

## From the Hut to the Totem: An Archetypal Analysis of the Holy See's Eleven Chapels at the Venice Architecture Biennale<sup>1</sup>

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*At the 2018 Venice Biennale, the Holy See participated with eleven chapels in the woods designed by eleven teams of notable architects from all over the world, allowing us to monitor the global vision of worship spaces today. In this essay, we analyse the architectural reflections of the different invited architects in the light of the two main archetypes of architecture: the primitive hut and the totem pole. The great difference between the two archetypes is in the subjective temporality of space. In the hut archetype, temporality takes us back to the beginnings of architecture, and within this group we have divided the chapels into two subgroups: those belonging to the inward hut archetype, which delimits an interior space isolated from the environment, and those that follow the outward hut archetype, which delimits an interior space that establishes a direct relationship with the exterior. The chapels that follow the totem archetype, on the other hand, have the characteristic of renouncing the delimitation of their own spatiality and, through the insertion of an element, are able to generate a field of imprecise boundaries and transform a portion of the environment into a place of prayer and meditation.*

### Introduction

Since the formation of the first Christian communities in ancient Rome, the church has been able to manage communication with its parishioners in a very refined way with all the means at its disposal. Especially relevant in this aspect is the use of architecture for its component of positioning, communication and evocation.

The Holy See has participated in international fairs and exhibitions since its inception, premiering with the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations in London (1851). Since then, the participations have been numerous,<sup>2</sup> especially since 1929, when the Vatican became part of the modern states under the Lateran Pact. This gave it new international status as an international juridical subject with the capacity to participate as a state in universal exhibitions.

Highlights include the participation in the Universal Exhibition of Paris (1937) with the "Pavillon Catholique Pontifical" by the architect Paul Tournon, that of Brussels (1958) with the pavilion "Civitas Dei" by Roger Bastin, and especially the participation in the New York World's Fair (1964/65) with a large

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1. This text is the result of the collaboration of the authors: Vidal Gómez Martínez: (words 1 to 4000) and Marta Sena Augusto (words 4001 to 8000).

2. P. Hitchen, *Vatican Presents Woodland Chapels at Venice Architecture Biennale*. 2018.

pavilion by a team formed by three studios with its first stone laid in 1961 by Pope John XXII by remote control from the Vatican. As a culmination of this exhibition, the Holy See sent Michelangelo's "Pietà Vaticana" with an insurance policy of twenty-six million dollars<sup>3</sup> - a clear example of the Vatican's involvement in this type of event (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Unloading of the Pietà at the Hudson River Pier, New York 1964.

Source: Vatican Pavilion Committee, Official Guide Book Vatican Pavilion (New York World's Fair, 1964).

Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI showed the same interest in these events, with the Vatican's presence at the Universal Exhibitions of Seville (1992), Lisbon (1998), and Zaragoza (2008) - with their own pavilion in the first. Seville celebrated the Age of Discovery and the five hundred years of the discovery of America and through the Pavilion of the Holy See wanted to create an artistic

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3. J. R. Alonso Pereira, "The Vatican Pavilions in International Exhibitions," in *Proceedings of the International Congress of Contemporary Religious Architecture 3* (ed.) Esteban Fernández-Cobián, 176-185 (A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 2013).

synthesis of American evangelization. The tour, articulated in fourteen thematic units, presented the so-called "Implantation of the Church" until today when America has become the continent of hope housing half of the world's Catholics. The pavilion, designed by Miguel Oriol e Ibarra, was a prismatic volume covered by vaults arranged in Latin cross built entirely in Barcelona with a prefabricated steel structure and glass coating. The three floors of the building contain a large inner courtyard, in the center of which was placed the great monstrance of the Cathedral of Toledo.

What is evinced from these initiatives, both through the mobile chapels and the church's participation in international events, is that it has always found a way to reach out to people. The idea of offering a worship site at the crossroads of an influx of people, such as in train stations, airports, ski resorts, campsites, or beaches, is not new. These chapels or churches which are flexible, ephemeral, and elementary in their conception, imply that true worship does not require the construction of a specific space, but simply the designation of a place.

Although this pavilion is the first Vatican participation in the Venice Architecture Biennale, it is only one step further in a dynamic that began five years earlier at the Venice Art Biennale in 2013. It was a small pavilion inspired by Genesis with the slogan, "Contemporary art saw the return of this thematic subject of the creation of the universe and of humanity, the de-creation (the Flood and Babel), and the re-creation with the beginning of the history of redemption in Abraham"<sup>4</sup> and organized in two parts. The first part showed three paintings inspired by the Sistine Chapel by Tano Festa, and a second with a video installation composed of four videos projected simultaneously in a dark room by Studio Azurro.

In 2015 the Holy See participated again with a pavilion led by Michele Reginaldi: a compact white volume of space representing the essentiality of pre-existing crags and accessed through a narrow fissure. Its shape is clearly visible from the north side, made up of two stretches of rounded and pointed arches, from which emerges the vegetation that grows on the roof as if it were through a crack in the rock. The 318-square-meter roof is corrugated sheet metal, half of which has an intensive green system. The whole is supported by a steel structure, mounted in situ without welds. The load-bearing structures, substructures, intermediate floors and roof are all in steel. On the façade the phrases "not by bread alone" and "give us our bread" are written and translated into 13 languages, and appear differently in the day and night. During the day, however, the effect of natural light produces the shadows of the writings on the surface.

Continuing this process of reconstructing the dialogue between art and faith, the Holy See proposed a unique and ambitious pavilion for the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. The submission was unique for its physical location and its relationship with the rest of the exhibition and ambitious for the size and relevance of the interventions. The project was directed by Francesco Dal Co and Micol Forti and eleven prestigious architects on the international scene whom were

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4. G. Cardinale Ravasi, "The Holy See at the Biennale Architettura 2018," in *Press Conference for the Presentation of the Holy See Pavilion at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale: Vatican Chapels*, 20.03.2018.

invited to rethink the Forest Chapel of 1920 by Gunnar Asplund at the cemetery of Stockholm in the present socio-cultural context. Specifically, the participants were Andrew Berman (United States); Francesco Cellini (Italy); Javier Corvalan (Paraguay); Eva Prats and Ricardo Flores (Spain); Norman Foster (Great Britain), Teronobu Fujimori (Japan), Sean Godsell (Australia), Carla Juacaba (Brazil); Smiljan Radic (Chile/Serbia); Eduardo Souto de Moura (Portugal) and Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel (Italy).

The eleven chapels were located in one of the few wooded spaces of Venice: the garden of the Cini Foundation on San Giorgio island (Figure 2), designed by Luigi Vietti in the fifties. This small forest stands as an isolated space within bustling Venice, perfect for inviting the religious and secular pilgrimage offered by the pavilion.



**Figure 2.** *Location of the Pavilion on the Island of San Jorge. View from the Bell Tower of San Giorgio Maggiore and Plan Scheme of the Authors*

*Source:* Aerial photo google maps and authors.

The designs were constrained by requiring the use of material manufactured or installed by the sponsors - companies in the construction sector - previously

designated to each participating team. Thanks to this patronage system, it was possible to guarantee the Pavilion free of charge as required by the Vatican. These companies (Alpi, Barth Interni, Gruppofallani, Laboratorio Morselletto, Leucos, LignoAlp, Maeg, Moretti, Panariagroup, Piaggio Group, Sacaim, Saint-Gobain Iatly, Secco Sistemi, Simeon, Tecno, Terna, and Zintek), in addition to providing the materials and technology, supported the cost of construction and collaborated in the execution project. Their involvement in the project, beyond mere sponsorship, is recognized in the informational panels and publications, where they expressly give credit to the architects.

For the 2018 Venice Biennale, the Vatican Pavilion has the unique feature of allowing us to monitor the vision of spaces of worship today by architects from different cultural backgrounds. Below, the reflections of different architects are analysed in the light of two of the main archetypes of architecture - the primitive hut and the totem - with the aim of identifying which building archetypes still have traction in contemporary society and culture in relation to religion.

### *The Eleven Chapels for the 2018 Venice Biennale*

*Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel / Alpi:* The first of the chapels, built entirely of laminated wood, is an exhibition space for drawings and models of Asplund's own Forest Chapel. The Forest Chapel, designed by Gunnar Asplund, inaugurated in 1920, is a small wooden building with white walls and black tiles and is also made of wood. The chapel is composed of two spaces with equivalent surfaces. The first is a classic portico of twelve columns. In this portico, above the entrance, is the only decoration of the chapel: a small angel from the death of Carl Milles. The second space is a square interior covered by a dome through which light enters indirectly. The portico is a transitional space between the forest and the inward interior crowned by the hemispherical dome.

Magnani and Pelzel's project – unlike the Asplund Forest Chapel – does not have a transitional space between the forest and the interior, but rather resembles a much more contemporary reinterpretation of a Stavkirken.<sup>5</sup> Magnato worked with Alpi to develop an experimental material from cladding woods. The exteriors of the building are made entirely of 9,000 laminated wood tiles. The roughness of the dark brown outer shell contrasts with the softness of the light that bathes the ash wood walls inside.

*Terunobu Fujimori / LignoAlp Barth Interni:* In Terunobu Fujimori's sketches for the Biennale, we see a chapel similar to a traditional hut whose roof is supported by tree trunks and whose structural elements convey the idea of an easily-built construction.

Like the chapel of Magnani and Pelzel, the chapel of the Japanese Fujimori also creates a clear break between the place and its interior space, reinforced by the extreme narrowness of the main door, while establishing a minimum exterior shelter space for the faithful through a portico composed of six partially squared pine trunks that stand out on the rigorous black that surrounds the rest of the

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5. A medieval Scandinavian church built entirely of wood.

chapel. Access to the chapel is made through an opening of only 40 cm, forcing the visitor to constrained movement that guarantees the liberation of external distractions and concentration in the interior space. In contrast to the black exterior space, the interior is bright and simple, composed of a single nave with a gabled roof supported by a visible wooden structure, which in turn defines the cross of the altar. On the white of the walls and the loose gravel of the floor stand out the sheets of gold leaf that highlight the cross thanks to the overhead light and the decoration of the background by charred logs. The side windows, on which are extended washi paper panels designed by the architect, complete the decoration and complement the natural lighting of the environment. The link with LignoAlp forced Fujimori to work with wood, a very appropriate material for a Japanese architect, so he took the opportunity to do a stereotomy exercise, avoiding the use of glues and nails.

*Soto de Moura | Laboratorio Morseletto:* For his part, Soto de Moura works in collaboration with Laboratorio Morseletto, "the tailors of marble," so his work is carried out entirely in stone from Vicenza. He configures the chapel as a contemporary reinterpretation of the dolmen. Based on large pieces of stone, it defines a minimal and intimate space with an entrance in a bend and culminating in the only element covered: the altar, also defined by two large stone slabs.

The bend in the entrance defines a kind of entrance compass, perhaps a reference to the portico of the chapel at Asplund, while the interior is completely defined by the geometry of the large stone blocks, arranged trapezoidally to emphasise the altar. The geometry of the blocks forms side benches.

The contrast between the rough feel of the cut stone on the outside and the silky touch of the honed interior emphasise the abstraction of this small meditation space in which the altar is a block of stone. The only reference to the Christian rite is a cross defined by two fine cuts in the stone.

*Smiljan Radic | Moretti Sait-Gobain Italy:* According to Chilean tradition, "animitas"<sup>6</sup> are a trap for the soul. Radic imports this tradition by proposing a chapel with which seeks the harmonious coexistence between monumentality and domesticity.

Smiljan Radic proposes a space formed by a single truncated cone-shaped shell of dark grey polymer concrete resting on a traditional Venetian base made of plastered logs. The use of pluriball in the formwork gives it a texture of great depth that focuses the visitor on the upper opening covered by a large glass pane, visually supported by a steel beam and a wooden strut that forms the central cross.

The entrance to the chapel is marked by a solid wooden door, a clear reference to Chilean farms. The flat door never quite fits into the surface of the chapel, offering wide gaps that invite visitors to enter even when it is closed. It is a door that pivots on an inclined axis; its own weight turning it into the spring that activates the trap for the soul.

*Andrew Berman | Moretti Terna:* New York architect Andrew Berman believes that the location should be more important than the work itself. He, therefore,

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6. Small chapels or mounds of popular construction that are located at the foot of the roads to remember tragic events or venerate people from the environment to whom mystical abilities are attributed.

proposes a triangular geode inspired by the geometric shapes found in the different corners of Venice and its basilicas.

He proposes a piece with a translucent polycarbonate cladding that contrasts with the black interior that draws us into our own interiority with the help of the very strong light contrast. The piece opens on one of its sides, providing a bench protected by a powerful eave. This is not a space that precedes the interior; on the contrary, it is conceived as a second space for reflection based on the tranquillity that emanates from the immense sheet of water of the Venetian lagoon over which it overlooks.

*Francesco Cellini / Panariagroup:* Francesco Cellini does not approach the project as a chapel but as an architectural and abstract reflection on the meaning of sacred spaces, their proportions and functionalities. Cellini's proposal is conditioned by his links with Panariagroup and the premise of using large-format porcelain stoneware slabs. Taking advantage of the characteristics of the material as a flat and uniform cladding, it proposes a structure that levitates above the floor, with a dark matte texture on the outside that contrasts with the extra-glossy white interior that reflects the forest inside it.

Although the preliminary designs include substantial shells that even create a liturgical hall, in the final project Francesco Cellini chooses to de-materialise the walls. The final result is perceived from the outside as a frame for the wooded landscape. However, once the visitor stands inside - a mere threshold - it becomes a space pierced by the surrounding forest, as well as by its openness due to the reflections on the inner surface of the walls that reflect the forest, blurring the boundaries between landscape and architecture.

Like Fujimori, Cellini creates a division between exterior and interior through the chromatic contrast of the bright white porcelain of the interior with the ferrous texture of the exterior panels.

*Norman Foster / Tecno Terna Maeg:* Foster creates the main structure, made of tensioned wires and struts, which acts as a support for a wooden grid. The structure is tensioned from three symbolic crosses, placed on a slightly inclined platform. Around the arms of the crosses is a composition of wires and struts which creates a balanced tension system. Wooden cladding is added to this structure which connects the tensioned structure, covered with wood, with the supporting bridge. This creates an interesting play of light and shadow in the interior.

When we enter the chapel we head towards the forest and when we reach the main space there is a change of direction towards the lagoon. In this last part of the chapel, a few wooden seats allow you to enjoy the view. The result is a pier that floats over the forest covered with struts and tensors supporting a tunnel of vegetation leading to the altar of tame pines with the lagoon in the background.

*Javier Corvalán / Simeon:* Javier Corvalán's proposal is based on respect for nature, almost without touching it, turning the forest into a true space for meditation and the sky into the only covering. With this premise, he recovers the diameter of the dome that covers the interior of the Asplund forest chapel to delimit a circular space in the forest, without interrupting it, by means of a suspended cylindrical structure designed to sway in the wind - unfortunately it is now blocked for security reasons.



It is a plywood drum on a steel structure suspended from a single mast, on which a large cross rests. It is conceived as a structure that can be dismantled and moved elsewhere, requiring a single point of support. For this work, where the structure takes on special importance, Corvalán worked with his usual collaborator, the engineer Andrea Pedrazzini.

*Ricardo Flores y Eva Prats / Sait-Gobain Italia:* This chapel, designed by a Chilean and a Spaniard, was inspired, and practically traced from, an image of the project by Ivan Leonidov for the Bol'shoj Artek complex for young pioneers,<sup>7</sup> on the south coast of Crimea (1936-37). Flores and Prats probably chose this reference because its shape is reminiscent of the open-air chapels of Latin America derived from the ancient temples of the indigenous people, where the threshold under an arch was used as a presbytery and where communion with the natural environment was established. In this chapel, the exterior space is complementary to the project.

The chapel wants to "transmit joy, a sense of community and communion with the cosmos"<sup>8</sup> and allows a few to sit protected from the sun and rain. The chapel appears on the side of the road, offering the possibility of crossing it to enter the forest. On the side of the forest, there is a small niche with a lectern that opens to the forest, nature and the lagoon. The construction methods were similar to the traditional ones of Venice. The foundations are made with Venetian wooden piles, the bench is made of red brick and the walls are covered with "cocciopesto".<sup>9</sup>

*Sean Godsell / Maeg Zintek Nice:* Godsell proposes a chapel-kiosk, which combines the totem's characteristics of designating a place with the reception capacity of the Oostpriesterhulp's truck-chapels.

When closed, it is a grey metallic prism, a real totem that can turn any available space into a site. When it opens its wings for prayer, it concentrates a golden beam on the altar thanks to the gold aluminum finish on the inside of the prism, while at the same time providing a small shelter for the celebrants. The vertical element serves as the altar, while the space for the faithful is the surrounding meadow, which is organised spontaneously, as in the truck-chapels, benches, chairs brought by each person, standing or sitting on the grass.

*Carla Juaçaba / Secco Sistemi:* Carla Juaçaba goes beyond the marking of a place by a vertical element. She proposes an invisible chapel, a chapel made of the site.

She has simply marked the place with a cross - literally - made of polished stainless steel, 8 metres long, with a square section of 12 centimetres. This structure forms the whole ensemble: two crosses, one marking the altar and the other serving as a bench defined by a spectacular cantilever, invisible from afar, but blending in with the forest through the reflections of the surroundings.

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7. A. De Magistris and I. Korob'ina. *Ivan Leonidov, 1902-1959* (Electa, 2009), 222-227.

8. R. Carrai, *A Dialogue with Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats* (2018).

9. Waterproof mortar used based on lime and crushed brick with varied granulometry.



### Under the Sign of the Hut: From the Origins to the Holy See Spaces

The primitive hut was, for many centuries, an archetype of architecture as described by Vitruvius in his *De Architectura* in the 1st century BC, and depicted by Filarete 1,500 years later in his *Treatise on Architecture*. It is a structure made up of four tree trunks with forked ends on which a two-sided roof rests.

Marc-Antoine Laugier also postulates in the 18th century that the primitive hut composed of living trees with their foliage, is the origin of the classical temple, offering the model that modern architects should always consider. The small rustic cabin was the archetype of the first house. Laugier describes quality architecture only if it is legitimized by nature and reason.

Two centuries later, the same hut archetype was proposed by Le Corbusier in his Cabanon (Figure 3); an irreducible interior space (14 square meters). Le Corbusier's Cabanon is an archetype of the "millennial" house with multifunctional furniture: the bed hides the drawers of the wardrobe, the support of the sink serves as a separating element, a bench is also a staircase to the upper warehouse, etc.—it refers to an ideal of welcome, essentiality, and privacy.



**Figure 3.** View of the Le Corbusier's Cabanon at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, France  
Source: Authors.

One of the most consolidated strategies in the evangelization of society since the beginning of the existence of the Christian church, has been the reuse of the spaces of worship of the creeds it displaced. Besides the economy of material resources, it is a way of staging the change of beliefs while facilitating the transition of parishioners to the new religion by preserving the previous place of

worship. There are numerous examples of this practice that we can find throughout the geography in which the Catholic Church has been taken root, which at the architectural level can be grouped into three clear trends: integration, insertion and substitution.

With the Edict of Thessalonica by Emperor Theodosius I, in the year three hundred and eighty, Christianity became the only religion of the Roman Empire, and the construction of Christian temples on pagan structures was permitted. Perhaps the clearest example, due to the few modifications it underwent, is the transformation of the Pantheon of Agrippa into the Church of St. Mary and All Saints. Although in the Italian context, there are numerous examples of higher architectural complexity. In this sense, it can be mentioned the San Nicola in Carcere, Santa Maria in Cosmedin and San Lorenzo in Miranda<sup>10</sup> churches in Rome, or the integration of the temple of Athena into the Duomo of Syracuse, where the naos clearly forms the central nave, while the perimeter portico defines the side bays and supports the façade. Only the side chapels and the apse are independent of the Greek structure.<sup>11</sup>

In the Iberian Peninsula, the second process of Christianization is linked to an entire process of geopolitical redefinition carried out through agreements and very difficult war campaigns. This is clearly reflected in the Christianization of sacred spaces. The mosques are often razed to build the new cathedrals reflecting the new religion, as was the case of the great aljama mosque of Seville, of which only the minaret is preserved, transformed into a bell tower, and part of the ablution courtyard that functions as a cloister. More respectful, regarding the material conservation of the existing work, but with the much clearer connotation of imposition, is the transformation of the aljama mosque of Cordoba into a cathedral, inserting a cruciform factory in the forest of columns. Other times, the process is much less traumatic and is limited to turning the cult from south to east, locating the apse to the east and the new façade to the west, while the qibla is relegated to a simple chapel in the epistle bay.<sup>12</sup>

The recovery of the classical canons of beauty, as well as the evolution of the constructive systems during the Renaissance and the Baroque, allowed the architects to put all the emotional potential of architecture at the service of the Evangelical message (Figure 4). Thus, since the fifteenth century Rome it begins to generate and export spaces full of drama thanks to the exponential expansion of scale with the development of structural systems, the management of spatiality through the manipulation of classical orders, and the control of natural light by the combination of both factors that allowed architects to generate almost ethereal spaces of worship.<sup>13</sup>

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10. D. Agnelli, *Le chiese di Roma* (Roma: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1902), 228-229.

11. S. Sgariglia, *L'Athenaion di Siracusa. Una lettura stratigrafica tra stori e Segni* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2009), 61-82.

12. S. Calvo Capilla, "De mezquita a iglesia: el proceso de cristianización de los lugares de culto de al-Andalus," in *Transformació, destrucció i restauració dels espais medievals* (eds.) P. Giraldez and M. Vendrell, 129-148 (Barcelona: Patrimoni 2, 2016), 129-148.

13. J. Arnau Amo, et al. *El espacio, la luz y lo santo. La arquitectura del templo cristiano* (Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Castilla La Mancha (COACM), 2014).



**Figure 4.** Subjective view of the Interior of San Ivo alla Sapienza, Francesco Borromini 1642-1660.

Source: Vidal Gómez Martínez, 2018.

### **Under the Sign of the Totem: From the Origins to the Holy See Spaces**

The archetype of the totem refers to an autonomous architecture that builds its places through the addition of a minimal element to the place, capable of modifying its meaning. In the words of Norberg-Schulz:

"The fundamental properties of human space are the symbol of the vertical axis and the expansion zone of the horizontal plane. In the past, the country was considered the center of the world: a center that sometimes assumed a precise characterization as Delfi's Omphalos to the Greeks, or the roman Campidoglio, that was their caput mundi. In other cases, it could be a sacred mountain, or even a totemic pole that symbolizes the axis of the world."<sup>14</sup>

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14. C. Norberg-Schulz, *Il Mondo dell'Architettura* (Milán: Electa, 1986), 24.

Some nomad tribes carried this pole with them, an element that was their referent of location in the world so that the centre of the world was where they were. Mircea Eliade tells the story of one of these nomad tribes whose referent of place in the world is given to them by such a pole they always carried: "the most primitive of places constituted a microcosm: a landscape of stones, water and trees".<sup>15</sup>

These places were not chosen, but rather discovered. Sacred places function as centres, become points of orientation and identification and constitute a spatial structure. The Achilpa tribe moved with their sacred pole, through which their divinity - Numbakula - had access to the heavens, choosing their destination by the inclination of the pole and erecting it again as soon as they settled. The pole allowed them to move their world wherever they went.

"although continually moving, they are always in their world and, at the same time, in communication with heaven, where Numbakula disappeared [...] once the sacred pole was broken, the whole tribe was taken by anguish; its members wandered for some time and finally sat on the ground and let themselves die"<sup>16</sup>

From the early eighties, when we are already talking about a post-modern era, structuralist and semiological thought is dethroned by post-structuralist thought, put forward by Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, whose theories lead to new scientific interpretations based on a universe in non-equilibrium, without fixed points, expressed geometrically in fractals, under the theory of chaos that justify discontinuous, fragmentary and provisional interpretations, based on transformation and difference, a new archetype began to impose on that of the hut: the totem.

During the 20th century, social and cultural changes had a major impact on the way of life of billions of people who saw how the reconfiguration of their cities to the rhythm of the changes driven by the second industrial revolution greatly modified their daily habits in terms of transport time, leisure or family and social life. These changes were compounded by the devastation of the two world wars, which destroyed many urban centres in Europe and obstructed social mobility. In this environment, the church developed various mechanisms to transmit its message to parishioners and the rest of the population, taking advantage of the democratisation of the transport system and the centres of cultural exchange represented by the universal exhibitions.

In this context, the church uses the archetype of the totem based on the introduction of a singular and specific element in the landscape, capable of transforming it into a place of prayer and meditation by its mere presence. In this sense, it develops different types of totems to get its message across to parishioners and to the rest of the population, taking advantage of the democratisation of the means of transport.

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15. M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1963), 269.

16. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959).

## Mobile Chapels

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church Extension Society of America sent priests to small border towns to celebrate Mass and distribute the Eucharist from the back of three train cars.<sup>17</sup>

The development and consequences of the world wars activated numerous initiatives. During World War I, the Belgian army had two chapel cars moving along the front line.<sup>18</sup> The German Missions-Verkehrs-Arbeitsgemeinschaft, founded by the aviator friar Paul Schulte, made a fleet of planes and cars available to missionaries in Africa. After World War II, he also provided German priests with motorized vehicles.

As a consequence of World War II, twelve million Germans were forced to seek refuge elsewhere in their country. Their fate attracted the attention of Catholic charitable organisations, such as the Eastern Priests' Relief Organisation, which provided them with material and spiritual aid through a fleet of mobile chapels. An estimated six million Catholics settled in regions where no Catholic Mass had been celebrated since the Reformation. Many of them were cared for by Catholic charitable organisations, the most important of which was the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza or "Vatican Relief". In the eyes of the German government and the occupying forces, this aid was a welcome stabilising factor, while Catholic leaders realised that the intellectual and spiritual starvation of the refugees could lead to total apathy in religious matters. Therefore, to keep the German flock in the church, an emergency strategy was needed. In addition, there was a structural shortage of priests; in the Soviet zone, for example, the number of refugees was estimated at two million, while there were only 660 Catholic priests, one third of whom were over seventy years of age. This gave rise to the phenomenon of backpack priests who carried a chalice, a paten and a missal in their chasuble as emergency liturgical equipment. These clerics travelled great distances, defying fatigue and reading Mass in the most improvised and squalid settings.

## Kapellenwagen

In 1947, after a visit to Germany, the young Premonstratense priest Werenfried van Straaten, decided to create a structure through which material and financial aid could be sent to Germany. The organization, called Oostpriesterhulp,<sup>19</sup> grew at an extraordinary rate thanks to contributions and donations mainly from Holland and Belgium. Under the motto Ein Fahrzeug für Gott - A Vehicle for God - the EPRO initially provided the clergy with motorcycles and cars. The next step of this mobile apostolate was the Kapellenwagen - chapel-trucks (Figure 5) - which solved three

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17. S. Sterken, "The Chapel Truck is Coming to your Village! The Eastern Priests Relief Organization and the Refugee Problem in Germany after World War II." *Trajecta: Religion, Culture and Society in the Low Countries* 26 (2017): 65-86.

18. P. Pierre Lebrun, *Le temps des églises mobiles. L'architecture religieuse des Trente Glorieuses* (Gollion: Éditions In Folio, 2011), 157-159.

19. Eastern Priests Relief Organization (EPRO).



problems at once: the lack of space for worship, the transport of supplies and the shortage of priests. The Kapellenwagen were towing coaches purchased from the Dutch railways and adapted.



**Figure 5.** *Celebration of the Mass at One of the Chapel Trucks. Date, Location and Photographer Unknown (top) and Chapel truck in Belgium, 1951. Photographer Unknown (bottom)*

Source: Aid to the Church in Need, historical archives, Königstein.

Fourteen metres long and two metres wide, these trucks contained separate areas for the storage of goods for the chapel, which could be opened using two large doors, that together, formed a kind of altarpiece and between which a covering cloth could be placed to provide a minimum of shelter for about a hundred worshippers. The trucks were manned by a driver and two priests (one German and one foreign). The red-painted trucks were generally received with enthusiasm by the isolated villages, and the mission, which began in 1950 with two prototypes, a year later twelve, and reached its peak with 26 trucks.

They celebrated more than seven thousand masses and distributed more than two hundred and fifty tons of supplies. In 1970 the campaign was officially

suspended. Some of these trucks were used for promotional purposes, while the rest went on to Latin America, for a new field of action for the organization under the more generic name of Aid to the Church in Need. It could be argued that EPRO put into practice the idea of a church reaching out to the people long before it was taken up in the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council.

### Blow-up Chapel

Chapel trucks anticipated a fundamental paradigm shift in pastoral care that would reach its most direct emanation in the inflatable chapel. Literally, a chapel could be carried in a backpack, designed by the German-born architect Hans Walter Müller in 1969. The chapel, consisting of a PVC sheet that took on a polyhedral shape when inflated, combined opaque and translucent elements, establishing a dialogue with its surroundings and making its inner activity visible from the outside. It could seat approximately 200 people. The image of the chapel folded into a package on a balance weighing thirty-nine kilos with the label "Inflatable church, 200 people, assembly 10 min" is very illustrative (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** *Ephemeral Church, Hans Walter Müller. The Chapel Folded, During the Inflation Process and in Use*

Source: © Hans Walter Müller.



This first inflatable chapel was designed for the Parisian suburb of "Montigny-lès-Cormeilles" which lacked a place for worship. It was premiered in 1970 during a holiday weekend. The result was astonishing with the shadows of the trees reflecting on the surfaces and the movement of the light throughout the day being projected into the interior. In fact, Hans Walter Müller has become a reference in today's architectural landscape both for his "architecture of air" and for his long research into the association of synthetic materials with artificial light and the projected image.

### **From Hut to Totem: An Archetypal Analysis of the Eleven Chapels of the Holy See at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2018**

In our analysis, the eleven chapels have been grouped into two archetypal groups: those that follow the archetype of the hut and those that follow the archetype of the totem. The first is based on the idea of a primary interior protective space, meanwhile the second is an architectural tendency that abdicates its own spatiality, to be a ready-made place through the insertion of an element that transforms its space of proximity into a different space in relation to the surrounding space.

Within the archetype of the hut we have divided it into two subgroups: the introverted hut which delimits an interior space, isolated from the surroundings, and the extroverted hut which delimits its space by establishing a direct relationship with the exterior.

The Forest Chapel, designed by Gunnar Asplund, which served as a motif for the construction of the eleven chapels, belongs to the archetype of the hut—a transitional space that follows the archetype of the extroverted hut and an interior space that follows the archetype of the introverted hut.

Within the first archetype, the hut, within the first archetypal subgroup, the introverted hut, we find five chapels (Figure 7): those projected by Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel | Alpi; Terunobu Fujimori | LignoAlp Barth Intern; Souto de Moura | Laboratorio Morseletto; Smiljan Radic | Moretti Sait-Gobain Italia; and Andrew Berman | Moretti Terna. By interior cabin archetype we mean those chapels in which there is an interior space that is perfectly defined and differentiated from the exterior. It is the archetype most commonly used by the Catholic church, which isolates itself from its surroundings to create a sacred space, as in the case of the interior space of the Chapel of the Forest, designed by Gunnar Asplund.



**Figure 7.** Views of the Introverted Hut Archetypal Chapels: Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel (top-left); Terunobu Fujimori (top-middle); Souto de Moura (top-right); Smiljan Radic (bottom-left); and Andrew Berman (bottom-right)  
Source: Authors.

- The first of these, Francesco Magnani's (Italy) is the most reminiscent of Gunnar Asplund's Chapel of the Forest, but without its transitional space, remaining in this way with a perfectly delimited interior space.
- In the chapel of Terunobu Fujimori (Japan), although the loose gravel of the floor recalls an outdoor environment, there is a clear break between the place and its interior space, reinforced by the extreme narrowness of the entrance door.
- The chapel by Souto de Moura (Portugal) made of Vicenza stone configures a space completely isolated from the outside and open to the sky.
- The chapel by Smiljan Radic (Chile) is also open to the sky and is configured as a cylindrical interior space perfectly delimited and isolated from the outside.
- The chapel of Andrew Berman (USA) is, in archetypal terms, the most similar to that of Asplund, with its transitional space between the exterior and the interior and its perfectly defined interior space, closed and open to the sky.

In the second archetypal subgroup - extroverted hut - we identify two chapels (Figure 8): Francesco Cellini | Panariagroup and Norman Foster | Tecno Terna

Maeg. By archetypal extroverted hut we mean those chapels in which there is a well-defined interior space, often a floor or roof marking the boundary of a sacred ground, but which are open to the outside, such as the entrance space of the Forest Chapel designed by Gunnar Asplund.

- In his chapel, Francesco Cellini (Italy), creates an interior space through the chromatic contrast of the bright white porcelain of the interior with the ferrous texture of the exterior panels. The interior space is open but introverted and well delimited.
- In the chapel by architect Norman Foster (United Kingdom), the internal space is defined by the floor and walls made of wooden profiles, tensioned cables and struts completely open to the outside.



**Figure 8.** Views of the Extroverted Hut Archetypical Chapels: Cellini (top) and Foster (bottom)

Source: Authors.

In the second archetypal group - totem - we find the last four chapels (Figure 9): Javier Corvalán | Simeón; Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats | Sait-Gobain Italia;



Sean Godsell | Maeg Zintek Nice and Carla Juaçaba | Secco Sistemi. By totem archetype we mean those chapels that do not have their own space and, like portable chapels, chapel trucks or inflatable chapels, through the introduction of a singular and specific element in the landscape, transform their space of proximity into a place of prayer and meditation.



**Figure 9.** View of the Totem Archetypal Chapels, Chapel by Corvalan (left-top), Flores y Prats (left-middle), Godsell (left-bottom) and Juaçaba (right)  
Source: Authors.

- Javier Corvalán | Simeón's chapel is presented as a suspended cylindrical structure, designed to be swayed by the wind like a sculpture that marks a different place in the environment, without a defined internal or functional space.
- The chapel by Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats (Spain) doesn't delimit an interior space and the exterior space is complementary to the project. The chapel appears on one side of the road, as a gateway to the forest. On the forest side, there is a small niche with a lectern.
- The chapel by Sean Godsell (Australia) proposes a chapel-kiosk with the function of an altar, while the space for the faithful is in the surrounding

meadow, which is organised spontaneously, as in the bus-chapels, benches and chairs brought by each person, standing or sitting on the grass.

- Carla Juaçaba's chapel (Brazil) is marked by a slender vertical mirrored element, which mirrors the green of the place and becomes almost invisible and immaterial.

### Conclusions

Architecture is always an expression of its time, even when it remembers a past time. Each work is situated in it as if in relation to a place. The structure, the light, the form indirectly alludes, not only to the context, understood as an evident physical presence and to other spaces, but also to age. Time acts on the body of the architectural space through its elusive step that increases its age at every moment; it acts within the "spirit of the time", where the prevailing tendencies of an era manage to permeate the work and make their influence felt, and acts on the movement of the human body within it. However, time in architecture is also subjective time (also called psychological time). It is neither material nor mechanically measurable, it flows in the mind and is the product of an inner, subjective experience, through the emotional intensity that accompanies it, and through the archetype that underlies the creation of a new place in the world.

The South Korean philosopher and essayist Byung-Chul Han in his 2009 book, *The Scent of Time: A philosophical essay on the art of lingering*,<sup>20</sup> analyses the disappearance of initiation times and thresholds in general in today's society. He points out that the time of life has fragmented and accelerated to such an extent that it is no longer articulated by cuts, conclusions, thresholds and transitions, but that we rush from one presence to another. This reflection is important in the sense of contemplating the evolution of the thresholds of spaces and the transitions between spaces out of history. The inhabited space, for example, which began as a threshold or transitional space, acquired an inner space, fragmented it and isolated its fragments more and more, and the threshold spaces became compressed until they became non-existent. The reason for this process can be found in the evolution of the living of time and the time given to the other.

In the 2018 edition of the Venice Biennale, the Holy See recognises that people's needs for meditation and isolation in the 21st century are very different from those of previous centuries: it requires an instantaneous spiritual retreat that can take place anytime, anywhere. It brings the chapel into the mass tourism movement and the globalised world has placed the "instant chapel" as an exercise in architectural experimentation to 11 of the world's most renowned contemporary architects.

This experience has allowed the world to understand some of the current paradigms of the Catholic place of worship and has allowed us, at the same time, to analyse the different approaches to the chapel in the 21st century.

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20. B.-C. Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingerings* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

It is evident that among these approaches the question of temporality was decisive in an epistemological sense, not only because of the requirement of instantaneousness but also, and in the interest of this essay, because of the subjective temporality to which each of the 11 architectural experiences refers.

The great difference between the hut and totem archetypes is in the subjective temporality of their spaces. In the hut archetype, temporality takes us back to the beginnings of architecture. Within this group, we have divided the chapels into two subgroups: those belonging to the inward archetype, which delimits an interior space that is isolated from the environment, and those that follow the outward archetype, which delimits an interior space that establishes a direct relationship with the exterior.

The chapels that follow the totem archetype, on the other hand, refer us to the present time—the time of the masses, of globalization and instantaneousness—and have the morphological characteristic of renouncing the delimitation of their own spatiality, and, through the insertion of an element, are able to generate a field of imprecise boundaries and transform a portion of the environment into a place of prayer and meditation.

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