

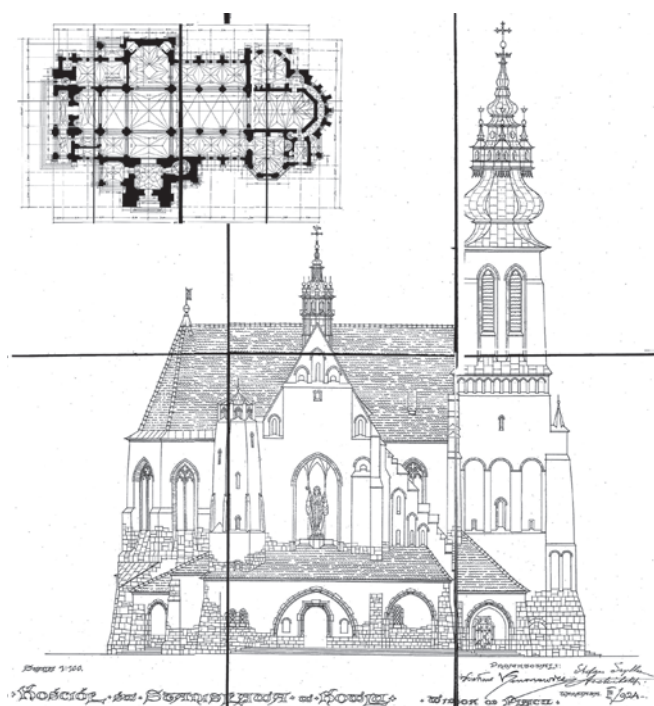
## Sacral Architecture in the Interwar Volhynia: Tradition and Modernity

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The determination of interwar period in European architecture as gradual assertion of modernism ideologies with simultaneous existence of historical trends is an axiom. These two opposite trends have acquired a particular expression in the context of sacral architecture that always had all the reasons to be considered as exponent of the public *zeitgeist*. However, relationships between traditionalism and new vanguard mode in area of architecture were not simple. Modernistic ideology, denying previous experience, in an unobvious manner associated with the left atheistic moods. Hence, there is no wonder that the subject of sacral architecture did not interest European avant-gardists at all on this stage. The projects of churches look barely as rare episodes among works of "new architecture" during the 1920s. For example, project of stylish church by architect Rob Mallet-Stevens for edition of *Une Cité Moderne*<sup>1</sup> seems to be one of them.

1. Rob Mallet-Stevens. *Architecte*, in: "Archives d'Architecture Moderne" (ed.), Bruxelles 1980, p. 189.

1. Kovel. *St. Stanislav Church, architects S. Szyller & B. Kononowicz, 1924*. Source: O. Mykhaylyshyn *Architekturna spadszczyna Volyni, 2008*



Adam Miłobędzki was right asserting that "restitution of independence in 1918 and subsequent post-war renewal of country first of all has strengthened the popularity of those forms which considered before as national ones"<sup>2</sup>. For this reason attempts of searching for "national style", that would imitate historical prototypes, have found many supporters during two interwar decades<sup>3</sup>. Such attempts were peculiar both for whole renewed Poland, and actually for Volhynia, that we discuss in this paper.

Volhynia as constituent of the second Commonwealth of Poland was the largest province with territory about 39 thousands sq. kilometers (including Polesie)<sup>4</sup>. Statistics of religic denomination per 1,000 inhabitants in obedience to the census of 1921 looked as follows: Roman Catholic - 115, Orthodox - 742, old believers - 115, other - 28<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, in this region the architectural stage looked not only as confrontation of tradition and modernity but also as an interpenetration of different directions of architectural designing.

After more than centennial abidance of Volhynia under Russian empire (1795-1918), a new geopolitical situation substantially influenced on the field of sacral buildings' construction and naturally caused significant changes in church architecture. There were several reasons for it. First of all, considerable quantity of Catholic churches and monasteries of Volhynia has been abandoned and then destroyed due to actions of Russian authorities in 19th century. Secondly, considerable part of the Catholic sacral

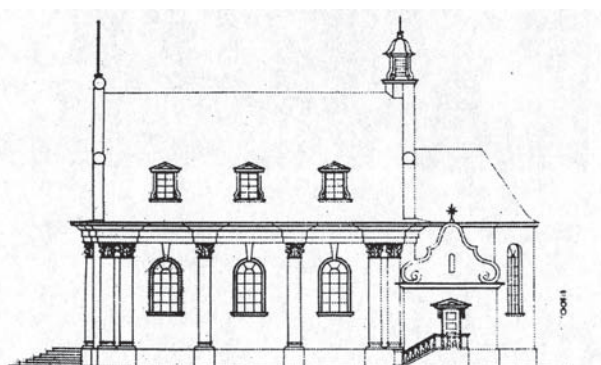
2. Miłobędzki A. *Zarys dziejów architektury w Polsce*. Wyd 2., Warszawa 1968, p. 310.

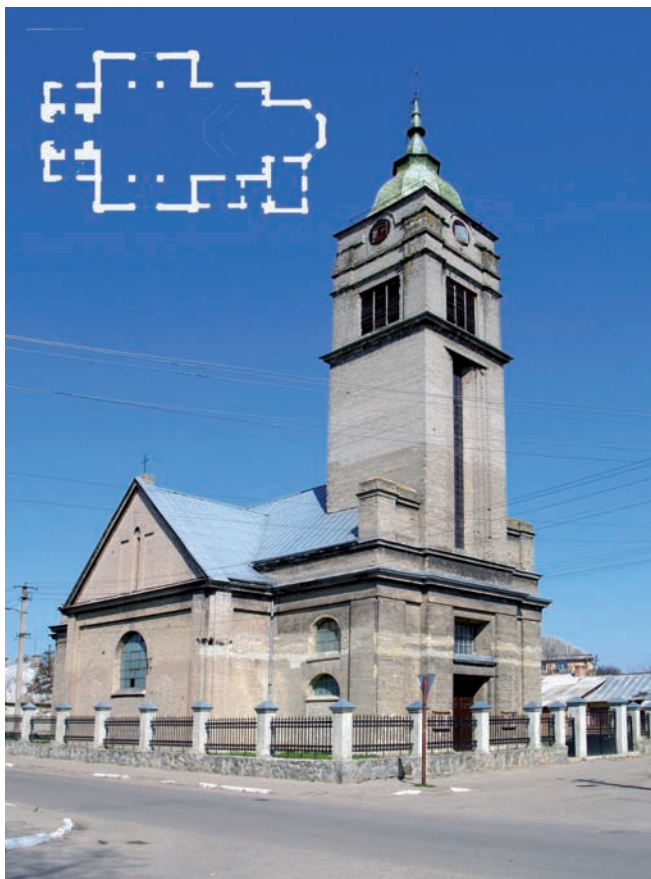
3. Kaczorowski B. *O sztuce w Polsce*. – Warszawa 1991, p. 137.

4. Orłowicz M. *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Wołyniu*, Łuck 1929, p. 26.

5. Ibid.

2. *Malynsk. Parochjal Church, engineer E. Wojtowicz. 1938 r.* Source: L. Popek, *Świątynie Wołynia, 1997*





3. Zdolbuniv. Sts. Peter and Paul Church, 1928-1938. Measuring by P. Rychkov & O. Mykhaylyshyn. Photo by P. Rychkov, 2006

objects built yet before the partitions of the first Polish Commonwealth was confiscated and passed to Orthodox confession that entered the path of their restructuring accordingly to its own architectural canons<sup>6</sup>. Thirdly, in the interwar period Catholic Church availed itself of its right for "revanche" - both against its earlier confiscated temples, and partly in relation to Orthodox churches. Similar actions could

6. Rychkov P. *Mizhkonfesijnyj transmorfizm w sakralnij architekturi Wołyni*, [in:] *Między Wrocławiem a Lwowem. Sztuka na Śląsku, w Małopolsce i na Rusi Koronnej od XVI do XVII wieku*. Wrocław 2011, pp. 383-398.

5. Rivne. Sts. Peter and Paul Church, arch. W. Czeczott 1938. View from the North. Photo by P. Rychkov, 2009



4. Kostopol. Heart of Jesus Church, arch. F. Michalski 1933. Postcard from 1930s. Source: L. Popek, *Świątynie Wołynia*, 1997

not but influence, at least mediately, on character of new temple architecture. A number of interesting implementations appeared as a result.

In the context of the mentioned circumstances on the territory of multi-confessional Volhynia it is possible to distinguish appearance of a number of interesting churches, both Catholic and Orthodox. From one side, they demonstrate traditional forms, from another side, one can see inclination to stylistic modernization. The extent of such modernization was different - from slight historical allusions and separate details that were foremost peculiar to the Orthodox churches, to the vanguard attempts of functional formism when designing Catholic churches.

The brightest embodiment of traditionalistic conception of "national style" in Volhynia's sacral architecture is undoubtedly the monumental Neo-Gothic temple-monument of St. Stanislaus in Kovel, designed in 1928 by architects Stefan Szyller and Wiesław Kononowicz (Fig. 1). It was talented and brilliant attempt to renaissance of Polish identity in construction of temples. That had to symbolize revival of the Polish statehood on the whole and on the Volhynia in particular. In one of appeals for sponsors (1935) on support of this construction the special role of just this style was emphasized: " here we have memorable for us illustration of Western culture, despite of neighbourhood with Oriental patterns. It is the Vistula Gothic, thus it underlines Polish character of sacred object... It is a monument; it is an evidence of the long centuries of our faith and religiosity, of our Western Polish culture, of our creative scope"<sup>7</sup>. From here, it is possible to conclude, that for the authors of Kovel's church the total imperceptions of modernistic morphology were a matter of principle, although modern architectural ideas took hold confidently of architectural community.

Sometimes historicism revealed itself within the Baroque tradition, being oriented towards the widespread prototypes of parish Catholic churches built in 17th and 18th centuries. Two examples are characteristic: uncompleted church in Malynsk (Fig. 2) and a project of a new church of Heart of Jesus in Ozhenyn near Ostrog town.

The Catholic church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Zdolbuniv near Rivne, built in 1938<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 3), demonstrates the distinctive symbiosis of both Baroque and Modern styles. The ground plan of this temple had an interesting feature: short bilateral naves have been separated from central space by the pairs of columns. Such decision had formed a specific kind of transept distinctly accented on lateral façades by

7. See: Popek L. *Świątynie Wołynia*, t. 1, Lublin 1997, p. 102.

8. Popek L., op.cit., p. 165.



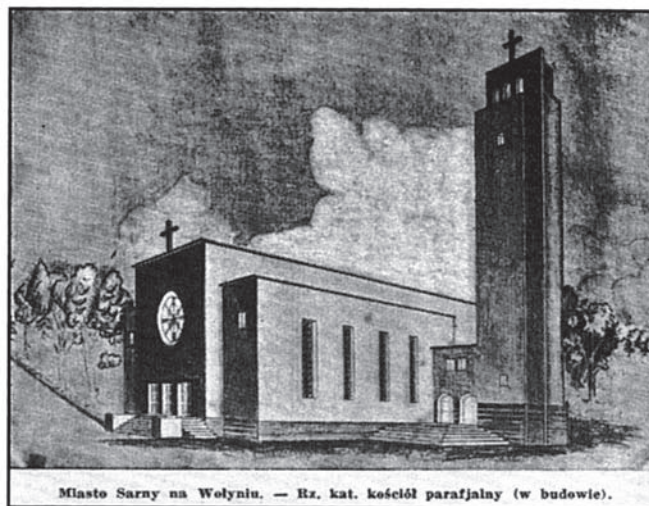
6. Rivne. Sts. Peter and Paul Church, arch. W. Czeczott 1938. View from the East. Measuring by P. Rychkov & O. Mykhaylyshyn. Photo by P. Rychkov, 2009

powerful triangular pediments. Verticalism of temple bell-tower was emphasized by the high vertical window opening with counter plat bands. The figures of saints, envisaged by the project on a main façade, were not installed. Soviet administration in 1960 adjusted the church for utility needs and only in 1991 it was returned to Catholic community.

The Heart of Jesus Church in Kostopol, designed in 1933 by architect Feliks Michalski<sup>9</sup>, built in 1939 was similar by a spirit and style to Zdolbuniv one (Fig. 4). Asymmetric composition of the building had expressive monumental lines

9. Łoza St. *Architekci i budowniczowie w Polsce*, Warszawa 1954, p. 202.

7. Rivne. Sts. Peter and Paul Church, arch. W. Czeczott 1938. Interior. Photo by P. Rychkov, 2009



8. Sarny. Lord's Transfiguration Church, arch. W. Stachoń. Postcard 1936. Source: L. Popek, *Świątynie Wołynia*, 1997

and a high bell-tower with baroque completion and became a significant vertical accent in the existed urban environment.

Among the Volhynia temples in "solid" modernistic style, the garrison church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rivne can be distinguished (Fig. 5-7), by architect Witold Czeczott<sup>10</sup>. In spite of modest size, this building looks monumentally enough due to a very advantageous location at crossing of two primary urban streets. It should be noted that this temple is similar to other well-known garrison church in Katowice (1930-1933) that was the first sacral building in Poland, built on principles of vanguard European architecture and described sometimes as "cubistic" one<sup>11</sup>.

The Lord's Transfiguration Church in Sarny by architect Władysław Stachoń was designed also completely in the modernistic style (Fig. 8). Its main façade appeared very similar to that of church in Rivne, however with such essential difference, that a bell-tower was separated from a temple and connected with altar part by an overground passage. The St. Joseph Church in Potasznia<sup>12</sup> was designed in similar character by an engineer Otton Fedak. With that difference, that a bell-tower was located from the southern side of building.

The two-domed version of modernistic Catholic church in the traditional composition mode was demonstrated by the project of parochial Catholic church in Pidubtsi village near Lutsk, although the war beginning in 1939 made impossible its completion.

A number of the Orthodox churches built in interwar period was relatively insignificant and their architectural forms depended on public and religious life of that time<sup>13</sup>. Orthodox priests and parishioners in the dominating majority were under the impact of Neo-Russian architectural canons that firmly took roots on Volhynia in the Russian Empire age. Therefore the use of modernistic architectural forms in the Orthodox churches' construction was the extremely rare phenomenon. Church architecture depended foremost on conservative moods and tastes of customers<sup>14</sup>, which were inclined to maintain historical tradition, mainly in its Neo-Russian version.

Taking into account aforesaid it should be mentioned creative work of the Ukrainian architect Serhij Tymoshenko (1881-1950), who tried to follow his own vision of Ukrainian architectural traditions in his Orthodox churches' projects.

10. Łoza St. *Architekci i budowniczowie w Polsce*, Warszawa 1954, p. 202.

11. Łoza St., op. cit., 1954, p. 5.

12. Broniewski T. *Historia architektury dla wszystkich*, wyd. 2, Warszawa i.i. 1980, p. 536.

13. Popek L., op. cit., pp. 96-98.

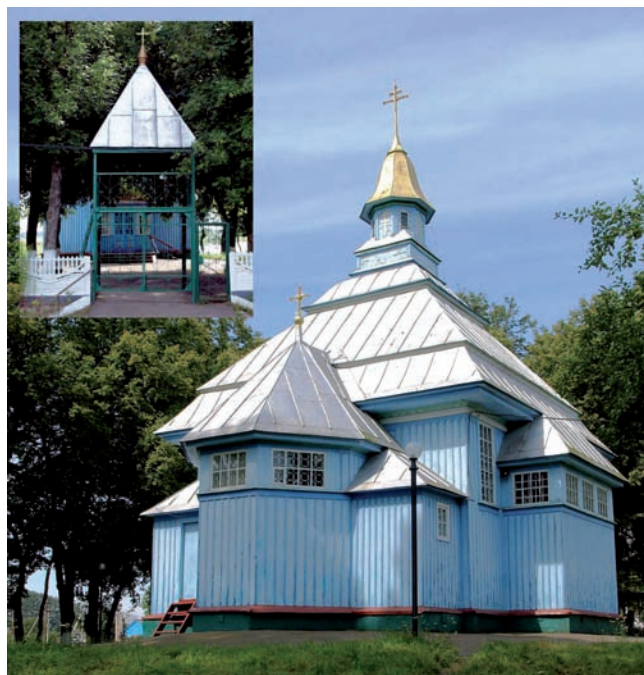
14. Rychkov P., Mykhaylyshyn O. *Konkurs 1928 roku na projekty cerkwi prawosławnych w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej: w poszukiwaniu nowej tożsamości architektonicznej*, "Budownictwo i Architektura", – Vol. 12 (4). Lublin 2013, pp. 185-200.



**9.** Bronniki (village near Rivne). The Mother of God Church, arch. S. Tymoshenko, 1928. Photo by P. Rychkov, 2009

Along with traditional forms he simultaneously succeeded in indication of present modernity in some external and internal details. Among his churches a wooden church in Bronnyki village near Rivne exudes as a characteristic three-domed type of the Ukrainian temple with annexed bell-tower (Fig. 9). The interesting example of one-domed wooden temple is also St. John Forerunner Church in Prylutske village, built in 1932 (Fig. 10).

It is possible to assert as a conclusion, that interwar twenty years in sacral architecture of Volhynia were



**10.** Przylucke (village near Łuck). St. John Forerunner Church, arch. S. Tymoshenko, 1932. Photo by P. Rychkov, 2009

characterized by dynamic coexistence and interpenetrations of two ideological paradigms - romantic historical method and vanguard modernism. The first trend was inspired by nostalgia in relation to semantic richness of old historical styles along with their national-romantic symbolism. The second one was rather the display of the cosmopolitan inspirations, oriented on the searching of new architectural morphology which was indifferent both to the historical and cultural context.