



VATICAN - "STONES, SOUNDS, COLOURS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD": Inspiring Principles for the building of churches and places for the celebration and the adoration of the Eucharist (2) by Bishop Mauro Piacenza

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The compositive criteria of a church depend on the nature of the cultural habitat. It is a complex and organic, symbolic and iconographic place offered to Christifideles convoked in holy assembly for the celebration of the divine mysteries. It is therefore a community, sacramental, mystagogical and eschatological place. When planning a church respect for memory for the inculturation of Tradition, respect for the Liturgy for the inculturation in the Rites (lex orandi, lex credendi) are important.

The building of a church is planned on a narrative tissue ordered by certain criteria of composition. These must be understood by the users if they are to grasp the connection of the narration, so as to participate actively and allow themselves to be captivated by the divine. Although church architecture does not need to invent the plan of the structures it elaborates with creative genius, since this emerges from the ritual demands, it must infuse beauty to the spacial component in order to confer on the liturgical action the necessary sacrality through which to experience the ineffable divine.

A church must be a characteristic building both inside and outside. A consistent and comprehensible narrative system gives shape to the place to be dedicated to the sacred in a unitary iconographic programme. The system is achieved by composing within the project architecture, decoration, painting, sculpture, windows, furniture, sacred objects, vestments, lighting and sound. As a whole these elements structure an organic body vivified by the liturgical action generating a universe planned for worship and inhabited by the community.

Each single element becomes an integrant part of the one «installation» which has the altar as its focal point. This «installation» will be subject to change. It usually varies according to liturgical seasons and the rites celebrated. The place must therefore be structured in such a way as allow occasional short-lived play on lighting, different processional paths. Whatever the case, the style must always invite the faithful to religious devotion.

Ideology of space:

The internal space must guarantee the active participation of the faithful. Hence ritual elements must be visible and comprehensible, the people must be able to sit or move in procession, the structure must meet the ritual needs and the number of participants. It is necessary to create an atmosphere of devout participation, and so good lighting, sound diffusion and comfortable air conditioning is most important.

The outside of the building also has religious values and so must never neglect the narrative element which becomes announcement and invitation by means of the architectural presentation, iconographic exposition, recourse to inscriptions and the sound of bells. Not to be forgotten relation to the urban surroundings, coordination of front porch and doors, material and styles. It is a good things to construct adjacent buildings, particularly parish premises, because lex orandi must be pastorally conjugated with lex vivendi.

Structurally a church generates an impact on the environment. Volume, style, material enter into relation with the other buildings and the surrounding area. This means the architect must give the building the character of a place of worship. The building must be recognisable.

In the past, even huge constructions -monastic complexes and shrines - did not mar the countryside, since they were planned in keeping with nature and built with natural materials. Today the choice of artificial and heterogenous materials must be carefully pondered and volumes which match the territory must be studied. Since the church celebrates the encounter between mankind and God it must remind people that this encounter is possible first of all in the itinerary which from creation leads to the Creator.

+ Mauro Piacenza, President of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, President of the Pontifical Commission Sacred Archaeology.. (Agenzia Fides 24/10/2006 - righe 50, parole 585)