Research project and scientific committee

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XII International Liturgical Conference
LITURGY AND COSMOS
The cosmological foundations of the liturgical architecture
Bose, 29-31 May 2014
Organized by the Monastery of Bose
in collaboration with the National Office of the Church's Cultural Heritage of the Italian Bishops' Conference

RESEARCH PROJECT AND COMMITTEE

The 12th International Liturgical Conference, organized by the Monastery of Bose and the National Office for the Church Cultural Heritage of the Italian Bishops' Conference, will be dedicated to the theme Liturgy and Cosmos and to the study of the cosmological foundations of liturgical architecture. The relation between the building, the church, and creation cannot be limited to the problem of sustainability, but needs theological and anthropological reflection. This conference will be the first of a series of three, which will treat then in turn of light and of voice and sound in liturgical space.
Today's sensibility to ecology raises a new question about the relation between man and cosmos. Man cannot be thought of apart from the universe. A spiritual, and not only a biological and scientific dimension is needed to renew the bond between man and nature.

The planet is disfigured because modern western man lacks a view of the world that integrates science, religion, and art, that is, knowledge, spirituality, and aesthetics. It is necessary to pass from a fragmented vision of the cosmos to a total vision indicated both by new scientific theories and by philosophic and religious traditions.

Many ecological currents seek a kind of "communion" with the earth and through it with the entire cosmos.
The entire liturgical tradition shows clearly that the faith of the Church is marked by a close bond between God, man, and the cosmos. "The cosmic circle and the historic circle remain, in spite of their difference, the only circle of being: the historical liturgy of the Church is and remains, inseparably and incontrovertibly, cosmic, and only thus does it subsist in all its greatness" (J. Ratzinger). Theology, anthropology, and cosmology, hence, form a symphonic unity and find expression in the liturgical action in space and time, which provides form, voice, sound, and gesture to the matter of creation. "Verily it is becoming and right to praise Thee, to bless Thee, to glorify Thee, to give Thee thanks, Maker of every creature visible and invisible, the treasure of eternal good things, the fountain of life and immortality, God and Lord of all: Whom the heavens of heavens praise, and all the host of them; the sun, and the moon, and all the choir of the stars; earth, sea, and all that is in them; Jerusalem, the heavenly assembly, and church of the first-born that are written in heaven; souls of martyrs and of apostles; angels, archangels, with loud voice singing the victorious hymn of Thy majestic glory…" (Anaphora of St. James).

Man's doing, the "poetics" of architecture, then, are an active response of human creativity and a resonance to the Creator's work, who made a formed cosmos from and unformed chaos "through Christ and in view of him" (Col 1,16). Between nature and culture, between technique and inspiration, between the hubris of the tower of Babel and the humility of the Tent of meeting, between human initiative and divine order, between space and time, to build appears as a dialogue between eternal Wisdom and the inhabitants of time, between man and the cosmos.
While the Church in prayer assumes and transfigures the cosmos in liturgical action, architecture, the arts, and the sciences are questioned about the transformations they work upon creation. In the history of architecture various tensions have existed between the construction and its context.

Landscape has become the frame in which cultures deal with the formal expressions of nature, while a reference to milieu or to ecology implies a reference to the physical components of nature itself. What space is left, however, to seeking the sense of nature understood as cosmos or as creation? Does such a question touch in some way the constructing itself or is it only a distant presupposition dependent on the builder's culture? Attention to resources has become a general, trans-cultural theme, but beyond the calls for saving and for sustainability can ethical questions and formal choices confront each other? Sustainability is a term on which are founded efficacious technical practices, less so ethical, and very few questions of poetics or of form.

In the last decades the Churches have explored itineraries of research intended to place in a dialogue what theology says about creation, the ethics of sustainability, and building practices. Some consequences of the theological reflection have been directed towards the architectural activity of the Churches themselves. It is widely accepted today that the construction of new edifices of worship and the recovery of historic church architecture should be in accord with ethics, but there is much to be done yet to call attention to poetics. The care of creation and the care of the community face a double challenge: to make architecture for worship not only sober, sustainable, and respectful of the milieu and the landscape, but also significant aesthetically with regard to the liturgy and to the cosmos.

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