

ARCHITECTURAL VIOLENCE IN UMBRIA

“THE FUKSAS CHURCH”

Andrea Pacciani

In some modern churches, not only do the faithful struggle to find the physical entrance, but seemingly even Jesus Christ struggles to find a means of entering. Among this number is the church in Foligno, Italy that has garnered international renown for the boldness with which this concrete cube fits into Umbria, one of the most beautiful regions of Italy. It is the land of St. Francis and St. Clare. Not far from here the most figurative expression of the Catholic faith in antiquity, the creche, was invented. But Fuksas did not take this heritage into account as a means of guiding and informing his design. Although his reasons are unclear—whether out of ignorance, hostility, or the belief that tradition is outdated—the church as built is an act of violence. On the one hand the church demonstrates an act of architectural violence against



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the Umbrian countryside, on the other an act of spiritual violence against some of the most beautiful pages in the history and tradition of Catholicism.

Indeed, the church does not identify itself as a church except by the monumental aspect of the facade. While this monumental character is typical of Umbrian churches, it is here distorted into a giant that only expresses inadequacy and arrogance. With exposed, raw-looking concrete, it evokes the fleeting structural solidity of hundreds of Italian churches built in the last half century whose now-crumbling facades exhibit the bleeding stains of rusting rebar.

From an architectural point of view the church is criminal, an affront to the scenic area in which it is inserted. But the architect portrays the church—both the building and the institution—as a social crime as well: the crime of faith in a secularized society amid a contemporary relativism that denies the spiritual in favor of a chronic materialism. It almost seems that the architect intends to disparage the church for its awkward presence in the neighborhood fabric so that the parishioners would feel singled out by the rest of the community.

Looking at the structure both from the outside and inside one can imagine how it was conceived as an empty space impossible to fill, with smooth and regular walls, so that no seed of Christian devotion could take root in that building.

The sense of shock in such a strange space masks a spiritual uneasiness; the



Photo: Ettore Guerriero

The parish "piazza" is a slab in front of the looming presence of the church

practice of affection for the neighborhood church and the living presence inside are difficult to develop here during daily devotions: Eucharistic adoration, prayer vigils, and reciting the rosary all need places we can frequent every day with growing affection, and not with a sense of alienation, or worse, of guilt.

In the end it is a place created merely for its oddness, not for a daily confessional life that sustains the needs of faith, within a place where it can be expressed and strengthened. I cannot imagine celebrations enriched by the assembly's spiritual fervor taking place in that church, nor solemn feast days

broken by the cry of a newborn or a little child running around—but I don't think the designer could imagine them either.

No one knows the real name of this church, or to whom it has been dedicated, but everyone calls it the Fuksas church, as if it was a deconsecrated place or perhaps simply not worthy to be linked to something holy.



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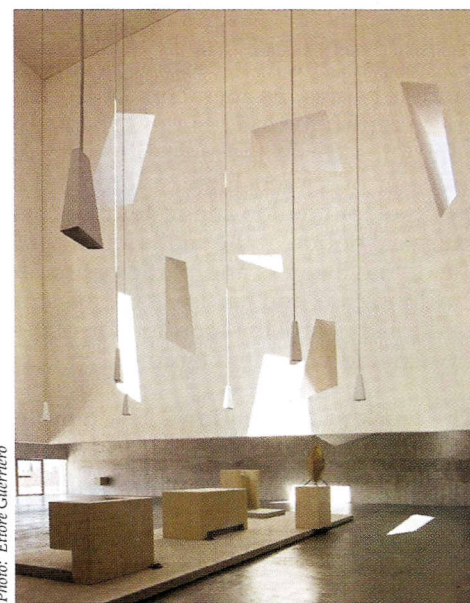


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