


Between author's dreams and client's wishes: Competition projects of Christian Orthodox temples in Belgrade from idea to realization

Entre los sueños del autor y los deseos del cliente. Proyectos de concurso de templos cristianos ortodoxos en Belgrado desde la idea hasta la realización

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary praxis of church construction in the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and the client-architect relationship are conditioned by Church tradition and regulations. The main question is what constitutes the essence of tradition and what are the mechanisms of its transmission and change, as well as who are the interpreters—the client and/or the architect. This paper focuses on a couple of rare examples of Orthodox Christian temples built in Serbia based on the awarded competition designs. It analyses the transformations of awarded designs until realization. In the analysed cases, the voice of the client—who is usually personified by the diocesan bishop, in accordance with the internal structure and the Constitution of the SOC—is articulated in a specific and less direct way, through the competition program and the votes of the jury members.

KEYWORDS

Serbian Orthodox Church; sacred architecture; architectural competition; client; Belgrade.

RESUMEN

La práctica contemporánea de la construcción de iglesias en la Iglesia Ortodoxa Serbia (SOC) y la relación comitente-arquitecto están condicionadas por la tradición y las regulaciones de la Iglesia. La cuestión principal es qué constituye la esencia de la tradición y cuáles son los mecanismos de su transmisión y cambio, así como quiénes son los intérpretes: el comitente y/o el arquitecto. Este artículo se centra en un par de ejemplos raros de templos cristianos ortodoxos construidos en Serbia basándose en los diseños premiados en concurso. Analiza las transformaciones de estos diseños hasta su realización. En los casos analizados, la voz del comitente—que suele estar personificado por el obispo diocesano, de acuerdo con la estructura interna y la constitución del SOC— se articula de forma específica y menos directa, a través del programa de concurso y de las votaciones de los miembros del jurado.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Iglesia Ortodoxa Serbia; arquitectura religiosa; concurso de arquitectura; comitente; Belgrado.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on a couple of examples of architectural competition practice—cases of Orthodox Christian temples built in Belgrade based on the awarded competition designs. It analyses competition programs, awarded designs, and jury commentaries, as well as the transformations of competition solutions until realization, trying to shed light on the decision-making process. After analysing the regulatory and historical context, the paper will focus on the contemporary praxis of public architectural competitions for Serbian orthodox churches held in Belgrade since 1990s, following the revival of church construction after decades of stagnation since the beginning of World War II and during the socialist Yugoslavia. Through analysing those rare examples and their transformation from awarded design to realized building, the authors will try to shed the light on the client-architect relationship and church tradition and regulations that influence it.

REGULATORY CONTEXT

In the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), in accordance with its Constitution, the diocesan bishop ensures «that churches, monasteries, and chapels are built in the style adopted by the Serbian Orthodox Church» (108 §8), thus personifying the client.¹

The diocesan administrative board ('board of directors') has the jurisdiction to approve the construction of new buildings and major repairs in church congregations (municipalities) (153 §11) and approve the cost estimations and plans for the construction and erection of new churches, parish homes and other ecclesiastical-municipal buildings prepared by the administrative boards of church congregations in agreement with the parish priest (201 §10).

The councils of church congregations decide, with the approval of the competent diocesan authorities, on the proposals of the church congregations administrative boards regarding the maintenance, renovation and construction of temples, parish homes, church-municipal, fund and endowment (foundation) buildings and in general on the establishment of institutions within its jurisdiction (191 §7).

In practice, the diocesan bishop's influence on the design varies and depends on personal affinities and the way the particular diocese functions, but in theory, it is inviolable. The implementation of these decisions and the realization of construction are handled by the church congregations administrative boards in coordination the parish priest (who is the member of both the council and the administrative board of the church congregation) and special church congregations building committees of which are usually appointed for every construction of the new church.

The Constitution also prescribes that the Holy Synod issues instructions for the construction of holy temples and monasteries (70 §13). The Constitution does not specify the exact style adopted by the Serbian Orthodox Church; therefore, it is clear that it suggests looking to existing practices and historical models, i.e., respecting and continuing tradition. It does, however, leave space for free interpretation of the content and essential characteristics of that tradition, or the «adopted style» (67-68).

In other orthodox churches, the guidelines for the construction of churches are also formulated at the level of the highest church body – the Holy Synod, or its commissions, the permission to erect churches is given by competent diocesan bishops or church committees, and the implementation is at the parish level (Manić, Niković and Marić 2015). The guidelines that exist in some churches, and refer to 'style', are not clearly defined, and reflect insufficient knowledge of the matter of church architecture, which is obvious from the use of terms such as 'Eastern Orthodox style', 'Orthodox-church style'.

The activity of the churches is influenced also by the legal acts of the states in which they operate. The first regulation in Serbia after the liberation from Ottoman rule to address this area, the Law on Church Authorities of the Orthodox Faith from 1862, recommended that churches should be built «preferably in the Byzantine style».² The 1863 Law on how to proceed when churches are to be built did not determine a specific preferred style or approach to church architecture, but it is expressly emphasized that the church should be «such and of such material, according to the desire and ability of the people who

will build the church».³ The current Law on Churches and Religious Communities from 2006 regulates the issues of worship space and construction for all recognized churches and religious communities allowing them to independently determine the purpose of the buildings they build and the style of construction, with the mandatory obtaining of the necessary permits stipulated in the regulations in the field of planning and construction.⁴

By its canons, the Orthodox Church defines, indirectly, only the most general issues of temples' organization, while the details of spatial organization, design and architectural expression are not discussed (Manić, Marić and Niković 2013).⁵

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Contemporary practice of church construction in the Serbian Orthodox Church and the client-architect relationship are conditioned not only by church regulations but also by tradition, which holds substantial significance for the Orthodox Church and cannot be overlooked or discarded either in the field of church architecture (Manić 2016; Stanimirović 2015, 2017; Stanimirović and Dabić 2017). As tradition plays an exceptional role in Orthodox theology, the role of tradition and its significance cannot be disputed in church architecture (Manić 2016). The main question is what constitutes the essence of tradition and what are the mechanisms of its transmission and change, as well as who are the interpreters - the client and/ or the architect.

Due to unfavourable conditions for church activities during the socialist era (Kadijević and Pantović 2011, 2014), and very limited financial resources available to the church, a relatively small number of new churches and chapels of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) were built throughout the former Yugoslavia.⁶ The main design activity took place in the Patriarchal Design Bureau, founded in 1961 with the blessing of the then Serbian Patriarch German, led by PhD architect Dragomir Tadić, the designer of the majority of churches built during that period which have still not been sufficiently studied. His church architecture could be characterized as academic historicism, firmly rooted in Serbian and

Byzantine medieval architectural tradition, with a «certain symbiosis of old and new, interweaving medieval Serbian architecture with new architectural solutions» (Mileusnić 1989, 9) (Fig. 01).

Due to the marginalization of the church and significantly reduced construction activity, the post-war acceptance of Modernist innovations in the field of secular architecture did not find resonance in the sacred construction of the SOC.⁷ This was also because there were understandable attempts to protect and preserve the endangered tradition through the cultivation of a historicist approach (Manić et al. 2015). The high quality of Tadić's accomplishments, along with the fact that almost no one else was engaged in this endeavour contributed to the impact of his creative poetics, which represents continuity with the dominant pre-war direction of development in Serbian church architecture.⁸ The role of Patriarch German as the 'client'—the main initiator and patron of the restoration and construction of sacred objects—was very significant (Mileusnić 1989).⁹ The high level of understanding between Patriarch German as the main commissioner and architect Tadić is also indicated by the fact that Tadić designed the patriarch's personal endowment, the New Lazarica in Velika Drenova, built in 1962 (Mileusnić 1989).

The flourishing of church construction in the late 20th century

After decades of stagnation since the beginning of World War II, the revival of church construction began symbolically with the continuation of work on the construction of the Saint Sava Temple in Belgrade in 1985 and was fully manifested after the societal shifts in the early 1990s. A large number of architects began to participate in this area of design, often with prior experience in the preservation of architectural heritage, which further contributed to the absolute dominance of historicist authorial poetics. In this period, the Patriarchal Design Bureau had ceased to exist, and the Patriarch's participation in the construction of new churches became less noticeable when compared to diocesan hierarchs. This led to a relatively large diversity but also uneven quality

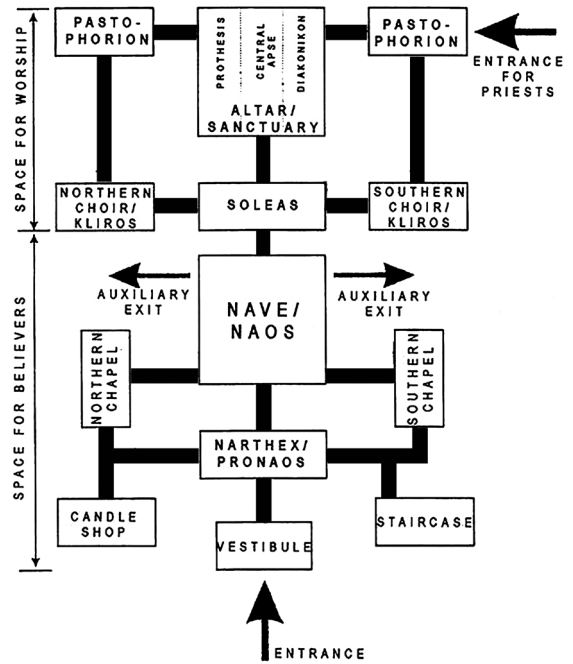


Fig. 01. Dragomir Tadić and S.J. Clewer, Serbian Orthodox Church of the Holy Prince Lazar, Bournville, Birmingham (UK), 1968.
 Fig. 02. Functional scheme for the St. Luke's Church competition, 1995 (translated by the authors).

of new sacred objects, which, however, shared a common reliance on tradition.

Unfortunately, there persists a strong emphasis on the superficial, strictly formal attributes of historical architecture, treating them as unchanging and mandatory values. This approach overlooks a fundamental aspect of tradition: its vital process of consistent renewal and the flow of change across generations (Manić 2016). The traditionalist stance towards church architecture is common among clients and believers as end-users, as well as among most architects. Nevertheless, even in cases where the visions of the patron and the architect largely coincide, alterations to the project frequently occur during the construction phase, often in opposition to the designer's intentions.¹⁰

In 1986, the future Patriarch Pavle [Paul] of the Serbian Orthodox Church, then serving as the Bishop

of Raška-Prizren, formulated in a conversation published in the Gazette of the SOC, his standpoint. In terms of architectural design, he recommended not copying our existing churches, but drawing inspiration from their artistic forms in an effort to fit into the developmental line of Orthodox temples and, in doing so, infuse them with freshness, vitality, and beauty; so that we can gradually arrive at a new style acceptable to Orthodoxy. The awareness of the need to formulate clear guidelines and recommendations for architectural design resulted in the organization of the scientific conference «Tradition and Contemporary Serbian Church Architecture» in 1994, organized by the Institute of Architecture and Urbanism of Serbia and the Theological Faculty in Belgrade. The proceedings from this conference gathered recommendations from architects, theologians, and historians of architecture and art (Stojkov

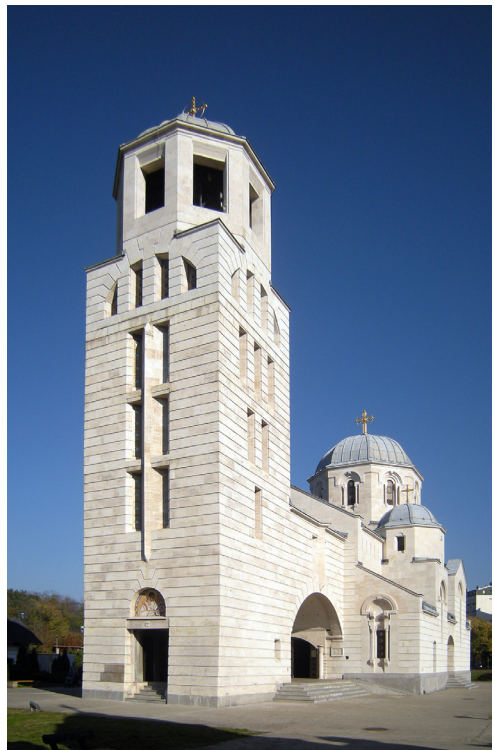
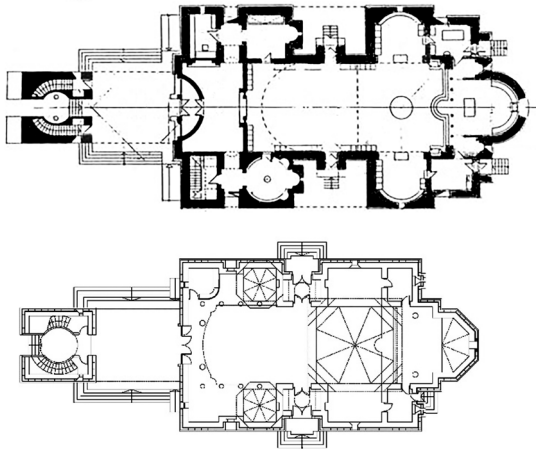
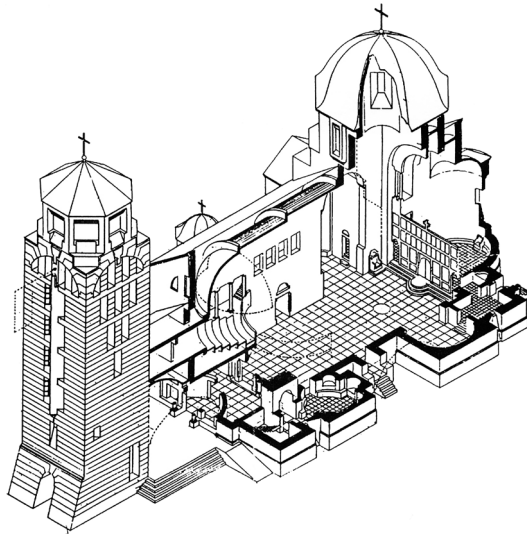


Fig. 03. Miladin Lukić, St. Luke, Èukarica (Serbia), 1995; first prize.

Fig. 04. Above, base of the competition project; below, base of the executed object.

Fig. 05. Façade.

and Manević 1995), which can be considered a kind of programmatic starting point for clients and architects. These recommendations were officially part of the program task in the first subsequent architectural competition for an Orthodox church in Belgrade.

PUBLIC ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITIONS FOR ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN BELGRADE

The praxis of obtaining architectural solutions for new temples through the institution of open public architectural competition is very rare in Serbian Orthodox Church (Manić, Vasiljević-Tomić and Niković 2016, Stanimirović 2022, Stanimirović, Vasov, Momčilović-Petronijević and Krstić 2022). In such cases, the voice of the client is articulated in a specific and less direct way - through influencing the formulation of the competition program and through the votes of the jury members. Although, as a rule, the diocesan bishop presides over the jury and influences the choice of its other members, when making a decision, he is still only the first among equals, which opens the possibility for promoting different authors' poetics.

In the process of developing the competition design and creating technical documentation for the construction of the temple, a decision-making process takes place where regulatory, programmatic, budgetary, technical, aesthetic, and other issues are resolved. This process decisively affects the final appearance of the temple.

Three public architectural competitions for Orthodox churches in Belgrade have been conducted thus far. The winning designs from the competitions held in 1995 and 1997 have been brought to fruition and built. The competition, which took place in 2019-2020, concluded with an exhibition and the release of a catalogue (Konkurs 2020). However, no results have been announced due to the passing of the competition's patron, then-patriarch Irinej (Irenaios; Gavrilović), in 2020 and the jury has not yet resumed its work.

Competition for the Orthodox temple in Čukarica (Church of Saint Luke), Belgrade, 1995

This was the first-ever architectural competition for an Eastern-Orthodox temple announced after the World War II in Belgrade. It was an open, public and non-anonymous competition. The competition program was very comprehensive and detailed regarding urban planning and architectural specifications of the structure, including a precise functional scheme (Fig. 02). In terms of design, the earlier mentioned stance of Patriarch Pavle was given as a recommendation. It was also indicated that the design of a domed structure was assumed (Manić, Vasiljević-Tomić and Niković 2016).

Bishop Irinej (Irenaios; Bulović) of Bačka presided over the competition jury, which predominantly consisted of architects. A total of eight out of thirty-one competition designs were awarded of purchased, from which six completely traditionalist and historicist ones. Of the other two proposals, only one was completely non-traditional, but still based on the domed rotunda typology.

The first prize was awarded to the project by architect Miladin Lukić (Fig. 03). This author, with extensive conservative experience and exceptional knowledge of architectural heritage, chose the Serbian medieval Raška architectural school as a starting point and inspiration, which is a rare case.

Throughout the project's development and the execution of the Saint Luke Temple, adjustments were implemented, but the basic concept was fully preserved, and the architect retained full control over the process (Fig. 04). The result is one of the most successful and highest quality achievements in the last 40 years, about which there is an extensive body of work in Serbian literature (Kadijević 2009, 2010; Kadijević and Pantović 2011, 2014; Manić 2016; Manić Vasiljević-Tomić and Niković 2016) (Fig. 05).

Competition for the Orthodox temple in New Belgrade (Church of the Holy Great-Martyr Demetrius), 1997

Two years later, the second competition took place, and up to this point, it remains the most recent public competition that led to actual construction. This

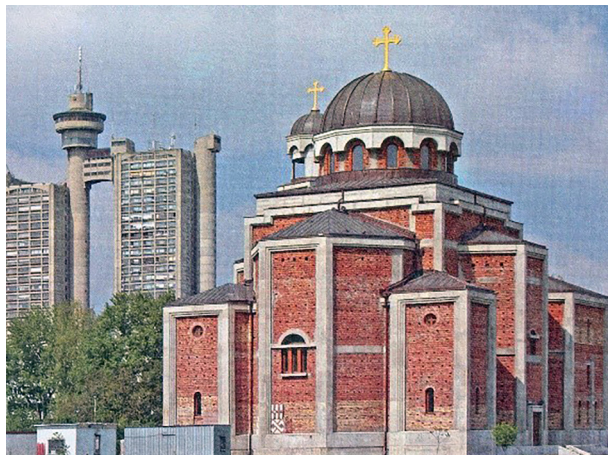
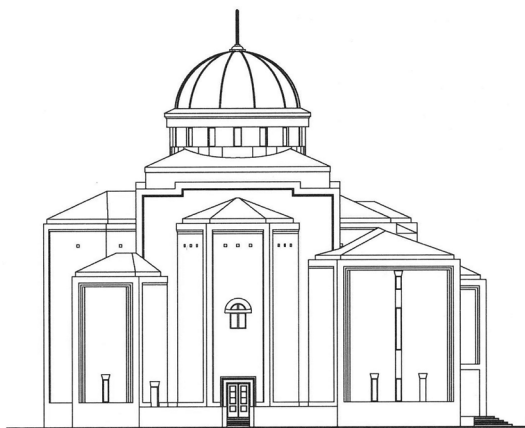


Fig. 06. Nebojša Popović, The Holy Great-Martyr Demetrius, New Belgrade (Serbia), 1997; first prize.

Fig. 07. Work in progress.

Fig. 08. View after the completion of the façade renovation.

competition was open, public and anonymous. In addition to the competition documents, participants were provided with a curated selection of literature, which included the previously mentioned compilation of works, *Tradition and Contemporary Serbian Church Architecture* (Stojkov and Manević 1995). The responses to the inquiries clarified that the choice of roof structure and dome type was not conditioned, provided that the church's painting was allowed and a definitive choice of the central type of the temple was confirmed. The reference regarding the Serbian-Byzantine style of the temple with the basis in the form of an inscribed or free-standing cross was also neutralized (Manić, Vasiljević-Tomić and Niković 2016).

Serbian Patriarch Pavle served as the president of the jury which was predominantly composed of architects. A total of eight out of fifty competition designs were awarded or purchased. This time there were five traditionalist and historicist proposals. The authors of other three competition designs tried to achieve a contemporary architectural expression, and one of them (Brajković, Šarović, Brajković team) designed completely modernist building best fitting to the New Belgrade surroundings.

The first prize was awarded to the project by Nebojša Popović, created in the spirit of Hansen's interpretation of tradition, with a postmodern approach to shaping the façade planes (Fig. 06). This building has also left a significant mark, and much has been written about it as well (Kadijević 2010, 2013; Kadijević and Pantović 2011, 2014; Manić, Vasiljević-Tomić and Niković 2016, etc.). Premature death prevented the author from fully realizing his project, but the character and architectural concept of the competition solution were completely preserved, until the recent facade cladding (Fig. 07-08). Structural elements were brought out onto the facade to blend the temple into the New Belgrade environment. The materialization of the facade was initially designed «in the traditional style of brick, quarry stone, small roof tiles, and thick mortar joints» (Popović 1997, 55). This greatly contributed to the contemporaneity of its appearance and the partial connection with the modernist architecture of the surroundings, in line with the concept of architect Popović.

Competition for the Memorial chapel in the Ascension temple churchyard, Belgrade, 2019-20

Thus far the last competition was announced in 2019, for the memorial chapel in the Ascension temple churchyard. The temple was to be built in the memory of the victims of the WWII 1941 German bombardment. It was stated in the competition programme that the 'traditional approach' to the spatial organisation and architectural design is expected. The single- or multiple-nave as well as rotunda typology were proposed, large enough to accommodate 200 believers, with an exonarthex for 300 more people. A crypt —an unusual part of the Serbian orthodox church architectural programme— was also mandatory.

The competition was not anonymous and all participants had to present their work. The names of the jury members were not announced to the participants and the public, which is also not a standard procedure for the architectural competitions in Serbia. After the presentation of the competition designs, the exhibition was held and the catalogue released. Since the competition's patron, then-patriarch Irinej, passed away in 2020, the jury has not resumed its work and the competition results have never been announced. During the presentation, it was announced to the participants that all of the nineteen obtained designs will be distributed among the Serbian Orthodox Church bishops in order to promote the different approaches and architectural ideas, ranging from rigidly traditionalist to uncompromisingly modern ones.

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

In the praxis of designing Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade and Serbia, the dominance of the traditionalist and historicist approach can be observed. It has been dominant throughout whole 20th century and still is today. This is, among other factors, a consequence of the dominant role of the client. References to tradition and church canons is a commonplace among clients and the most active designers of churches in Serbia, and at the same time, it is the

main argument against the modernization of architectural praxis in this area.

Although there are some elements in the design of Orthodox Christian churches and rules that are fixed and non-negotiable, innovative elements of architectural design and spatial organisation do not necessarily violate traditionally adopted values. Through architectural competitions, the authors are motivated and enabled to propose different interpretations of these elements, thus the spirit of contemporary architecture can be brought in. The bearers of positive changes are architects and designers who understand the basic principles of traditional church building but are able to interpret them in a new, creative way, as well as the juries of the architectural competitions which personify the client, and are composed of representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and architects.

The analysis of the results of the competitions conducted since 1990 shows that the juries, dominated by clergy, always awarded first prizes to traditionalist solutions that proposed a moderate modernization of the architectural expression. Also, as a rule, those who offered a more radical modernization were also always found among other award-winning works side by side with dominant (in number, not quality) traditionalist ones. This indicates that there is an openness to search for new approaches. Partially, it is conditioned by the fact that the decisions are made not only by bishops or clergy, but also by architectural professionals as members of juries. However, only few churches in SOC have been built after competition design.

The development of the awarded competition designs suggest that if the designer is not present in that phase, the client regains full control and tends to make the design more traditionalist. However, this can be only speculated of, based on the differences between the adopted and built design, since the process is not documented.

A broader understanding of the most important clients and main decision-makers, primarily church leaders, and cooperation with the architectural designers is needed so that new church buildings can become also the benchmarks of contemporary archi-

ture as were the ones from the past. The competition praxis, where bishops presides over the juries as the first among equals, can guide us to the possible way of cooperation.

Reaching for a traditionalist and historicist architectural expression is motivated by the desire to preserve tradition but also for the temples to be a symbol of local culture. This approach proves to be very problematic, both due to the unsatisfactory architectural quality of the new buildings, and due to the fact that the dominant interpretation of the concept and content of tradition is inconsistent with its basic meaning and essence. Insisting on the external, superficial, strictly formal characteristics of the architecture of the past as immutable and binding values, one of the essential characteristics of tradition which is its constant renewal and continuity of changes from generation to generation - is abolished. Thus, instead of tradition and the traditional approach, traditionalism, which is contrary to them in spirit, is nurtured. However, even the authors who share a traditionalist approach, have completely different poetics and rely on different elements from tradition, hence indirectly indicating through their work that there is significant freedom of architectural creativity in the field of church architecture.

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NOTES

1. «Ustav Srpske pravoslavne crkve» [The Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church]. 1957. Accessed 2023/10/14, <https://bit.ly/3Zpkoyd> [in Serbian], <http://arhiva.spc.rs/eng/church.html> [in English].
2. «Zakon o crkvenim vlastima pravoslavne vere (1862)» [Law on Church Authorities of the Orthodox Faith (1862)], *Srbske novine* XXIX: 119-122.
3. «Zakon o načinu kako æ se postupati kad oæe da se grade crkve (1863)» [Law on how to proceed when churches are to be built (1863)], *Srbske novine* XXX: 79.
4. «Zakon o crkvama i verskim zajednicama (2006)» [Law on Churches and Religious Communities (2006)], *Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije* [Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia], 36/2006. Accessed 2023/10/14, <https://bit.ly/4ePNSuN>
5. «A temple can be erected only with the approval of the bishop; the temple must be dedicated to the sacred relics of a martyr; it should have an altar area segregated

from the rest of the building and with limited access; it should have an area for those unbaptized and pennants; it should be facing East; it should have a cross insignia and icons» (Manić, Marić and Niković. 2013, 46).

6. This period has been insufficiently explored to this day, and according to available data, which pertain only to one part of the post-war era, a single-digit number of new churches and chapels were constructed each year. For example, in the period from 1958 to 1971, around 100 churches and chapels were built (Protić 1972), and by 1989, around 200 (Mileusnić 1989). There are several cases where decades were needed to obtain approval for construction.

7. Exceptions are rare and exclusively in the diaspora.

8. The situation was somewhat different in the diaspora (although Tadić also designed outside of Yugoslavia), but the achievements of other authors in those contexts remained less known and had little influence on architecture in the homeland.

9. Although the Patriarch of the SOC was the eparchial hierarch only of the Belgrade-Karlovci Archdiocese, Patriarch German's influence on the construction of the SOC far exceeded the boundaries of this eparchy, aided by the activities of the Patriarchal Design Bureau.

10. This is attested by one of the most prolific designers of sacred objects, architect Predrag Ristić, who claims that almost none of his works were executed entirely according to the project. He explains this with the thesis that «building a church is a great passion... and everyone who builds 'falls in love' with the work being built» (Janakova 2005, 5) and does not want the authorship to interfere.

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- Fig. 01. Wikimedia Commons.
 Fig. 02. Archive of the Society of Architects of Belgrade.
 Fig. 03, 04a. Konkurs 1995.
 Fig. 04b. Miladin Lukić Archive.
 Fig. 05. Božidar Manić.
 Fig. 06. Idejno 1997.
 Fig. 07. Crkva 2006.
 Fig. 08. Pavle Kaplaneć.