THEOLOGY AND THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH ARCHITECTURE INTERPRETATION OF THE TRIADOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

Nevena Debljović Ristić[*]

Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Radoslava Grujića 11, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

Development of the doctrine and solving the questions about God as a Trinity featured the Christian thought dependent on the most significant Judaistic ideas and on those of Late Antiquity, as well as the philosophical conceptual constructions. In a quite significant theological and philosophical text, *Corpus Areopagiticum*, dating from the 6th century, a triadological image of the Universe was discovered and reconstructed. For purposes of better understanding, the concept of Trinity is compared with the concept of the Borromean Rings or Knot made of three interlocking circles or loops. The logic of the structure is that cutting any loop or ring frees all the other loops so that no two loops can be directly linked. In the Areopagite's structure the three rings would be the three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the apophatic, symbolic and kataphatic theology, the celestial, the ecclesiastical and the earthly hierarchy, etc. In its centre, inside all the circles, is the Unity, the unity in multiplicity. As a subject of such research, the basic aspects of architecture come first – the form, the function and the structure. Each of them could be viewed separately, with its qualitative differences, but at the same time, they could not be separated, as they make architecture complete. By making Theology and Architecture mutually dependent, an area for recognising a triadological structure is created, which is in analytical terms a unifying factor in a vast field of semiotic meanings. Actually, a theological concept designs an architectural space, so the principle of triadology is manifested through an act of creation.

Keywords: triadology, architecture, apophatic, symbolic theology, kataphatic theology

1. Introduction

A question about a relation between religious architecture and Theology is the one of the original principle – *αρχή*. Theology is immanent to architecture that incorporates a model, the triadological, the eternal one, that which is beyond all existence. Eastern Christian understanding of unity and distinction, i.e. the unity in multitude corresponds to the Holy Trinity, and when translated into the

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[*] E-mail: nevena.debljovic@heritage.gov.rs, fax: +381 11 344 14 30

field of religious architecture, the Trinity principle, as a personal co-relation of the *Three Hypostases consubstantial with God*, can be interpreted through the manifestation in an organic structure of the Eastern Christian church structure.

Development of the doctrine and solving the questions about God as a Trinity featured the Christian thought dependant on the most significant Judaistic ideas and on those of Late Antiquity [Plato, *Timaeus* 31b-c*, Fedón*, 65E-65A, *Feder* 247C; Philon d'Alexandrie, *De Abrahamo*, 52,120; Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.2.11, 4.2.1.5; 4.7.41.35-36;6.3.1.23.etc; Proclus, *Parmenides* 6.41.107;.46.23, 24, 32. etc; Saint Clément d'Alexandrie, *Les Œuvres*, 1.5; 6.90.4.; 6.91.2], as well as the philosophical conceptual constructions. In analysing and following their adoption, we notice some advancement in solving the questions of understanding the One and the many, i.e. one God as the Trinity, which was made manifest already in the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers in the 4th century. In a quite significant theological and philosophical text, *Corpus Areopagiticum*, dating from the 6th century [1], a triadological image of the universe was discovered and reconstructed. It showed an inherited division of theology into kataphatic, symbolic and apophatic. The Areopagite's system was constructed of relationships governing among the celestial, ecclesiastical and earthly hierarchies. Thus devised structure was recognised and assumed as a theoretical model which enables understanding of complex symbolic images of the Christian world.

For purposes of better understanding, the concept of Trinity is compared with the concept of the Borromean Rings or Knot made of three interlocking circles or loops. The logic of the structure is that cutting any loop or ring frees all the other loops so that no two loops can be directly linked. But the Borromean Knot is seen as a metaphor of the abstract universal triadological principle [2]. In the Areopagite's structure the three rings would be the three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the apophatic, symbolic and kataphatic theology, the celestial, the ecclesiastical and the earthly hierarchy, etc. In its centre, inside all the circles, is the Unity, the unity in multiplicity. Mirrored in the field of architecture, the Trinity principle, as a relationship of 'Three Hypostases in one Ousia', completely corresponds to an organic structure of the Byzantine church architecture and a wider ecclesiastic world.

As a subject of such research, the basic aspects of architecture come first – the form, the function and the structure. Each of them could be viewed separately, with its qualitative differences, but at the same time, they could not be separated, as they make architecture complete. Therefore, considering the hypostases of the Trinity, God the Father, as the First Cause, as unfathomable, indescribable, immeasurable, corresponds to the function in architecture. It is of a transcendental character, perfect as a concept, but can only be manifested in a concrete form, which corresponds completely to revealing God the Father, through God the Son – God-Man. So, God is manifested in the Son, like function is manifested through form. The hypostasis of Christ corresponds to form in architecture. Existence of form is not viable if not pervaded by structure, for in the terms of manifestation, no form can exist without structure, so without the

Holy Spirit, pervading the Son, there would not be God-Man, as well. Therefore, architecture per se is fractal, regardless its manifestations. It is composed, on the whole and in part, of the function, the form and the structure. So the symbol of the Borromean Knot is used for better understanding of the abstract idea of the unity and multitude expressed in triadological terms, as a principle of a higher order that is immanent to architecture.

By making theology and architecture mutually dependent, an area for recognising a triadological structure is created, which is in analytical terms a unifying factor in a vast field of semiotic meanings. Actually, a theological concept designs an architectural space, so the principle of triadology is manifested through an act of creation.

Architecture as the *Unity* in three aspects can best be interpreted through the Eastern Christian temple/church. The form of the temple (the House of God) is of an utmost significance for architectural composition, manifesting the function, while being a perfect structural set (*τόπος*/the Borromean Rings). Such architecture creates a consecrated interspace between the earthly and the heavenly in the interior of the temple, where real experience of the invisible God omnipresence is possible.

In order to prove this triadological (sup)position, the idea of the unity is taken as a starting point, the unity that is of intangible nature, embodied in the material aspects of architecture (structure, form) [3]. A path to an organic unity of the function, form and structure realised in the temple itself, was the one of search, wondering and straying, but also one of perfecting the human spirit. Aspiration to unify the man and God, the heaven and earth, is realised in a specific shape of a domed structure.

2. Discussion

2.1. The Eastern Christian temple architectural structure development process

Having its grounds in Classical heritage, the Byzantine spiritual culture, particularly in the period of Justinian I, gave a distinctive world view system, which opened up possibilities for creating characteristic forms of art and architectural originality [4]. From the historical-theoretical standpoint, occurring processes in the field of art followed the philosophical-theological concepts, with architecture as a unifying discipline of all artistic creation. A particular precondition that had to be met was the experience of architecture, especially of its interior, as well as the experience of a sacred place, as highly significant in perceiving ideas which were, by means of Christian thought, incorporated in the architectural-artistic body [5, 6].

Theology has a key role in connecting the spiritual and the material world into a unified whole. Architecture and art bear a force of experiential understanding of God and the world itself which does not end there, at one place, but the experience remains in endless motion, leading towards reaching the truth about God and the communion with Him.

The design of the temple structure and solving the most complex problems of dome support, that is, symbolically joining the heaven and earth, occurs at the time when a cryptic theological-triadological work was written, based upon an antinomic interpretation of the world as a dynamic motion from the heavenly towards the earthly and/or vice versa (*Corpus Areopagiticum*, 6th century religious buildings built during the Justinian's rule, 6th century). It is about an obvious synchronism between a development of the triadological thought and that of the Byzantine temple architecture.

The search for an ideal spatial structure, from the first centuries of Christianity, underwent a painstaking process of resolving numerous logic, constructive (static, seismic) problems, in order to obtain a specific concept of an interior with a dome in its centre, the dome that in its essence, besides being structured in symbolical forms, on an empirical level had to have a gnoseological character developed in connection with the liturgical gnosis [7]. As the theological thought was formulated in the frames of the inherited philosophical terminology structures, the efforts in solving the temple architectural form problems were adopting the inherited structures which could reach a symbolic synthesis with the function and the form.

The process of producing and defining a structural, architectural and functional concept of the Eastern Christian religious architecture features perfection of the central plan domed building structural system and a basilica-like structures of late Antiquity and early Christian tradition, which together, by combining the horizontal and the vertical plan, could be an answer to the functional conditions of ever more complex Christian liturgy [8].

In the period prior to the 6th century, those two basic late Antiquity architectural forms were dominant quite independently – a basilica (longitudinal) and a central axis (symmetrical) forms, which then were apparent in many church buildings in a specifically obtained synthesis, creating endless variations – in essence, a completely balanced architectural concept. The origin of the mediaeval architecture structural elements is close to those found in the Roman buildings with a frequent use of arches and vaults, with the Pantheon as an example of the first steps in the use of a dome vaulting. The use of the arched structures opened up a possibility of building a barrel vault, and then by intersecting the two at a right angle, a groin vault was developed, leading to multiplying the vault sections – although it took time to finally resolve the issues of the dome in general, an end to which the builders were striving in those first centuries of Christian architecture [9].

A succession of developmental circumstances coupled with the acquired experience, particularly the presence of the idea of a 'Heaven on Earth', helped a puzzle of how to support a dome – without which the Eastern Christian religious architecture is inconceivable – to be solved, in an endeavour to attain symbolic, structural as well as geometrical perfection. The goal was to create a unity of opposites or the unity and the distinction.

Therefore, each singular structural element had to not only be in compliance with its symbolic role, but to transfer its weight to and be in balance with the other elements, all in harmony with a complex form that was emerging, that is, with a function it had to meet. Such a complex structural system had to respond to two primary and quite practical requirements – receiving the vertical load from the dome/vault, which had to be conducted all the way to the foundation and the ground, without crashing the structure at that, as well as damping the horizontal load that occur due to seismic or wind forces.

At this level of investigation, the cross section of vertical and horizontal forces is clear, and by solving it, the extrasensory, transcendental space of the building interior was being formed, determined by the structural forms and individual elements on the whole. While researching and resolving those multifaceted questions, a stream of changes was observed, which progressively, with each new form and structural solution, was attaining a complete expression of the Christina idea, to reach its climax as early as in the 6th century [10].

For a better insight into solving the problem of the Heaven 'descending' to the Earth, of bearing the dome and the vaults, there will be given just a glance of several presumed steps. The first one leans on the architectural heritage of Rome. It is founded in a concept where the walls, with their sheer mass and not by the geometry of their abutments, receive the horizontal thrust. Massive walls were not the best of solutions for the religious architecture of the East. A disadvantage of the massive system is the occurrence of a large moment of inertia, so a structure would be subject to a devastating effect of an earthquake, the seismic forces (Figure 1-1). The second step was to make the massive system a lighter one, so that the walls were transformed into shells. Such a solution decreased the mass of the structure significantly and the walls became of a more rational dimensions. When looking at a structure cross-section, a pyramidal silhouette emerges, so that the horizontal thrust pushes against a larger counter moment. In short, such a structure better reinforces the dome horizontally (Figure 1-2). Further development in resolving the horizontal thrust led to a creation of a 'double' ring, or the so-called rotunda (basilica) (Figure 1-3). The inner ring bears the major vertical thrust of the dome and the outer one – the nave, bears the horizontal, like a continual round beam. In the next step, the surrounding nave is assumes an octagonal shape, so the inner ring becomes an octagon, with some 'impurities', however, as the distance between the outer and the inner ring varies and the thrust differs – but the instability of this system is negligible (Figure 1-4).

However, the problem becomes more complex when the nave assumes a rectangular shape, so the difference in the thrusts along the diagonal line and in the centre is not negligible anymore (Figure 1-5). So the builders of the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Istanbul were faced with this problem of uneven thrusts of the surrounding nave. A solution to the problem would eventually come, when the square plan is combined with a quatrefoil, so in places where the structure is the 'weakest', shells appear, both in the surrounding nave and in the inner ring. In this way, the horizontal thrusts are

evenly compensated. The wind and earthquake forces are conducted from the dome partly to the inner ring shells and party to the square nave and thence to the outer nave walls. So, there is a threefold reinforcement in the horizontal sense. Such a system was applied in central buildings plans (Figure 1-6).
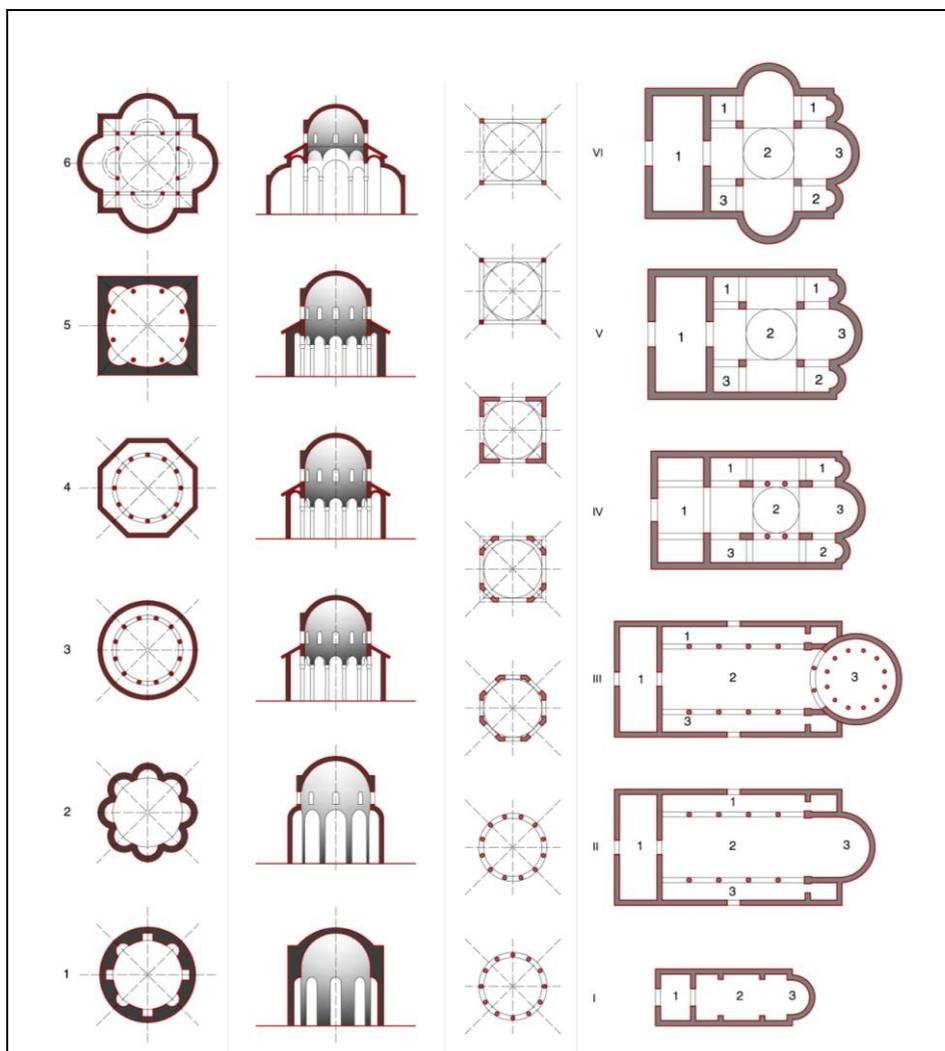
Figure 1. Transposition process of geometrical shapes into religious architectural forms.

Only, solving the problem of vertical thrust coming from the dome was actually the question of the inner ring which in this case could be viewed irrespective of the total structure plan. In the oldest buildings, the dome problem was solved through an architrave ring supported by columns. A disadvantage of this system were the columns themselves, which had to be placed at a relatively short distance, thus in a great number. A striking example of this is the Saint Stephen's Rotunda, Rome. The next step in solving the dome support was an

experiment with the arches. Such a system had numerous columns due to a small arch radius. One of the examples is the Santa Constanza Church, Rome. Establishing an octagonal plan, the dome supporting structure was based on a system of eight arches. Such a solution was acceptable and it provided an open plan view of the interior. The best example would be the Basilica of Saint Vitale, Ravenna.

Dome support on an irregular octagon results in smaller arches, on the one hand and a larger radius of the surrounding arches. That suggested a transition from the octagonal to the square plan. Examples of this could be found in square-quatrefoil ground plans. Then the columns were combined into an 'L' shaped corner ones, which finally formulated a question of vaulting a square plan with a dome. Here, the issue of the dome support was solved with squinches, but still it was a solution where the dome had to be supported at eight points.

The final goal was to achieve support at four points or columns, but still with the use of squinches in turning the "square into a circle" [9, p. 87]. In the end, a system that completely solved the problem of an even distribution of thrust from the dome to the columns was the one with pendentives [9, p. 101] which follow the direction of the dome weight forces, conducting them to the ground, without the occurrence of 'dead centres'. Such a structural solution perfected the system of the dome vertical support over a square room below. The first example of applied pendentives is the Saint Mina Church, Alexandria, Egypt, early 5th century. After that, the Eastern Christian architecture mainstream adopts the structure, using it ever since.

From the geometrical aspect, the cube and the sphere merged, making triangular spherical segments which, on the stereometric level, are the manifestation of merging the heavenly and the earthly through a concrete symbolic form. As there was also another style, the development of the longitudinal plan structures, the central plan was gradually transformed into an elongated shape with a tendency to adopt a cruciform shape, which, in a way, resulted in the central plan losing its original shape.

The reason for that was how the place was experienced, a subjective feeling of the space, a sequentiality conveying a meaning of a path, a need for aspiring and union. The spatial boundaries of the central plan do not provide a path, only a transition from the common to the consecrated space. Therefore, a necessary condition was a symbolic motion – a path provided by a Roma basilica. Apart from that, however, aspiration of an Eastern builder was focused on establishing a system of psychological associations, by composing a specific, so-called 'ideographic writing', which existed not only in the very architectural shapes as spatial signs, but also in the images that associate the Christian idea in the human mind, representing incarnation. For the shapes to produce a space that corresponds to a theology of mystical experience, it was necessary to establish multidimensional relations in the space.

Therefore, a classical basilica could bring a new steam which the central plan buildings could not provide – horizontal motion. The basilica itself was based on a rectangular plan, usually of three naves and an apse at one side. In the pre-Christian period it had its secular purpose, but considering its shape and size it could allow a large number of people, so it became a favourite type of a religious building whose motion final point was the apse. The West remained loyal to the basilica shape during the entire mediaeval period. The experience of moving through space and how it felt within basilicas of all the (style) epochs, was taking place 'on the earth' in just two sequences. The climax was reached at the so-called end of the path – the apse; what it lacked was a dynamic liberation, a rise to heaven, the point of culmination, the place where the earthly joins the heavenly (Figure 1-I, II, III).

Only when the basilica longitudinal nave was coupled with the domed central plan, when two orthogonal horizontal and one vertical axis crossed, an architectural concept was realised, which then made possible a polysemous spatial play. Considering, for instance, the horizontal plane, the cruciform shape emerges, the conch type cruciform shape, solutions of the cross-in-square ground plan, which then provided endless spectrum of possible combinations with other shapes (Figure 1- IV, V, VI).

The structure of a temple came about through combining spatial structures that could build an entire 'body', whilst none of the elements preceded another, so their existence was possible only in relation to another. The idea of such an architectural structure affirmed the worldly through distinction.

This research into building has been a real experiment of matter, disclosure of the possibilities contained in the natural material by balancing the weight of material elements realised as architectural creation. The dome was built as a free structure over an emptiness, like the 'arrangement of the Heaven', measuring the 'circle over an abyss'. The natural materials in the various individual structural elements were losing their own weight (dematerialised) only in the process of building the entire structure; the weight was streaming down from the dome, through the pendentives and arches and columns; from the vaults to the barrel or groin vaults, arches, walls, imperceptibly reaching down to the ground. And that distribution and loss of material weight is actually a process of transformation of matter [11].

Hence, a temple was an expression of a divine design of the Universe, a direct and tangible, perceptible by senses cognition of theology, a search for God, a reality where one takes part in the transfiguration and a deification, all for the sake of eschatological hope to future salvation.

2.2. Triadological model of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Research of any religious building in its space-time variations from the 6th century on, it is possible to reach a confirmation of the architectural triadological origins if such research includes reading the theological texts by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, based on revealing the secret about the Holy Trinity.

Pseudo Dionysius Areopagite is a mysterious Christian theologian from the early 6th century, whose identity has never been revealed. He is an author of one of the most influential Christian writings called *Corpus Areopagiticum*, supposedly consisting of, by a chronological order: Περι θειων ονοματων, De Divinis Nominibus; *Περι της ουρανιας ιεραρχίες*, De coelesti hierarchia; *Περι της εκκλησιαστικες ιεραρχίες*, De ecclesiastica hierarchia; *Περι μυστικης θεολογιας*, De mystica theologia, and a collection of ten letters and epistles (Lettres: quatre lettres à Gaïos, une à Dorothée, une à Sosipater, une à Polycarpe, une à Démophile, une à Tite)

No matter how such revealment, or the very disclosure of the Dionysius's structure, seems non-transparent at first glance, the intention is to conduct an analysis, starting from the Holy Trinity that penetrates the spheres of existence, thus becoming a visible model correlating with the function, revealing a spatial geometry of a temple.

The hierarchical structure of the temple is not designed as an already given plan, where the theological method may be used to interpret God and the world (man). Religious architecture as a structure could not be rationalised through a hierarchical structure, but the other way round; through its construction, it was acknowledging a true transcendental presence of an absent God, who by His participation in the creation and His relationship with the created determines a proximity or a distance in a synchronistic triadological creation. A temple was often compared to the *Jacob's Ladder*, leading from the visible to the invisible, not being a hierarchically set path towards experiencing God as a final goal, but an unreachable goal, as experience cannot be final.

So how is the Arepagite's triadological concept manifested in architectural structure of a church building?

The triadological principle can serve as a medium for solving the relationship between theology and the Eastern Christian temple structure through form which mirrors the Universe, the human society, the place of service and celebrating God, by honouring the Holy Trinity.

If we take the Areopagite's assumption that God, in His metaphysical being, is 'unknowable and ineffable' as a starting point, and that the Incomprehensible is revealed as the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), then it is clear that Areopagite found the basis of all the revealed structures in that basic Trinitarian form. Above all, there is that inherited division of theology to the cataphatic, the symbolic and the apophatic [*De mystica theologia*, (MT) 2.1000B.7, in De Gandillac, *Œuvres*]. So, all further analysis steps could be adapted to that initial categorisation of theology.

The lowest level of the sensory world belongs to the cataphatic, the positive theology, and by denying it, the first level of spiritual advancement is reached – *purification*. The second level can be reached by stepping into a mysterious world of symbols, where the sensory and extrasensory spheres are still connected, leading to the *revelation*. By denying all the real and unreal altogether, the highest level of the mystical, could be reached, i.e. communion with God – the *theosis.*

It is clearly a personal experience, and it is possible to be achieved only by revealing the Holy Mysteries in the acts of Baptism, Eucharist and Unction. A mystical experience may occur (within a temple) with a presence of the earthly hierarchy – the catechumens, the believers, the monks; the church hierarchy – the deacons, the priests, the bishops; and the heavenly one – the principles, the authority, the thrones – and all in the act of the Divine Liturgy [*Les Noms Divins*, DN 3.1.164D, DN 3.1.165C, in De Gandillac, *Œuvres*].
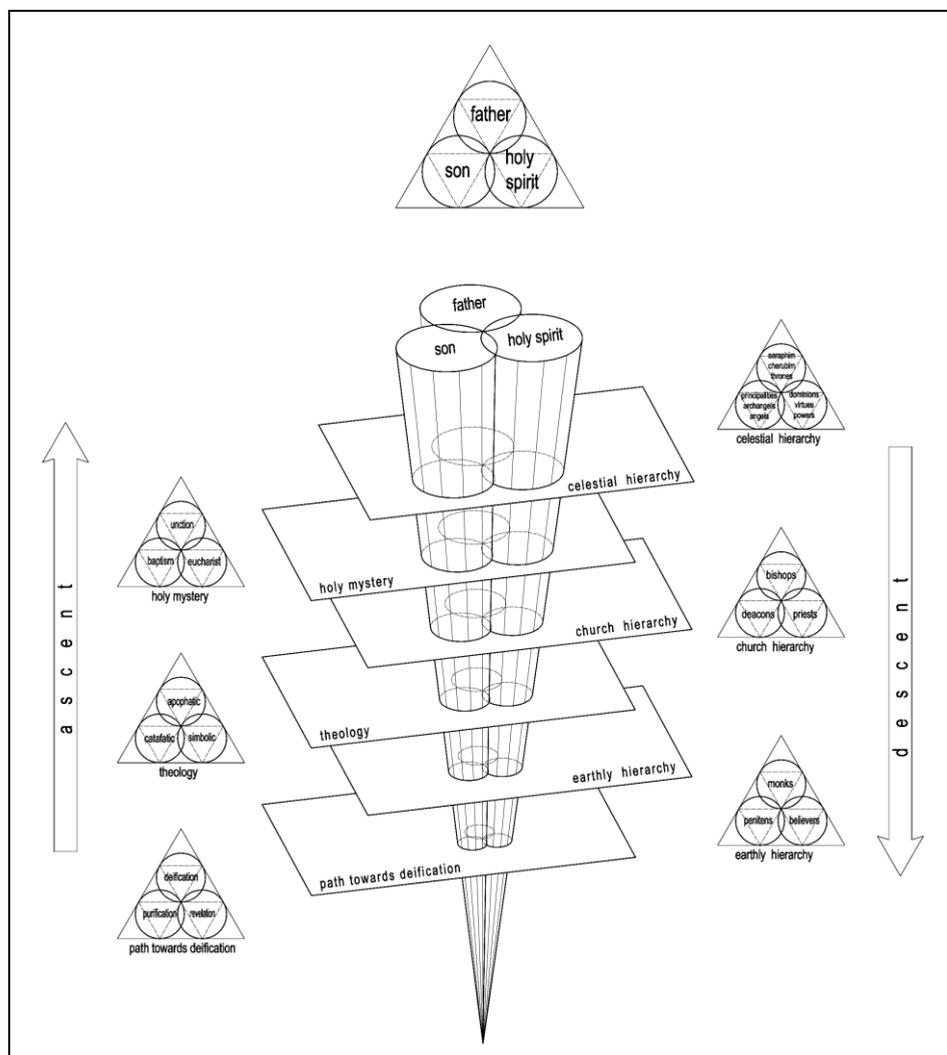

Figure 2. Hierarchical system according to Dionysius Areopagite.

The system set by Areopagite can be interpreted (from the present perspective) by the Borromean Ring (or Knot) concept. Such a structure would represent the three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In its centre,

inside all the circles, is the Unity, the *unity in multiplicity* – the Holy Trinity. (Figure 2).

An early 13th century French manuscript from Chartres holds an iconographic illumination of the Holy Trinity, presented in three interlocked rings (Figure 3a) [12]. So, The Borromean Knot. Apart from the image itself, there are the words that follow the structure. A word *Trinitas* is split into syllables: TRI-NI-TAS, and each syllable occupies a place in one of the respective rings. So, only when the structure is whole, it is the *Trinitas* (Trinity). In the centre, where the rings are interlocked, there is a word UNITAS. Therefore, *Trinitas = Unitas*. The Trinity is a unit and vice versa. That is a visual presentation of the *unity in multiplicity* and the *multiplicity in unity*, or their established relations and dependence.
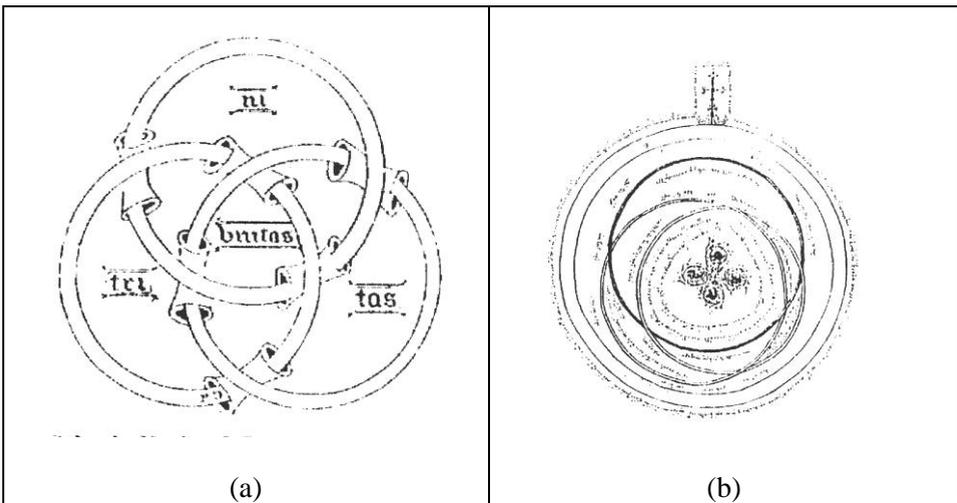
Figure 3. (a) French manuscript from Chartres, (b) Image mystery of the Trinity by cod. Paris 887, p.1 (Manuscript by Constantine Paleocapa 1539–40).

Furthermore, the idea of the Borromean Ring in its infinite variations. The relation between the rings remains the same, it is the words that change. So, for instance, the rings may contain the words *Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit*, and in its interlocking centre it reads the *Holy Trinity* or any of the triune structures – e.g. deacons, priests, bishops = the church *hierarchy*; or a function, a form, a structure = architecture, and so on. In any case, the idea of the structure remains unchanged.

There is a less known that once again features the interlocked rings, an Eastern Christian version of how the doctrine of the Trinity was understood. And again we have *unity in multiplicity*, the 'Three Hypostases in one Ousia'. The motions of the interlocked rings are followed by the text flow (Figure 3b). It is the words and excerpts from the Saint Maximus the Confessor (one of the most versatile interpreters of Areopagite) scholia, written in the 7th century [http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/2722340.html]. In short, the text contains an

essence that God is one (monad) in three independent and free personalities and in their intercommunion.

Dionysius sets up a triadological structure which is being developed on several planes. And for each subsequent plane in the hierarchical scheme the effect of the previous plane is a compelling one. It is based in being, where the higher levels of being are connected with the lower ones through an organic interdependence. Summing up the Dionysius's arguments, dependence between three theologies and the man's three-step path towards deification come out clearly, so the first step of 'purification' necessitates the cataphatic theology. The second step of 'revelation' leads to a mysterious world of symbols, where the symbolic theology governs, whereas in complete denial, the apophatic theology reaches the unity with God or deification.

The temple architecture features function-structure-form dependence between the parts and the whole, so the mediaeval ecclesiastic architecture is called the 'organic' one. In correlation between the horizontal and the vertical planes (governed by the three-step hierarchy) is the temple spatial unity. The Areopagite's reconstructed hierarchical structure, founded in the idea of the Holy Trinity, is manifested (whether consciously or not) in the Byzantine temple architecture.

The temple spatial structure in its triune hierarchical signification, along the longitudinal motion line, consists of three parts: the narthex (νάρθηκας), the naos (κύριος ναός) and the altar (βωμός). In accordance with the temple symbolic significations, the narthex is the place designated for the catechumens, the penitents (purification/cataphasis), the naos for the believers (revelation/symbolism) and the altar is the place of invisible one, the area detached from the world, meant for the priests (theosis/apophasis).

The door between the narthex and the naos are of two wings, symbolising the two Testaments, often decorated with scenes from the Old and the New Testament. The area of the nave is also divided into three sections: the right, south one is for the men, the left, north one for the women and the midsection usually had an elevated place, an ambo for liturgical reading, above which, in the dome, Christ Pantocrator is watching over. A border line between the worldly and the heavenly, the visible and the invisible, the church and the altar is the altar screen – the iconostasis. It has three doors: the north, the south and the royal doors in the middle. The highest in the hierarchy is the 'upper place' and the bishops throne, then in the north there is a proskomedia and in the south, the diaconicon. Even the occurrence of a trifora in the altar space is identified with the three rays of light as the Holy Trinity appear in the altar [13-15]

Therefore, the church body, the nave where the believers pray and attend liturgy, bears the cataphatic meaning; the altar screen, expressed in the 'visible witnesses to the invisible' – where there are the Virgin, Christ, the saints, as a transition from one world to the other – is a symbolical one; the altar is the place of apophasis consisting of a mysterious secret – the Eucharist, it is a place where matter is being deified. "The altar represents a secret of the essentially

unattainable Trinity, a temple – its design that could be recognised in the world, as well as the Trinity forces." [16]

In a liturgical functional sense, the temple is the centre where the *worldly hierarchy* (the penitents, the believers and the monks) meet the *heavenly one* (the principalities, the dominion, the throne) through the *church hierarchy* (deacons, priests, bishops) [CH7, CH 8, CH 9, in De Gandillac, *Œuvres*].
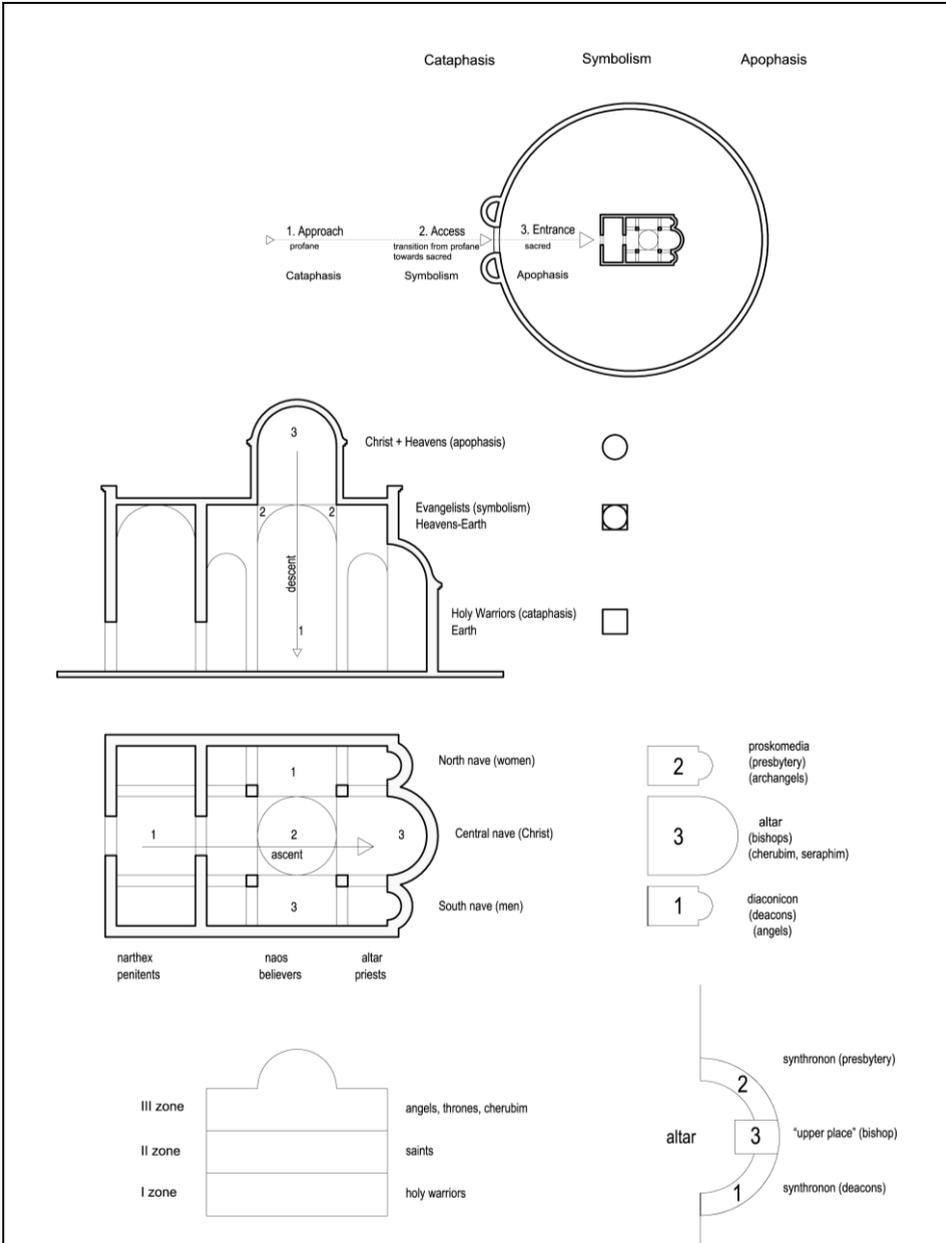

Figure 4. Space tripartite hierarchical division.

Over the central temple area, the naos rises a dome, as the highest expression of the religious architecture symbolic character. It is celestial sphere descending from the Divine to the worldly, from the transcendental to the immanent. By stepping into an interior area, one starts a personal communion with God, on one's own free will, revealing the secrets by the use of symbols, as carriers of often contradictory meanings, those that speak of both death and resurrection, striving towards unification – the deification. The interior of the temple invites to an inner life and in all mimics the idea of the man's *ascent* to God and God's *descent* to man.

The forms of the upper structure (the heavenly) – domes, vaults initiate the apophatic principle of theological gnoseology (symbolically: a circle as a perfect geometric shape); columns, walls, drum represent rectangular shapes related to the earthly, thus expressing a cataphatic principle (square/earth); the area in between, where the dome descends, is the place of pendentives – the area of symbolic principles (a symbolic transition from the square to the circle). (Figure 4)

3. Conclusions

The temple itself is in service of transformation of the man and the world, where in his first encounter with the temple the man is introduced to the divine attributes. By stepping in the interior area, the man starts a personal communion with God, revealing the secrets by the use of symbols as signs and signifiers, often of often contradictory meanings between the experience of death and resurrection, in the hierarchy of pictorial images that are present along a path towards unification – deification.

The temple interior appears as a "harmonious hierarchy of images that convey the true information from the level of a super-being to the level of human existence, while the frescoes on the walls have their particular place – on the level of the secret, that is, between the heavenly and worldly hierarchy ranks" [17].

In the theological sense, the frescoes become a medium where communication between the otherwise unrelated 'beings' and 'super-beings' is realised. By way of the painted images it is possible to reach, in one's mind, a unity of the divine transcendence. I accordance with deeply theological ideas, the fresco paintings reincarnates the 'God revealed truths', represented in visual, sensory-perceptible images. The light that shines from either the frescoes or the icons transcends the sensory perception and the mind, it is intangible, nonphysical. In such an atmosphere, either the outer or the inner light symbolises the divine energy, the grace of the Holy Spirit, in a descent transferring from God, over entire hierarchy of personae, to man. The temple inner architectural space becomes a carrier of theological ideas, which have created a complex, unified and expressive interior.

The spatial experience of the temple, in its opposing verticals and horizontals, in the motion from the dome, pierced with beams of light coming towards the earth – the God's descent towards man, but also the man's ascent towards God – in the motion from west to east, from the temple entrance to stopping before the altar, all is permeated with symbolic shapes and painted beauty.

We may finally say that the emotional-aesthetic character of the gnoseological system, as a special 'form of thinking' set on an 'experimental' plane (in Eastern Christian culture in general), is based upon establishing a 'ladder' as a communication between the transcendental sphere and the one of the world of being. This particular 'theory of hierarchies' is the work of Dionysius the Areopagite. The idea of 'assimilation' as an ontological-aesthetical act is a print, a trace of (the absence of presence) God Himself. It is realised at each level, and as part of the liturgy that assimilates, it develops and practically occupies the 'eternity' of the Trinity, both through a liturgical experiment that abolishes the antinomy of the transcendental-immanent relation by means of the 'mystery of mysteries', and through creating a visual-olfactory-auditory atmosphere within a triadologically designed temple.

A structure that Areopagite sets, based on the triadology and the hierarchies, can be fluently read in its entirety in an Eastern Christian temple architectural text. The triadological theology is analogue to the Borromean Rings. It has been proven that the structure disintegrates by disconnecting one of the rings, i.e. by removing any of the elements of the triune structure as set in the Dionysius's supra-structure, the whole theological system would fall apart. Such a structural property coloured with a mystery of a triune God provides possibilities for re-examining and interpreting the text anew through centuries. This time, it has been done with an aim to define the theoretical aspects of the mediaeval architecture and its reflexive iconic feature from the aspect of transculturalism.

Acknowledgment

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