

# Summary

The book focuses on the ecclesiastical architecture of the Catholic Church in Poland in the years 1918–1939, that is chiefly on Catholic churches designed in the inter-war period. Its geographical scope is delineated by the borders of the 2nd Republic of Poland. The chronological framework is defined by the historical caesuras: the regaining of independence and the outbreak of the 2nd World War.

**Chapter One** is devoted to the discussion of the role, significance and position of the Catholic Church in the 2nd Republic of Poland, and the relations between the Church and state authority. It also presents the legal and economic basis for the ecclesiastical architecture.

Although Catholicism was not the official state religion of the 2nd Republic, the authorities had granted it privileged status, which was even recorded in the Constitution. The phenomenon of giving one religion special significance in the ideology of state power – that is singling it out as one of the crucial „foundations of national identity” and an important element of the symbolic universe of a freshly constituted country – is, of course, typical not only to Poland, but also to e.g. Ireland after 1922 and Finland after 1917. In the 2nd Republic, however – a state with a much more complex ethnic, religious and cultural structure – that a single religion was granted such status was far more meaningful. In the multi-national and multi-denominational country, troubled by ethnic conflicts (especially in the south-eastern borderlands, where the predominantly Catholic Polish population clashed with the primarily Greek-Catholic Ukrainians), Catholicism of the Latin rite became a symbol of Polishness.

**Chapter Two** focuses mostly on the issues of creating cultural landscape (including the architectural one) of the new state in the first years of its existence, e.g. with the application of forms which even before the 1st World War had been considered to determine national identity. Among the topics discussed in this chapter there is the role of the largest and most impressive churches built in the 1920’s in the eastern and western borderlands of the country.

After 1918 the main focus was on the re-shaping of the landscape of that re-constituted, yet still largely new state. Churches in the „national style” were supposed to be one of the elements that would unify its architectural landscape. They also were designed to create / strengthen / protect what Tim Edensor calls „ideological landscapes” which, according to John Hutchinson, arouse the „national sentiment”. Renaissance and Baroque forms, usually subjected to „native” stylisation and transformed into *sui generis* „national signs”, as well as neo-Classical forms – equally popular at the time, but used more in the cities than the countryside due to that style’s traditional association with authority – were also supposed to help eliminate the marks left on the landscape by the powers that had partitioned Poland, that is to remove the effects of imperialist and colonising actions, especially in the lands formerly annexed by Russia and Prussia. Thus, this was mainly an action that strengthened the instinctive, unreflecting perception of the landscape as „native”. This was to be achieved by the introduction of „indigenous” forms into the landscape and the concurrent removal of the „alien” ones.

In the period in question, therefore, Roman-Catholic churches that had the above-mentioned forms were meant to reinforce the state’s integrity, to co-create its homogenous architectural landscape and to emphasise the cultural continuity of the new political organism. Yet the task of this architecture was greater than just to strengthen the citizens’ feeling of being „at home” (especially with regard to the Polish settlers in the eastern borderlands). This architecture was supposed to legitimise Poland’s right to the contested borderland areas which it had gained in the years 1918–1921.

**Chapter Three** concentrates on the late 1920’s and early 1930’s – a period of transition in the ecclesiastical architecture as much as in the secular one.

Slightly modernised revivalist forms, chiefly Renaissance, Baroque and neo-Classical, predominated in the Polish religious architecture of the years 1918–1925. From the mid-1920’s onward, however, new formal and spatial solutions for Catholic churches began to be sought. Yet, especially in the case of churches, this transition involved not a violent break with the past, but rather an increasingly strong influence of new formal, constructional and spatial conceptions. The transition from the convention of national revivalism to modern compositions and to designs inspired by contemporary trends in the world’s architecture was only gradual.

At the beginning, observable are mostly new interpretations of old forms, attempts to depart from typical arrangements of church interiors. Initially the clergy rejected daring modifications and syntheses of historical forms, or audacious proposals for new spatial arrangements of churches that departed too far from the tradition of church architecture. Non-standard formal and spatial solutions, inspired by e.g. Expressionism or Functionalism, aroused the clergymen’s distrust. Also, the current canonical law hindered changes in the

functional arrangement and the disposition of the church interiors. It is also possible that the hostile attitude of the Polish Catholic clergy to new forms in ecclesiastical architecture was also to a large extent influenced by the views of the pope himself. Despite the clergy's antagonistic attitude to modernist architecture, however, in the architectural contests of the latter half of the 1920's designs in the new stylistics gradually began to supplant the more strongly revivalist ones.

Yet the purist aesthetics of the Functionalism was relatively rarely referred to in the Polish church architecture. Polish architects who in that period designed religious buildings were more drawn towards Structuralism in the Perretian manner. The influence of Perret's reinforced concrete churches that remained within the French tradition of rationalist/structuralist reinterpretation of the Gothic architecture, is clearly discernible in Oskar Sosnowski's church of St. Roch. Polish architects were inspired not only by the most recent French or German architecture, but also Dutch one. In ecclesiastical architecture, the best example of a reference to the so-called Amsterdam School is the monastic complex of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Warsaw (Karol Jankowski and Franciszek Lilpop, 1925–1936).

The influence of the trends and variations of the Modernist architecture, notably Expressionism, Functionalism and Perretian Constructivism, are discernible in Polish ecclesiastical architecture already by the mid-1920's. However, in the years 1925–1931 relatively few churches were created that would entirely break with traditional formal and functional solutions, in contrast to, for instance, Czechoslovakia, where this was far more the case. The reasons for this reluctance were several. One is probably the fact that neither among the clergy nor the architects themselves there existed any wider discussion of the principles of ecclesiastical architecture. It could also be significant that in Poland, in contrast to e.g. France, reinforced concrete structures were expensive. In that period, the application of reinforced concrete on a wider scale was often quite beyond the means of a parish intent on building its own church. It must be remembered that in the late 1920's and early 30's Poland underwent an economic crisis, the effects of which were perceptible until ca. 1935.

It appears, however, that the foremost reason for the fact that so few modern churches were built in Poland in the years 1925–1931 was the already-mentioned problem of the clergy's hostile attitude to all new forms and solutions in ecclesiastical architecture. The representatives of the Church were particularly distrustful towards the avant-garde movement, which was identified with the circles of the extreme left and associated with „Bolshevism” and „atheism”. Apart from that, the majority of clergymen was afraid to secularise church architecture; the prevalent anxiety was that a churchgoer might not be able to discern churches not only from secular edifices, but from

factory structures. A gradual process of accepting „modern” architecture in the (broadly-understood) Catholic Church in Poland, as well as the circles associated with it, is apparent by the early 1930’s. The clergy accepted also the application of compromise solutions that merged tradition with modernity. Those are typical for the Polish church architecture of the 1930’s.

**Chapter Four** is devoted to the resultant monumental, „averagely modern” ecclesiastical architecture of the 1930’s. In that period, church architecture began to be increasingly included in the strategies of state authority; it was officially becoming a part of state policy.

Many architectural designs and constructions carried out in the years 1931–1939 constitute attempts at a compromise between tradition and modernity. The preferred conceptions were strongly synthetic and monumental. References were made chiefly to classical tradition, but also to the Gothic one, as the main model taking competition designs for the Temple of Divine Providence in Warsaw and the Sea Basilica in Gdynia, both by Bohdan Pniewski. Such architecture: monumental, impressive, conforming to the requirement of magnificence and, in addition, not breaking with tradition, was much appreciated by Church authorities.

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The book was organised around the notions of architectural landscape, architectural policies, and space in architecture. The key research issues are: the formation of a young state’s architectural landscape; new formal and spatial conceptions in the ecclesiastical architecture of the inter-war period; the influence of ecclesiastical and secular authorities on the form of church architecture; the symbolic message in Roman-Catholic churches erected in Poland in the period in question (especially in the eastern borderlands and in the western voivodships of Silesia, Poznan and Pomerania). The last of those problems was given a special attention.

In the eastern borderlands, Poles were the ethnic group that was ethnically and economically dominant, but inferior in number. Archival documentation cited in the book confirms that in those regions, national/ethnic identification was inseparably linked to the declared denomination. The development of the Roman-Catholic parish structure was there perceived (not only by Poles) as a part of the Polonisation programme – or the programme of „strengthening Polishness”. In the eastern borderlands of the 2nd Republic, it was the Roman-Catholic churches that were generally associated with Polishness. State and church documents demonstrate that in many cases they were actually meant to „represent the Polish state”.

Numerous archive materials demonstrate that supporting the development of Roman-Catholic parish network (as well as investing in the education system and settling military and state-official families in the region) was perceived by

the state authorities – initially primarily the local authorities – as a crucial element of „strengthening Polishness”, „defending the Polish possession” and „reinforcing the Polish component” in the eastern borderlands. Polonisation of those lands was carried out with varying intensity throughout the entire inter-war period. In that region, Catholic churches were one of the vital tools of state propaganda, or even, more broadly, the ideology of power. And this was indeed the way they were perceived – not only by Poles, but also by the ethnic minorities (who in the east were actually „majorities”, at least in some cases).

Throughout the 1920's, „Polishness” of the eastern borderlands was to be corroborated by picturesque churches which had the forms of the „native” Baroque, usually mingled with Renaissance motifs. In the western voivodships, neo-Baroque churches fulfilled a similar function. Associations stimulated by this architecture were of crucial importance. The Baroque was linked with the period of the greatest pre-eminence of the Republic of Poland; it bore connotations with Polishness and Catholicism. In designing the most magnificent monument-churches, however, classical forms were applied as ones traditionally associated with political power, in order to symbolise, above all, the „stability of authority”. Roman-Catholic churches built in that period in the eastern borderlands must be analysed also in the context of the symbolic representation of the dominant ethnic group. In the east, those forms were to remind the population of the Polish people's political, economic and cultural supremacy.

In the 1930's, churches were often intended as a dominant element, or a focus, of elegant districts, designed e.g. in Warsaw and Gdynia. A Catholic church functioned as the key urbanistic feature in the new industrial towns of the Central Industrial District, in settlements designed in the coastal regions from Gdynia to the Hel Peninsula, and in the Polish colonies in the south-eastern borderlands.

Documents show that in all those places, monumental churches which had forms that were modern, but at the same time correspondent to tradition, constituted an integral part of state policy. They were to express the strength of state authority and to underline the importance of the Church. Also, this type of architecture helped to create the new, modern image of Upper Silesia and Pomerania. It has to be stressed, however, that neither in the case of the „native” neo-Baroque and neo-Classical forms of the 1920's, nor in the case of the monumental reinforced-concrete temples of the 1930's do we encounter any direct dependence of architecture on politics. There existed no system of state directives that might designate certain motifs to, for instance, represent the Polish state in the borderlands. Even in the latter half of the 1930's, those were not forms that would be made obligatory by some special decrees.

Neither can it be said that the state authorities assigned any concrete meanings to those forms. What can be discerned is more like implicated

meanings ascribed to certain elements (for instance a church or its part, e.g. a tall spire or a cupola), which had many sources: documents, speeches, press articles etc. Churches with „Polish” attic balustrades, with bulbous Baroque helms of church towers, or the monumental churches, bare of architectural detail and furnished with spires, could equally be regarded as signs in the landscape – the carriers of meaning.

Of course, not every church erected in the inter-war period must necessarily be regarded as a carrier of some hidden, intentional meaning or symbolic message (although each is a clear statement, dependent on the context). It must be stressed, however, that political and ideological meaning of church forms increased in the borderland regions, e.g. in the east. Also in the case of the monumental temples of the 1930’s, semiosis was particularly strong in the eastern-borderland churches. Those churches were perceived as the manifesto of the state’s power and stability of its authority, but it seems that they were also supposed to fulfil persuasive functions, directed at the Ruthenised minor gentry of the east and the partially-Germanised population of the western voivodships, who, according to the state authorities, was inclined to identify with the German culture.

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The Polish church architecture of the inter-war period is outstanding indeed. The very number of churches build in less than two decades – close to a thousand edifices – is impressive, as is the dynamic development of the parish network after the year 1918. Against the background of the European and the world’s ecclesiastical architecture of the 1920’s and 30’s, Polish churches stand out due to the diversity of applied forms. Catholic churches were designed by local architects as much as by the best, most gifted architects of the era, e.g. Jan Koszczyk Witkiewicz, Bohdan Pniewski, Oskar Sosnowski or Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz. In the inter-war Poland, a church constituted an important „architectural topic”. The majority of those edifices has survived in good condition and today attests to the high level of architectural culture in the 2nd Republic.