determined according to the physical peculiarity of the place in which the salvation is celebrated by *Familia Dei*. This form invokes an aesthetic-symbolic quality, in order to enable the delivery of human and social poverty in coherence with the Mystery. These experiences accompany the hard research of an appropriate place for the form of faith and an adequate faith for the form of the place. Given the absolute symbolic relevance of the ecclesiastical building and the performative capacity of the ritual, every research and intervention depend to personal and pastoral requirement rooted into extra-liturgical area. In fact, fiddling with the ritual means not only tampering the celebratory quality, but reconfiguring the ecclesial identity itself.

## KEYWORDS

Giacomo Lercaro, Bologna, *Familia Dei*, *Actuosa Participatio*, Choral History.

## RESUMEN

Ante la emergencia de construir nuevas iglesias, mientras Bolonia vivía un auge demográfico en los años cincuenta, Giacomo Lercaro decidió crear un sistema integrado de progreso. La forma ritual de la fe se determina espacialmente según la peculiaridad física del lugar en el que la *Familia Dei* celebra la salvación. Esta forma invoca una cualidad simbólico-estética, para permitir la entrega de la pobreza humana y social en coherencia con el Misterio. Estas experiencias acompañan la dura investigación de un lugar apropiado para la forma de la fe y una fe adecuada para la forma del lugar. Dada la relevancia simbólica absoluta del edificio eclesástico y la capacidad performativa del ritual, toda investigación e intervención depende de los requisitos personales y pastorales arraigados en el área extralitúrgica. De hecho, jugar con el ritual significa no solo alterar la calidad de celebración, sino reconfigurar la identidad eclesial misma.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Giacomo Lercaro, Bolonia, familia Dei, actuosa participatio, historia coral.

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Fig. 01. The faithful around Lercaro (Bologna, 25/06/1956).

## THE BEGINNING OF EPIC

It was the year 1955. The 26th of June. An open car emerges from the quiet heart of the historic Bologna towards those suburbs that urban development had quickly generated with rivers of cement. On board was Cardinal Lercaro. Embracing a large cross. He was preceded by a police motorcycle and followed by a group of loyalists. It will be a desired and intense tour: eleven *stations*, one for each land on which a sign is placed, announcing: «Here, with the help of God and the Bolognese people will rise the church of...» (Lercaro 1996, 86) (Fig. 01). It hasn't even been three years since he entered the diocese and the Cardinal has fulfilled a strong, charismatic and prophetic gesture, which exposes and compromises him. It is the effective beginning of a successful and in all a short work that Lercaro promotes around the pastoral urgency of reaching the *disappeared* sons in the disarranged suburban. He wanted to redeem in a programmatic way those forgotten suburbs which had made the evangelism action of the classic parish structure precarious.

It was therefore necessary to identify the potential coordination centers of the new city; which often seemed still confused, immature, troubled by the uncertain and uncoordinated development. For this reason, it was necessary to meet with the agencies responsible for the various bodies concerned, both for a better knowledge of the real situations and also in the case of forecasts and decisions. (...) Because this is the most seductive aspect from a Christian profile, and also from the social human profile: a community is created! (Lercaro 1996, 85-94).

With deep intuition Lercaro catalyzes around him in a few months a group of professionals and priests who organizes the most complete and transversal system prepared by a diocese to develop a pastoral plan. In the months before that 26 June and the ones immediately following, here is the most significant number of events and institutions that arise with providential intensity: 1954, November, arise the Office for the Study of the Problems of the City and forensics, directed by Don A. Mazzoli; 1955, 14 May, announcement of the Plan of the New Churches; The Archbishop's Organizational Technical Office was born, headed by L. Gherardi; August 1, the Office of New Churches is born, director Don A. Mazzoli;

23/25 September emerges the National Congress of Sacred Architecture with the inauguration of the Exhibition of Sacred Architecture, modern sacred furniture in Europe and the Exhibition of suburban churches; In the same period the Center for Studies and Information for Sacred Architecture was founded, directed by Gl. Gresleri, from which the magazine *Chiesa e Quartiere* directed by L. Gherardi was born. This short list gives us the measure, the difference and the uniqueness of the work of which Lercaro was the promoter, thanks to which the redemption of the relationship between the Church, The Liturgical Movement and the Modern Movement comes to its most complex and driving form. Bologna obtains tools for the analysis, study, debate and dissemination of ideas in an international horizon.

Lercaro's love for the *city of the poor* (poor of urban quality) made him imagine that the new Bologna, in the face of the historic center saturated with buildings and spaces with high significance, could also conform as a place of great signs, as new iconic architectural buildings capable of radiating vitalizing energies to the suburbs, certainly through the power of pastoral action, but also with the driving force of the emblematic quality of architecture! (Gresleri 2004, 27).

The Petronian Diocese, which in a short while will see architects such as Tange, Le Corbusier and Aalto pass through, would live a structural different experience than, the Milan of Montini or Turin of Pellegrino. Glauco Gresleri, a witness of those years, noted that

Bologna will establish an integrated system of progress. The exchange between liturgists and architects is an everyday operational practice. Ideas move forward together with solutions, one by encouraging the other according to circular spiral processes of constant growth. There are no rules; from time to time but they're created and found. Liturgical intuitions are born to formalize through the light of the experimentation that only architecture can give. The architecture clarifies the liturgy, as it defines it, providing it with the keys to organize the space (Gresleri 1991, 106).

The heart of Lercarian liturgical thought is well explicit precisely at the inaugural lecture of the 1st Congress of Sacred Architecture, in that wondrous 1955. In the context of a historical *excursus* that compares the pagan temple to the Christian basilica, the Cardinal states:

Christian worship, instead is essentially communitarian. It is the *plebs sancta*, it is the *familia Dei*, it is the mystical Body of Christ, which, together with its divine head, elevates the anthem of praise, thanksgiving, imploration, supplication to the majesty of God. The liturgy, is known in the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, is the prayer of the total Christ, Chief, that is the limbs. But the assembly that is welcomed in the church is that of the *familia Dei* for the encounter with the Father not in a private conversation (...), nor collective (Lercaro 1996, 19).

The explicit reference to the encyclical of Pius XII *Mediator Dei* (1947) serves as a systematic framing of an element that is peculiar to Lercaro, or rather the insistence on the *familia Dei*. In the pontifical text the noun *familia* is used five times directly and one time within a citation, without being followed by the genitive *Dei*. In the adversative that opens the quoted words «But the assembly that welcomes us in the church is that of the *familia Dei*...», let's take all the human-spiritual intensity and liturgical-theological specificity of Giacomo Lercaro. In reference to the absolute centrality of Mass (Marzola, 1988,18), he is experientially convinced that the celebration of divine mysteries is the place of theological transformation for fraternity and familiarity in the renewed sign of the Gospel. In December 1955 he publishes his very popular directory *For the active participation of the faithful at the Holy Mass read* which, could not have by title except the exclamation *A Messa, figlioli!* Why did I speak earlier about *experiential persuasion*? Lercaro, in May 1948, as Bishop of Ravenna, welcomes in his home the first three boys of which will become the *Famiglia*, formed by young people permanently housed with the intention of freeing them from poverty and supporting them in formation. Through the passage to Bologna the *Famiglia* still finds its place in the episcopate, expanding



Fig. 02. Glauco Gresleri, Beata Vergine Immacolata alla Certosa, Bologna (Italy), 1958.

further and structuring itself as a kind of community. Well, precisely to *his boys*, on January 7, 1967, he directs an autographed writing that expresses with intense affection and faith the *poietic* of Lercaro and illuminates what has been said so far:

Today, at the first Vespers of our celebration at home, the feast of the Holy Family, will be-blessed the semi-public Oratory, that is, the Chapel, of our home and consecrated the Altar. Without the altar our *Famiglia* wouldn't even have been born; if born, it couldn't have continued, let alone grow; if, for one hypothesis, the Altar were to fail, the *Famiglia* would cease immediately and *Villa S. Giacomo* would become a Hotel or, at most, a hostel. The reason to be of our *Famiglia* is written on the altar and indicates the meaning that the altar has in our home: just because on the altar we fraternally divide the Heavenly Bread, it is reasonable and dutiful that we divide together even the earthly bread, much less precious than the Heavenly one (Chiesa di Bologna 2019).

I think that in this autograph there is the most vibrant synthesis of Lercaro's liturgical-pastoral vision, where action and mysticism, charity and prayer, are expressed in an accomplished form. If the focal point of ministry care is for him the active

participation of the faithful (Lodi 1991) this aims to form, through the sacraments, the Family of God. The essence and spirit of liturgical prayer

It is first and foremost essentially the work of that spirit of Christ that permeates the Church; which arouses it in the hearts of the faithful united with the Church by the faith; It is he himself, indeed, the Spirit of the Lord, that lifts from the hearts of the faithful the filial prayer: *Abba*, Father! (Lercaro 1996, 22).

#### BUILD THE CHURCH TO BUILD UP THE CITY: AN ARCHITECTURE FOR THE *COMMUNITAS*

The relationship between the sharing of heavenly bread and the sharing of earthly bread, the foundation of the *Lercarian belief*, therefore finds in Bologna the possibility of being rethought in a horizon until then unknown. In order to become a pastoral and social project, it must also become an architectural and urban project, with an essential poetic quality. Thanks to the involvement and collaboration of personalities such as Giorgio Trebbi, Giuseppe Vaccaro and Giuliano Gresleri, the potential of this approach doesn't delay to express itself courageously.

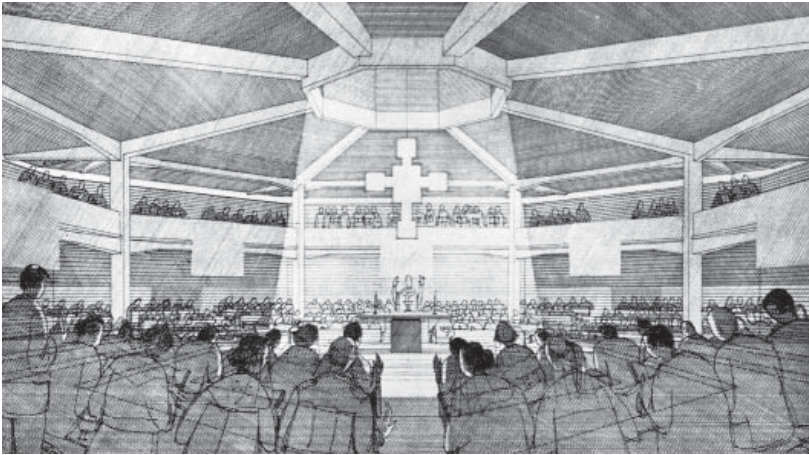


Fig. 03. Cooperativa Ingegneri e Architetti di Reggio Emilia, The assembly of faithful, Reggio Emilia (Italy), 1956.

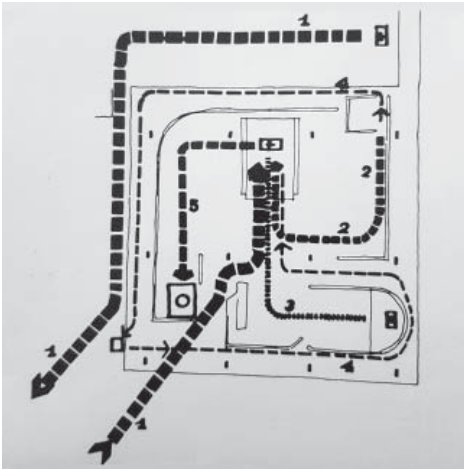
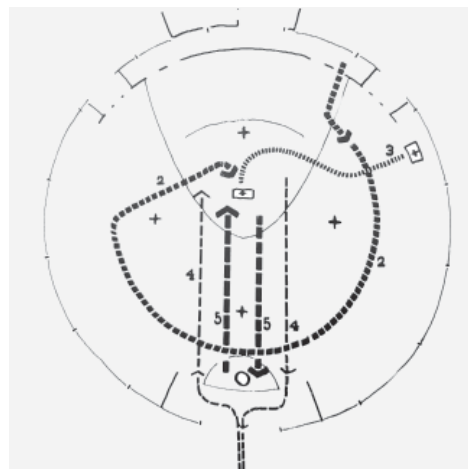
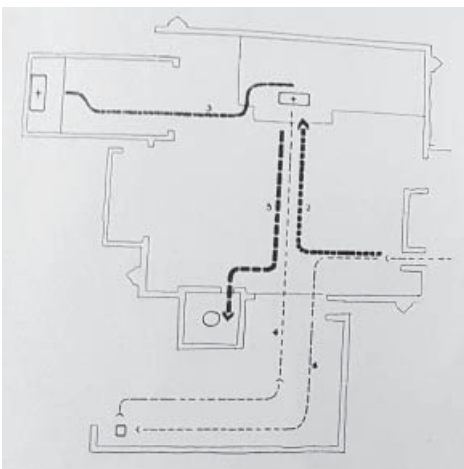


Fig. 04. Liturgical processions.



Trebbi and his people study the way of free aggregation of the faithful starting from the photos of the clusters that gathered around the crosses for the future churches of the epic carousel led by Lercaro in June 1955 (...). Pioneering are the drawings of the Cooperative Engineers and Architects of Reggio Emilia that appear in the number 2 of *Chiesa e Quartiere*: the procession of the faithful happens in an arena at the center of which, inundated with zenith light, camp the celebrant priest; (...). This spatial device, one of the cornerstones of the *Lercarian* in pastoral and liturgical magisterium, was beginning to experiment in the Diocese, which other additional incentive for active participation (Bettazzi 2016) (Fig. 01).

Comparing the drawings on which Bettazzi speaks about, published in 1956, with Giuliano Gresleri's project for the church of the Blessed Virgin Immaculate at Certosa (Fig. 02), which construction started in the same year, we can get a precise idea of the potential liturgical system that the assembly is distributed around the altar, which with centrifugal and centripetal force organizes the ritual (kinetics) paths and the relationship between the faithful (proxemics) (Fig. 03).

It will be the number 20 of *Chiesa e Quartiere* that will give us an account of the work of interchange between architects and liturgists by publishing the cycle of liturgical paths related, a part from the church of the Immaculate Virgin, to the church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Vaccaro-Nervi, starting in 1956) and that of St. Joseph worker (Bassi-Boschetti, since 1957) (Fig. 04).

It demonstrates the definition of a church that Lercaro gave in the first line of the Prolusion in Bologna in 1955. It is «a typical structure of its functionality, set in the world of the secular buildings that surround it, with which it divides the space and creates the city; but living thanks to a spirit of his own, all new, in which the Christian soul of the community vibrates» (Lercaro 1996, 17). This *spirit of its own*, as is evident in Lercaro's teaching and in the articles of the magazine *Chiesa e Quartiere*, frees the design from mere functionalism. For the cardinal,

no one like the artist has the ability to feel deeply and sometimes to foresee, almost to capture, perhaps unconsciously but with exquisite sensitivity, addresses, positions, aspirations of an environment, a moment and to make an interpreter. The artist who creates the church must deeply experience the idea of liturgical worship and taste and assimilate its soul; then it will be easy and almost spontaneous to bring to the men of his time, in their language, the echo of the divine word. (...) People alive: yes, because God is the God of the living and not of the dead. For this reason I think that the language of sacred art should be grabbed and understood by the soul of the people (Lercaro 1996, 25).

Certainly the Bolognese Movement, since its inception, is the protagonist of a cultural renewal that exceeds both national and ecclesiastical boundaries and expresses «the awareness that art had to be contemplated in the definition of the sacred space» (Apa 2004, 135).

At this point it is necessary to outline a summary about Lercaro's thinking about the relationship between liturgy and architecture, in reference to the experience that was maturing in the Petronian premises. Two expressions present in the conciliation constitution on liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, are particularly valuable and useful for this purpose. The first, at number 48, states that the active participation of the faithful —aimed at offering themselves in union with Christ's offering— is based on the understanding of the mystery of faith *per ritus et preces*, that is, through the celebration itself. Ritual performance has, in the complex relationship between the languages that determine it, a cognitive *proprium*. Not only does it *express* a faith that has already been acquired, but it is *fons* of its form (SC 10). Secondly, the number 49, states that the pastoral effectiveness of the Mass also depends on the quality and mode of its celebration, that is, thanks to the *ritual form, rituum forma* (Della Pietra 2012). If not in this way the number 50-57 that prepare the *Revision of the ordinary of Mass* would be a simple makeup operation. Proceeding along this line but taking a further step forward, we could say that faith by its nature spatially determined according to the characteristics

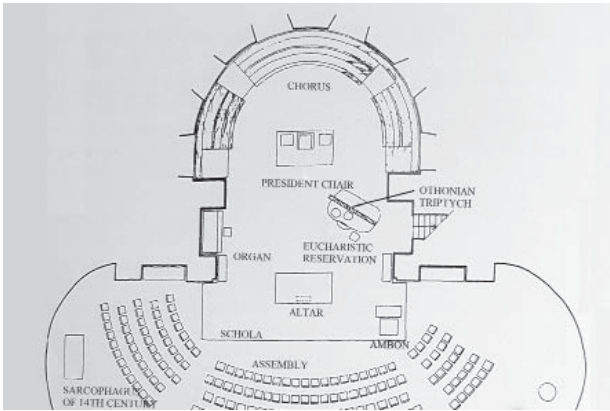
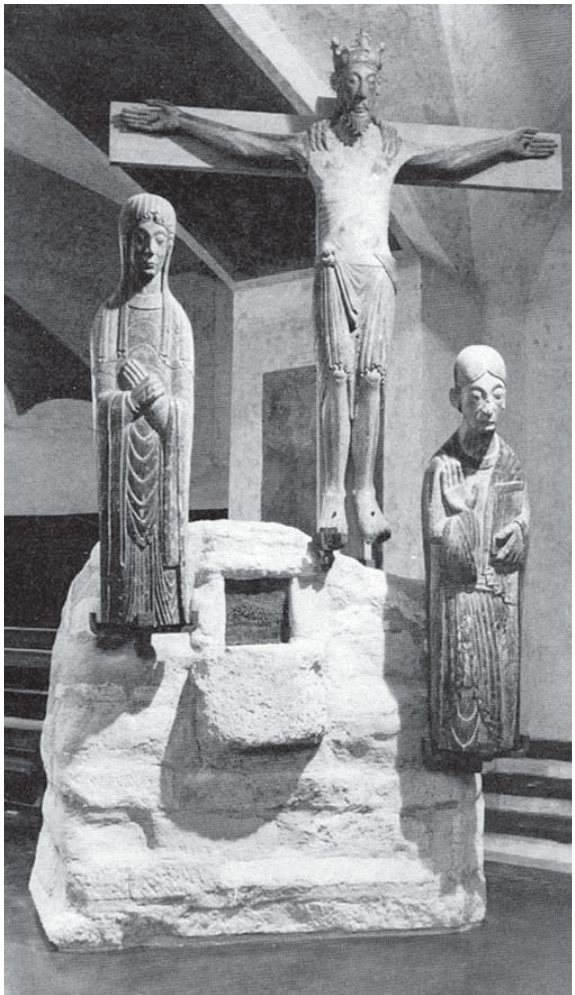


Fig. 05. Gaucio Gresleri, Schematics of the crypt; Othonian triptych; view from the chorus, Bologna (Italy), 1966.



of the place where it celebrates salvation. In fact, «sacred space is necessary for the transformation of participants. If space, in general, imposes a *feeling* in those who live there, this is in all the major reason for sacred space» (Leto 2017, 192). The *Sitz im Leben* Bolognese allows us to interpret in this direction Lercaro's statements about the transformative capacity of the sacred space: «The church, which the architect is about to build with frankness and enthusiastic love, is for that family the house, *conditioning and nourishing its life*» (italics are mine) (Lercaro 1996, 39). In 1959 at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, anticipating almost SC 48 *sub species architecturae*, Lercaro exclaims: «But is it evident that to make, if not strictly possible, certainly easier, truer, more effective that understanding and participation of the faithful to the sacred Mysteries, the functionality of the church's architectural complex is crucial» (Lercaro 1996, 66).

#### THE LITURGICAL ADAPTATION: ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE AND POLICY PRAGMATIC

Here we are, therefore, to address the theme of the renovation and liturgical adaptation of the crypt of the Bolognese cathedral, carried out by the will and under the supervision of Cardinal Lercaro then President of the *Consilium ad Exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*. It is his *first work* in line with the new liturgical constitution in which he «wanted to express the double truth of the participatory liturgy and the need that the spaces of historical sacredness acquired must also be reread and transformed in the spirit of the new liturgical consciousness» (Gresleri 2004, 235). In the project carried out in the afterwards of the Council by the architects of the Center for Study and Information for Sacred Architecture, meets with all the liturgical lines described so far come together. The great themes of the active participation of the *familia cuncta Dei*, of the relationship between liturgy art and architecture, have here their authoritative reprocessing on the basis of the Council *magisterium*. The number 37 of *Chiesa e Quartiere* relates the entire work and, offers a brief historical and technical nod, explains

the purpose of the intervention: a) ensuring liturgical functionality in the clear articulation of spaces and in the enhancement of the pieces of art placed there; b) to give back to the environment its original charm; c) determine a clear hierarchy between: *elements for active worship* (altar, tabernacle, cathedra, ambo, schola, organ); *devotional elements*; *museological elements*. The liturgical functionality is sought above all with a scale back of the presbytery area and its proportions, projecting it towards the assembly in such a way to make the altar the focal point of all the space. Thanks to the positioning of the *Schola* and the organ, the altar becomes the center of the cruciform system both structurally and proxemics. Around it on the four sides Assembly and ministers are placed. Particular attention is given to the Eucharistic reservation, built with blocks of Selenite from the Roman era, above which are placed and positioned three statues of the Ottonian era (Christ, the Mother, St. John) (Fig. 05).

The guiding criteria for adaptation can be traced back to the study sent by Lercaro to the annual Symposium of artists in Cologne in 1968, entitled *Instructio De cultu mysterii eucharistici* for the construction of the churches (Lercaro 1996). The *Instructio* stems from a request by Lercaro to Paul VI, noting

the practical difficulties on Eucharistic worship, due to a lower compliance with numerous rules (...) to the new ordering of the rites. There was also some apprehension about certain initiatives, which gave the impression of less veneration towards the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist (Bugnini 1983, 818).

The project design of the crypt (opened in 1966) and the development of the *Instructio* (published in 1967) are parallel. The issues addressed by Lercaro in the study are: a) the place of the altar, b) the altar-assembly relationship, c) the place of action of the assembly, (d) the conservation of sacred species. He acknowledges in paragraph 53 the merit of having also completed in the applicative way, the process of rediscovering the primal record of dinner in the global economy of the Eucharistic mystery, translating it into a norm of behavior. Caused by the *intrinsic*





Fig. 06. Grelo (Gresleri Lorenzo), The Iercarian crypt, Bologna (Italy), 2004; axonometric.

Significant, in support of this reflection of Le Goff, that Lercaro had asked, without obtaining it, to be buried right in the crypt. That place was therefore symbolically representative —*stone document*— of his episcopate.

Bologna, after Lercaro's forced resignation in 1968, experienced a process of systematic estrangement from a Bishop who had been severely compromised and who, perhaps, had progressively created tensions and bad-feelings even in the diocesan clergy

and, regarding the crypt, he had created confusion among the Canons of the Cathedral (Gresleri 2004). The fate of a liturgical adaptation is therefore linked to dynamics that are not simply attributable to those ritual, architectural, technical. The monumental dimension of these interventions touches the ecclesiastical identity, acting on the symbols of identification and belonging, with frictions generated by the energies that are unleashed in the different ecclesiastical visions and in the relationship that they

*choral in the Eucharistic celebration* linked to the universality of Christ's sacrifice (Lercaro 1996) (Fig. 06), the altar «must therefore be arranged so that all the faithful can not only see it clearly from every point of the church, but may feel indispensable part (...) in the Liturgy of the Word and in the Eucharistic liturgy» (Lercaro 1996, 129). The choices of the architects made in the adaptation of the crypt seem to us perfectly commented by these citations.

Reading the plan of the crypt and the report published in *Chiesa e Quartiere* we may recall a kind of imbalance between the architectural and symbolic importance given to Eucharistic reservation in respect to the ambo and the president chair. If we don't consider the context that motivates the drafting of the *Instructio* and the post-conciliar discomfort regarding the location of the tabernacle, we would hardly be able to understand the reason for this choice. «Closely linked with the centrality of the altar and its relationship with the assembly is the problem of the conservation of Eucharistic species» (Lercaro 1996, 130): that is why «powerfully the plinth [where] is set the three cedar wood statues» (S. Pietro a Bologna 1966, 29) is located where today perhaps no one would propose to put them and where certainly, the pastoral note CEI on the liturgical adaptation would not recommend it because «the highly recommended solution for the placement of the Eucharistic reservation is a special chapel, easily identifiable and accessible, very dignified and suitable for prayer and worship» (CEI 1996, 124). Yet «the atmosphere of the site was of mystical high intensity. The group of the Crucifixion, for proportional and proxemics relation with the assembly space, stood out with exceptional evidence, achieving, with the wooden figures of the group itself, the sense of wrapping of the *familia cuncta Dei*, in order to make the *participatio actuosa* absolutely real» (Gresleri 2004, 236). Now let's ask what happened in the time of this intervention that *went around the world*, earning considerable acclaim. To be honest, it would be enough to go in person to the crypt of the cathedral, in person, to realize the current state of that *mystic space*. It has suffered a «hidden violence against the constituted quality» (Gresleri 2004, 235).

Every work of liturgical adaptation, never definitive, is comparable to a narrative process of writing and rewriting (Riva 2013). No wonder, then, that since 1966 till-now other experiments didn't changed the articulation of the celebrative poles. Lercaro himself, in 1968 warned: «We do not pretend to build churches for the next centuries, but let us just make modest and functional churches, which serve us and before which our children feel free to rethink of new ones, to abandon them, to change modify them as their moment and religious sensitivity will suggest» (Lercaro 1996, 150). Between 1996 and 1997, on the occasion of the liturgical adaptation of the Cathedral, despite the indications of the Superintendent of Architectural and Environmental Assets of Bologna which recommended to *save the original spirit* of the crypt, it was dismantled and used as a *material quarry* (Gresleri 2004). It was also a bad fate to the works of art placed in it: disassembled (the tabernacle), juxtaposed in the Cathedral space (the *Pieta del Lombardi*) or weakened in their new site (Ottonian triptych). Why was this choice made? The answer is very delicate but, according to a historical and contextualized reading, not impossible. Is the *monumental* value of that work that has made it, at some point, censurable and destructive. According to Le Goff,

the Latin word *monumentum* must be linked to the Indo-European root *men*, which expresses one of the fundamental functions of the mind (*mens*), memory (*memini*). The verb *monere* means to remember, to give *warning*, *enlighten*, *instruct*. *Monumentum* (...) is all that can recall the past, perpetuate the memory (...). But since Roman antiquity the *monumentum* tends to specialize in two senses: 1) a work of architecture or sculpture for commemorative purposes: arch of triumph, column, trophy, porch, etc.; 2) a funeral monument intended to pass on the memory in a field where memory has a special value, the death. The characteristics of the monument are to be linked to the capability, voluntary or not — to perpetuate historical societies (it is a legacy to the collective memory) and to refer to testimonies that are in the least written testimonies (Le Goff 1978, 38).

maintain with the government powers. Architectural practice depends on pragmatic politics, whether it is implemented by an individual or a group. Therefore we need to analyze in the terms of a *social history* of the relationship between space and liturgy, since «the history of the liturgical transformations of the sacred space is (...) a choral story: a history of collaborations, clashes, negotiations and bullying» (Montanari 2013, 64-65). Every architectural intervention, when it touches the context of memory, is inserted into this macrosystem and becomes a document as a «product of the society that has been made according to the relationship of the forces that held power in it» (Le Goff 1978, 42). And so exposes itself not only to be modified but also to be destroyed, based on the memory of which it is bearer and which a group of persons intend to perpetuate or erase. In this *dangerous game* includes the story of a liturgical adaptation, only partially dependent from regulatory, architectural and ritual evaluations. The «ungrateful fate» (Gresleri 2004, 235) which was met by the Lercarian redevelopment of the St. Peter's crypt in Bologna, tells us a story made up of «experiences, hopes, defeats» (Gresleri 2004, 226) in which the different *ecclesiastical currents* have acted in the same buildings by changing them according to their own political vision. Let us give the final word, as a hopeful revival, to Cardinal Lercaro, who so said to his listeners in Assisi in 1965:

Excellencies, distinguished congressmen, friends, I now have to make a wish, from the bottom of my heart. The torch, which has lit up the dark times and certainly which hands doesn't tame, nor quits, but fatigued by the years, have brought here with intimate passion for humanity and a great love for Christ Man-God, in the glory of God the Father, in the Holy Spirit and by his bound charity, can be received by the hands of the youngest, and for the integrity of the forces and the fresh creative energies can give concrete implementation to promises and expectations, not in the sign of breakage, or protest, but in the continuity of the living tradition of the Church (Lercaro 1996, 101).

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Fig. 01, 06. Bettazzi et al, 2004.

Fig. 02. [www.archilovers.com](http://www.archilovers.com)

Fig. 03. <https://ilmosaicobo.files.wordpress.com>

Fig. 04. *Chiesa e Quartiere 20* (1961).

Fig. 05. *Chiesa e Quartiere 27* (1966).