

## STYLISTIC CHANGES IN CONTEMPORARY SACRED ARCHITECTURE AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE IDEOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC TRENDS PREVAILING AT THE TIME (1945–1970)

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### Summary

In 1945, the time of dynamic political and social and economic changes begins in Poland, determining the creation of architecture, and also influencing its aesthetic qualities. This applies particularly to buildings and compounds of religious architecture – the free development of the latter was significantly hindered during this period. In the post-war period, only very few churches, built from scratch, were constructed within the area of the Archdiocese of Kraków. Until 1970, sacred construction projects, in terms of their architecture, were often expression of local capabilities, power of persuasion and perseverance of the designers and investors. Sometimes such projects stretched over a dozen or more years of complex implementations.

### Keywords

stylistic changes • artistic movements • Archdiocese of Kraków • post-war sacred architecture (1945–1970)

### 1. Introduction and background

The problem of stylistic transformations in sacred architecture still remains very topical. Church buildings have become a sign of the ‘Church’s’ presence on earth. They are an expression of the human spiritual needs, as well as the pursuit of the absolute beauty.

Church architecture differs from the residential and service architecture. Often, it is the epitome of historical tradition. In the spirit of Vatican II, it expresses its ancillary character to the community, creating conditions for the full development of religious life.

In the area of the Archdiocese of Kraków, which, topographically, is a very diverse territory, there are important determinants in terms of the context of the landscape – from the mountainous areas of Podhale to the vast and wide valleys around the city of Kraków. Therefore, due to this diversity of the environment, the architecture built in the Diocese seems even more varied, multi-threaded, and thus more interesting [Gil-Mastalerczyk 2013].

The period between 1945–1970 is a time of dynamic political and social changes, determining the creation of architecture in Poland and influencing its aesthetic qualities. This applies particularly to religious architecture, whose free development was significantly hindered during this period. It was most definitely the hardest time in the history of church construction in our country.<sup>1</sup> Difficulties associated with the construction process were no doubt hugely influenced by the historical and cultural context, and in particular the prevailing social, political and economic conditions. These impacted the number of the churches built as well as their architecture – in particular, their size, shape and appearance. In the years 1945–1970, any such projects met with numerous difficulties; whereas in architectural terms, they were the expression of local capabilities, power of persuasion and perseverance of the designers and investors. Sometimes these projects stretched over a dozen or more years of complex implementations [Gil-Mastalerczyk 2013].

## 2. Post-war sacred architecture (the example of the Kraków Diocese 1945–1970)

The post-war church architecture did not yield to systemic considerations or the influence of the national and socialist style; at the same time, it enjoyed a great social significance [Żychowska 2006, 287]. However, during the discussed period, due to the limitations imposed by the political system, this kind of architecture could not be developed freely and, above all, according to the social needs.<sup>2</sup>

World War II brought immense material damage of the country, as well as extreme loss of people and talent.<sup>3</sup> Also the Catholic Church suffered considerable losses – even though it continued to play a very important role, both in the political and the social life of the country. More than 900 Polish churches were physically damaged or destroyed [Sowa 2001, 46].

The beginning of the post-war period was a time of a certain degree of creative freedom. In the years 1945–1950, as many as 551 religious facilities were rebuilt throughout the country [Sowa 2001, 47]. Many church investment projects of that period, including those unfinished before the war or during the war, saw the conclusion of their implementation by the late 1940s and early 1950s [Żychowska 2006, 287].

The Second World War caused the interruption of certain styles and artistic trends. Due to the socio-political and economic conditions in post-war Poland, attempts to

<sup>1</sup> During that period, only about 300 new churches were built throughout Poland. Quoted after: [Wroński 2010, 279; Source: Gryz 2008].

<sup>2</sup> The Church faced new challenges. The new political system, which had been imposed upon Poland, was trying to isolate the Church from society. The most difficult time was the period of 1948–1956, so-called ‘the dark night of Stalinism’. This was the time of public harassment, persecution of the Church and fighting against it, limiting its freedom, and eliminating the influence of the clergy on society. These activities were aimed at destabilizing the Church, which had had a great power of integrating the Polish society. Quoted after: [Wroński 2010, 41–43].

<sup>3</sup> Losses in national capital were among the most severe throughout Europe – amounting to 38% of the capital value of August 1939. Quoted after: [Kaliński 1986, 13–18].

continue many of the pre-war activities and projects have failed, due to the prevailing tendency towards the economical, sparse forms, and restrained expression [Żychowska 2006, 294].

The beginning of the post-war period was a time of a certain degree of creative freedom. In the years 1945–1950, as many as 551 religious facilities were rebuilt throughout the country. In the early post-war years (1945–1951), which in the Archdiocese of Kraków fall to the last years of the service of Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha at the head of the Kraków Archbishopric, efforts were undertaken to complete all works – interrupted during the war – on the construction of churches, as well as provide the necessary outfitting and furnishing of temples built before the war [Wroński 2010, 44]. In subsequent years, due to the severe tightening of relations between the Church and the State, which started in September 1947, there have been increasing restrictions on the development of religious architecture. In the period between 1951–1955, only 86 Catholic churches were built across the country [Sowa 2001, 107].

During this time, post-war church architecture developed in stages [Żychowska 2006, 288]. The first years are characterized mainly by restoration, reconstruction and the so-called ‘resurrection of the monuments of national cultural heritage’ [Quoted after: Żychowska 2006, 288; Source: Łysiak 1981].

In the architecture of the church buildings that were erected in the Archdiocese of Kraków in the years 1945–1970, we see predominantly references to the regional characteristics and to traditionalism, which is a kind of a continuation of the pre-war trends. An example is the church in Dobczyce (1947–1949). The architecture of the building – due to the use of traditional forms – exhibits clear references to the characteristics of traditionalism. The church also has features of eclectic style. It is an example of traditional sacred architecture of high aesthetic and representative values, distinguishing it within its surroundings (Figure 1).

In this period, the regional trend has become quite significant and widespread. Architects and designers were drawing from the national and local realisations to date. Newly constructed churches were decorated using traditional, conventional materials (such as stone or brick), and their stylistics was a continuation of modernist forms. In the architecture of the churches, we note modern, hard geometrical and historical forms, with predominant axial elevation. The architecture of the church in Niegowić (1949–1959) – with its elements of modernism (Figure 2) – uses traditional forms, and therefore clearly refers to the traditionalism. ‘The author tried to link the architecture to the modern life. (...) The traditional forms used herein were not only secondary and eclectic. Instead, the architecture was founded on the wave of romanticism, and despite the characteristics of traditionalism, it remained functional and very much linked to the modern life’ [Białkiewicz 1987, 173–174].

In the post-war period, there also appear forms, which look to the pattern and the principles of classical architecture. Churches of the 1950s are characterized by a formal reference to historical styles derived from the mainstream of modern sacred architecture. An example is the neo-Renaissance church in Michałowice (1952–1963) near Kraków (Figure 3). It is a modern building, embodying compactness and harmony,

most apt for a holy place. The architecture of the church stands out from its surroundings, due to its monumental scale and elegance. Particularly characteristic, and visible from afar, is the dome, granting the buildings its majestic quality.



Photo by Gil-Mastalerczyk

**Fig. 1.** Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians [*Matki Bożej Wspomożenia Wiernych*] in Dobczyce (1947–1949), the view of the church silhouette from the side of the chancel – against the background of surrounding buildings

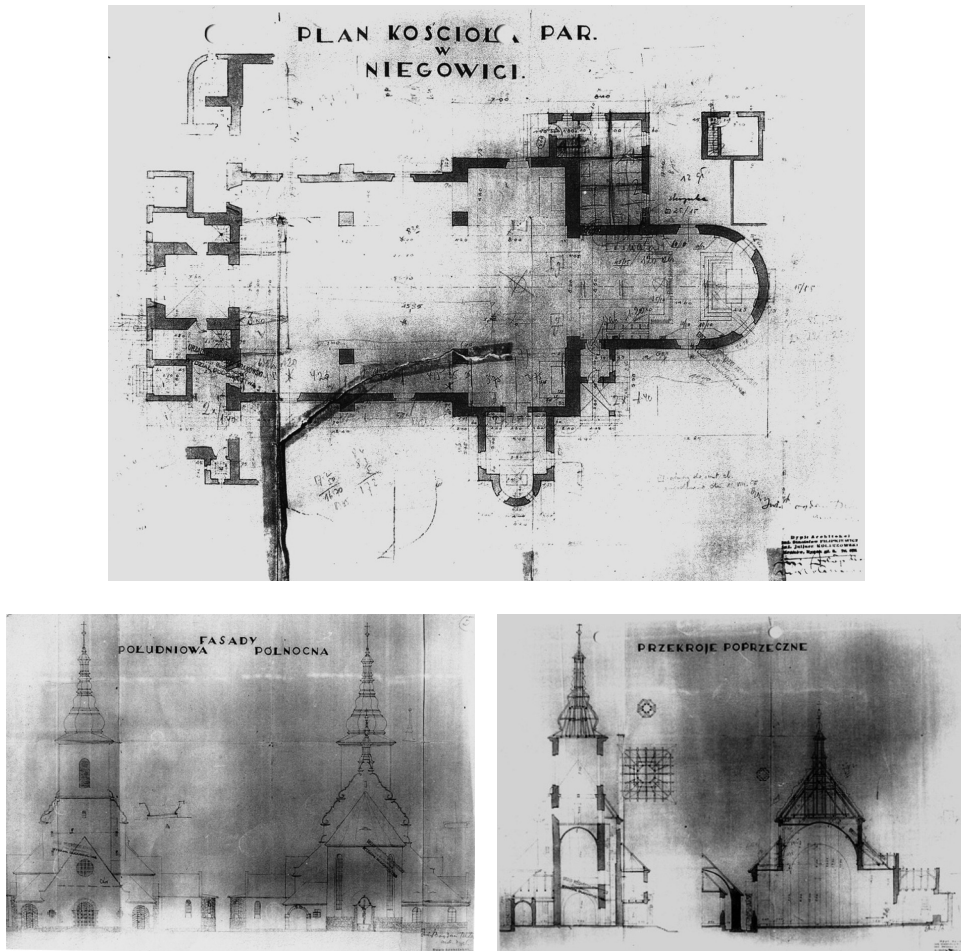
In the Archdiocese of Kraków, in the city of Kraków itself, ‘free interpretations of functionalist forms’ continued [Żychowska 2006, 287–296].

‘(...) On the one hand, conservative trends, traditional in expression, had a significant social acceptance and were also preferred by a significant group of architects themselves, and on the other hand, modernism and avant-garde groups effectively introduced modern styling’ [Żychowska 2006, 288].

Catholic Church, at that time, was an institution that integrated the society and provided support to the people. This fact could have impacted the stylistic continuity and references to earlier architecture.

The years that followed, up to the year 1956, had been the most difficult time in the evolution of stylistic forms. The creators of religious architecture, in the face of the mounting difficulties, seemed to have completely forgotten about the present (modernity).

After the ‘thaw’ of October 1956, the search for new forms in pre-conciliar architecture began. National traditionalism gave way to solutions that used new materials and expressive forms.



Source: the Archive of the Parish in Niegowić, after [Białkiewicz 1987]

**Fig. 2.** Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Niegowić [*Wniebowzięcia Najświętszej Marii Panny*], 1949–1959, designed by Bogdan Treter. Technical drawings, approx. 1938, plan of the ground floor, southern and northern elevations, cross-sections

Until 1970, the architecture of churches recalled the tradition of the post-war avant-garde and post-war Western European art trends [Żychowska 2006, 290]. It was also a period of independent creative work. This was reflected in the competition design for the church in Nowa Huta-Bieńczyce,<sup>4</sup> containing modern and unprec-

<sup>4</sup> The history of the construction of the church goes back to the creation of the parish in 1952 (by Archbishop Baziak), which integrated the local community. In November 1956, the Department of Religious Affairs has agreed for the church to be built. Then, in the beginning of 1957, the authorities agreed on the location – near Teatr Ludowy [the People's Theatre], in order to maintain peace among the population of Nowa Huta. The workers of Nowa Huta had pastoral support by the then



edented architectural solutions and materials – in both the plan and the shape of the building.<sup>5</sup>



Photo by Gil-Mastalerczyk

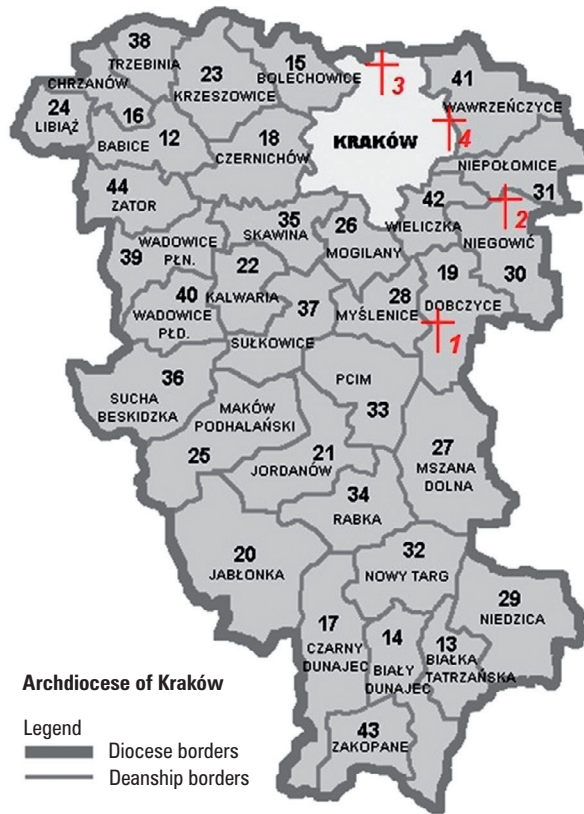
**Fig. 3.** The church of Our Lady Queen of Poland in Michałowice [*Najświętszej Marii Panny Królowej Polski*], 1952–1963, designed by Stanisław Murczyński, a perspective view of the church building from the side of the chancel

new bishop – Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General – none other than future Pope, Karol Wojtyła, who took over the protectorate over the implementation of the Millennium program. He knew the socio-political situation, as well as the techniques of propaganda used by the authorities. On 19 October 1958, he celebrated the holy mass at the site of the future temple. However, on 14 October 1959, the Presidium of the National Council of the City of Kraków repealed the earlier decision on the location of the future church. The money collected for this purpose, in the amount of 2 million Polish złoty, were requisitioned by the Department of Finance of PDzRN in Nowa Huta, and handed to the Fund of Building the Millennium School in Nowa Huta. On 8 February 1960, the Department of Internal Affairs (PRN MK) issued a decision to dissolve the Committee for the Construction of the Church in Nowa Huta. On 22 April of that same year, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reconfirmed the decision. In the location in question, the authorities decided to build a school as a part of the ‘1,000 schools in the Millennium’ campaign. Quoted after: [Wroński 2010, 49–50].

<sup>5</sup> However, the project was not implemented, due to the withdrawal by the authorities of the construction permit that they had issued earlier. “The whole decision-making system of the PRL [People’s Republic of Poland] was limiting to public religious life, within which, after all, the church building holds a special place. As far as the historic churches were treated with a fair degree of tolerance, [the authorities] were seeking to eliminate the modern church construction completely. (...) Architectural competitions were announced for new churches in Nowa Huta (104 entries were received), (...) and the outcome of the competition for the church in the New Huta was known already at the end of August 1957. Of the 104 projects, 14 referenced the pre-1914 style, 27 – returned to interwar style, while as many as 63 were modern architectural explorations. Ultimately approved for implementation, was the project by engineer Wojciech Pietrzyk, who also served as the architect supervisor of the construction; the wait for the commencement of the construction took more than 10 years. Implementation continued for the next decade (1967–1977)”; Information quoted after: [Nadrowski 2000, 58–59]

### 3. Conclusions

The development of the style of religious architecture, as well as the form and shape of the churches of the Archdiocese of Kraków between 1945–2000, were impacted, above all, by the conditions and the transformations of political, economic, and social nature, taking place in our country over that period. An extremely difficult situation, in which the Catholic Church in Poland found itself, various techniques used to destabilize its strength, as well as the legal and administrative procedures limiting its liberty and its freedom of action, exerted a major influence on the architecture of religious buildings.



Source: author's study

Fig. 4. Area of the Archdiocese of Kraków, divided into deanships, showing approximate locations of the discussed churches, built between 1945–1970 (according to the author's report). 1. Dobczyce, *Matki Bożej Wspomożenia Wiernych* [Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians], Deanship 19, Dobczyce, 1947–1949; 2. Niegowić, *Wniebowzięcia NMP* [Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary], Deanship 30, Niegowić, 1949–1959; 3. Michałowice, *NMP Królowej Polski* [Church of Our Lady Queen of Poland], Deanship 6, Kraków-Prądnik, 1952–1963; 4. Kraków – Nowa Huta, *NMP Królowej Polski 'Arka Pana'* ['Lord's Ark' Church of Our Lady], Deanship 11, Kraków-Bieńczyce, 1967–1977

Against the background of the conditions analysed herein, as well as contemporary ideological and artistic movements of the time, it is clear that the process of stylistic transformation is particularly highlighted in the evolution and pursuit of appropriate forms and functional programs. The systemic, economic, legal, and social transformations occurring in subsequent periods clearly demonstrate and reflect the atmosphere of those times, the aesthetics of the era, and represent the real picture of religious architecture.

The Archdiocese of Kraków at the turn of 1945–1970 was an important creative centre for the Polish architectural thought. Architects' milieu started their own paths of creative explorations, creating a specific aesthetics of emerging forms of sacred architecture. Many objects from this period provide a perfect reflection of the international and local architectural trends prevailing at the time, while, at the same time, they demonstrate the tastes of the local community and its artists. Church buildings often assume a modern and contemporary character, founded upon profound theoretical basis.

Presented buildings constitute examples of clear concepts and urban compositions, which powerfully define the public space; while their external forms have high aesthetic value. Buildings, which fit into the context of the environment, the fabric of towns and villages, are perceived as especially valuable, as icons of a kind. This is the architecture marked with representative and original designing solutions.

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