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Modern Church Architecture in Hungary after World War Two

I fully understand we need
Both carriers of sand and hewers of stone:
One cannot build a house without their labour.
But these have only the foggiest idea
Of the grand design in which they play a part. -
Only the architect comprehends the whole,
And even if he cannot carve the stone
The work is his creation, he its god. -

Imre Madách, *The Tragedy of Man*

Introduction

Hungarian church architecture after World War Two is the least known chapter in the history of this genre but probably one of the most exciting as well. It may seem to be obvious to divide the period between 1945 and our days by one sharp demarcation line of the 1989 political change but the situation is much more complex especially because the one-party system or communist dictatorship started only after the changes in 1948-49. In addition, our church architecture was influenced not only by the events of the short-lived Second Hungarian Republic but by more specific factors of the period such as the series of reforms within the churches and the changes in the architectural trends in the west which turned out to be stronger than any time before. In the following we make an attempt to set up a new periodization based on stylistic forms and church history rather than traditional historical events.

Staying within the historical time frames (1945-1989), in the period of our discussion we can speak about the construction of a few hundred new churches in Hungary. This figure seems to be high only at first sight; as a matter of fact, there are only a few dozen reaching the required standard. The rest would be the work of individual communities being aesthetically insignificant but sociologically all the more important. If time favours them, they might eventually find their place in the canon of art history like their predecessors built hundreds of years earlier in the Roman times. For the time being, however, we stick to the smaller group simply because certain phenomena appear more evidently in these churches. The first part of this essay will deal with those events that determined the Hungarian church architecture of the

period while the second part will point out its particular characteristics through the analysis of six outstanding churches.

The denominational distribution of the churches under discussion more or less accurately reflect the religious affiliation of the Hungarian people: the majority being Roman Catholic, the minority Protestant. Concerning the period between 1945 and 1989 we can talk about the building of only Catholic and Protestant new churches whereas there were only a few Lutheran ones built and no synagogue at all. Although the so-called small Churches got somewhat strengthened in the eighties—the Hungarian Baptists, for instance, built several chapels in that decade—but the real flourishing period was to come only later.¹ On top of all that, as we shall see, the churches built in the eighties have closer connections with those erected after the political change than with the earlier ones.

Summary

Our church architecture in the interwar period can be divided basically to two trends: the historicizing and the one following the modern trend in a restrained manner. Both trends have produced excellent works even if they do not belong to the main churches dominating the architecture of the period. Posterity is inclined to emphasize the churches built in the modern style such as Gyula Rimanóczy's building complex in Pasarét (1931-34), Aladár and Bertalan Árkay's church in Városmajor (1932-33) and Iván Kotsis's in Balatonboglár (1932-33), mostly comparing them to the Italian architecture of the time. However, in addition to the major works, it is worth remembering those which were searching for a compromise between the renewal of traditions and the modern discourse such as, for instance, the churches designed by Károly Weichinger or Nándor Körmeny—whose style were to explain a number of later phenomena.

However, the period which was not so much flourishing but rather consolidated was broken by the world war damaging and ruining a number of outstanding buildings. Fortunately, after-war reconstruction started quickly and included the building of churches as well; this is how the Kapisztrán Szent János Church in Rózsadomb was built in place of the destroyed chapel.² A great value of the architecturally not so outstanding building is that it is a visual memory of the church artists of the interwar period, especially that of the so-called Roman

School, and as such it is the last messenger of a free era since the Communist Party's seizure of power put an end to the period of church architecture in Budapest for decades. The Magyar Szentföld [Hungarian Holy Land] Church, the last building of the greatest master of the Hungarian Bauhaus was left unfinished; designed by Farkas Molnár—inspired by his travels in Palestine—the building might have become a very unique example of the history of Hungarian architecture.³

The ignominious fate of the Magyar Szentföld Church is also a turning-point in our church architecture since the strengthening of state control over the churches limited its possibilities. During the process called 'separation' with hypocritical euphemism the church properties were nationalized, the protesting clergy was cleared out of the way and the most important church leaders were forced to resign.⁴ The process was officially sanctioned by the Constitution accepted on 20 August 1949 which ensured the secular supervision of the religious organizations. In 1949–50 legal settlements were made between the church and the state leaders. On 19 May 1951 the government established the State Church Office which was the sole authority in religious issues in the following decades as well as the Council of the Free Churches responsible for the small churches.⁵ In the fifties there was no chance of building any church in Budapest and the best-known church artists were forced to work in provincial churches. To save the artists, a kind of underground organization came into being: for example, between 1950–54 Ernő Jeges decorated eight small provincial churches with wall paintings.

Nevertheless, even the severe state control did not mean total shutdown. It was during these years that, for example, the Lutheran church in Csengőd⁶ or the Roman Catholic Church in Taksony⁷ both of which clearly show the architects' search for new ways trying to strengthen the believers by renewing traditions. Árkay's church in Taksony is particularly interesting because, as it has been pointed out by Ilona Rév,⁸ in its details of form it follows modern prefigurations whereas in its treatment of space and mass it follows Baroque ones.

The slow political thawing from the sixties was parallel to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), the most important event changing the Catholic church art of the twentieth century. As a result of the preliminary negotiations, the Council confirmed the spontaneous reforms in church architecture and sacred art, allowing for greater artistic freedom. One of the most important architectural principles is that the buildings should be intimate, the tower- and cross-shaped floor plans are not obligatory and special attention is to be paid to the incoming light. The most important element of the liturgical reform was the changing of the thousand-year-old role of the altar which resulted in the rearrangement of the sacred spaces.⁹ In 1962 Pope Paul VI sent the following message to the church artists: "We do not want you to follow a certain tradition or stick to a certain style. We want your art to be true, worthy and effective for us to be able to understand, to bring help, to tell the truth and that the people be receptive to sacred religion by it. Be truly connected to the Christian spirit and cult, live in harmony with it and then do what you will!"¹⁰

The architects of the countries behind the iron curtain primarily had to meet the requirements of the state even in the matters of sacred buildings and the state tried to make their job as difficult as possible. According to the regulations of the State Church Office, for example, new churches could be built only on the old lot already used by the Church or they had to offer a lot of a similar value to the state—

which practice later turned out to be absolutely controversial. From a formal point of view, the church had to conform to its environment; in practice, it meant that the building of towers had to be given up. Another concern was that the construction was mostly to be done by the congregation. Although the formal requirements were not abolished, the political power slowly started to ease the situation of the Churches from the second half of the sixties: in 1967 the censorship of the religious papers was abolished and in 1968 the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party confirmed the state support of the Churches. In 1971 the Council of the Public Matters of the Churches eased its former rigour and abolished the decree prohibiting the political activities of the clergy. Within fifteen years each historical Church was represented in the National Council of the Patriotic Popular Front. Cardinal József Mindszenty, the person most guilty in the eyes of the state but more and more heavily criticized even from within the Church left Hungary in 1971 and with his death in 1975 "the church hierarchy was restored". The new cardinal, László Lékai could be present under the slogan "The trimmed tree is coming into leaf" in Békásmegyer¹¹ when the first sods were cut at the building of the first church without any predecessor in socialist Hungary even though he did not live to see its consecration.

Paradoxically, the declared or undeclared expectations of the Hungarian state as well as the tight financial situation showed some similarities with the changing concepts of church art after the Second Vatican Council expected spirituality rather than impressive ornamentations from the artists commissioned by the Church. For the architects educated on modernism, i.e. the generation which took over the control of church architecture from the mid-sixties the above cited principles of Paul VI—truth, efficiency and intelligibility—meant form without compromise. For them, the accumulation of historical citations cannot provide a solution; it will come into the forefront only from the appearance of postmodernism in the eighties when it became an almost instinctive requirement of the free Churches searching for a connection to the society in their own roots. In the sixties and seventies, however, the only acceptable style of contemporary church architecture was modernism both in the secular press and in the church media. This is the reason why Ilona Rév calls the churches of the era "experimental workshops"—even if the term can be applied rightly only to a few dozen of the several hundred Hungarian sacred buildings between 1949–1989. The reason why the transition is so unexpected and powerful is that nearly a whole generation was missing since the churches built in the two decades after World War Two cannot be regarded as works transcending the realities of everyday life and representing artistic concepts and world-views as a whole. When, however, in the early sixties a thirty-odd-year-old architect was commissioned to design a church in a small village in the Bükk Mountain, he started his job with a self-confident knowledge of the tools of modern architecture and created his work which turned out to be a milestone. The name of the village is Cserépváralja and that of the master is László Csaba.

The young Csaba who was working in the workshop of Iparterv started on his career completely by chance and became one of the most outstanding architects of the twentieth century. He was visiting an agricultural building nearby when a foreman from Cserépváralja and the local priest came up to him and asked if he was willing to accept the commission to build the chapel named after Worker Saint

Joseph for the township of eight hundred residents.¹² Csaba came up with a simple floor plan which was made avant-garde by the roof: the diagonally positioned cross beam rising towards the back wall created a unique spatial experience by placing the altar in the centre. Asymmetry is emphasized by a wedge-shaped prism functioning as a bell-tower and the windows breaking the wall behind the altar. The use of material conforms to the environment: the church-mass and the "tower" are covered by ashlar with the latter being whitewashed.¹³

The form without compromise did not mean that church-building was without conflicts. The most daring elements of the church in Cserépváralja—the tabernacle door painted by Béla Kondor and József Somogyi's Corpus—fell victim to the conservatism of the believers.¹⁴

In Erdőhorváti, in the absence, and without the awareness, of the architect, using some of his earlier authorized plans the locals built a Greek Catholic church which was referred to by Csaba as "the mirror of the Hungarian reality of the seventies"¹⁵. His best-known sacred building, the church in Hollóháza was erected in the place of the old one which was pulled down because of the expansion of the porcelain factory from the state budget in 1967. Later on it became a part of the state's official display.¹⁶ A similar story will be that of the All Saints' Church in Farkasrét whose picture was given as a present to Paul VI by János Kádár the first Communist leader who was received by the pope on 9 June 1977. Paul VI gave Apostolic benediction to István Szabó who received the Ybl Prize, the highest state award in architecture. It was the first time in the 35 year-old history of the prize that it was awarded for a sacred building. By 1980 the chapel named after the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Hungarians, the most visible sign of the good relationship between Hungary and the Vatican, had been built in the undercroft of the Saint Peter's Basilica in Budapest; the construction was supported by the Hungarian state although they also supervised the designing process.¹⁷

The examples of Cserépváralja, Erdőhorvát and a number of others show that the community commissioning the building of a church became much more important than for decades before. The patrons, the supporters and the companies caring about the spiritual life of their workers had disappeared; the believers had to create the conditions of construction. Almost all of the new churches were built in the form of voluntary work with the help of donations of the congregation; at best, from the end of the seventies donations for furniture came from some Scandinavian countries or from overseas. This kind of work cannot be realized without a charismatic pastor who is able to keep the community together such as László Koroncz in Nemeshtés or Imre Bíró in Farkasrét. In order to achieve his goal, the latter even entered political life. As opposed to the great number of disadvantages of community church-building, a positive feature would be a closer affinity with the building. It is well illustrated by the fact that at many places like Nemeshtés or Budapest-Farkasrét the anniversaries of the consecration have been regularly celebrated by the believers who take great care in preserving the original form of the buildings.

On the basis of the above we can draw the following conclusions: Hungarian church architecture was basically determined by two phenomena, namely, the pressures deriving from the rigour of the one-party state and the degree of sticking to the forms of modern architecture whereas its changes were generated by two events, namely, the Second Vatican Council and the weakening of the late modern trend in the eighties. All of our architecturally valuable sacred build-

ings of the sixties and seventies accept their own contemporaneity and one of their common characteristics is the fact that inspired by disadvantageous conditions they show some revolutionary solutions. These include the innovative structural solutions forced by the cheap building processes, unique floor plans deriving from the regulations and limited lot conditions and the special forms resulting from the tension between traditions requiring impressive appearances and the present expecting self-control. It would be a mistake to suppose that these phenomena were characteristic only of this side of the iron curtain. Quite the contrary: the church artists, architects, painters, sculptors and craftsmen in Hungary were concerned about the same problems as their American, Danish or Australian colleagues and more than once even their solutions show concrete similarities.

Beginning from the eighties, as the schism between the state and the church started to get smaller, the architects were less forced to give up their concepts which resulted in a growing number of good-quality buildings though not many of them being outstanding. The communities getting rid of the limitations were less keen on modernism and the historicizing motifs increased both in the Protestant and in the Catholic church architecture. While in Hungary the reviving religious communities commissioned churches with two-four, sometimes seven towers following medieval patterns, the Catholics of the world also discovered that the Second Vatican Sacrosanctum Concilium had not said a word about the architectural styles.¹⁸ Calls for the necessity of "reform of reform" came from the clergy as well as the congregations. The sudden burst of enthusiasm generated the neogothic form of the Houston Saint Martin's Church accommodating 1200 persons as well as the super-classicist cathedral of Our Blessed Lady for seven thousand believers in Licheń, Poland.¹⁹ During the past decades it has become clear that the insecurity and slow falling of the idol of architectural modernism as well as the cultural and stylistic pluralism emerging with the weakening of ideological limitations inevitably attract the domination of historical traditions or at least the appearance of the sometimes misunderstood references to them. Although the above examples are extreme, they illustrate the similarities of the discernible processes in Hungary and in the rest of the world.

"The Hungarian sacred architecture of the nearly five decades following World War Two can hardly be measured with the standards of a Western European architect," wrote Attila Farkas, Secretary of the National Council of Church Art and Heritage in 1991.²⁰ Since the two decades of its publication it has been proved that this idea has to be rethought. The comparative study of the greatest Hungarian works of an individual character born under the pressure of five-year plans and the control of state agencies and their counterparts in international architecture gives an opportunity for the discussion and research of such a wide context that would extend well beyond the scope of this essay; therefore, here we can provide only a few examples to illustrate the above-mentioned concept. The six churches in pairs are the following: Hollóháza and Budapest-Farkasrét, Nemeshtés and Nyíregyháza-Borbánya as well as the chapels in Ildikó Square and Táltos Street, Budapest. Their introduction is intended to point out the existence of stylistic and formal phenomena parallel to the international trends, referring to the conscious or spontaneous nature of the application of the forms of foreign origin as well.

Hollóháza and Farkasrét: the Basic Historical Types

The Saint Ladislaus Church in Hollóháza and the All Saints' Church in Farkasrét, built one decade apart, are the most significant sacred buildings of the four decades of the Hungarian People's Republic. After their completion, both became the symbol of the good relationship between the state and the Church. By today this aspect has lost its relevance but both of these churches are considered as milestones in the canon of the history of Hungarian church architecture. Their meaning and significance, however, are different because of their features deriving from the history of their construction.

"The external circumstances—the actual relationship between the state and the church—as well as the constant changes in the world strongly influenced and determined the chosen structure of my churches," claimed László Csaba in 1990.²¹ His work in Hollóháza was a fortunate exception: it was financed from the state budget for the porcelain factory whose expansion was the reason why the old church had to be pulled down. The local community had no right to have their say in the design but it also meant that the architect had a free hand in the planning of the building. The greatest problem was caused by the bad soil conditions. On the other hand, in Farkasrét everything was negative. The church had to be built above and partially using the old one, a restaurant-turned-chapel, in such a way that the latter could be used during the construction. The financial means were very tight so the construction lasting for twenty-two months was funded from donations and loans with most of the unskilled work done voluntarily by the believers and the students of the Budapest Piarist Secondary School. Architect István Szabó had to keep the poor financial situation in mind even in deciding on the building material.

As regards its form, László Csaba's church in Hollóháza is unusual as compared to its Hungarian predecessors. The mass of the church is formed by a horizontal triangular prism made up of three planes leaned against one another as well as of the similarly formed prism-shaped sanctuary. The most emphatic part of the building is the aisle closed with a glass wall from the direction of the village and the adjacent six meters higher open tower complemented by the mass of the sanctuary and the vestry. The expressive formation creates a definite mass easily recognizable even from a distance which further strengthens the rhythm of the surrounding landscape; its functional contradictions, however, had already been pointed out by contemporary criticism.²² The only traditional element of the building combining a marked exterior with an unusual spatial experience through the inward leaning walls is the longitudinal floor plan arrangement which is complemented with a organ-loft over the entrance. The church was ornamented with the works of József Somogyi and Margit Kovács, excellent artists acknowledged both by the state and the church of the time.

The direct predecessor of the church standing as a unique work in the Hungarian church architecture of the period was Oscar Niemeyer's Saint Francis of Assisi Church in Pampulha, Brazil.²³ The major difference between the two, however, is that the Niemeyer used the concrete surfaces making up the walls and the ceiling bent in a parabola arch and not in a broken form. According to the Brazilian architect, he

wanted to break the monotony of contemporary church architecture which he managed to do: the building had very wild protests, some people demanded its pull-down and finally, to save it, it was declared a protected building. The conservative church leaders in the state of Minas Gerais were willing to consecrate the building as late as 1959. Twenty-five years after its completion, the architectural discourse of the Saint Francis of Assisi Church in Pampulha was not likely to seem archaic which proves not only Niemeyer's genius of form but also its power reaching over continents. The church in Hollóháza whose form had been designed in a similarly daring manner by László Csaba and finished by 1967 was also received by the community first with some aversion but later—partly as a result of the evidently positive criticism in the press—it was fully accepted.

It was in the church in Pampulha that Niemeyer first used the curved method of the concrete surfaces which later became almost his trademark. In Hollóháza, Csaba efficiently recalls the Lord's tent,²⁴ the favourite topos of the modern period of the genre with his more rigid geometric form. Later the tent-form would become a recurring element in Hungarian church architecture too. It is interesting to note that when a few years later a Reformed chapel was built in Szamoskér of Szatmár County, also from state subsidy, the architects (István Kistelegdi and Zoltán Bachman) also reached back to a traditional church symbol, the form of a fish.

The church in Farkasrét is semantically different from the one in Hollóháza. The building stands on a kind of square opposite the main entrance of the Farkasréti cemetery. The actual sacred space which can be divided into two oblongs with their longitudinal sides next to each other is the upper level over the basement offices and the urn cemetery. The main front is divided into three separate units. The right-hand side walls of the narrower one rise towards the sky as raised hands which embrace the stairs leading to the entrance and the porch; the stairs are illuminated through the glass-window roof obliquely positioned between the two walls. This is the tallest part of the church, a kind of tower. The bells are hanging in the air over the central lower front section. In the left projection the space created by the missing building elements forms a cross which is open upwards. The glass window behind it illuminates the altar.

In connection with the church in Farkasrét, we can think of another canonical example of modern sacred architecture, namely Le Corbusier's Pilgrim Church in Ronchamp (1950-55). The seemingly daring comparison can be explained by Elemér Nagy's words meant perhaps as guidance or perhaps as consolation from 1958: "... from Ronchamp's example (...) we can also learn that one can create modern architecture from simple materials, with a lot of local limitations, let alone, using scraps."²⁵ Le Corbusier used the stones and scraps of the former chapel ruined in World War Two to build his church; István Szabó built his church on the walls of an existing block of flats using the cheapest building material, BH-60 concrete filling. Le Corbusier made the panes of glass of the chapel himself just as Szabó made the 130 m² glass window of the church applying a gluing technique²⁶ and he himself produced the plastic ornamentations and he designed the furniture as well.

The arched walls and shell-like roof-plane of the chapel in Ronchamp are in harmony with the hills of the environment. When designing the mass of the church in Farkasrét, he wanted not only to adjust the building to the environment but wished to form the latter.

The balanced facade of the church emphasizes the square spontaneously formed in front of it and gives a perspective to the opposite cemetery. From the point of view of townscape, its mass is dominating but not prominent. The term "creative adaptation" so characteristic of the church in Farkasrét is used by Norwegian architectural historian Christian Norberg-Schulz to introduce a new category.²⁷ This "regionally modern architecture" or in the words of British architectural historian Kenneth Frampton, "critical regionalism", however, is not a combination of formal features but a kind of attitude which is characterized by a special attention paid to the environment.²⁸ The representatives of critical regionalism understand and accept locality as an identity which is determined by its physical and existential relations together. Their churches, then, reflect not only the universal elements of contemporary culture and civilization but also the features of the special place where they stand.

These characteristics appear not necessarily in concrete materials, structural modes or planning forms but also on an abstract level. Both above mentioned architectural historians refer to Jørn Utzon whose church in Bagsværd built between 1974-76 exemplifies this way of thinking. The building located in the northern suburb of Copenhagen was made from prefabricated concrete panels fixed on a concrete framework, i.e. with a method which can be repeated anywhere in the world. The modular, kubus-like exterior, however, hides a peculiar—in Frampton's words: "relatively uneconomical"—roof structure of the interior. Along the horizontal side of the church aisle the white-coloured reinforced concrete skeleton is floating over the space as a rain-cloud. Frampton says: "as a matter of course, the purpose of this form of expression is to secularize the sacred form by avoiding the use of the regular semantic and religious elements in order to prevent the usual responses to these elements. (...) This is the adequate method of church architecture in a secularized age when any reference to traditional ecclesiastical contents immediately becomes trash."²⁹

While in Bagsværd the aim to create lively new relationships is realized by hiding the sacred content into a "secular" guise, in Farkasrét it happens in quite the opposite way: the everyday turns into sacred. While the church in Hollóháza is a universal work of art able to ignore the realities of the age, the one in Farkasrét is fully determined by the circumstances and the concept relying on these circumstances makes it outstanding.

Solitary Messengers of International Phenomena

The architecture of socialist Hungary was not very much influenced directly by the western contemporaries. Nevertheless, due to its special situation, church architecture is an exception to this rule. Although we cannot talk about clearly separate styles, there are a number of sacred buildings built in the given period which carry the features of certain dominant stylistic trends without compromise, taking the responsibility for later ideological obsolescence or for conflicts caused by the changes in taste. The churches in Nemeshegyes and Nyíregyháza-Borbánya are outstanding examples for the transplantation of internationally recognized trends into the Hungarian situation. The work of the architects was perhaps supported by the relatively peripheral

locations (a township in Zala County and a suburb of Nyíregyháza) as well as the communities being more open than the average.

The Catholic population of Nemeshegyes, a small settlement not very far from Zalaegerszeg, had been using a twenty-year-old school building for their religious life since 1949. When the chapel was already in a very bad shape, Ferenc Török was commissioned to design a new one, which became his first major church-building project.³⁰ The church was built with the help of the believers within two years. Although it is not so striking from the outside, the floor plan of the church in Nemeshegyes is axially symmetrical: it creates a quadrangle with cut-off corners on the two vis-à-vis sides. The inner space planning of the building is strung on the cut-off corners, that is the diagonal between the entrance and the altar. It also determines the two half-cylinder shaped protrusions near the entrance. The irregularity of the exterior is due to the fact that one of the half-cylinders, the stairs from the basement to the tower leads only up to the half of the facade, the other, overhanging the height of the facade, reaches a tower keeping the half-cylinder shape. The bracket line is also irregular by following the inverse couple roof design devotedly the spine of which is situated at right angles with the ground plan, but a bit bias to the other diagonal sliding towards the altar. Rainwater assembled here is channelled by an overhanging water-gathering slip. The entire surface of the church is fair face concrete; the continuity is broken by some gaps only at two spots, on the balcony above the entrance and behind the altar. The interior is decorated with the murals of Antal Nemcsics, renown church artist of the period.

Just as in the case of the Nagyodobsza church with its brick-covered, massive but finely indented frontispiece, the one in Nemeshegyes built from concrete also shows the influence of foreign examples. Török who later found his own style and became an outstanding member of the second generation of church architects after World War Two admitted it: "My first completed church was the one in Nemeshegyes. I was young then, so it was made during my learning years and the foreign examples, foreign influences can be more strongly felt in it."³¹ As regards the materials used, he mentions the impact of Carlo Scarpa adding that the realization was not consistent: the finished concrete surfaces in their formwork should have been broken through with hammers to achieve the final result but after having installed formwork for two years, the local masters were simply not willing to do this.³² This explains the present image of the church: from a distance the double texture looks as if it were rastered with the rational lines of the formwork joints whereas on close inspection it shows the fine network of the wood.

Talking about Hungary in the sixties, György Jánossy, a dominant person of the period remarked with some irony: architects used raw concrete mostly because defects could be hidden with it.³³ In Nemeshegyes Török went beyond the pressure of makeshift arrangements and used the material for stylistic reasons. Its historic and epoch-making predecessor in Hungary is Aladár and Bertalan Árkay's Heart of Jesus Church in Városmajor, Budapest, which was built in 1933 and stood with exposed concrete facade until 1940 when it was covered with travertine. Architectural public taste changed to accept raw concrete facades on public buildings only in the sixties and perhaps Török's Nemeshegyes church was the first example for its application on a sacred building. Scarpa's probably most important work, Brion-Vega Cemetery referred to by Török can be justly mentioned as a parallel.³⁴

However, the Nemeshe-tés church displays a similar impact of the rational mass-formation, spatial and frontal design of the brutalism dominating the fifties and sixties Great Britain in which there is hardly any parallel with Le Corbusier's more lyrical "beton brut" trend. An American example of this trend would be the Third Church of Christ in Washington, D.C.³⁵ which is a twin piece of Török's church in Nemeshe-tés not only formally but also in the way of their formation of the front.

The Nemeshe-tés church is also remarkable in terms of its interior: it is one of our first churches that attempted to rearrange the sacred space. Although the church in Hollóháza was built years after the Second Vatican Council, in terms of its floorplan it is a traditional building. In Nemeshe-tés, however, by means of using the diagonal, Török created a mixture of the longitudinal and the central schemes thereby producing a basic scheme which will come back several times in Hungarian church architecture, particularly among the Protestants.

In a little less than a decade in Borbánya, in the other part of the country Ferenc Bán started to build his so far only sacred building with a similar way of thinking though with different means and he reached a totally different result—at a time when Török was working on the Greek Catholic Church in Edelény, a milestone in his church architectural career.³⁶ Concerning its size, the Saint Ladislaus Church built in one of the end-streets of the suburb of the capital of the Nyírség region adapts to the environment with family houses but its forms are anything but traditional. The ground plan of the nave is a quarter-circle, its rooftop ramps towards the centrally located stumpy tower. The cylinder shaped tower is the same height as the cornice with squaring cubes on each side with a cross on the top where the bell is located. The right side of the nave is assigned with smaller, also section shaped block which is the vestry. On the right edge of the facade, there is an arcade with six columns perpendicularly connected to the wall as a tangent, which is attached to the vestry forming the layout plan to be spatial. The square shaped entrance gate is situated in the middle of the arch facade with a semicircular window above it. The ending of the six roof-supporting balks overhanging the wall's level is presented as a unique ornament on the plain facade. The idea of an atrium with a similar size and shape as the cubes on the tower in front of the entrance has not been accomplished.

The special formation of the church is in part explained by its position. The circular main front, the largest and most impressive part of the church, is on the edge of the triangular lot and faces the intersection and the downtown. The playful tower which stands behind the sanctuary in the middle of an imagined circular floor plan cannot even be seen from that direction and therefore it does not have a special role in the townscape. All the lines of the floor plan, its circle, its tangent and diagonal, all the geometrical bodies and rational elements direct the attention to this point while the sanctuary does not appear in the mass of the building at all. The light getting through the narrow vertical windows creates a semi-dark space in the irregular-shaped aisle tearing the believers away from their everyday reality.

The archway and the LEGO-like geometrical elements are recurring motifs in Bán's works in this period which provided the greatest pieces of Hungarian postmodern architecture. The church in Borbánya is the architect's customary and intelligible interpretation of the architectural events in the better parts of the world, in this case, the aspirations of neorationalist architecture. The evident parallel between Aldo Rossi, the leading figure of *Tendenza* and Bán can be

seen not only in the formal features but also in the fact, for example, that both of them particularly like the architectural drawings tending towards the surrealist. What Carlo Scarpa meant for Ferenc Török and his contemporaries in the first half of the seventies was Aldo Rossi for Bán's generation a decade later. Péter Reimholz reconstructed Rossi's Venetian Teatro del Mondo (built in 1979) as the entrance of the Oak Gallery of the College of Art and Design in 1983, only one year after the construction of the church in Borbánya, turning form-centred neorationalism into a semi-official style.

The church in Borbánya is as much solitary in the suburban environment of family houses as the objective realization of a theory perfected on urbanistic fundamental assumptions can be and with such maturity which was unfortunately never repeated in Bán's later works. Figuratively, as a reaction to the "cube-houses" dominating the image of the Hungarian countryside it is a kind of formal assimilation but with such an empathy deriving from the other side which has rarely been repeated in Hungarian architecture. "A poet happening to be an architect"—this is how Ada Louise Huxtable, architectural critic and judge of the Pritzker Prize defined Rossi when he was awarded with the highest prize of the profession; it would be difficult to find a more worthy Hungarian person for this description than Bán.

The churches in Nemeshe-tés and Borbánya are individual relics of Hungarian sacred architecture which corresponded to international standards of the time, and even to those of the main trend of contemporary architecture. Maybe we are lacking the perspective but it would be difficult to find similar examples in the Hungarian church architecture of our days.

Structural Innovations and Industrial Forms

The last group of the churches to be discussed here include two buildings designed by the same architect. After his retirement in 1972, with his All Saints' Church in Farkasrét and eight further churches István Szabó became a dominant figure of Hungarian sacred architecture but his name is less known today than that of László Csaba, Ferenc Török or Ferenc Bán in spite of the fact that in the 1984 special issue of *Kunst und Kirche* on contemporary Hungarian church architecture Günter Rombold emphasizes that the expression of Szabó's churches can be appreciated on the level of international architecture as well.³⁷ The two other Budapest churches, the Reformed Church of Ildikó Square and the Roman Catholic Church in Táltos Street built after the one in Farkasrét were realized with a consistent and daring structure and form in a period of Hungarian sacred architecture to be forgotten which would deserve a more concentrated attention.

The Sacred Cross Church built in the row of houses in Táltos Street belonging to the Budapest-Németvölgy parsonage had been completed thirty years ago in 1979.³⁸ The front of the square-shaped building with its saddle-roof perpendicular to the street adjusts itself to the plane of the walls of the houses at the ground-floor level but from the loft upward the whole mass juts out. The lower segment of the wall with the entrance facing the street was made of unplastered filling while the protruding upper section accommodating the loft is made of industrial glass. The use of simple materials and the marked mass

formation make the sacred nature of the building evident in such a way that it does not press heavily on its environment.

The interior space can be accessed through the gates in the middle of the front which reflects the simplicity of the exterior. The materials used here were also concrete fillings, industrial glass and Kipszer-type space lattices, Szabó's patent which was first used in the construction of the market town of Kőbánya for Hungexpo in 1970-72. The furniture was made of the simplest materials: wooden elements fixed on metal frames. An integral part of the interior was the group of statues, the Stations of the Cross, which had been created by the architect and which was hanging in front of the glass surface over the altar as well as the light small figures symbolizing the angels and hanging from the roof. Just like the original roof-cover, these were made of aluminium. The parsonage at the back of the plot was built at the same time.

The reformed Church in Ildikó Square, Külső-Kelenföld, was built in a totally different environment, on an independent lot at the cross-section of a housing estate and a family house zone and completed by 1981. The building which, at first sight, has a strange statics forms a leaning hexagonal prism. Its exterior is covered with aluminium plates and its framework is made of space lattice painted white. The interior is illuminated through the upper glass level cut perpendicularly to the walls and the light is filtered by diagonally positioned lamellas. The wall behind the pulpit and the pedestal are covered with blue tiles. The metal bell-cage in front of the church has been designed by Zsuzsa Bartha.

With these two buildings Szabó managed to realize good examples of the application of industrial structure with a sacred purpose. Through its use of material in Táltos Street it is a transition between the church in Farkasrét and the chapel in Ildikó Square; its raw architectural manner reminds us of the difficult conditions of the time of the construction. The simple and raw surfaces as well as the spirituality of the interior space similar to a factory hall are created by the architect's fine artistic plastics; the tension vibrating between the two different discourses make the interior inimitably interesting. The Blessed Virgin Church in Érdliget completed by 1983 is a very similar building; it was reconstructed from a one-time cultural house with the use of similar building materials.

In the case of Ildikó Square and the Reformed Church in Dunaújváros completed by 1985 the pressure to complement the row of the street was not present. As opposed to the Catholic religion, for the Protestants the church is not God's house but a place for the church service. Its sanctity, then, is present and created by the service going on within its walls. This may have been a reason for Szabó to use a more abstract structure here than in the case of the earlier built Catholic churches. In the choice of the form of the churches the featureless environment did not mean to much inspiration either. Nevertheless, the churches had to have an impressive exterior since the very fact of their building in the first half of the eighties in Budapest and in the first "socialist city" of the country was a kind of magic. This complex system of arguments might have made the architect turn to a formerly known genre, the building of exhibition pavilions. By means of the cold, emotionless system of space lattices Szabó produced crystal-like structures. When choosing the hexagonal type of space lattice resembling the Reformed star as the basic building material, he turns the structure into an ornament.

In the case of these churches the form does not follow the function any more and it does not adapt; it gets free responding to the environment as an individual. These churches are not God's houses but the huge instruments created to examine him. The person entering the church does not feel that s/he has arrived home and found satisfaction but rather that s/he has become part of the huge construction heading towards the other world, the sky, and like a special spaceship, communicates the message of the earthly believers to the Lord living beyond the clouds.

The structure of the Dunaújváros church can be interpreted as a reference to the local industrial traditions, to the "citadel of metallurgy".³⁹ It is a fact, however, that the building in Ildikó Square had been completed much earlier—with the same structure. In these churches we cannot find organic features and in their language we cannot hear the discrete dialect of critical regionalism. In Szabó's architecture it is a recurring idea that he interprets the building as a separate structure independent from its environment which is responsible only for itself. However, Szabó makes distinctions: he employs this principle only then and there where he feels that the environment allows or requires it. Where he does not feel so, he tries to create the "genus loci" rather than withdraw. His churches accept the semiotics deriving from functionality. This brave formation offered the possibility of the acceptance of a new contemporary identity to the communities commissioning the work. An alternative which is interesting, especially knowing the Reformed churches built after the change of regime; and as this period has proved: it remained only a possibility.

The example of the church in Táltos Street shows that when better times come, the community is inclined to forget about its miserable past and, as it becomes possible, to hide it. The church built with a number of building defects and from quickly aging materials was reconstructed on the basis of the designs of Péter Pottyondy in 2001. The front and the interior concrete surfaces were covered with clinker; the protruding loft was truncated and walled on the sides. The profile glass on the street front was replaced by metal-framed laminated plate-glass and the one above the altar was hidden by a wall. The roof was covered with roofing iron imitating tile-cover. After the reconstruction only the Stations of the Cross was put back into the interior, the ceiling sculptures and the composition above the altar were moved to the Christian Museum in Esztergom.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Based on the above, we can discover several unique features in the first three decades of Hungarian church architecture following World War Two which make it a separate period.

The characteristics deriving from the peculiarities of the one-party system and the ones determining the conditions of the construction and thereby the whole formation of the church are typical only that period. On the other hand, as it is shown by the example of Farkasrét, they cannot be called Hungarian phenomena. In some cases the works of the architects gaining more freedom after the seventies can be more easily interpreted by the set of concepts of the international trends than in their own locality. These are rare but worthy examples. Finally, the demand of the intersection of the two resultants, i.e. the pressure of the state and the demand for a modern style led to

a result which could be understood only in the given period; the unfortunate example of Táltos Street shows that a few decades after their completion these buildings had lost their meaning for the communities using them. We should not let these buildings perish because they represent a special stage of our architectural history.

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- 1 The 1990/5 issue of *Magyar Építőipar* [Hungarian Building Industry] deals with three contemporary Baptist chapels: the one in Budafok (Lajos Barbarics and Béla Nagy, 1979–82), the second in Békés (Gyula Benedicty, 1981–83) and the third in Pécs (Erő Tillai, 1981–83).
- 2 Architect: Antal Say-Halász, 1948.
- 3 Of the twenty chapels embracing the oval inner space of the church being built from 1940, seven had already been completed by 1949 and the form-work of the dome was also started. The construction was stopped by the State Security Agency (ÁVH). The pieces of art were carried away and the unfinished building was used variably as a student's hostel, a storage place and an apartment-house until finally it was given to the Capital Archives. The building which was declared to be a heritage building in 2006 is currently vacant.
- 4 Cardinal József Mindszenty was sentenced for life, Lutheran bishop Zoltán Turóczy to ten years in prison. Bishops László Ravasz, Lajos Ordass and Imre Révész of the Reformed Church were forced to resign.

- 5 From an objective point of view, it was a step backward as compared to the Act XXXIII of 1947 which recognized the equality of the Hungarian denominations.
- 6 Sándy Gyula, 1950–1963.
- 7 Árkay Bertalan, 1956–58.
- 8 Ilona Rév: *Templomépítésetünk ma*. Corvina, Budapest, 1987. 39.
- 9 Parallel to the Second Vatican Council a similar process of reforms started in the Lutheran Church.
- 10 Quoted in Béla Erdőssy, Dr.: *Korunk magyar egyházművészete*. Budapest, 1983. For the decrees of the Council and their impact see: Edit Lantos: Három vagy négy egyszerű pasztellszín – A II. Vatikáni Zsinat liturgikus rendelkezéseinek hatása a templomokra és a templomba járókra. *Magyar Építőművészet*, Utóirat, 2008/5. 42–47.
- 11 The Blessed Özséb parish church stands on the square named after Cardinal Léka. It was built between 1984–87 according to the plans of László Csaba.
- 12 As compared to the story narrated by Ilona Rév (op. cit., 43.) Csaba has a different version related in 1990. While according to Rév the building of the church was required by the extension of the school, the architect said that the president of the local council "kicked out" the believers from the school and they had their masses in the open air in front of the altar placed in a recess in the rock until the building of the church. See László Csaba: *Templomok és templomszerkezetek*. *Magyar Építőipar*, 1990/5., 193–199.
- 13 Unfortunately, later the tower was uniformly plastered to have a smooth surface.
- 14 Kondor's work was repainted while Somogyi's Corpus was moved from the altar to the windbreak. Later both were taken to Budapest and the painting was restored. Fortunately similar reactions did not become general: Kondor's works can still be seen in the interior of the new churches in Balaton földvár and Sajószentpéter.
- 15 László Csaba, op.cit.
- 16 It is typical that in the book *Hungarian Architecture 1945–1970* (Corvina, Budapest, 1972.) there is only one church, the one in Hollóháza.
- 17 Official administration was done by the Hungarian Institute for Culture and Art. None of the otherwise renown Hungarian artists working in the chapel had any significant church-related work of art before.
- 18 See Fr. George William Rutler: *Ten Myths of Contemporary Church Architecture*. *Sacred Architecture* (Ed. Duncan Stroik, Fall 1998.)
- 19 Saint Martin's Episcopal Church, Houston Texas; architect: Jackson & Ryan Architects, 1997–2004. *Bazylika Matki Boskiej Bolesnej Królówej Polski*; architect: Barbara Bielecka, 1994–2004.
- 20 Attila Farkas, Dr.: "Régit és újat hoz elő..." A hazai szakraális építészet fél évszázada. In: *Magyar Építőművészet*, 1991/4., 2–3.
- 21 Csaba, op. cit., 193.
- 22 Even architect György Szrogh who had a good opinion of the church prepared a long list of faults. See: György Szrogh: *Templom, Hollóháza*. In: *Magyar Építőművészet*, 1968/6., 36–41.
- 23 1940–42, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
- 24 The Lord's instructions for the building of the tent are described in *Moses 2:26*. Later the tent-form would become a recurring element in Hungarian church architecture too.
- 25 Elemér Nagy: Új tér – új formák. Látogatás Ronchampban. In: *Magyar Építőművészet*, 1958/6., 187–192. Keeping to reality, Nagy does not speak about "modern sacred architecture" but only "modern architecture".

- 28 Although in the literature glued glass technique is often attributed to Szabó, it had its antecedents. In 1960, in an article in *Magyar Építőművészet*, Miklós Hófer writes about the works of József Kühnel Szabó which consist of dyed-in-the-glass planes glued on colourless glass planes. See Hófer: Új üvegmozaikok. *MÉ*, 1960/5., 56.
- 27 See Norberg-Schulz: *Hiteles építészet felé. A mérhető és a mérhetetlen. Építészeti írások a huszadik századból*. Typotex, Budapest, 2004. (first edition 2000.), 233–253.
- 28 Kenneth Frampton: *Kritikai regionalizmus. Az ellenállás építészetének hat pontja. A mérhető és a mérhetetlen*. 290–308. The term "critical regionalism" was coined by American architectural theorists Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre but it was developed into a program by Frampton. For a summary see Mariann Simon: *Regionalizmus – a hely (k)hívása. Architectura Hungariae*, 2000. március. Url: <http://arch.eptort.bme.hu/kortars5.html#1>
- 29 Frampton, op. cit., 299.
- 30 The churches in Nagydobsza and Nemeshegy were designed by Török in the same period but the latter was built first.
- 31 Ferenc Török: *Architektúra – Vallomások sorozat*. (György Pálincás and Györgyi Pécsi ed.) Kijárat Kiadó, Budapest, 1996. 40.
- 32 Ferenc Török, op. cit., 21.

- 33 *Magyar Építőművészet* (1988/3.). Interview with György Jánossy. 18.
- 34 Brion-Vega Cemetery and memorial place, San Vito d'Altivole, Italy, 1969–72.
- 35 Architect: Araldo A. Cosutta (I. M. Pei and Associates), 1971
- 36 The parsonage linked to the church was completed only in the nineties and today it is used as the Hungarian centre of the Order of St Camillus.
- 37 *Kunst und Kirche*, 1984/2. *Blickpunkt Ungarn – Művészet és egyház Magyarországon*. The special issue was partly generated by the fact that not long before the Christian Museum in Esztergom displayed the newly built churches in a photo exhibition.
- 38 The legal predecessor of the church was the chapel of the Alkotás Street Hospital built in 1884 which was destroyed in 1945. After this masses were held at 4 Csórsz Street, then from 1976 in a temporary barrack. The church in Táltos Street was built from the compensation paid by the capital.
- 39 As it has been done by many, e.g. Ilona Rév, op. cit., 77.
- 40 The original plan varieties included the solution that the composition originally placed above the altar should be put on the new glass front but finally a huge cross was put there. Gábor Rosch: *Megszépülő ke-rületi templomaink. Hegyvidék*, 10 September 2003., 4.