

The Gothic temple, its heritage and the architectural presence of the altar in the second half of the 20th century¹

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Abstract: The article defines the role played by the architecture of a Gothic temple in the aspect of the synthesis of the cultural and liturgical image when it concerns the form of the cathedral's facade, its floor plan culminated with the eastern choir and metaphysics where the light processed by stained glass in contact with the frame (stone skeleton) structure brings a symbiotic, symbolic image. The above-mentioned synthesis was interpreted specifically after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) by the demolition of the rood screens closing the Gothic choir in front of the nave of the lay faithful. The liturgical renewal with a visually open choir introduced the main altar at its culmination, obligatorily connected to the tabernacle, and additionally elevated by a retable. The article describes the interior of the Gothic choir after the Council of Trent, liturgically up to date with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Then, it describes the renewed image of the Gothic choir after another, modern, liturgical renewal. By specifying a new presence of the altar and tabernacle after the Second Vatican Council in the church (currently defined as the domus ecclesiae), the article elucidates the validity of the architecture of the Gothic interior when it exists in accordance with the post-conciliar regulations and serves the purpose of building the community of faith.

Keywords: façade, Gothic choir, rood screen (choir screen), council, altar, tabernacle, architecture

Introduction

An architect designing a church creates both internal and external space of the building, proper for its liturgical function. The construction is designed as a place of prayer for the Church community, yet, at the same time, a symbolic house for invisible God, our Creator, is delineated. The space and symbolism of the Gothic temple, where the synthesis of light and structure provides significant answers, express particularly well God's presence. The form of the Gothic temple was accepted both by medieval liturgical experience and later by other liturgical forms. This fact is proven by the transformations taking place after the Council of Trent (1545-1563). They were caused by the introduction of an obligation to implement the liturgical renewal of the existing architectural interiors other than Gothic ones.

The Council of Trent by dismantling rood screens (choir screens), which divided the Gothic choir from the main nave, turned away from a me-

dieval organizational concept of a smaller church encased within a larger church. The renewal after the Council of Trent introduced a new culture of architectural interpretation of the Gothic interior, however, the respect for it is now as valid as it was before the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) as well as after it, in further years of the 20th century.

Approval of the temples with the chancel (presbytery) opening onto the nave zone, in accordance with the after-Trent celebration in the Latin language, was in place up to the times of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). It was not until the 20th century, 100 years after the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), that the next Council proposed the renewal of liturgical celebration. Preserving the concept of the chancel open towards the lay faithful, the post-conciliar

renewal introduced a new liturgical position of the celebrant, namely facing the people, and the celebration of the Holy Mass in a native language.

The definition of a church building provided by Vatican II, specifying it more as 'domus ecclesiae' – the house of religious community rather than 'Domus Dei' – the House of God, has a great importance to architectural designers who observe the liturgical renewal of the Gothic church. It is a departure from the concept of monumental architecture of the church building towards an object which is a lived-in and lively place (Bandelier, 1999, p. 125-126).

While presenting the research methodology in this article, it is necessary to mention monographs connected with the architectural analysis of the Gothic church interior. It is a book by Felix F. Schwarz (*Symbolique des cathédrales – Visages de la Vierge*, Paris 2003), Jean-Marie Guillouët (*Églises, abbayes et cathédrales*, Luçon 2016) as well as two books by Xavier Barral and Altet (*Rendez-vous avec l'art gothique*, Milan 2009) and (*Histoire de l'art*, Paris 2023). As far as the liturgical analysis of the Gothic interior is concerned, one should enumerate a book by Guillaume Durand de Mende (*Manuel pour comprendre la signification symbolique des cathédrales et des églises*, Fuveau 1996). A liturgical problem of the transformability of the Gothic choir after the Council of Trent has been discussed in a book by Bernard Chedozeau (*Chœur clos, chœur ouvert*, Paris 1998). A similar problem, however, more from an architectural perspective, is presented in a book by Louis Bouyer (*Architecture et liturgie*, Paris 1991).

The liturgical rules of the interior arrangement of a pre-council church in the 20th century are described by Jan Danilewicz (*Kościół i jego wnętrze w świetle przepisów prawno-liturgicznych*, Kielce 1948). Documents concerning post-conciliar arrangement of the interior are presented by Jan Miazek – an editor, in the monograph (*To czyście na moją pamiątkę*, Eucharystia w dokumentach Kościoła, Warszawa). Other documents that deserve our attention are *Ogólne Wprowadzenie do Mszału Rzymskiego*, published in 1970 and 1983 and a renewed *Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego* published in 1983. The teachings of John Paul II included in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

(Encyclical on Eucharist by John Paul II, Katowice 2003) refer to the aspect of beauty of both liturgy and objects serving this purpose.

The author of this article has discussed the undertaken problem in several monographs published by the publishing house Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk in Katowice. They include, among other positions: *Architektura historycznej formy kościoła a ołtarz współczesny – Architecture de la forme historique de l'église et l'autel contemporain* (2003), *Architektura chóru gotyckiego i przestrzeń sakralna – Architecture du chœur gothique et l'espace sacré* (2008), *Actualité de la fonction de l'architecture du temple gothique – Aktualność funkcji świątyni gotyckiej* (2016), *„Dzieło Opata z Saint-Denis a architektura gotycka południowej Polski. Mistyka/Cystersi/ołtarz – L'œuvre de l'abbé de Saint-Denis et l'architecture au sud de la Pologne. La mystique/les cisterciens/l'autel* (2023).

The present article takes into consideration the fact that Gothic interiors with their vaults and glazing supported by the stone skeleton structure are in principle higher and more structural than Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical interiors. Transparent individuality of Gothic structures makes it possible to define the Gothic temple as an object naturally serving the purpose of the function of sacrum. A characteristic feature is the length of the eastern Gothic choir culminated with the sanctuary, which is often incomparable to short presbyteries built after the

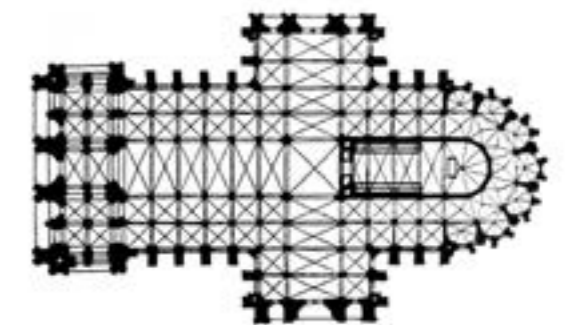


Fig. 1. Cologne (Germany). Cathedral of the Most Holy Virgin Mary and Saint Peter, Gothic choir (1248-1322), the main body of the cathedral was periodically constructed after damage (1347) to the 19th century. Gothic choir separated from the remaining space of the interior, invoking the image of the church functioning within another larger church. Drawing by Mirosław Bogdan.

¹ Article in polish language: Świątynia gotycka, jej dziedzictwo a architektoniczna obecność ołtarza w drugiej połowie XX wieku, https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fetr/2023_4mbog.pdf

Gothic period. It invokes a Gothic-related concept of organizing the church as one space enclosed within the second larger space. This concept is contradictory to Gothic structuralism of the stone skeleton and has not been approved since the period of the Council of Trent up to the present times.

The article describes architectural, mystical and liturgical beauty of the Gothic temple. It refers to the layout of the interior culminated in the east with the choir, ambulatory and radiating chapels. The paper conducts an analysis of the symbolism of the interior taking into consideration the light entering it through Gothic stained-glass windows. Prior to the description of the Gothic choir after the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, the article presents the presence of the altar in the Gothic choir in the period preceding the renewal. It is a choir from the early second half of the 20th century, which is still valid as far as regulations introduced by the Council of Trent are concerned. According to these regulations, the main altar topped with the tabernacle functioned as the altar of the Most Holy Sacrament, constituting a liturgical centre – visible to everybody present in the sacred space. That function ceased to exist in the post-conciliar period, where a second altar (altar table) took place in the chancel and was located on the main axis before the historic altar and took over the role of a liturgical centre. All that happened obviously in compliance with the liturgical law, which also decided about the image and validity of the Gothic choir after Vatican II in the 20th century.

1. Façade and stained-glass window versus choir architecture with the exposition of the main altar

Generally, façade in the French Gothic is organized as an introduction to the layout of the building's interior. It plays a crucial role in the symbolism of churches. It becomes a privileged place, through which the faithful discover and penetrate the object. More often than not, it is oriented with its façade facing the west and the setting sun (Guillouët, 2016, p. 73-74). Its elevation refers to the number of storeys and naves in the church. In particular, the presence

of the main nave is highlighted by a special elevation of the architectural object axially leading to the end of the church, which serves the purpose of the individualization of the rood screen (choir screen), and after its removal – the individualization of the main altar and the Eucharistic Elevation.

The presence of the portal solves this issue in a characteristic way and creates a clear image of the Gothic cathedral. The presence of the portal is in principle obligatory on the Gothic façade. The west façade which was constructed in Saint-Denis before 1140 constitutes the first implementation of the Gothic portal. Apart from the central function of the tympanum, the Gothic portal has characteristic jamb columns and colonnettes with jamb figures (Chartres). The figures being integrated through columns on the Gothic façade replace statues located in the glyphs from the Romanesque epoch (Barral and Altet, 2023, p. 46). There is also Gothic rib vault with an archivolt and wimperg.

When the great façade portal is flanked by portals corresponding to side aisles, the whole composition strives upwards, not losing the visible structural solidity of the interior's stone skeleton. Thanks to a harmonious compatibility of the façade lines, light enters the interior through colourful, static stained-glass windows and creates a spatial image. In this way, a symbolic connection is formed between the earth and heaven (Bogdan, 2023, p. 32). The reality of stone sculpture and stained-glass windows forms a visual 'organization', a synthetic composition preserving the cohesion of the whole masterpiece.

Thanks to it, nothing on the façade is accidental, each element is a visual consequence and result of the organic architectural structure of the entire object. The walls of the Gothic object never compromise its architectural skeleton, on the contrary, they highlight it. In fact, the walls 'disappear' and only buttresses are visible giving an impression of lightness. Matter is transformed into spiritual substance. On the one hand, all this forms a protective cloak for the faithful, on the other hand, it creates a veil concealing the mystery of God (Schwarz, 2003, p. 77-78).

In this way, a medieval conviction of the constant presence of the supernatural world influencing human actions came into being. It was possible due to the

theory of gradation, which defines beings as organized by their gradation (Latin *gradus* – grades) – from matter, through body-and-soul beings to purely spiritual beings. This concept was used in art by revealing transcendent beauty, based on brightness and harmony, which was attained by means defined nowadays as artistic. That purpose was served by the Gothic temple, as it was perceived as the harbinger and image of God's Kingdom, whereas the reference to the Apocalypse of St. John conveyed the need for the perfect reality expressed in a symbolic way (Sadoch, 2018, p. 198).

It is presented by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (pseudo-Denys), who in the Middle Ages initiated the idea of hierarchical life of the universe and of rising towards the sources. It refers to the manuscript *The Celestial Hierarchy*. The author of this work and other mystical and theological writings, who had been converted by St Paul and later became a martyr and patron saint of France, was a great inspiration for Abbot Suger (Latin Sugerius) – the builder of the first Gothic choir in the history of architecture (Dahl, 1987, p. 51). To Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, light was of divine origin, it had its source in God and was good in itself. He writes that Good is praised under the name of light because it is revealed through this model image. He also states that material lights denote the spreading of immaterial light, whose image they are (Dahl, 1987, p. 52).

No doubt, a great mystery of light coming from God is concealed in the Gothic rose window. As a large, round stained-glass window conveying the artistic impression of brightness and harmony, it is located above the central portal of the west façade. This feature is present in all large Gothic cathedrals, where sculpture follows the evolution parallel to the one in architecture and the cathedral façade becomes the fundamental site of the sculpture implementation. We mean here the façade with two twin towers with buttresses, which contribute to the image of verticality of the building. A longitudinal gallery and often the storey of the great rose window organize its central zone (Barral and Altet, 2009, p. 31). The rose window, which belongs to this space, may be treated by the faithful as a sign of the concealed presence of the main altar and its sanctuary in the church interior.

The great rose window shows first of all Holy Mary's Glory, it reveals the theology of Mary the Mother of Christ. It depicts episodes from her life, her Jewish genealogy and her glory in heaven. The rose window in the cathedral of Chartres presents Mary the Mother of God with a Holy Infant in its central part, whereas the circumferential petals show the figures of kings and prophets who foretold the coming of Jesus. All these are accompanied by the petals which depict also angels in adoration (McNamara, 2017, p. 184).

Taking into consideration the Eucharistic aspect, the circular composition of the stained-glass rose window (this symbolic west sun) lets in sunrays, which are axially directed from the west to the east towards the altar. It is even more emphasized when the great rose window is located at the altitude of the chancel windows. The layout of the chancel, being an oblong space of the Eucharistic centre and the culmination of the main nave, is emphasized by the sacrificial table, which constitutes the centre of the sanctuary. In the east Gothic choir, in France, this place is preceded by the space reserved for the clergy.

External Gothic walls feature larger stained-glass windows than the ones in Romanesque walls. The natural lighting coming through stained-glass windows engulfs material objects, which become real only when they participate in the luminous power of light. It happens when we treat a pure form of light in a substantial way (light as a creative energy of the Neoplatonic type). It concerns the light introduced into a non-transparent object and the light which spreads by means of transparent space leading to the transformation of the afore-mentioned object. In this way, a picture of transparent and translucent architecture is built. The purpose is to achieve the state when none of the elements exist in the darkness but are subjected to the efficiency of the work of light (Bogdan, 2023, p. 101). Gothic Architecture serves this purpose. By means of a structure open to sunrays, it becomes symbolically transformed thanks to a new form and composition of the window glazing. In particular, it refers to the windows containing tracery, as opposed to mere openings in the walls existing still in the Gothic period in cathedrals in Chartres and Soissons (Willesme, 1982, p. 20).

Together with stained-glass windows, which are aligned with ribs supporting the vaults, the Gothic choir creates space for the Eucharist – unheard of since the Romanesque architecture. The transformation occurs thanks to the light which bursts into the interior through windows made from colourful transparent glass, like ‘God’s Writing’ which drives back the wind and rain. In a symbolic way, they bar all harmful things from entering the building and hurting the congregated faithful.

While the windows let real sunlight in (the light from the One who is God), ‘God’s Writing’ enlightens all those who dwell in his bosom. Taking into account the mystical interpretation, which is broader and superior to the literal meaning, the windows had to be wider on the inside. And the other way round, their form meant that they had to be narrower on the outside, which represented five senses of the body. It was done so they would not attract the vanities of the world. The broadening of the windows towards the interior made it possible for the spiritual gifts to be poured in abundance. Grating placed before the windows showed prophets and unknown doctors of the Church Militant. Sometimes, in order to present two Great Commandments of Love, two identical columns were placed on both sides of the windows. It also symbolized the apostles, who had been sent in pairs to spread Gospel to other nations (Durand de Mende, 1996, p. 38-39).

Whereas the broadening of the stained-glass windows towards the interior finds its place in the apse zone of the choir, the Gothic positioning of the Eucharistic table at the eastern termination of the apse even more emphasizes its privileged architectural position. It takes place in the sanctuary, a characteristic culmination of the chancel – organized in such a way so as to focus the sole attention on the altar itself. The space highlighted by vertical lines contributes to that fact (McNamara, 2017, p. 102). The light introduced into this space defines it in a mystic and symbolic way, whereas the rood screen (choir screen) obscures similar work of sunrays. In this way, windows with tracery located in accordance with the rhythm of the rib vault neutralize the historic significance of the external wall and create walls being ‘see-through’ partitions, reinforced by flying

buttresses. On the other hand, the rood screen veiling the sanctuary along with the clergy in the choir manifests its non-transparency.

In this way, the church zone around the altar of liturgical celebrations was defined with the reference to the Holy of Holies place in Solomon’s Temple. The Gothic chancel (presbytery) was also perceived as a microcosm of the heaven separated from the rest of the church by means of a barrier or rail (McNamara, 2017, p. 102). When such a barrier had a form of the rood screen (choir screen), the lay congregation in the Gothic epoch were not visually admitted to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, only to the preaching of the Word of God delivered from above, i.e. from the platform of the rood screen immersed in the light of sunrays transformed by stained-glass windows.

This is the legacy of the Carolingian epoch, when the choir had a form of an extension, usually a square one, of the main nave, at the chevet of the church, with or without the presence of the transept. However, there is another, a more historical, explanation of the meaning of the choir. The name originates from the word chorea (dance) or corona (crown). It means that the clergy used to stand in a crown-like fashion around the altar and chant psalms. There were two choirs of singers who signified angels and spirits of the just. They praised God with mutual will and jointly encouraged each other to do good. Therefore the word ‘choir’ denotes everything that is implied by the word harmony, or rather concord (concordia), which results from love. In other words, in accordance with the thought which defines the participation in God’s good, those who do not have love cannot sing in a proper way (Durand de Mende, 1996, p. 35).

When a single cleric sings, it is called ‘monodia’ in Greek and ‘tycinium’ in Latin. When two clerics sing, the name ‘bicinium’ defines this type of singing. Finally, when there are many singers their unanimous melody is called ‘chorus’ – the choir (Durand de Mende, 1996, p. 35-36).

From an architectural perspective, the two above-mentioned choirs in the Middle Ages take a form of two sets of stalls rows, positioned opposite each other, flanking on both sides the main axis of the temple, usually in the choir before the sanctuary. They could also exist as an independent zone in the

main nave. Through the creation of such a characteristic system, the choir of the clergy determined the relation with the chancel (presbytery), where the presence of the main altar constitutes its eastern culmination. In the process of moving the zone of the clergy choir closer to the sanctuary, i.e. the area of stalls up to the culmination of the main altar, the whole system finds its place in the apsidal end of the church, creating thus the eastern choir. To show respect for the altar, the choir stalls were always separated from the sanctuary with a barrier (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 25). The Gothic choir is higher and often longer than the Romanesque choir, and thanks to the presence of the rood screen (choir screen) creates an image of a church built within another church.

2. The Choir functioning as a closed space in the Gothic epoch

The rood screen (choir screen) is also associated with the term ‘pulpitum’, which was built at the choir’s end bordering with the main nave and completed the choir’s composition in the Gothic period. It refers to an element of the chancel arch covered in metal, placed on pillars or columns, whose beam was used for holding the crucifix (rood), statues of the Holy Virgin and St. John as well as reliquaries. The rood screen being an intersecting wall carried a gallery, which served the purpose of reading the Gospel or singing, and similar to the chancel arch was decorated with the crucifix. Rood screens (choir screens) were usually linked by means of two ‘arms’ of lateral barriers of the choir (Brutails, 1997, p. 130).

According to some authors, rood screens were introduced beginning from the year 760. A question remains, to what extent they were able to define a sacral place, and to what extent they constituted just a delimitation of boundaries between the place of prayer for the clergy and the place of religious practice of the lay faithful. An important moment was the appearance of closed choirs in large and long churches as a result of the development of the canon law at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 19).

A typical French rood screen (in French jubé) was introduced at the end of the 12th century and was constructed as a hall of three spans. The middle span led to the interior of the choir, whereas both side spans featured altars visible to the lay faithful. The crucifix of the rood screen was centrally displayed above the choir door, which was equipped with curtains or sometimes with grating. The door was bilaterally flanked with candlesticks with lit candles. This composition was completed by great groups of sculptures, statues, paintings, low reliefs and objects placed in the interior after the removal of the choir barrier (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 16-17).

Similar rood screens were erected, among other places, in cathedrals in Sens (1135-1176) in the years 1220-1230, in Chartres (1195-1240) in the years 1220-1240 and in the cathedral of Amiens (constructed from 1220) around the year 1260. The French rood screen (jubé) played its function well in Belgium. Up to our time, this type of rood screens has been preserved, for instance, in the interior of the basilica in Walcourt (11th-12th c.) and the Notre-Dame cathedral in Tournai (12th-16th c.). An example of a preserved rood screen can be admired in Spain, in the cathedral in Toledo dating back to the 13th century. In the case of Poland, a historical presence of the rood screen of the French type was documented, e.g. in the Mother of God Church on the Sand in Wrocław (1334-around 1380) or in the Franciscan church in Zawichost (1245 – 1256). The inspiration of the form of the rood screen of the French type lasted in Europe as long as up to the 18th century.

Historically, in Poland we may find numerous structures reminding of the above-mentioned large pulpits. However, they had only one altar for those practising the cult, and not two – which were placed underneath the platform of the French rood screen. When the altar visible to the lay congregation was located on the main axis and was flanked on both sides by the doors leading to the choir, then we are talking about the German rood screen (choir screen), which was also introduced in Central Europe. As for partition screens, also different from the French ones, the pulpit was located behind them on the main axis and was opening, under the arch, towards the interior. Such screens made it possible to place the

pulpit on a position higher than the ciborium of the altar. Another type was the rood screen, in which the partition in its entire length was built in the form of a pulpit without the presence of an altar for the cult celebrants, who, in front of it, could find their place before God (Bogdan, 2008, p. 65)

The polar opposite of the rood screen (choir screen) featured seats for the church hierarchy, the rostrum (bema) and the altar, which were located essentially to the east of the continuation of the nave, at the choir termination. In this place, only the bishop and the clergy formed the chancel choir congregation. They were preceded by the rood screen (choir screen), which took the central place in the first part of the Holy Mass celebration. The rood screen was located on the west entrance to the choir, making it possible to deliver sermons and preach the word of God. There was also the seat for the bishop or parish priest present in this place, however, it was used only on grand occasions (Bouyer, 1991, p. 65). Basically, the rood screen (choir screen) had two functions attributed to it, namely that of a screen (partition) and that of a tribune. They were slowly on the decline in the 16th and 17th centuries due to the demand for good visibility of the liturgical ritual in the temple. Also, the weakening of the status of canon priests contributed to the elimination of rood screens (choir screens) at the turn of the Baroque epoch and the Neoclassicism (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 24).

However, when the above-mentioned status was still powerful, the space in front of the rood screen (choir screen) was visited by the lay faithful, without the possibility of seeing the inside of the choir. That fact referred also to the space surrounding the liturgical choir in the church with the ambulatory, which was a characteristic feature of both Gothic and Romanesque layouts. However, in the Gothic period, the ambulatory of the choir underwent metamorphosis into a more mystical image in relation to its Romanesque form. The transformation was made in the form of radiating chapels, among which the central radiating chapel was dedicated to the Holy Virgin Mary (Willesme, 1982, p. 16-17).

The Lady Chapel, as a characteristic chapel at the axial termination of the temple, found a new purpose after the liturgical renewal of Vatican II, as

a place of storing the Eucharist. Obviously, any other chapel in the Gothic interior can be designated to play the above-mentioned function. That also refers to the exposition of the Eucharist in a monstrance. Until recently, in cathedrals or collegiate churches, the tabernacle was not part of the main altar, but was kept in a chapel of a similar function (Bouyer, 1991, p. 75). This fact serves the purpose of individualization of space beyond the liturgical choir in relation to that choir. In the Gothic period, it existed as a closed space and now it functions as an open space.

With the rood screen (choir screen) present, the Gothic lay faithful could not directly participate in the ritual, but were distanced from the mystery of the Holy Mass and not supposed to witness it. A large intersecting composition, closing the perspective, was used to bar the view. From the height of its construction, a lector was calling for the blessing before the reading of the Gospel: 'Jube domine benedicere'. Hence the French name 'jubé' – meaning the rood screen (choir screen), whose structure is practically non-existent nowadays (Guillouët, 2016, p. 123).

With the rood screen (choir screen) present, the procession of the gifts disappeared, whereas the communion of the faithful took place only on special occasions. Most religious songs were sung only by the choir, the whole Liturgy of the Word was incomprehensible due to the use of the Latin language, which was understandable only for the clergy. Nothing was left for the faithful to participate in. Devout lay people were advised to say their private prayers of worship parallel to the liturgy, however, without any connection with it, for instance the rosary. More educated ones were given advice to become engrossed in the reading of a book being the basis for private meditation (Bouyer, 1991, p. 64).

Gothic sacral space does not define the relationship between the space of a lay person praying to God and the space of the altar. Each of these places existed rather for its own sake. Those praying in the Gothic times in the nave were either standing or kneeling. The faithful had no place in the choir except for few chosen dignitaries. A different situation took place in large cathedrals or collegiate churches,

where there were more free seats in the zone of the stalls for clerics and choir singers. It referred to the presence of men, who were more willingly accepted in the space of the choir than women.

In view of all the faithful, beginning from at least the 12th century, one or two additional altars were placed in the nave. It was done even when the choir with the sanctuary was closed in relation to the rest of the interior. Such supplementary altars were not generally used for public celebrations, but for more or less private Holy Masses. After all, in this way the devout faithful had an opportunity to participate in the Eucharistic celebration (Bouyer, 1991, p. 69).

3. Altar in the light exposition, treated as a sacrificial table

The Gothic sanctuary, constituting the eastern termination of the choir, embraces the altar or altars by means of its ambulatory and a balustrade located in front of it. With reference to cathedrals and collegiate churches, they had one main altar, whereas Benedictine monasteries two – above the crypt containing relics of the titular saint or the saint of the monastic order. The medieval sanctuary also included a considerable number of tomb stones, tombs and holy relics. If the lay faithful had no access to the choir stalls, there was even more reason for not admitting them to the most holy space of the church (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 26-27).

Following the demolition of the rood screen (choir screen), the whole Gothic sacral space belongs visually to the eastern liturgical choir, which, from a historical perspective, is built within the space located at the architectural termination of the floor plan (within the cathedral's head – chevet). When it has a form of the architectural choir it includes radiating chapels, ambulatory and liturgical choir reserved for the clergy in the Gothic epoch (Guillouët, 2016, p. 94-95). In the case of a lack of the radiating chapels, its boundaries are delineated by the ambulatory.

When there is no ambulatory, the notion of the architectural choir is identical with the notion of the liturgical choir.

Contrary to the rood screen (choir screen), which bans access to the main altar, the visual language of the light in the Gothic temple does not separate or restrict anything, but it links all zones of the interior. Sunrays are evenly distributed throughout the whole nave, in the ambulatory and side aisles. The whole Gothic space comes to life thanks to the light, as if immersed in God's grace. The sun, or rather sunlight, symbolizes the Highest Lord who is God.

The basis for this symbolism has been laid out in a fragment of the Gospel of John, whose words contribute to spiritual and artistic imagination. According to St. John, Jesus speaks about himself that he is the light of the world. In line with the Saviour's words, whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Bible, 1980, Gospel of John, 8,12, p. 1226). Apart from that, light has many symbolic meanings in the whole Bible (Feuillet, 2009, p. 69)².

That is the reason why the eastern liturgical choir has the right to be more illuminated by means of stained-glass windows in the eastern apsidal end of the church than the rest of its interior. In this particular way, the Gothic builders emphasized the symbiosis between the sanctuary and the clergy zone. The zone of choir stalls was subordinated to the zone of the main altar in spite of the existence of a transparent, nevertheless, barrier between them. It is symbolically expressed by the fact that the nave of the Gothic basilica is built as an oriented one, from west to east, and the light entering the interior from the east reminds the faithful about the light coming into the interior from the west through the great rose window (Bogdan, 2008, p. 25-28).

It became obligatory to build Gothic basilicas in such a way so that the head of the viewer would face the east. This concept was reflected in the architecture as the termination of the church floor plan (the chevet) was oriented towards the rising equinoctial sun. That proclaimed that the Church,

² In the biblical tradition God is light (Ps 27, 1; 1z 60, 19-20), which in itself is divine because God separated light from darkness (Gen 2, 3). Christ is the light of the world (John 18, 12; 9, 5), focusing on the light of the law (Ps 119, 105) the Messiah enlightens people (Łuk 2, 32), who in their own way should be the reflection of God's illumination (2 Kor 4,6): such light comes from love (1 Jan 2, 8-12). The journey towards salvation is a fight against darkness, which is waged by people in the light of the Spirit.

which was fighting on Earth, had to be directed and managed with moderation and spiritual balance, both in joys and sorrows. In consequence, the church's chevet (the end of the floor layout) should not face the west, that is the rise of the sun's solstice. The western light as the solstice light does not provide a symbolic answer as far as the state of moderation and spiritual balance is concerned (Durand de Mende, 1996, p. 28).

Stained-glass windows do not diminish the atmosphere created by daylight. Their colours are joyful, contrasts gentle and the whole space emanates with a symbolic peace of the heavens. The altar situated underneath the choir windows shows the part of liturgy which is expressed through the movements and gestures of the celebrant's hands. The word spoken by him justifies the search for the symbiosis between the sound of the voice of truth and the colour of stained-glass windows. They reflect the liturgical word and symbolically find strength to identify themselves with the truth. The truth that the spiritual light concealed in the Eucharist at the altar has a greater value than the one coming into the interior from the outside through the tracery of stained-glass windows. In a special way, the altar signifies first of all the mortification of our senses or of our heart, in which the commotions of the flesh receive consultation and inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the altar denotes spiritual Church and this fact is expressed by the four directions of the world, over which Church extends its reign. Thirdly, the altar constitutes an image of Christ, without whom no gift can be offered as a pleasant one to God. It reminds of Church which has a custom of addressing God in its prayers, however, through the mediation of Christ. Fourthly, the altar is a symbol of Christ's body, which entails the final aspect, i.e. the representation of the table at which Christ ate and drank with his disciples (Durand de Mende, 1996, p. 55).

It complies with the legacy of the Council of Trent, which took place between 1542-1563, and implements thus the 'explanation of the doctrine concerning the offering of the Holy Mass'. The Council, acting against errors resulting from the Protestant Reformation, decided to defend

the Catholic teachings on the mass. Following the Council, three great popes of that period: Pius V (1566-1572), Gregory XIII and Sixtus V shaped the reform after the Council of Trent. The first of the above-mentioned popes is known as the one who introduced the ways of holiness, which had been previously practised in history, to the Holy Seat. The changes included the re-organization of the Roman Curia and the introduction of simplicity of life and austerity of morals. Saint Pius V put the liturgical life of Church into new forms. Taking into consideration the Trent guidelines, he reformed the missal and breviary. All that was implemented by virtue of Bulla *Quo Primum* of 1570 (Banaszak, 1989, p. 161).

In medieval churches with the closed choir, the main altar was different from that in the Trent church. Behind the rood screen (choir screen) functioning in the Gothic epoch, the altar existed only as a sacrificial table and did not feature the tabernacle cabinet on it. The sacrificial table was surrounded by fabric curtains, which could completely screen it. It was sometimes topped with a canopy and constituted the centre of the sanctuary. Normally, the altar was bare and did not feature any candles or the crucifix, which could be placed on it only during the ceremony. Sometimes, it leaned against a small altarpiece – the retable, whereas in churches without the Eucharistic cabinet it was topped with a hanging element (for instance, dove), where the Holy Bread was stored (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 29-30).

When the Gothic main altar was built in such a way that it lacked the connection with the tabernacle, its majesty did not express 'the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar'. A different situation took place beginning from the Trent period when the tabernacle was placed behind the table (mensa) of the main altar, which fact shaped the form of the altar different from the Gothic one. That fact modified the role played by the Holy Bread and consequently the awareness of the lay faithful present in the church. In the Middle Ages, the Reserved Sacrament was perceived as the one set aside for the sick, rather than the manifestation of the real presence of Christ. Such presence was shown only

by means of a monstrance. The placement of the tabernacle over the altar table (mensa) expressed, from above, the Catholic dogma of the real presence of Christ when the Communion was distributed from the *holy table* (Chedozeau, 1998, p. 52).

Different to the tabernacle, the sepulchrum altar existed in the medieval period and later in the after-Trent period, to finally become honoured in a similar way till the times of the Second Vatican Council. After Vatican II, when the sepulchrum was present under the altar table (mensa), it was no longer necessary to place the relic of a martyr in it – as was the case in the pre-council period. It was enough to refer generally to the relic of a saint (OWMR, published in 1975, no. 266). However, the way of placement of the sepulchrum under the post-conciliar altar table (mensa) in principle reminds the method of its placement in the pre-council period.

Before the Second Vatican Council, the altar table slab was supposed to be made of one homogeneous, natural, intact and unbreakable stone (K.P.K., 1917, Can. 1198, §1). It refers to regular hard stone without the obligation to use noble material, such as marble (S.R.C., 1899, no. 4032). At the same time, a ban was introduced on using artificial stone, including plaster, cement or terrazzo. It was obligatory for the altar table (mensa) to be constructed as a single uniform block, without joining horizontal layers of the stone, in order to create the top of altar table (Danilewicz, 1948, p. 54).

Such a stone block had to lie on a base, called stipes, which were also made of stone. Other materials, such as brick, metal or wood, were excluded. It referred at least to the four pillars (stipes) which supported the altar table (mensa) (K.P.K., 1917, Can. 1198, § 2). Having ensured that the stipes were made of stone, it was possible to use bricks or different stones of various sizes to fill in empty space under the altar table and between the four stone pillars. A rule was also adopted that the space under the altar table (mensa) was not filled in, which made it possible to construct it in the form of a table where the table top was stabilized by four corner columns with an empty space between them (Danilewicz, 1948, p. 54).

4. The altar with and without the exposition of the tabernacle

The altar itself consists of two main parts. There is always the table (in Latin mensa) and the base (in Latin stipes) screened by the antependium (OWMR, 1975, no. 265). The antependium can be made in the form of a fragment of fabric or a panel placed below the altar table (mensa). If additionally there is the retable exhibited above it, either painted or sculpted, it does not belong, in a liturgical sense, to the altar. Starting from the late Gothic, a similar vertical decoration of the altar forms its background. It is permanently fixed with the sacrificial table, it expands and often becomes a triptych (Koch, 2013, p. 464, 490).

Historical research concludes that apart from very few exceptions of altars from a period of more or less late Middle Ages, none was used for the 'versus populum' celebration. So beyond Rome and its closest surroundings, there is no trace of an alleged application of this position facing the people (versus populum). As a result, we are not able to cite the Church's stand on this matter, which would order this way of celebration in connection with the adoption of the Roman rite after the 9th century (Bouyer, 1991, p. 72-73).

The 'versus populum' celebration, the non-Trent one, began to be used in the 20th century after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The priest has to not only circumwalk the sacrificial table, which was possible even before the Council, but also say the Holy Mass facing the congregation (OWMR, 1975, no. 267; Inter Oecumenici, 1964, no. 91). This purpose is served by the fact that the altar, both in our time and in the times of the Church Fathers (Antiquity), constitutes only a sacrificial table, i.e. it creates a composition without the participation of the predella, retable and tabernacle and readably presents a well-adapted, independent and flat plane for the offering of Christ's sacrifice. An indispensable element of this space is a tablecloth, crucifix and candlesticks (OWMR, 1975, no. 268, 269, 270). Obviously, the crucifix and candlesticks may stand beside the altar and not necessarily on it.

Clear readability of this sign, in the form of self-sufficiency of the table without any supplementary functions apart from the chief function of the

Eucharistic transubstantiation, invokes great respect for the gift of the Eucharist. Therefore in the sacral interior of the second half of the 20th century, by removing the tabernacle from the altar, it is forbidden to accentuate the presence of Eucharistic Christ on the altar from the beginning of the Holy Mass. According to the Canon law, this presence is the fruit of the consecration, which is not performed at the beginning of the Holy Mass (Inter Oecumenici, 1964, no. 95; Eucharisticum Misterium, 1967, no. 55).

Gothic liturgy does not define, in a visual sense, the place of the cabinet for storing the Hosts. At that time the tabernacle in its present form did not exist yet. In the Middle Ages, the Holy Species of Bread and Wine were stored in a capsula in the vestry constituting sacarium and were carried to the choir only for the time of the Eucharistic celebration. The capsula also stored the Holy Scriptures and the sacarium itself communicated with the choir (Bouyer, 1991, p. 74).

However, many medieval churches can be found where there were cabinets for storing the Holy Species located in the choirs. It took place, for instance, on the northern side, where the Book of the Gospel was also placed. On the other hand, in the cabinet located in the southern wall of the chancel (presbytery) other books were placed, which were used as lectionaries. In addition, there existed a custom that the Eucharistic pyx was hung over the altar. It was used solely during the celebration as it contained the Holy Sacrament which had just been carried from its cabinet and elevated over the sacrificial table (Bouyer, 1991, p. 74).

The first Gothic tabernacles appeared in the 13th century in the form of tower cabinets, elaborately decorated, rising high above the floor level. Each time they were placed on the northern side of the altar, as separate forms not directly related to the altar. When in the Renaissance epoch their height was lowered, they were moved as the proper tabernacles to the centre of the high altar (Bouyer, 1991, p. 75).

Before Vatican II, there was an obligation to permanently store the Most Holy Sacrament only on one altar in the church. This rule did not refer to the churches with the perpetual adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament. In such interiors, the presence of the second tabernacle was a good solution. In this

way, there were two tabernacles, which were located on the altar table (mensa) of the corresponding altar (Danilewicz, 1948, p. 76).

Before the Second Vatican Council it was obligatory to store the Most Holy Sacrament in an immovable tabernacle situated in the central part of the altar. Also, in agreement with the ordinary bishop, the consecrated hosts could be stored for the night in a safer place than the church. In addition, to supplement the above, the corporal and the chancel light or altar light (the so-called eternal light) were indispensable in each place which stored the Most Holy Sacrament (Danilewicz, 1948, p. 76).

The tabernacle on the main altar, which was exhibited above the altar table (mensa), was obliged to function as the altar of the Most Holy Sacrament – creating the most perfect space. It is a visible and undoubted sign of the authentication of its existence and the reinforcement of its cult. That is the reason why the structure of the predella should emphasize that the tabernacle above it constitutes the dominant of the central part of the altar. It constitutes a readable form, existing at the end of the main axis of the church. A visual image of the tabernacle at the top of the central part of the altar slab should not contradict the functional freedom of the altar table (mensa), which precedes it and on which the transubstantiation takes place (Zieliński, 1959, p. 94-95).

The tabernacle has to be always hermetically closed from each side. Before Vatican II it also had to be immovably situated on the altar and fixed onto it, which protected it from being robbed. Also, small open windows for the viewing of the Most Holy Sacrament were banned (S.R.C. 1806, no. 2564). The obligatory use of the conopeum, concealing the external part of the tabernacle, emphasized the gravity of its function. A similar external veiling of the tabernacle, a remnant of an old custom of covering the whole altar with byssus curtains, was obligatory in spite of the application of gold, silver or other precious metals for its construction (S.R.C. 1880, no. 3520). The conopeum could be made of silk, linen, woollen or hemp, in white or a different colour consistent with the liturgical colour of the day. Black colour was not taken into consideration and was generally replaced by purple (S.R.C. 1882, no. 3562).

5. Post-conciliar altar without the exposition of the tabernacle

In our time, the Church Law precisely states that after Vatican II, the church which is newly built or the historical one which is liturgically renewed should feature only one altar for the performance of liturgical functions (OWMR, 1975, no. 267; Inter Oecumenici, 1964, no. 93). It invokes the thought about the only Saviour, Jesus Christ, who is symbolized by this very altar (Bogdan, 2020, p. 117)³. When it is situated on the main axis of the temple in the Gothic choir or in front of it, it is possible to preserve the historic altar at the end of the axis to extend the tabernacle function connected with it. When the partition screening the Hierarchy is no longer present nowadays, the lay faithful may stay around the sacrificial table. Contrary to the Gothic epoch, everybody can visually participate in the Holy Mass today.

Following Vatican II, the sacred space with internal pillars supporting the historic interior, including Gothic one, and the one without the internal pillars, is always defined by one sacrificial table playing a liturgical function. The church built in the second half of the 20th century does not have the chancel (presbytery) exhibiting the system of stalls. In the post-conciliar church all seats, except for the celebrant's seat, are located in the nave of the faithful, which is one as one is the Lord, one sacrificial table and one community.

The post-conciliar chancel (presbytery) is a liturgical counterpart of the medieval end or termination of the liturgical choir. Nowadays it has lost its old name and is now called the zone of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The zone features the sacrificial table, i.e. the altar, the table of the Liturgy of the Word of God, i.e. the pulpit, and the celebrant's seat, i.e. the sedilia (a place of presiding). Apart from the above-listed objects, also the tabernacle and the baptismal font may be placed in this zone. Obviously, the Liturgy

of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Word have a crucial importance in the presbytery (OWMR, 1975, no. 258; Inter Oecumenici, 1964, no. 91).

With the introduction of a single space into the church with the ambulatory, with the lack of the historical main altar, the zone terminating the Gothic interior in our time becomes more clearly comparable to the zone of the contemporary architectural presbytery than at the presence of the old type of the altar. The decisive factor is the decision not to accentuate the system of two sacrificial tables on one axis, but a single post-conciliar altar table. In this case, the arrangement of a space for the contemporary tabernacle, originally located at the axial end of the historical Gothic choir, in a different part of its zone, or beyond it, at a small distance from the altar – is a correct solution.

The tabernacle may also find its place in the chapel of the Most Holy Sacrament or in a different chapel, where the second altar may be placed in compliance with the Church Law (OWMR, 1975, no. 261). It refers to a chapel which is separated from the church nave, however, it is open towards its space. Such a solution ensures communication, which is necessary for the priest carrying Hosts after the performed consecration from the altar serving the liturgical function on Sundays and other holidays to the chapel with the single tabernacle functioning now in the church space.

With the tabernacle located on the historical high altar, the carrying of the Most Holy Sacrament by the priest from the post-conciliar altar table to the tabernacle, and vice versa, is clearly readable as the way planned alongside the main axis of the layout. With the presence of a long Gothic choir and the location of the post-conciliar altar at its beginning, the way between the two altars becomes visibly long. The majesty of this route is highlighted by the height of the Gothic choir and its soaring verticality achieved thanks to the application of the ribbed vault.

³ New liturgical books clearly refer to the original tradition of Church. Therefore the Roman Pontifical provides guidelines to build only one altar in new churches, as it denotes the only Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the only Eucharist of the Catholic Church. Simultaneously, it is suggested that the construction of many altars should be abandoned, when it serves the purpose of making the sacral interior more beautiful. Obviously, it is permissible to build the second altar, but in a specially prepared chapel, separated from the nave.

In the second half of the 20th century, as a result of the Vatican II sessions (1962-1965), the Liturgical Law introduced the renewal of the Liturgy, which separated the tabernacle from the altar table. Even in the 1950s it was not common. Nowadays, the sacrificial table as an independent altar table (*mensa*), without being combined with the tabernacle, is sufficient to confirm credibility of the consecration (Inter Oecumenici, 1964, no 95; Eucharisticum mysterium, 1967, no. 55). Obviously, the altar – either bound with the tabernacle function or without it (like it was in the Gothic period) – is always exhibited as the chief place of the liturgical celebration and offertory. From a theological perspective, the altar does constitute an image of Christ himself. It is understandable as the Body of Christ is perceived as the site of the sacrifice, martyr's death, after which the resurrection followed (McNamara, 2017, p. 212; Obrzęd poświęcenia ołtarza, no. 22a).

The tabernacle exhibited on a *stella* and bound with the altar by means of communication provides different autonomy than the one located in the wall or a stained-glass window. A special responsibility befalls a designer or artist, who introduces a new tabernacle in place of the eliminated old one, which existed at the post-Trent termination of the Gothic choir. The materials and colours used are always of great importance. The application of different colours and the structure of textures speak in the space deprived of internal pillars, whether it refers to the Gothic choir or the contemporary presbytery. They speak about the hierarchy of objects in the most important liturgical space of the church.

It is decided by human creativity, which contrary to divine creativity, consists in manufacturing and thus using the existing materials, such as wood, stone or hues. It is the artist who provides them with an individual form and meaning. Discernibly, God's creativity is different to man's creativity. The divine creativity is creation in itself. Between it and man-made creation there is always the so-called 'disparity in

their essence or nature' (Kowalczyk, 2020, p. 76-77). A true artist designing liturgical spaces and objects serving God is aware of the existence of such disparity.

John Paul II's Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* emphasizes the importance of the visual cultural and architectural experience in the service of the Mystery, being the expression of full faith of the Church. Therefore various forms of altars and tabernacles developed in different liturgical spaces. They reflect not only motifs of human imagination, but also rules resulting from the clear understanding of the Mystery (John Paul II, 2003, p. 62). To serve the faithful, it requires the accuracy of the artistic expression regarding the formal expression of the Church's faith, in accordance with the pastoral guidance (John Paul II, 2003, p. 64)⁴.

The tabernacle located at the termination of the main axis of the Gothic choir is situated higher in space in relation to the post-conciliar altar table (*mensa*) and accentuates its background, when you look at it from an axial perspective. When it refers to the tabernacle located under the historical *retable*, the preservation of the historical beauty of the whole high altar becomes obligatory. It amounts to the preservation of the aesthetics of the dominant of the historical culmination of the Gothic choir, which through its visual harmony invokes the need for a longer pause before Christ dwelling in the tabernacle.

It reminds of the words of John Paul II, who in the above-mentioned Encyclical emphasizes the significance of 'the art of prayer'. It is backed up by an aspect of a spiritual conversation, which stirs us to a constant need for silent adoration before the Most Holy Sacrament (John Paul II, 2003, p. 32). A proof of this fact can be found in the post-Trent space of the Gothic choir, which features, at its termination, the authentic art of constructing altar forms culminated with the tabernacle and *retable*. After all, beyond the time of the Holy Mass, the present Gothic choir has a form of a large chapel, filled with desire for silent adoration.

In old churches, including Gothic ones, which were renewed by the post-conciliar liturgy, there is a custom of placing the tabernacle behind the *mensa* of the main altar. However, it is also acceptable to situate the liturgical presence of the tabernacle over the *mensa* of the side altar (OWMR, 1975, no. 258). In this case, the way delineated between the celebrant standing behind the sacrificial table and the tabernacle does not go along a straight line, which exists in the case of the tabernacle functioning on the historical main altar. It is supported by the composition of two altars, the historical one located at the eastern termination of the choir and the contemporary one situated at the western introduction to the church space. Both of them were erected on the main axis of the church, bilaterally flanked by the system of stalls between them. They are practically non-existent in short presbyteries built after the Gothic period and the way between the historical and the post-conciliar altar of the 20th century is visibly shorter.

The order to dismantle the rood screens (*choir screens*) of the long choirs after the Council of Trent made it possible for everybody to visually locate the zone of stalls, which participates in the liturgical arrangement of the interior in the same way as it does today. It refers to two historic dispositions of the clergy stalls located opposite each other, with the amphitheatre-like rows, erected one behind another. What is important is that the beginning or the end of free space between the zone of stalls becomes a proper site for the location of the post-conciliar altar in the 20th century. When it finds its place at the beginning of the above-mentioned free space, it constitutes the beginning of the choir zone. A similar layout indicates the possibility of placing it in front of the choir on the main axis by extending the way linking the liturgical altar and the historical altar connected with the tabernacle.

This way is definitely the shortest when the post-conciliar altar finds its place at the eastern termination of the free zone between two systems of stalls. Then, it is visibly closer to the zone of the functioning tabernacle on the existing historical altar. It makes it possible to introduce, into the space of the Gothic choir, the zone of seats located

in front of the post-conciliar altar. The seats are organized in rows perpendicular to the system of stalls bilaterally flanking a similar arrangement of the interior.

Therefore along with the simultaneous introduction, into the choir, of the congregation situated in the choir stalls and perpendicular rows of seats, a concept re-appeared to call this zone 'the church functioning within the church'. Obviously, without the presence of the rood screen (*choir screen*), that presents a picture of a long Gothic chapel at the termination of the floor plan, which plays a liturgical function and is open on the main axis towards the church nave. Such a solution is not possible when the church features a short presbytery, without the possibility of implementing additional seats for the faithful. Then, the search for the concept of 'church functioning within church' cannot be further continued.

Summary and Conclusions

Apart from structural and cultural values, like the stone skeleton accompanied by stained-glass tracery walls, the architecture of Gothic temples also leaves the legacy connected with the liturgical sphere. The display of the great rose window on the *façade* of the French cathedral bears witness to the symbiosis of light and liturgy, where the symbolically setting sun refers to the presence of the altar concealed, in the Gothic period, behind the rood screen (*choir screen*) – the *façade* of the choir which has barely survived till our time (see: Photo 1A, B). Another, rarely preserved, liturgical object is the tabernacle tower, which was placed next to the altar topped with a triptych, whereas triptych *retables* often constitute a preserved testimony from the epoch of late Gothic (see: Photo 2A, B). Following the Gothic period there still exists the legacy of long choirs with the exposition of stalls showing the style of the epoch in which they were constructed (see: Photo 3A, B). What is also current is the impact of the architecture of the ambulatory responsible for the transparency of the Gothic interior, liturgically open toward radiating chapels, including the Holy

⁴ The Church has always given artists broad space for their free artistic creation. However, sacral art must be able to accurately express the mystery contained in the Church's faith and to comply with pastoral guidance provided by competent church authorities. It refers both to visual arts and church music.

Lady's chapel, which exhibit altars with reference to the centralization of the main altar elevated in the Gothic choir (see: Photo 4A, B).

Since the ambulatory of the zone of the Liturgy of the Eucharist (the contemporary ambulatory) may constitute an element of modern sacral interiors, they functionally remind more of Gothic than post-Trent interiors, which do not feature the presbytery ambulatory. It refers to single-spatiality, which enables the visibility or 'viewability' of the interior of the Gothic choir from each side after the elimination of the rood screen (choir screen) and the replacement of a brick partition of the choir along the ambulatory with a transparent grating, after the Gothic period. The function of encircling the post-conciliar altar by the congregation in contemporary interiors does not have any reference whatsoever to the churches shaped according to the Trent pattern, i.e. the church of Il Gesù (1568-1584), Baroque churches and churches from later epochs, where the absence of the ambulatory reinforces the visual language of the 'viewability' of the altar zone exhibited solely towards the nave zone.

The legacy of Gothic façades and stained-glass art constitutes a great part of European culture. The art and architecture of this period combines structure, visual effects and symbolism in a perfect way. The after-Trent, post-conciliar renewal helped to understand the mysteries of the Gothic temple in a more profound way, whereas the Vatican II renewal fully defined the universal character of the Gothic architectural interior and its flexibility as regards the requirements of the liturgical renewal in each epoch.

The liturgical renewal of the Council of Trent, which was valid up to the 1960s, introduced a concept of a long way leading along the main axis of the layout

through the main nave and the choir to the high altar. After the Vatican II renewal, the post-conciliar altar may find its place exactly on this way.

With the altar table situated deep inside the Gothic choir, against a background of the historical altar, or without such a background, the universal character of the Gothic layout shows respect for the concept of the church with after-Trent liturgy. Nowadays, a long, post-conciliar presbytery may play a function of the chapel during week days, whereas on holy days it may naturally constitute the culmination of the Sunday church for a big number of the faithful.

In the 20th century, the location of the post-conciliar altar on the way along the main axis of the layout leading to the historical high altar together with its location before the zone of the Gothic choir emphasizes respect for the contemporary post-conciliar church. That refers to the concept of the post-conciliar sacrificial table which exists surrounded by the faithful when they find their place in the naves of the main body and in the arms of the transept.

Since the post-conciliar altar of a contemporary architectural object may be designed in its geometrical centre, or close to it, this shapes, in a natural way, the space encircling the zone of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This is a form of the contemporary ambulatory, where different chapels may be designed, such as: the chapel of storing the Most Holy Sacrament, the chapel of the exposition of the Most Holy Sacrament, the chapel for parents with children, and, finally, the most readable one – the chapel of the week church. The location of one of the above-mentioned chapels on the architectural axis behind the zone of the Eucharistic liturgy emphasizes the aspect of historical presence of the chapel of our Lady. All this defines historical universalism of the Gothic temple.



Photo 1. Façade of the Gothic cathedral with the exposition of the great rose window and rood screen (choir screen), the west façade of the Gothic choir. A. Paris. Notre-Dame Cathedral (1163 – 1270). B. Tournai (Belgium). Notre-Dame Cathedral built from 12th to 14th century (Gothic choir erected in the years 1243-1255). Photo: Author.



Photo 2. Gothic tower tabernacle situated on the right side of the altar in the Gothic period and the function of the retable in the form of a triptych above the altar topped with the post-Trent tabernacle. A. Gdańsk. Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1343-1502), tower tabernacle (1478) and retable (1511-1517, Master Michael from Augsburg). B. Nysa. Church of St. Jacob and St. Agnes (1423-1430), retable, Passion Altar from the early 16th century. Photo: Author.

Photo 3. Function of the stalls in a long Gothic choir near the post-conciliar altar located in its west zone. Gothic choir culminated with the post-Trent altar. A. Wrocław. Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (1244-1376). B. Paris. Notre-Dame Cathedral (1163-1270). Photo: Author.



Photo 4. Function of the ambulatory versus shaping the transparency of the Gothic choir. A. Saint-Denis. Basilica of Saint-Denis, the first-in-the-world Gothic choir (1140-1144). B. Mons (Belgium). St. Waltrude Collegiate Church, Gothic choir (1450-1691). Photo: Author.

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