

Fifty Shades of Grey?

Contemporary Churches as Lived Liturgies that Mediate Mysteries

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These things are not intended to serve liturgy
but to be liturgy, even if in a modest way.¹

1. Introduction. The Accusation of Relativist Space

In recent years, some Roman Catholic architects and architectural historians have provided a harsh critique against the ‘beigification’ of contemporary church architecture as “theologically unsound” and thus “harmful to the Church.”² According to them, architectural Modernism could only lead to “large, empty spaces, marked by very little symbolism, narrativity, art, statuary or painting.”³ Indeed, many contemporary buildings – think of Tadao Ando’s well-acclaimed *Church on the Water* (1988) and *Church of the Light* (1989), Kister, Scheithauer, and Gross’s *St Maria Magdalena* in Freiburg-Rieselfeld (2004), Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas’s *San Paolo* in Foligno (2009), Renzo Piano’s domestic chapel at the Poor Clare convent in Ronchamp (2011), and Patrick Berger and Jacques Anziutti’s *St Paul-de-la-Plaine* in Saint-Denis (2014) – are empty spaces of bare concrete, as if they were nothing more than mere ‘shades of grey.’

¹ Rudolf Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate: The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture*, trans. Cynthia Harris (Chicago, IL: H. Regnery Co., 1958), 200. My gratitude is due to John Arblaster for proofreading this contribution.

² The term “beigification” is from Robert Barron, “Beyond Beige Churches: Modernity and Liturgical Architecture,” *Antiphon* 6, no. 3 (2001): 14–22, at 22; Moyra Doorly, *No Place for God: The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 118.

³ Barron, *Beyond Beige Churches*, 14.

If the problem were but stylistic, the only thing to be done should be “to render beautiful the bare concrete, the exposed steel beams, and the barren brick-work”⁴ in order to “look like a church” that is, to bring in “the conventional architectural markers of churchliness,” which are “a cross, tower, dome, conventional shapes, and proportions.”⁵ But the problem, according to these authors, is the underlying Modernist rationale: “The church architecture of the past forty years, precisely in the measure that it has been shaped by modern presuppositions, is incapable of bearing the weight of Christianity.”⁶ Grey dissolves both black and white, and thus serves as a good metaphor for what these authors abhor as “relativist space,” which is “homogenous, directionless, and value-free.” Because no place can have more meaning than another place, “sacred space, by definition, cannot exist.” In conclusion, “by adopting the Modernist style, the Church has incorporated Relativism into her very fabric.”⁷ In the wake of relativism emerge subjectivism, rationalism, dualism, and anti-traditionalism.⁸ Because relativist space is considered incapable of conveying any sense of transcendence, the Modernist style is dismissed as “ugly as sin.”⁹ As a result, these authors go back to Gothic architecture as the ‘right’ way to build and to think theologically.¹⁰

Although I do not follow these critics in their severe option of style, I entirely adopt their appeal for “church structures that not only house and gather the worshipping assembly, but that tell the Christian story boldly, unapologetically, and with panache.”¹¹ My answer to the accusation of contemporary churches as mere ‘shades of grey’ is that the theological depth of architecture should not be reduced to matters of norms or style but brought to life by examining how worshipping communities *use* and *appropriate* their churches. I have used ‘fifty shades of grey’ in a literal and metaphorical sense. The question is: could we recover, in reference to the popular novel, the embodied sensuousness of these shades of grey? This can only be done, I believe, when we are attentive to our body, that is, to both our individual and communitarian body.¹²

⁴ Doorly, *The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture*, 4.

⁵ Denis R. McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago, Mundelein, IL: Hillenbrand, 2009), 27.

⁶ Barron, *Beyond Beige Churches*, 14.

⁷ Doorly, *The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture*, 4.

⁸ Barron, *Beyond Beige Churches*, 14–18.

⁹ Michael S. Rose, *Ugly as Sin: Why They Changed Our Churches from Sacred Places to Meeting Spaces and How We Can Change Them Back Again* (Omaha, NE: Sophia Institute Press, 2001).

¹⁰ See McNamara, 3, 169. With Gothic architecture as paradigm, Michael S. Rose proposes three “natural laws of church architecture”: verticality, permanence, and iconography.

¹¹ Barron, *Beyond Beige Churches*, 22.

¹² I have done so more extensively in my *Spiritus loci: A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture* (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2015). In order to be theological, our analysis of church buildings should include the *synaesthetic*, *kerigmatic*, and *Eucharistic* dimensions of mys-

Contemporary churches *become* lived liturgies in communitarian worship. The mysteries they mediate can be experienced fully only in (repeated) celebrations.¹³ Therefore, in this article, I will explore two case studies of contemporary architecture, both parish churches, examining the different creative ways in which Eucharistic liturgies are celebrated by the Episcopalian community of *St Gregory of Nyssa* in San Francisco (John Goldman, 1995) and the Roman Catholic community of *St François de Molitor* in Paris (Jean-Marie Duthilleul and Corinne Callies, 2005).¹⁴ I do so in order to lay bare some of the inherent theological potential of architecture, which only mediates mystery in its fullness when the architecture, as *lex edificandi*, ‘participates’ in the liturgy or *lex orandi*, which corresponds to theology or *lex credendi*. On the one hand, although the first case study can certainly not be dismissed as ‘shades of grey’ because it adopts a rather colorful, traditional, and eclectic style, I have chosen it precisely as Episcopalian eye-opener for Roman Catholics because it brings to light a perhaps surprising search for transcendence and contemporariness. On the other hand, the Parisian church is the typical Modernist building that would be discarded by the aforementioned critics as mere ‘shades of grey’ unable to convey transcendence. While both parish communities are certainly not typical of all current liturgical practices in the Episcopalian and the Roman Catholic Churches in the West,¹⁵ their buildings represent complementary prototypes of the contemporary search for transcendence in architecture. I have chosen them precisely for the exceptional character of their communitarian

tagogic space. The first dimension pays attention to the individual body, the last to communitarian appropriation.

¹³ This is also the theological conviction at the basis of Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ My gratitude goes to both parish communities and their respective worship leaders Paul Fromberg and Father Gabriel Delort Laval for having so generously allowed me to take photographs during their celebrations. The following analyses reflect numerous visits during the years 2011 and 2012. The following websites give a good idea of the liturgies lived in and the mysteries mediated by these churches: <http://www.saintgregorys.org/> and <http://saintfrancois-molitor.cef.fr/>

¹⁵ In particular, the baptismal theology of *St Gregory of Nyssa* received a lot of critique, not in the least from an Episcopalian point of view. Their *lex credendi* is the hospitality of *open communion* to everyone, baptized or not. Effectively, as *lex edificandi*, the baptismal font is relegated to the outside, *behind* the centrality of the altar, which is the most prominent welcome for any visitor. In this article, I will not discuss this critique, and focus instead on what is valuable in the use of the space during ordinary Eucharistic liturgy. For an exposition of the baptismal theology at *St Gregory of Nyssa*, see Donald Schell, “The Font Outside Our Walls,” *God’s Friends* 12, no. 2 (August 2001): n.p. [<http://www.allsaintscompany.org/resource/font-outside-our-walls>]; See also Louis Van Tongeren, “St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco,” in *Sacred Places in Modern Western Culture*, eds. Paul Post, Arie L. Molendijk, and Justin Kroesen (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 151–157.

appropriation. They can therefore serve as valuable paradigms for *domus ecclesiae* that are truly *domus Dei* in a contemporary way.

2. Hermeneutic Framework. Spatial Configurations and Rhythmic Patterns

Both churches reveal their surprising capacity for conveying transcendence precisely in communitarian celebration. That is exactly the point of this article: we must look at the lived liturgy before dismissing a church too quickly as ‘relativist space’ – or ‘shades of grey,’ in literal and/or metaphorical sense. Therefore, two sets of hermeneutic tools will prove helpful in focusing attention on the community (and not moving away to sterile and esoteric explorations of so-called hidden meanings in architecture¹⁶): Rudolf Schwarz’s *spatial configurations* and Marcia McFee’s *rhythmic patterns*.

In the discussion of my case studies, it will become clear why I have precisely chosen these as hermeneutic instruments. Few theories, in fact, point out the importance of communitarian movement in liturgical architecture. That is, in the limited scale of this study, the major point I would like to retrieve of their fruitful thought. Together, they serve well to counter the critique of relativist space, because they bring to light what cannot be discovered without bodily participating in the living liturgies: the meaningful mysteries that are mediated through the dynamic *interaction* between moving (individual and communitarian) body and building. Whereas the first is a German architect who elaborated his theory in the heydays of the Liturgical Movement but is now largely forgotten, the latter is a current Methodist worship consultant with a vivid interest in helping communities appropriate their liturgical spaces.

In the 1930s, the Roman Catholic architect Rudolf Schwarz presented six ‘plans,’ not as mere blueprints for building churches, but as stills of a changing, dynamic ‘seventh plan.’¹⁷ More essential than the building is the spatial configuration of a worshipping community. Schwarz called his first ‘plan’ for church building a *ring*, because it is simply based on how a community gathers spontaneously in a ring around a central focus, be it an altar or a preacher. Schwarz warns that a literal and static interpretation of this plan could become “the most desolate of all forms,” a self-enclosed circle without any transcendence. Therefore, “the closed

¹⁶ That would be the point of *kerygmatic space* without attention to the *synaesthetic* and *Eucharistic* qualities of the space. See my discussion in *Spiritus loci*, esp. 203–249.

¹⁷ See Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate. The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture*, (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011). For a more thorough discussion, see my *Spiritus loci*, 278–299.

form lasts only as long as it remains open.”¹⁸ One way to open the ring is *vertically*, by introducing an *axis mundi*, an opening of light, as an architectural expression of the Ascension. The church becomes then what Schwarz called a *chalice of light*, which it receives from above.¹⁹ Another of Schwarz’s suggestions is to open the ring *horizontally* in what he called the *open ring*, by including a “sacred emptiness,” that is, an emptiness that is not bare and vacant but rich and inhabited by a transcendent presence.²⁰

Schwarz’s fourth plan, the *way*, is, together with the *ring*, another fundamental configuration: all are oriented as one People of God on a journey, a pilgrimage towards one goal. Schwarz observed that “even if we are loath to admit it, this is one of the great fundamental forms of our being together. [...] Those who are settled down in the closed forms will never understand this pilgrimage.”²¹ God is here the one who leads through the desert. Many ‘familiar’ churches reproduce such a *way*-form in a static way, and unfortunately oppose laity and clergy in harsh confrontation. Recently, Richard Kieckhefer has revalued this basilical type that he called “classic sacramental” by stressing its *processional* and *kinetic* value.²² Indeed, the *way*-form of our familiar churches divided into longitudinal nave oriented towards a sanctuary can only be rightly understood in a *dynamic* way. Again, Schwarz’s ‘plans’ should not be implemented literally, but somehow find their materialization during the flow of a liturgical year – because they permit the assembly to *embody* plural ways of relating to God, instead of imposing static, petrified uniformity.

Schwarz’s fifth plan, the *dark chalice*, represents the end of the journey, where Christ welcomes His people home. This converging configuration is the embodied answer to the *open ring*, after having gone the *way*. Schwarz imagined a dark inward space of homecoming. Some of his churches reproduce literally this parabolic vision.²³ Finally, the sixth plan is the *dome of light*, the joyous vision of the New Jerusalem, the wedding banquet of the Lamb as described in the book of Revelation, where the whole universe is cast in divine light.²⁴ According to Schwarz, a practicing architect himself, this vision was impossible to build. Nevertheless, it formed part of his six basic ‘plans’ for church building because of the underlying theological vision, which is dynamic, as expressed in his seventh ‘plan,’ the *Cathedral of all times*: “Only the cathedral is true body. The plans were like limbs of the hidden body of history; they contained the whole by implication but they

¹⁸ Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate*, 67.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95–113.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 67–94.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 114–153.

²² See Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 17–25.

²³ See Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate*, 154–179. The prototype of this parabolic plan is Schwarz’s *Heilig Kreuz* in Bottrop (1953–1957).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 180–188.

themselves remained its phase.”²⁵ This plan or ‘whole’ stands “above all plans”²⁶ and brings them all to completion and recapitulating them over time. Schwarz’s vision was an “ever-changing space”²⁷ that made “the building run parallel to the action.”²⁸

Schwarz’s theory for church building is based on the organic concept of the human *body*. The building had to bring to light an “inner spatiality”²⁹: “A higher life is at hand and it speaks from time to time in changing forms. But that which speaks is ever present.”³⁰ Church buildings had to “come into being solely out of the act of worship itself [...], welling forth from within.”³¹ Schwarz would reject the presumption that ‘shades of grey’ are incapable of conveying transcendence: even an empty vessel “would have a form and this form would have a meaning.”³² For Schwarz, architecture had to serve and even *become* liturgy: “Architecture lasts only in order to be let back into happening.”³³ That is exactly why “each of the great basic forms could be represented through the articulation of the people.”³⁴

Complementary to Schwarz’s spatial configurations, and from a completely different starting point, the American liturgical scholar Marcia McFee has distinguished between four basic energy patterns, based on the human body. She related them to distinctive liturgical rituals, going from *invigorating* liveliness (thrust), *ordering* energy (shape), *playful*, interactive participation (swing) to *contemplative*, sustained stillness (hang):

We are formed through the rhythms and dynamics of our worship as people who come to their feet, who are ready for action, inspired for action (*Thrust* energy). We are formed as people who name and claim God’s reality, who embody the vision of the reign of God, who share with others the sure foundation that is God (*Shape* energy). We are formed as people who love deeply, relate personally and intimately, who feel the ebbs and flows of life and emotion and respond to a hurting world (*Swing* energy). And we are formed as those who can listen for the still small voice leading and guiding us, able simply to ‘be’ present,

²⁵ Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate*, 195. On the seventh plan, see 189–210. All the following quotations are taken from this section.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

³² *Ibid.*, 199.

³³ *Ibid.*, 203.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

steeped in awe-filled moments, guiding others to the presence of the ever-mysterious God (*Hang* energy).³⁵

Both Schwarz’s six *spatial configurations* and McFee’s four *rhythmic patterns* will help focusing upon communitarian appropriation in the analysis of my two case studies. In order to counter the accusation of ‘shades of grey’ or ‘relativist space,’ I will proceed in two steps. First, I will show the fruitfulness of this simple hermeneutic framework for a perhaps obvious, but contemporary example of ‘shades of color,’ as an Episcopalian eye-opener for Roman Catholic critics, who would certainly dismiss this church as ‘relativist space’ for its apparent subjectivism and eclecticism. Second, once this approach proved useful, I will apply this framework to a typical Modernist ‘shades of grey’-church. In doing so, both case studies, however different in living liturgies and mediating mysteries, will bring to light a profound dimension of all of our buildings and celebrations: they must lay bare the *eschatological* truth of our liturgical gatherings. This is, at least, my growing conviction over the years.

The French theologian and liturgical scholar Louis Bouyer has argued that liturgical architecture should orient towards the *parousia*, the victorious coming of the Lord.³⁶ In order to explore the other metaphor of the title: liturgical architecture should shed (eschatological) light upon the shades of our time, or, in other words, the shades of liturgical architecture should orient towards eschatological Light. Let me explain this briefly, before proceeding to the case studies.

3. Shades of Light. Eschatological Heterotopias

The theological depth that this exercise will reveal in the case of both churches will be, as we will see, *eschatological*. A brief word on this theological truth is at stake before starting the exercise. Eschatology, for Karl Rahner, is the “futurity of the present.”³⁷ Eschatology does not relegate important issues to the future, but places us really in this present world by revealing its eternal depth. Because such futurity is not easily visible, imagination comes to our aid: “Christian hope is not

³⁵ Marcia McFee, “Primal Patterns: Towards a Kinesthetic Hermeneutic,” *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy: Annual Meeting, Baltimore, Maryland, January 2–5, 2009* (Notre Dame, IN: North American Academy of Liturgy, 2009), 136–157, at 153–154.

³⁶ Louis Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame press, 1967), 81.

³⁷ Karl Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, trans. K. Smith (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 323–346, 334.

imaginary, but it is irreducibly imaginative.”³⁸ Therefore, the German Protestant scholars Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff suggested “eschatological imagination” as an embodied practice of hope in the midst of a broken reality, opening windows that “show potential for life flourishing” by ‘reversing’ and ‘thickening’ ordinary experience.³⁹ The French phenomenologist Jean-Yves Lacoste evoked an “eschatological reduction”⁴⁰ of the liturgy: in phenomenology, reduction is used in order for the phenomenon to appear more clearly.

Hence, in liturgical enactment, the world is momentarily placed between brackets so that the eschatological Kingdom – or the eternal depth of our world – appears more clearly. Adopting the term *heterotopia* of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (who not precisely wrote on liturgy): I would call places in which the Kingdom becomes visible eschatological *heterotopias* that function as mirrors for our society:

Utopias are sites with no real place. [...] There are also [...] real places [...] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.⁴¹

Like utopias, heterotopias create another world, another place we dream of. But contrary to utopias, heterotopias are real places embedded and embodied in this world. These real places give us *already* a sense of another place – call it Kingdom – but they are *not yet* this Kingdom. Hence, how can our churches be *heterotopias* for the eschatological imagination, that is, “effectively enacted utopias,” real places embedded and embodied in our world, that give us a glimpse and a sense of the Kingdom by appealing at our imagination?

Let us turn to two contemporary examples for showing how this eschatological Kingdom can be brought to light in communitarian appropriation. Especially the last case will respond to the accusation that ‘shades of grey’ can only lead to ‘rela-

³⁸ Richard Bauckman and Trevor Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: 1999), 153–162.

³⁹ Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 15–48.

⁴⁰ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy 40, trans. Mark Raftery-Skeban (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27. Not only churches may function as eschatological heterotopias: there are so many places in our world that give us a glimpse of the Kingdom, in prisons, in hospitals, in schools, in homes.

tivist space.’ Examining what communities actually *do* with their spaces, how they use and appropriate them will reveal their hidden meaning: hence, these spaces are not ‘relativist’ but ‘meaningful’; ‘shades of grey’ should be, in any case, ‘shades of Light.’ This basically eschatological meaning is not encrusted statically in the bare concrete but comes to light only dynamically in communitarian *appropriation*. The aforementioned hermeneutic instruments of spatial configurations and rhythmic patterns are a help to bring this to light. That the ‘shades of grey’ of contemporary church architecture convey transcendent meaning and mystery can only be perceived when being attentive to the moving (individual and communitarian) body. In short, liturgical architecture is basically a question of embodied sensuousness. Let me first demonstrate this with a proudly contemporary example of shades of color, imagery, playfulness, mysteriousness, narrativity, art, and painting.

4. Shades of Color: St Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco (1995)

The exotic, fairytale shape of *St Gregory of Nyssa* creates a playful mysteriousness that is fitting for an eschatological *heterotopia* because it is so *unfamiliar*, and this precisely appeals to the imagination.⁴² Instead of the dull reproduction of familiar church schemes, unfamiliar styles and shapes release an eschatological imagination that is much more appropriate for our broken world today. Playful *unfamiliarity* might well be a condition for the contemporary character of a church, in order to be truly a *heterotopia*, a mirror for our world.

The spatial configuration of *St Gregory of Nyssa* is built around a well-forged liturgical pattern attuned over the years to the needs of a specific and fairly eclectic Episcopalian community. The complementary spaces for Word and Eucharist go back to early models of Syrian churches.⁴³ The Sunday liturgy begins in the octagonal rotunda around a simple wooden altar-table, on which stand earthen cups. People gather spontaneously around this altar-table in what Schwarz had called a *ring-configuration*. The familiar distinction between nave and sanctuary is abol-

⁴² For many people, it might be a space for an imagination let loose, drifting away from clear liturgical norms that keep things tight and clean and controllable. However, if one is willing to approach, to enter, and to appropriate the eclectic, exotic, seemingly esoteric language, one discovers an unexpected balance between clear limits and free space, between institution and charisma that other churches are only dreaming about!

⁴³ Donald Schell, “Rending the Temple Veil: Holy Space in Holy Community,” in *Searching for Sacred Space: Essays on Architecture and Liturgical Design in the Episcopal Church*, ed. John Runkle (New York: Church Publishing, 2002), 149–181.

ished. This is not a holy place where one should shut up and remain unnoticed. The Eucharistic space, the sacred heart of this place, comes first of all to the fore in the disarming dimension of simple human *encounter*. It is truly a *domus ecclesiae*, a house where a community feels at home. There is a lot of space for gathering and moving around.

When we enter this meeting place, newcomers are welcomed, people chat, and the choir rehearses in a contagiously confident way, without the need of instruments. Everyone wears a nametag, in order to foster encounter. Everyone is welcome in this family of sisters and brothers in Christ. Above our heads, eighty-eight historical and legendary figures, as one unlikely family lead by Christ, lift their hands in a welcoming gesture. This colorful fresco expresses the maxim of the church father Gregory of Nyssa written in the lantern above our heads: "The one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God's friend." This friendship mysticism is the hermeneutic key to the whole liturgical event, in which table fellowship has a central place. Encounter is part of the worship in *St Gregory of Nyssa*. But this is only one dimension, which corresponds to what the Evangelical theologian Mark A. Torgerson rightly has called "an architecture of immanence."⁴⁴ Because of this colorful fresco and the meaningful maxim of Gregory of Nyssa, we can recognize Schwarz's second configuration of the *chalice of light*: a ring that does not remain enclosed upon itself but opens vertically to another space, becoming eschatological *heterotopia* because it makes visible a Kingdom of God, a heavenly Church of dancing brothers and sisters, God's friends in communion.

Suddenly, the door of the vesting room opens. A small colorful procession comes out, the presider with an Ethiopian cross, the lay deacon with the Gospel book, moving hastily and cheerfully under colorful Ethiopian umbrellas among the quieted congregation. "Christ is Risen!" exclaims the presider, immediately responded by the assembly: "He is risen indeed!" From the beginning, it is the Lord who invites, as depicted in the fresco above our heads. What is most striking is the Paschal urgency of this entrance ritual, which could be understood as a *thrust* pattern in McFee's categories. Because of its energetic intensity, thrust energy does not usually last long. McFee suggests that thrust energy goes with the image of "a transformational God – a God on the move."⁴⁵

Indeed, three elements make this entrance ritual at *St Gregory of Nyssa* so meaningful: first, the *liturgical* dimension or *lex orandi*. We are welcomed with a Paschal greeting. Our Christian faith starts with the Risen Christ, who calls us together, who is the transformational God on the move inviting us to move with Him. Although He is not visible among us, does our heart not burn from what has been

told to us, have our eyes not been opened (Lk 24:32)? Is this central altar-table not a symbol of the Risen Christ present in our midst, such as it was for the disciples of Emmaus? It is so meaningful to start the Sunday liturgy in the exact same spatial configuration as we will bring it to an end. Second, the *theological* dimension or *lex credendi*: the encounter with the Risen Christ occurs on the basis of simple human encounter. Standing around this altar-table, we are the Body of Christ, locally visible here and now. Third, the *architectural* dimension or *lex edificandi*: above our heads are the ones who live in God's friendship and invite us to be one Church on earth, one vision of the eschatological Kingdom, in which the one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God's friend.

Now the *ring* breaks open and becomes an *open ring*: we move, in a sort of ordered procession behind the presider and his deacon, to the second pole of the liturgical ellipse, the elongated seating area. This procession reproduces Schwarz's fourth plan, the *way*, until it comes to an end, as Schwarz's *dark chalice*, ready, prepared, shaped for the liturgy of the Word, in what McFee called a *shape pattern* of balance, symmetry, clarity, repetition, moderation, and clearly defined functional zones. Due to its invariant stability, the inherent dynamism of this pattern could easily be overlooked, especially its power to shape a congregation. The oblong, ordered space is replete with furniture, antiphonal seating alongside a bema with ambo and presider chair at both ends as three signifiers for proclaiming (ambo), preaching (presider chair), and praising (antiphonal seating) one Word. The hierarchical roles are clearly laid out in the space. Behind the presider is a colorful fresco depicting Saint Gregory of Nyssa preaching. Above him, the friendship mysticism is made clear in the wedding of the human soul with the heavenly Bridegroom, in front of a depiction of the San Francisco church.

What is not clear from visiting this church outside of celebrations, but what can only be experienced during Sunday worship, is that this place is also used for what McFee called *hang energy*. After each of the two Biblical readings at the ambo, a well-chosen moment of silence is particularly dense, filled with the deep echoing sounds of Tibetan bells, which hold in suspense the divine Word that no one can fathom. Most of the people close their eyes in silent prayer or spiritual aftertaste. They become aware of each other again, tasting the divine echoes of the proclaimed Word, hanging together in contemplation, waiting, focusing on being present rather than on doing and what's going on. Sitting is appropriate for hang energy. There is no direction to go, there is but a place to be. Speech is totally unnecessary in this pattern, which speaks for itself and even fosters a certain ability to go with the flow. People just are for a moment, together in attentive stillness and intense connection. Such moments of hang energy are particularly apt for what I call 'body-building,' that is, for building the Body of Christ that we are. God is here the surrounding and grounding mystery in which we find and define ourselves again as community.

⁴⁴ Mark A. Torgerson, *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

⁴⁵ McFee, "Primal Patterns", 142.

After the Liturgy of the Word, the congregation moves a few times in a gentle, swinging dance around the altar, again as a *ring*, but a moving *ring*, repeating the same steps as depicted in the mural above our heads, as such connecting this earthly local church with the heavenly Church in one and the same divine liturgy presided by the dancing Risen Christ, and thus also as *chalice of light*. This move could be called *swing energy* in McFee's kinesthetic hermeneutic. It is a playful, interactive, rhythmic, and swaying movement. The primary focus in swing energy is on the community as one dancing Body of Christ lead by Christ. Because of the dance and the accompanying song, this processional move is totally different than the earlier one. It is more festive, and at *St Gregory of Nyssa* it is always a long expected highlight of the liturgy – *defining* the particular liturgy of this local Church. At this moment, the *lex edificandi* joins adequately the *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*. This dance bridges the Liturgy of the Word with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It grows out of the Word we have proclaimed, preached, and praised. The Word has enriched us and invites us now into embodied celebration. Such dynamic configuration corresponds in my view to Schwarz's sixth plan, which he called the *dome of light*. It is not easy to see how Schwarz's 'joyous vision' of the wedding banquet of the Lamb in the new Jerusalem could otherwise find architectural expression. I suggest that the community of *St Gregory of Nyssa* has found in its dance an appropriate dynamic expression of Schwarz's vision. The whole building becomes now an eschatological event, a true Temple of the Spirit.

This dance shapes the community into a *ring of circumstantes* around the altar-table for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which unfolds according to a *shape pattern*. The *sigma*-(C)-shaped altar-table is reminiscent of the oldest Last Supper depictions, such as the sixth-century mosaic in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna or the sixth-century Rossano Gospels (Codex Purpureus Rossanensis, fol. 3), following a Mediterranean custom of reclining at the curved side of a *stibadium*.⁴⁶ At *St Gregory of Nyssa*, the presider serves adequately at the conventional place of the servants, in memory of Christ who is the *diakonos* in our midst (Lk 22:27).⁴⁷ On Fridays, this same Eucharistic rotunda hosts the food pantry, which distributes food to less fortunate citizens in the neighborhood. They move around the altar in exactly the same direction as the Dancing Saints and the community during Sunday worship, as such acquiring a Eucharistic dimension. This rotunda is thus

⁴⁶ Sigma-altars were used from the fifth to the seventh centuries. See Otto Nußbaum, "Zum Problem der runden und sigmaförmigen Altarplatten," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 4 (1961): 29–37 and Georges Roux, "Tables chrétiennes en marbre découvertes à Salamine: Anthologie salaminienne," in *Salamine de Chypre* (Paris: 1973), 133–196.

⁴⁷ Otto Nußbaum, *Der Standort des Liturgen am christlichen Altar vor dem Jahre 1000: Eine archäologische und liturgiegeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Theophaneia 18, 2 vols. (Bonn: Hanstein, 1965), I, 444; Steven J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1998), 69–74.

truly the sacred heart of this church, providing an eschatological vision of the Kingdom in its four dimensions of encounter, dance, Eucharist, and solidarity.

Having examined the architecture of this particular church through the lens of the liturgy, with the help of four *energy patterns* (thrust, shape, hang, and swing) and six *spatial configurations* (ring, chalice of light, open ring, way, dark chalice, dome of light), let me now formulate some conclusions before moving on to my next case study. First of all, these hermeneutic keys should not be applied rigidly. They allow the discovery of different tones or colors in our liturgies. The more we can recognize these patterns in our liturgies, the richer they are. Schwarz himself did not conceive of his 'plans' as blueprints for church building, but recognized that a "single movement flows uninterrupted through all the 'plans' and one of its phases is set down in each of them."⁴⁸ That is why his seventh plan, the "Cathedral of All Times," recapitulates the six plans and brings them to completion. This plan, however, is impossible to build. Therefore, if one has to choose, the *open ring* was Schwarz's preferred vision for the everyday Eucharistic celebration. The issue at hand is not to stick to one static configuration or energy pattern alone but to recognize (and implement) different spatial configurations in our liturgies, such as my analysis of *St Gregory of Nyssa* has shown. Whereas McFee's patterns allow one to focus on the *rhythm* of our celebrations, Schwarz's plans translate the different *shapes* of a community. Both emphasize liturgical *dynamism* and communitarian *appropriation*. With this colorful Episcopalian eye-opener in mind, let us now move to the 'shades of grey' of a recent Roman Catholic church building, and see if we can lay bare its embodied sensuousness that would make it truly attractive, festive, contemporary, and eschatological – as 'shades of Light.'

5. Shades of Grey. St François de Molitor, Paris (2005)

The Roman Catholic *St François de Molitor* (2005) in Paris presents a totally different situation, showing that liturgical dynamism is open to multiple expressions, really and fortunately depending on the local communities' appropriation of their space. At first sight, this building gathers all the characteristics of 'shades of grey' and 'relativist space' so abhorred by the critics. If truth be told, 'shades of grey' would still only function metaphorically in this church. It would rather be dismissed as 'shades of beige,' but the point is clear. Its minimalist, empty, 'beigified' space is "marked by very little symbolism, narrativity, art, statuary or painting."⁴⁹ In fact, three polychrome statues stand in the corners and are not visible at first

⁴⁸ Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate*, 191.

⁴⁹ Barron, *Beyond Beige Churches*, 14.

sight. Prominent are the metallic crosses on the walls and the golden cross of glory in front of the glass wall, also without corpus. The global atmosphere could even be characterized as Protestant, when not attentive to communitarian appropriation.

The exterior façade of this church does not display the same exotic exuberance as *St Gregory of Nyssa*, and is more indistinguishable in the busy street. Therefore, if there is an eschatological quality to be brought to light, we must find it inside.⁵⁰ After a dark passageway, we enter a bright open space. This surprising experience, which might remain unperceived or unconscious for most visitors who are not attentive to the *synaesthetic* qualities of the space,⁵¹ is in my view definitely reminiscent of Schwarz's *dome of light*, in which one is taken in, especially in contrast with the darkness and confinement of the entrance. So, the first spatial configuration is actually this vision that Schwarz thought was impossible to build. Let us hang in there for a while. Indeed, McFee would speak here of *hang energy*: "We are formed as those who can listen for the still small voice leading and guiding us, able simply to 'be' present, steeped in awe-filled moments, guiding others to the presence of the ever-mysterious God."⁵² Similar to the beneficial *hang*-moments in *St Gregory of Nyssa*, this Parisian church is propitious for contemplative listening. The smooth, diffuse light falling in from the glass wall helps to create the right atmosphere for contemplation and stillness.

The elliptic configuration of the pews around the central altar is a prominent expression of Schwarz's *ring*, very similar to how the rotunda is used in *St Gregory of Nyssa*. Nave and sanctuary are not separated in a familiar basilical way, but the sanctuary is enclosed within the nave, it is the sacred heart that transfigures the assembly into the Body of Christ. One could even imagine that the main rhythmic pattern displayed in this building is *shape energy*: there is order, balance, symmetry, clarity, repetition, moderation, and clearly defined functional zones. The white, cubic Carrara-marble altar is so much moved to the center that people seem reduced to mere unmoving observers. At least, this is the extent of what we think we see when not looking at the architecture through the lens of living liturgy. But then we miss the mysteries it mediates! And we might dismiss it all together as mere shades of grey without embodied sensuousness, without imagination, such as the movie was dismissed in relation to the popular erotic novel.

It is surprisingly wonderful to see how the static *ring* breaks open as a Schwarzian *open ring* at the penitential and doxological rites, appropriately during

⁵⁰ This being said, the marble plates are lit at night and thus shed mysterious Light on the streets. But the eschatological dimension of this church is definitely not reduced to this playful feature.

⁵¹ I discuss *synaesthetic space* as the primary dimension addressed to the individual body in *Spiritus loci*, 161–202.

⁵² McFee, "Primal Patterns", 154.

Kyrie and *Gloria*. This is an extraordinary example of communitarian appropriation of the space. At this moment during the Eucharistic liturgy, all present – clergy and laity – turn their bodies towards the cross of glory and the luminous garden: the *ring* of people remains open, at the same time defining the open space as absolutely sacred. According to Schwarz, the open ring is a "bleeding form," which "shows that wherever the earthly form breaks off prematurely, God begins."⁵³ The golden cross is in fact a cross of glory, because it does not carry the crucified, and thus becomes the eschatological sign of the victorious Christ who comes at the end of times.

By orienting themselves bodily, by moving their bodies together, in a kind of very subtle *swing energy* in McFee's suggestive terms, the gathering of individuals is silently, bodily, boldly, playfully, sensuously, and without a word formed, shaped, and *incorporated* into one Body, one worshipping community oriented towards the cross, recognizing their creaturely limitedness and giving glory to the saving Creator. They are, to take another of Schwarz's plans, configured as one People of God on a *way* that ends in God. Together, they are in expectation oriented towards the cross, towards the light, and towards the garden: a perfect eschatological symbol for the new creation and a reminder of the garden of Eden. The luminous garden with the cross of glory is a spatial symbol of the liturgical (not the geographical) *Oriens* or East, the eschatological *already but not yet*. This heavenly garden of paradise is *already* visible through the glass, *but not yet* within our reach: it is not physically accessible.

During this moment of the liturgy, the worshipping community allows emptiness to break their enclosed ring open. Schwarz warned that a ring would not lead eventually to an unhealthy opposition between laity and clergy (what often can be experienced in basilical churches). That is why his *way*-form situates the presider walking in front of the community, that is, oriented as well towards the liturgical East. In an open ring, presider and assembly are all together oriented toward the emptiness. Schwarz argued that "this invasion of emptiness is not meaningless annihilation: it is the beginning of growth into the light."⁵⁴ In *St François de Molitor*, this emptiness is made sacred through the implicit symbols of garden and light and the explicit symbol of the cross of glory, but most of all through the embodied appropriation of the community, in their orientation towards this sacred focus, every time again making this center sacred at the same time as being themselves formed into and defined as an expecting community.

Let me now quickly review the other plans of Schwarz's theory. In *St François de Molitor*, a timid *axis mundi* is suggested in the circular opening above the altar, but at no moment during the Eucharistic liturgy does Schwarz's *chalice of light*

⁵³ Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate*, 77.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

come explicitly to the fore, probably due to the overpowering symbol of the luminous garden. Schwarz's *dark chalice*, emphasizing God's mysterious and threatening silence, may be evoked during evening celebrations, where the garden is clad in darkness, which is particularly apt for Good Friday and Easter Vigil celebrations. Another image for the *dark chalice* is the tabernacle, with its twelve Pentecostal flames, placed as the only light source in a dark chapel oriented towards the geographical East.

In contrast to *St Gregory of Nyssa*, the main energy patterns that are present are *shape* and *hang* energy. But I have suggested *swing* energy in the bodily move of the community during the penitential rites. One could also find interactive *swing* energy in the communitarian singing: this is yet another fundamental feature that one only perceives through repeated, embodied participation. The spatial *ring*-configuration (that at first sight only fosters *shape* energy) helps enormously for this swing energy to be felt, because this subtle form of energy can only be perceived by and in one community. Together with *hang*-energy it is essential for communitarian 'body-building'. In *St François de Molitor*, the choir is situated in the ring, near the altar, and no clear distinctions separate the choir from the rest of the assembly. Playful, interactive *swing* energy would not be felt were only the choir singing and the assembly reduced to mere listening but not participating observers.

Lastly, let me finish with a brief word on *thrust* energy. If McFee is right about the necessity of all four forms of energy for community-building, and I believe she is, where would we find *thrust* energy in our Western celebrations anyway? She defines it as invigorating power that shapes us into "people who come to their feet, who are ready for action, inspired for action."⁵⁵ *Thrust* energy seems totally absent (and perhaps unnecessary) in *St François de Molitor*, because there is no room for processional movements. However, I suggest that it might be felt during an energetic and moving homily, for instance, or in passionate proclamation. Our communities deserve this as well. Let us enrich our drowsy celebrations!

In conclusion, what at first sight might appear a static and closed configuration of a *shape*-patterned *ring*, and thus emphasizing the "architecture of immanence" of a *domus ecclesiae*, reveals the inherent transcendent dimension of a *domus Dei* or *open ring* during the *swing*-patterned penitential rites. Again, the architecture has to be analyzed through the lens of the particular liturgy of a local Church. This enriches the theological *lex credendi*, in this case especially the eschatological imagination – or expectation, symbolized by the luminous garden and the cross of glory.

⁵⁵ McFee, "Primal Patterns", 153.

6. Body-building or Communitarian Appropriation?

Architecture plays an essential role in liturgical praxis. Much depends on the ethos of the communities, and thus on the appropriation of architectural space, in order for it to mediate mystery and become truly living liturgy. Both case studies have demonstrated that the issue at hand is *eschatological*: how do our places of worship today mediate the mystery that our world is *already* saved but does *not yet* coincide with the Kingdom of God? How can both 'shades of color' and 'shades of grey' be fundamentally 'shades of Light'? This question, I guess, corresponds with the fundamental critique of the aforementioned authors against 'relativist space.' Thus, both approaches converge in their question, although not in their conclusions.

My method for answering this question was simple: examining how parish communities appropriate their spaces during ordinary Sunday worship reveals in the diverse rhythms of their spatial configurations an embodied eschatological vision of the Kingdom, be it a swinging dance or common orientation – both sensuously engaging the individual body in order to be configured as communitarian body. Both case studies do so in different ways: on the one hand, through colorful imagery, lavish decoration, and communitarian dance ('shades of color'); on the other hand, through sacred emptiness, noble simplicity, and embodied prayer ('shades of grey'). Both are contemporary examples of how a *lex edificandi* can correspond to and even foster the well-known *lex orandi*, *lex credendi* axiom. Both are contemporary examples of how the individual and communitarian body is engaged through the 'triad' between architecture, theology, and liturgy.

It is only in the liturgy that church architecture is rightly understood as bearing theological meaning. For instance, the colorful fresco of the 'communion of saints' in *St Gregory of Nyssa* could be appealing or not (as part of the *lex edificandi*), but only receives its full theological meaning (*lex credendi*) when a worshipping community is effectively dancing around the altar-table (*lex orandi*), mimicking their heavenly dance, as such uniting Terrestrial and Celestial Church in one embodied vision of the eschatological Kingdom. In the same way, in *St François de Molitor*, the luminous garden with the cross of glory (as part of the *lex edificandi*) only receives its full theological meaning (*lex credendi*) when a worshipping community is effectively (bodily) *oriented* by this liturgical Oriens of the expected Savior (*lex orandi*). The same could be said about the stairway to heaven in Paul Böhm's definitely 'shades of grey' *St Theodor* in Cologne-Vingst (2002) or the cross of glory and the tapestries of the 'communion of saints' in Rafael Moneo's *Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels* in Los Angeles (2002), because these images participate in the *lex edificandi* by their spatial orientation, mimicking the worshipping community.

Even though sacred art appears to be in crisis today, some symbolic *imagery* comes theologically 'alive' in the liturgy – and, as lived liturgy, mediates mystery. These images define as much the liturgical space that they overflow the limits of their two-dimensionality in order to incorporate the liturgy by their tridimensional (or spatial) theology. In this article, I have only focused on particular images that receive a precise *eschatological* dimension in the liturgies celebrated. Sure, this is an *imaginative* way of understanding eschatology. Without a doubt, the eschatological imagination opened by these “effectively enacted utopias” lays bare the ‘futurity,’ or eternal depth, of the present – a hope our broken world longs for.

With this modest contribution, I hope to have countered both the harsh critique and the common opinion that contemporary churches are mere “shades of grey” – uninspiring, empty containers or multipurpose areas that mediate no sense of mystery and induce no lived liturgy. There is no need to go back to the Gothic style in order to convey transcendence. As an exercise in practical theology, I have written for any users of churches (visitors and worshippers), merely pointing out the embodied theology of our celebrations, already present by being bodily and sensuously present, by moving, acting, and celebrating. Our liturgical places should be more than mere empty rooms for gathering, more than mere ‘shades of grey,’ more than multipurpose areas – even though some *ad hoc* places can occasionally be lived as extraordinary eschatological *heterotopias* or ‘shades of Light.’⁵⁶

What have we gained with this short excursion in the living liturgies of contemporary church architecture? Both case studies, one European and Roman Catholic and the other American and Episcopalian, have proven very different, but also complementary eye-openers for parish communities today who wish to appropriate their buildings and discover their inherent potential. Both hermeneutic instruments, one from a European Roman Catholic architect and the other from an American Methodist liturgist, have proven very different as well, but also complementary tools for parish communities today. In short, this excursion has not led to a dismissal of the shades of grey of contemporary architecture as relativist space, but has reinstated the need for symbolic foci, such as the frescos and the wooden sigma-altar in *St Gregory of Nyssa* and the marble altar, cross of glory,

⁵⁶ I remember a nurse recalling the impacting experience of a Christmas Eucharist celebrated in the most ordinary and grey hall of the hospital instead of the tiny chapel. For special occasions, it is good to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, precisely in order to light up the inherent Kingdom *already* embedded in our world. A Eucharistic celebration is capable of transforming any place into a Eucharistic space if people are willing to enter the mysteries celebrated and appropriate them by living the liturgy. At regular times, our ordinary liturgical rhythm needs such compelling, extraordinary celebrations in order to be in touch again – albeit temporarily – with the bare *essence* of the mysteries we hope to mediate and the liturgies we attempt to live. It is precisely an architect who emphasized that liturgy does not need architecture: “Die Liturgie braucht den Kirchenbau nicht.” Rudolf Schwarz, *Kirchenbau: Welt vor der Schwelle* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1960), 43.

and luminous garden in *St François de Molitor*. Furthermore, it has reinstated the need for kinetic and flexible dynamism, and the discovery of the multiple energy patterns and spatial configurations that a specific space can display, for enriching communitarian appropriation. Most of all, this excursion has led to one clear message to our parish communities: the more the ‘shades of grey’ of our churches are appropriated by the living liturgies of our individual and communitarian bodies, the richer the mysteries they mediate and the more they are true shades of eschatological Light.