

## Article

# Praying to the Same God: Multi-Confessional Space Project for a “World House”

Eduardo Delgado-Orusco 

Department of Architecture, School of Engineering and Architecture, University of Zaragoza,  
50018 Zaragoza, Spain; edelgado@unizar.es

**Abstract:** This article offers the architectural definition and interpretative keys to a unique project. It is a space shared by the three main Abrahamic faiths: the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions. Although conceptually other religions could be accommodated. Its configuration is very elementary: a cubic volume, massive and almost blind, with a cylindrical space crowned by a simple skylight. Each of the religions is based on a scratching of the interior surfaces of the space, forming the ritual areas of each of them. And towards the center of the space there are other areas of prayer and celebration that could be shared among the believers of the different religions, from the conviction that they are addressed to the same God. In this configuration there is a will of invitation, of offering to all men of good will. The article, written by the architect of this space, mentions some plastic and conceptual references that have served as inspiration for the project and its presentation is intended to fuel the debate on the possibility of this space.

**Keywords:** World House; Multi-Confessional; pray; project; design; architecture; God

*“We have inherited a large house, a great ‘World House’ in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace. (King 1967).*

Martin Luther King

Reading these words of Luther King leads immediately to a yearning, the desire for a peaceful world that knows how to coexist with those who are different. But this idea contrasts sharply with the reality that comes to us every day. Perhaps the first step could be taken in the world of religions. From this reflection and this will is born this project of a multi-faith chapel, a shared space between Jews, Christians and Muslims (Figures 1–4).

At this point, it should be made clear that the writer is an architect and, as such, believes that behind every project with intellectual ambition, there is research. And this research will be all the more consistent the more detailed its origins and the reasons that support the decisions taken in its development. It is also true that many of these steps are poetic or creative, not scientific. In any case, it is interesting to apply the scientific method to the process of creating a work of architecture, a process that will reveal both its brilliance and successes as well as its shortcomings or limitations.



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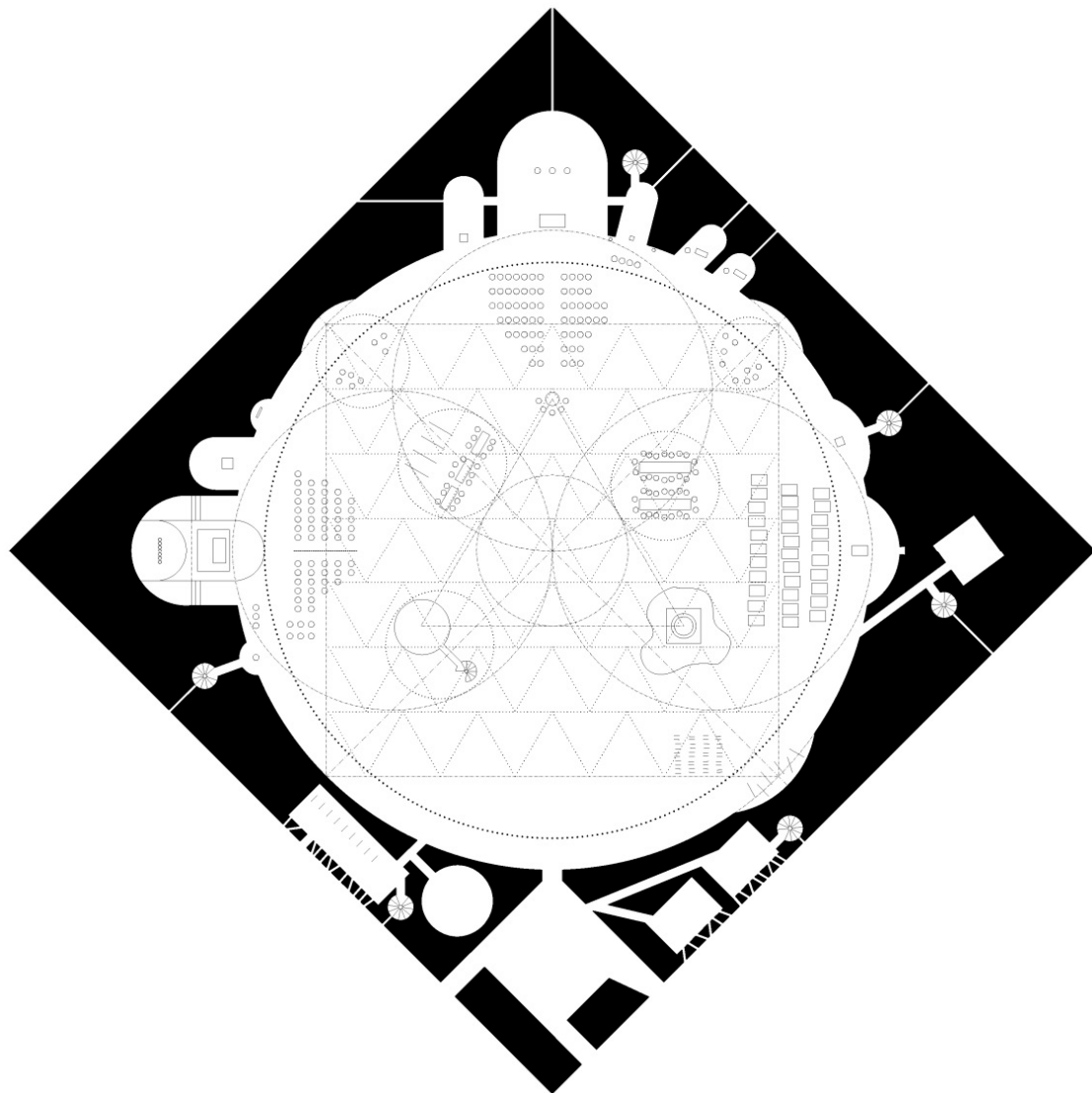
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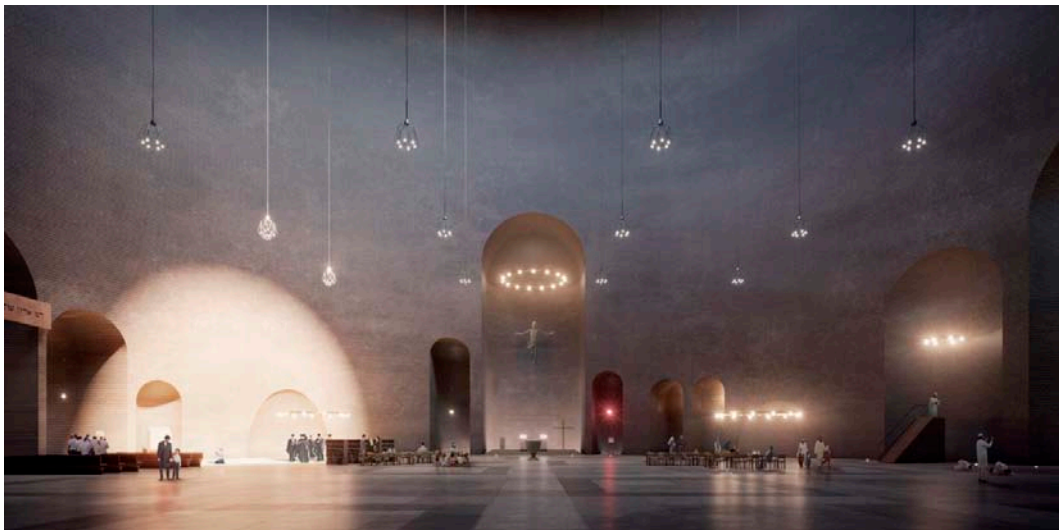


**Figure 1.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for a “World House” (2022). Plan.

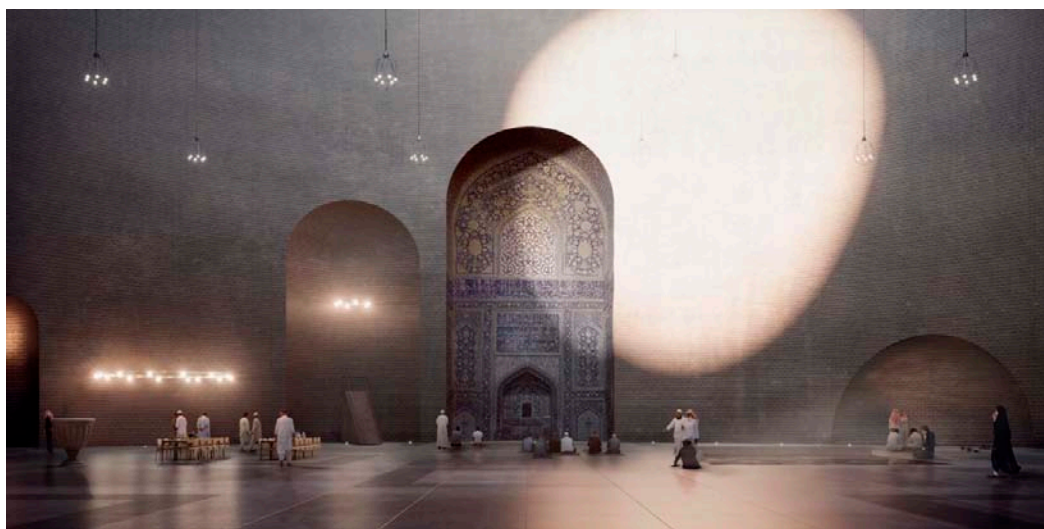
The project we are studying here is a utopian idea and lacks a location yet. However, it explores the origins of Spain, where the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities coexisted for centuries—a coexistence that was mutually enriching, though unstable at the same time. In view of subsequent events—the expulsion of the Jews, defeat of the Muslim kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula, forced conversions, et cetera—the time for peaceful coexistence had not yet come. Maybe for this reason, and after several centuries, the project is particularly suited to a land such as Spain, a cultural melting pot, characterized by the fusion and assimilation of ethnic groups. In this sense, our hope is that this project will symbolize reconciliation and the coming of a time that fosters the desire to coexist. In any case, that condition of being placeless confers the greatest relevance to the volume that encloses it. The simplicity of form is inspired by the polyhedron on which God the Father and God the Son rest their feet in the fresco by Luca Cambiasso on the vault above the choir in the basilica of San Lorenzo de El Escorial: a mysterious, incongruous volume—a cube—that has naturally been associated with the treatise on cubic form by the great Juan de Herrera ([Herrera 1976](#)), architect to Philip II.<sup>1</sup> ([Figure 5](#)).



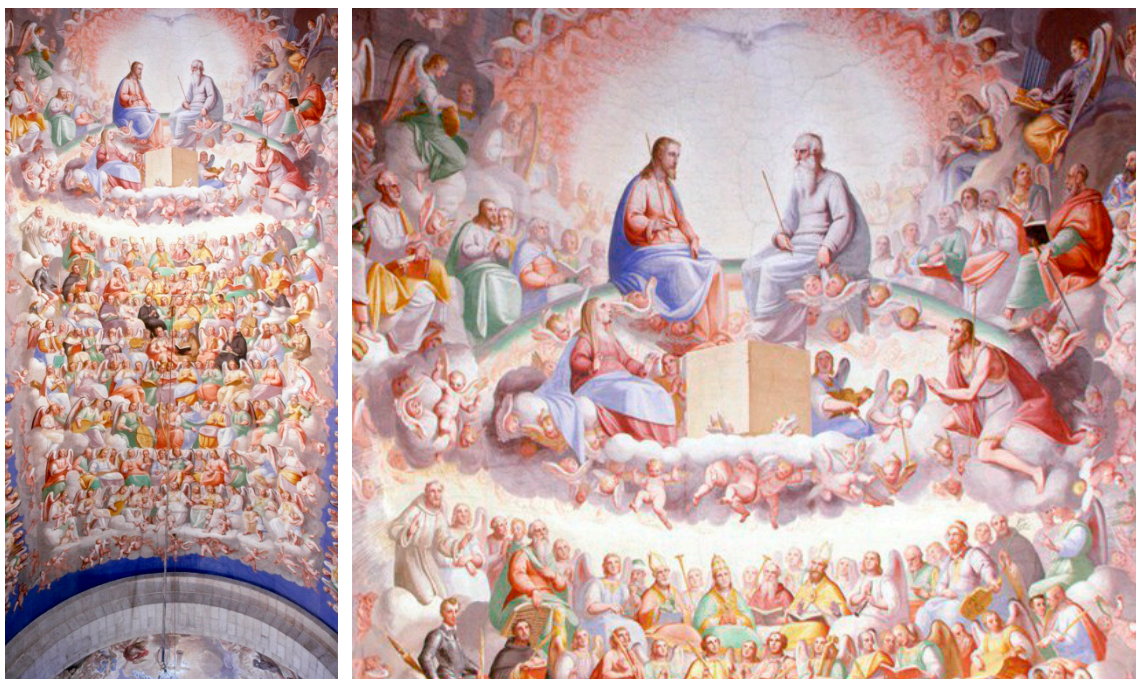
**Figure 2.** Interior view of the Multi-Confessional Space Project for a “World House” (2022): Jewish space.



**Figure 3.** Interior view of the Multi-Confessional Space Project for a “World House” (2022): Christian space.

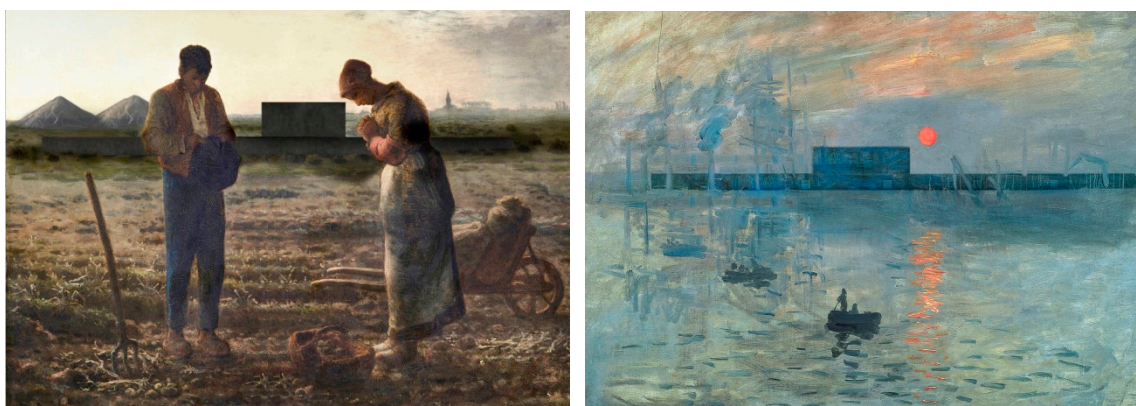


**Figure 4.** Interior view of the Multi-Confessional Space Project for a “World House” (2022): Muslim space.



**Figure 5.** Vaulted ceiling of the choir in the basilica of San Lorenzo de El Escorial and detail (1584–85). Luca Cambiasso, artist.

A contemporary visual reference to this massive volume—full of mystery and mostly opaque—might be the project designed by Alberto Campo Baeza in collaboration with Raphaël Gabrion for the international competition for the conservation facility for the Louvre Museum. As part of the proposal, the architects inserted the most essential element of their design—a dark, unquestionably mysterious volume—into several works of art housed in the Louvre. This image may help to understand our project’s expression, or the absence of one (Figure 6).



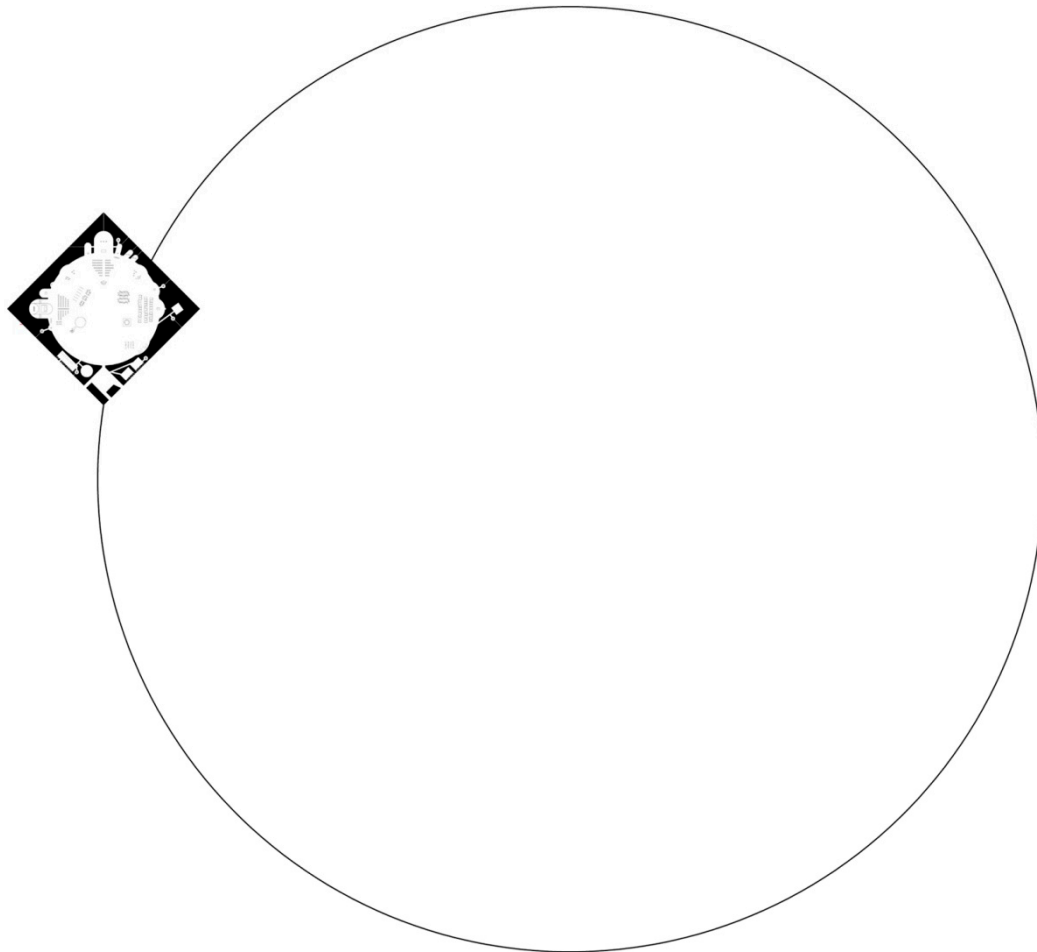
**Figure 6.** Louvre Museum in Lievin competition entry (2015). Alberto Campo Baeza and Raphaël Gabrion, architects.

These two mysterious references, the figure painted by Luca Cambiasso and the image of Campo Baeza and Gabrion’s project, serve to explain the desire for abstraction of the container volume of this project. An elementary geometric figure, one of Plato’s polyhedra, inside of which a space with another geometry, even another nature, is carved. The outer cube speaks of the sacred character of the construction, of its separation from the world, always more chaotic and informal. The interior is carved and divided among the three

religions, although its cylindrical geometry orients the space vertically and shows a unique and shared center.

Yet, that volume is not, obviously, divinity itself, nor is it even a representation of divinity. It could rather be considered an attempt at a trace, an evocation, an illumination of the divinity through the order of geometry.

The volume is symbolically understood as immersed in a sort of circular, geographical orbit that evokes both the inside and outside of paradise, of coexistence with God. The volume—this space that aims to be multi-confessional—can be also considered a boundary between those who seek God, knowingly or not, and those who have found God and would dwell in the paradise envisaged as a walled garden (Figure 7).



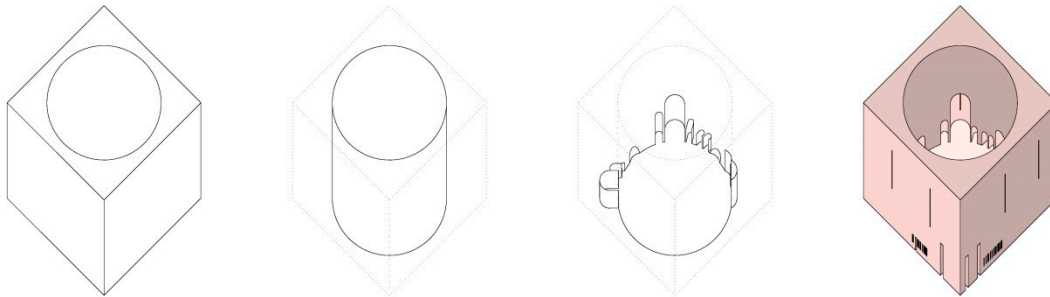
**Figure 7.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Site plan.

This would be a topological configuration similar to that expressed by French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean Philippe Vassal in their first construction project, a small dwelling in Niger, in which they differentiated the domestic indoor space, an open-air space, a covered, semi-public space, from the rest of the world. This reference serves to explain the three spaces into which the world is divided according to the World House project. There would be an interior space, an intermediate space or space of proximity to the construction and, finally, a completely exterior space. These three spaces would correspond to three conditions of the soul: the one that has found its Creator, the one that seeks Him and the one that lives indifferently (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Photo and ground plan of the single-family dwelling in Niamey (1984). Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, architects.

But back to the World House project description. This striking volume is transformed on the inside—is occupied—with a sort of large, geometrical cylinder that houses three ritual areas in a single space (Figure 9).



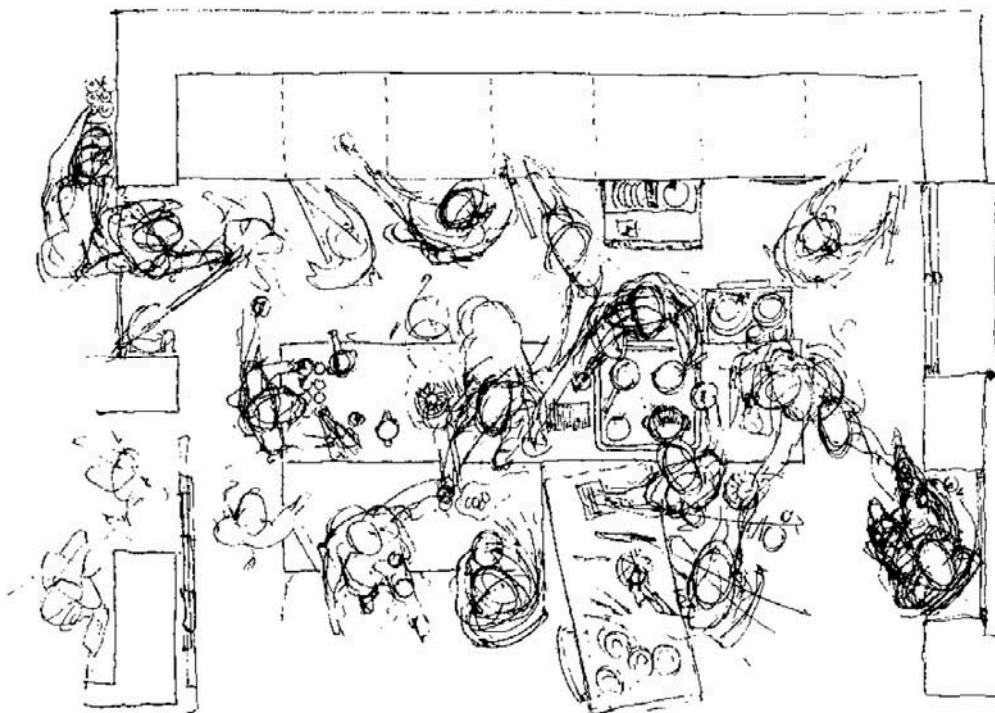
**Figure 9.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Outline of the geometry of the multi-faith chapel.

In his own practice, the author of the project has always identified this shape—the circle—with the sacred. In fact, in the foreword to the book *Sceneries with Soul*, Alberto Campo concurred with this idea when he wrote (Delgado Orusco 2013):

*“Because if we go to the origins, to the earliest sacred architecture, what does the space that makes up the large stones in Stonehenge have but that sacred character that we are analyzing here? I do have complete confidence that behind those powerful stones there was an architect and a very good one indeed. It is not coincidence that Delgado Orusco insists on the circle as a form imbued with sacredness”.*<sup>2</sup>

Of course, meaning space is never mere form; however in this project, the ritual areas are structured through the concept of space which refers to the reality of the lived space, informed, to use Italo Calvino’s precise expression, by the labyrinth of human existence (Figure 10).

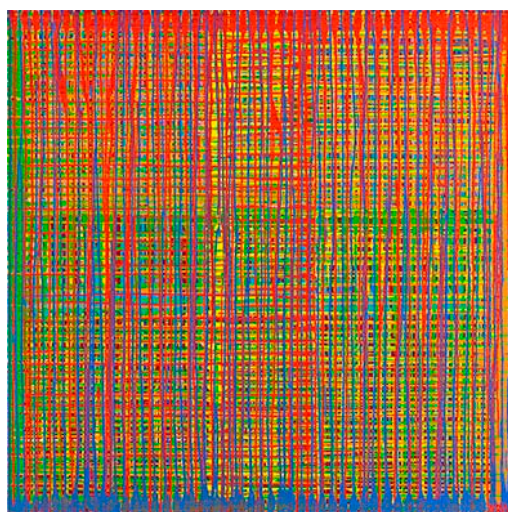
Precisely the chapter dedicated to the city of Ersilia<sup>3</sup>—taken from his unforgettable *Invisible Cities* (Calvino 1983)—provides an essential lesson in the sense that delimiting activities does not need to involve the habitual partition walls or divisions of indoor space. Discovering openness, particularly in association with modern space and the techniques that produce it, leads to an understanding of the spaces designed as concentrations of activity that is not necessarily exclusive. Indeed, the opposite is true, as will be seen, since the aim is, in fact, to be inviting and inclusive.



**Figure 10.** Ground plan of a kitchen with actions (c. 2000). Fernando Lancho, artist.

In this same line of recognition of the reality drawn by the actions of men and by time, and which serves to understand the outline of our project, another conceptual entry can be glimpsed in the theoretical work by the architect Juan Navarro Baldeweg, who mentions invisible threads, “fingers”, that connect things to each other—as well as to people—with intersecting relationships, such as in the city of Ersilia:

*“There are tactile extensions, fingers, between one thing and another. Direct links embedding themselves at different levels of physical structures: in the skin or in an internal organ. Because of these projections, these channels, it is difficult to distinguish bodies. They blur the edges that create the illusion of autonomy. The form is affected by numerous contacts made by the internal routes crossing through its materiality: by functions that operate on the periphery of organic structures, following planes that cut into the figure when least expected”* (Navarro Baldeweg 2001) (Figure 11).



**Figure 11.** Cruz enhilada III (2015). Juan Navarro Baldeweg, artist.

This is the case with the World House, which offers the opportunity to address fundamental architectural issues, such as those related to form, matter, gravity or light and other, no-less-important concepts, such as the program development and the nature of buildings. Let us continue with the explanation of the project, the reasons for it, its sense, its meaning, and, in doing so, it will reveal, by analogy, the secrets behind the practice involved in architectural projects.

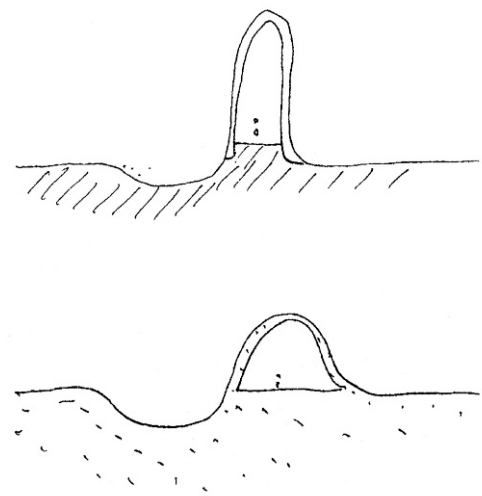
The proposal approaches the area of the strictly ritual spaces as surface scratches, orderly excavations in the mass of the volume described above and in the common preexisting matter.

Professor Juan José López de la Cruz, in his book on the drawings of the architect Sverre Fehn, addresses a set of these drawings that follow a similar strategy:

*“Among the many categories that we could establish for Fehn’s drawings, one would doubtlessly be that in which the land provides shelter and architecture emerges out of it, scraping the surface matter up and piling it into heaps” (López de la Cruz 2014).*

López de la Cruz himself explains that “Fehn discovered this atavistic construction on his trip to Morocco, where towns and villages seemed like a huge, single work of construction resulting from moving earth from one place to another, to the point of altering the straight line of the horizon” (Figure 12).

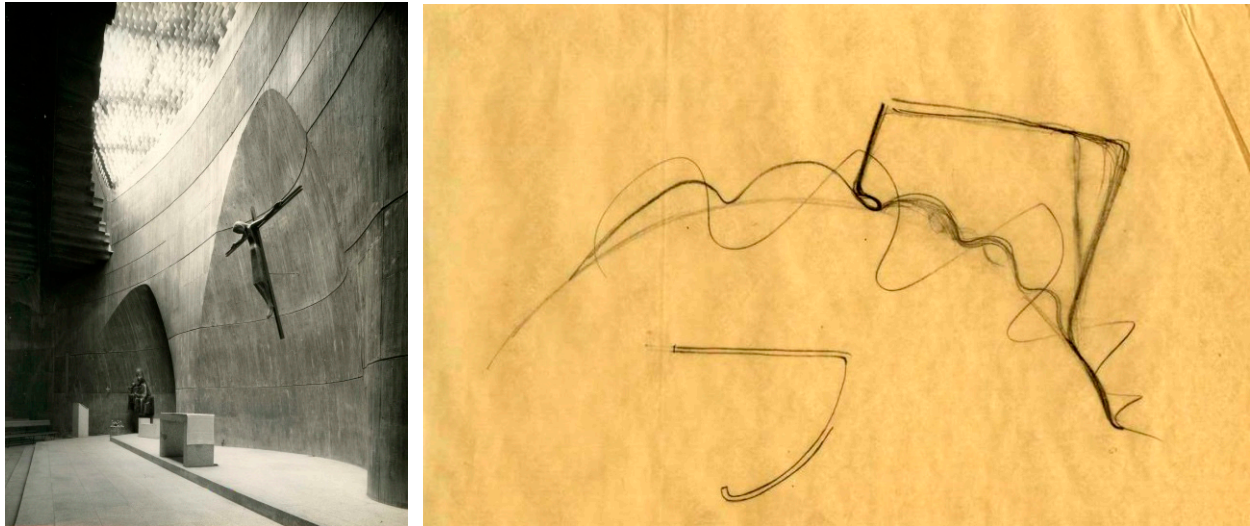
This same strategy can be found in the exciting project for a church constructed by the architect Miguel Fisac in the Moratalaz district of Madrid. The author himself noted that this was his first project after the Vatican II liturgical reforms, which multiplied the focal points for celebration.<sup>4</sup> (Figure 13).



**Figure 12.** Town of Ait Ben Hadu-Morocco and drawing (1984). Sverre Fehn, architect.

Also in the World House, each space consists of the sum of a series of focal points, each of which responding to a specific ritual moment in each religion. In the Jewish space, we find the Aron Hakodesh or Sacred Ark, in which the Sifrei Torah or Torah Scrolls are kept; the Bimah or dais, where the Torah rests during its reading; the Amud or Teiva, attached to the Aron Hakodesh, the lectern from where the Chazan leads the prayers. A Ner Tamid is also contemplated, a permanently lit light in front of the Aron Hakodesh. And towards the center of the space, there is a Mikveh for ritual baths. In the Christian space, there is an altar for liturgical celebrations, an area for the ambo, a place for preaching and a tabernacle for the Eucharistic reservation, as main elements, and there is also a baptismal font away from the wall and close to the Mikveh. Finally, in the Muslim area, the Mihrab

has been integrated into the wall, understood as a Kibla, a Minbar or pulpit where the Imam climbs for deliver sermons, and the Sabil or ablutions fountain, next to the Mikvé and the baptismal font. The building integrates the functions of the Bell Tower or Minaret by absorbing its functions into the volume of the cube.



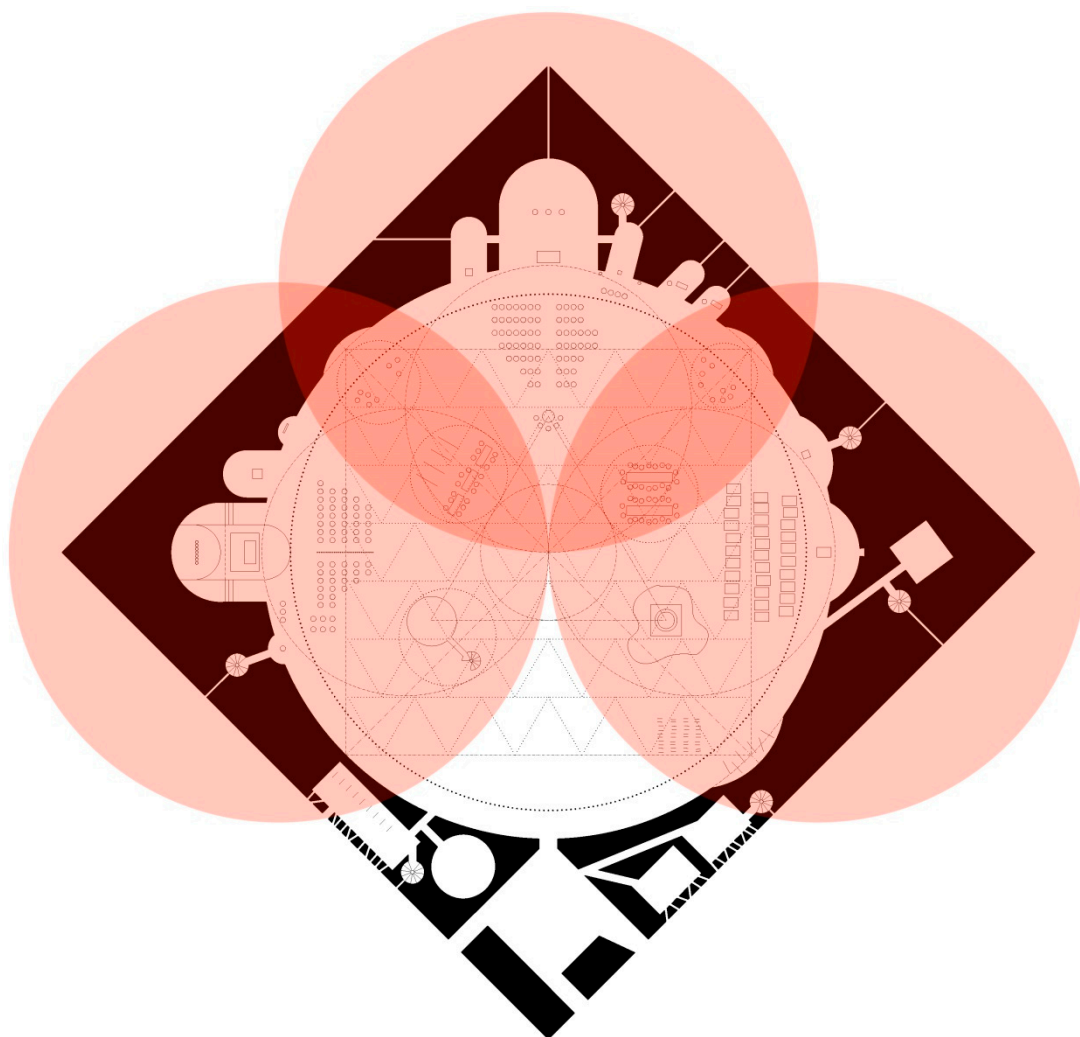
**Figure 13.** Photo of the interior and sketch of Church of Santa Ana (1965). Miguel Fisac, architect.

This decision is a declaration of not wishing to renounce anything from the respective rituals, understood as measured deviations of a tradition involving varying concerns. But the action of them all orienting outwards into a common space can be understood as an invitation to all people—whether their own or others—to join together (Figure 14). There is an element of unveiling and also of offering in this shared radial geometry, as each and every one of the cavities carved into the common building mass can be seen from any point on the interior surface. In fact, the nature of the scratch created by each of these chapels—if we call them that—expresses the immanent condition of our prayers, while the shared volume acts as a reminder of the unity and transcendence of the divinity invoked.

In this decision to scratch the shared surface of the great volume, there is something symbolic, a representative feature of the common goal of addressing God, a concern sown in all believers' hearts by the same Creator they have in common.

The placement of the respective areas of each religion in the interior of the space is materialized according to the traditional orientation of the different confessions. As is known, the apse of the Christian churches is traditionally oriented towards the east.

*“Christians look toward the east, the rising sun. This is not a case of Christians worshipping the sun but of the cosmos speaking of Christ. The song of the sun in Psalm 19(18) is interpreted as a song about Christ when it says, ‘[The sun] is coming forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber. . . Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them’” (Ratzinger 2007).*

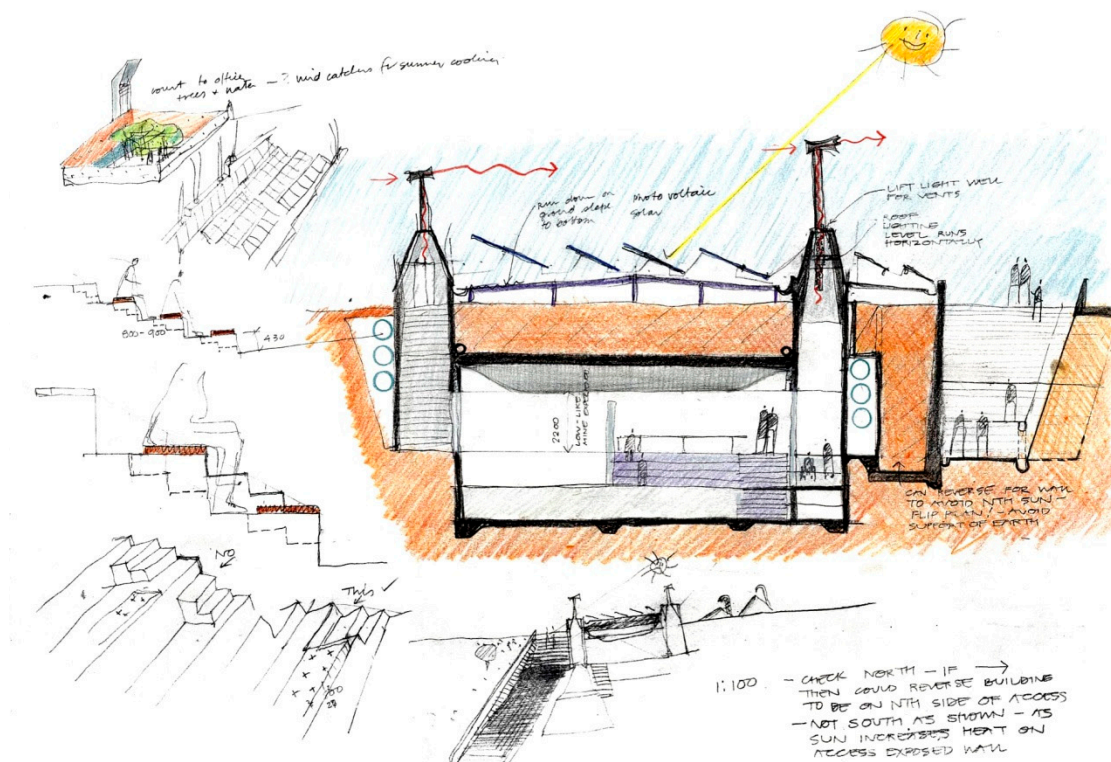


**Figure 14.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Ritual focus.

Of the other religions included in the project, Islam prescribes the orientation of the Kibla towards the city of Mecca, while the Jewish one orients its head towards Jerusalem. This approach involved certain degree of abstraction, and each space is at an equal distance from the other two and also from the entrance, using two perpendicular diameters that connect these spaces in pairs, without preference for one over the others. While any criteria could be used for the placement of the areas, a criterion of antiquity of the religions has been adopted, something like a temporal evolution, a historical journey, arranging the Jewish area immediately at the entrance, the Christian area next and the Muslim area closing the circle.

This topic of orientation involves new learning. The general space in which architecture unfolds—our planet—can be considered as a stage in which certain fixed laws operate: there is gravity, but also orientation. As architecture is an action, a reality connected to a specific place, we should attend to its particular conditions.

The Australian architect Glenn Murcutt has left us the legacy of his commitment to this reality, which led him to accept only those assignments where he could personally experience the conditions, often inhabiting those places himself before designing his projects: the sunrises, sunsets, prevailing winds and with them, the smells, the passing of the seasons, the views and all types of presences. With this example, we want to insist on the need to pay attention to the environment—also, what could be called cosmic environment—in which the architecture is based: in our case, the World House (Figure 15).



**Figure 15.** Sketch. The Australian Opal Centre (2017). Glenn Murcutt, architect.

The Spanish architect Javier Carvajal addressed this condition, although to point out what some would call a return journey, a second reflection. The elderly professor pointed out to his students with his characteristic vehemence (Beltrán-Bernal and Vicensy-Hualde 2006):

*“We have been told that our designs should face south, that we should open houses up to hygiene, light, the sun. Fine. One day, a cherry tree comes into blossom to the north...someone opens a window to contemplate it...and the project design begins”.* (Figure 16).



**Figure 16.** Javier Carvajal and a view of Carvajal House (Madrid, 1968). Javier Carvajal, architect.

What has just been described does not conflict with attending to the setting, but quite the opposite, in fact. It is a call to keep our eyes open, to stay alert. The great stage is there, but it displays a richness and an extraordinary complexity that are not always easy to fathom. We need to convert our offices, our places—and our classrooms too—into arenas to train our perception.

In this regard, it is worth recalling a specific scene from the film “The Girl with the Pearl Earring” by Peter Webber, based on the novel by Tracy Chevalier and inspired by the painting of the same name by the great Flemish painter Johannes Vermeer. In the scene, the maid—played by the actress Scarlett Johansson—tries to understand the master she indirectly works for. And at a certain moment, in the course of a conversation between them, in a fit of impatience, the master opens a leaded window and, pointing to the sky, asks the girl what color it is. The young girl, upset by the artist’s anger, replies that it is blue, which is the conventional opinion on this topic. But Vermeer keeps the window open and leaves the question in the air, which forces the female character to raise her head...and to look! She then becomes fascinated by the exercise and begins to name all the colors she can see: blue, green, orange, grey... It is a glorious and emotional moment that captures the capacity that each person has, to a greater or lesser extent, although we have not kept it in tune, it seems, since at least the 17th century (Figure 17).



**Figure 17.** Stills from the film *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (2003). Peter Weber, director.

It means learning to look, using our own perspective to produce statements that answer our questions, or, even better, learning to ask the questions that we need to answer.

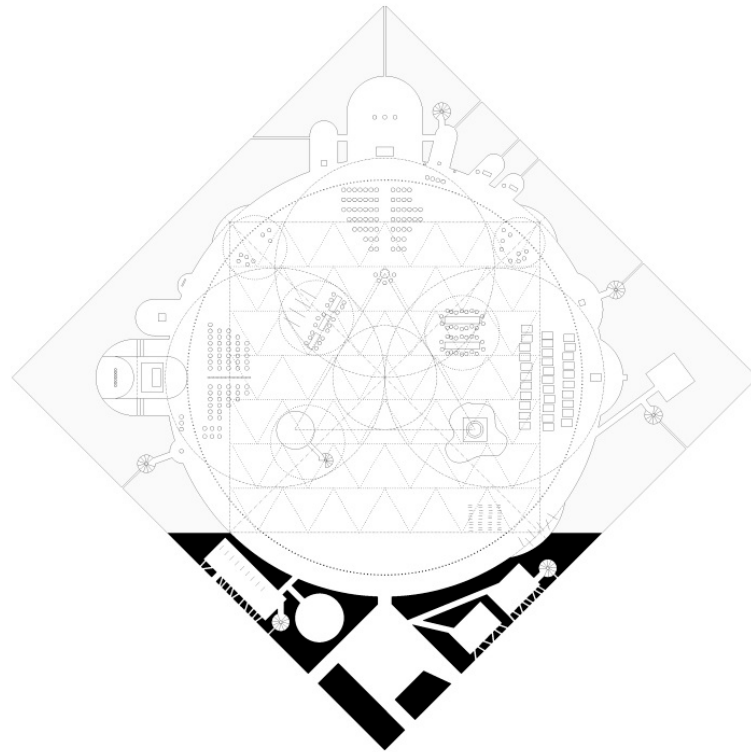
This is a reflection of the wisdom of ancient peoples who have learned to read nature, the heavens and the stars, and the natural cycles, the habits of animals and people. All this is right in front of us but, usually, the increasingly accelerated pace of our lives and our scientific arrogance prevent us from seeing it.

Let us return to the World House project and begin at the beginning: the entrance. It has been designed as a single, shared entrance to encourage meeting and awareness of the fact that those who come enter a common space. It is, however, a bent entrance in which the interior is not visible from the outside. It involves taking the decision to go inside in order to participate in the experience of the shared space (Figure 18).

This game of discovering the inner space intends to reproduce the games created by some of the masters in architectural history, such as the great seventeenth-century architect Francesco Borromini, who manipulated the entrances to his spaces—perhaps less magnificent than those of his contemporaries who worked for wealthier clients—and managed to control the impression that his architecture caused on those who visited it.

It is the game of the Baroque, with which our time has a certain familiarity. At this point, at the beginning of the 21st century, we are heirs of modernity, the movement that sought to objectify architecture a century ago. But we are also heirs of other movements that have tinged our intentions, such as the Baroque that sought to manipulate the observer and

his senses. We demand authenticity and objectivity, but we take pleasure in imagining the impressions and effects produced by our architecture. Part of this richness was studied and explained to our time by Robert Venturi in his famous book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (Venturi 1966).



**Figure 18.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Detail of the entrance.

To insist on this phenomenological approach to architecture, we can turn to the teachings of the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. The atmospheres he describes are not the result of a literal interpretation of a clearly defined geometry, but rather a diverse, dense experience—even unexpected, casual and so often unplanned. It could be the contrast—a paradox—between order and surprise: the rational and the irrational in architecture. Zumthor himself explains it as follows in gnoseological terms:<sup>5</sup>

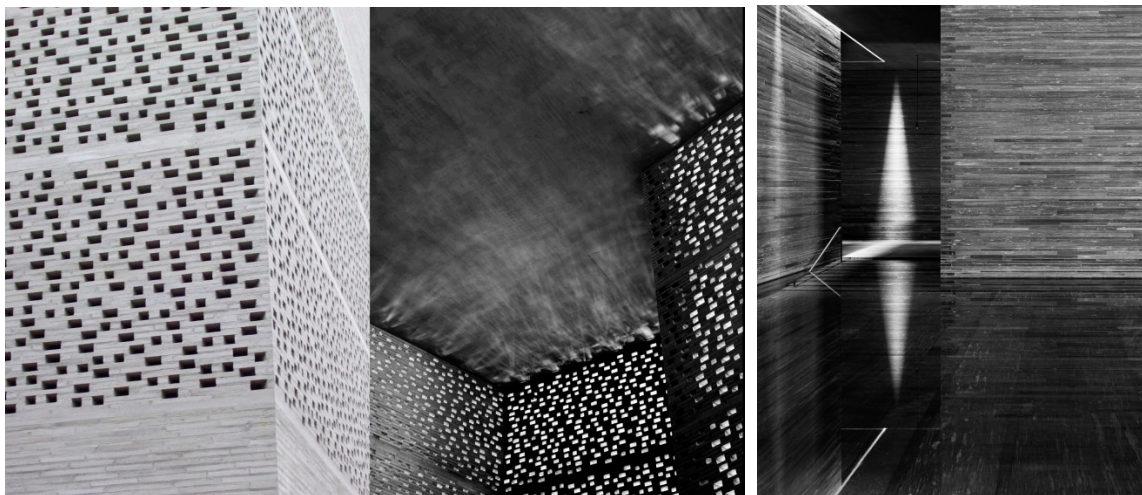
*“We perceive atmosphere through our emotional sensibility—a form of perception that works in credibly quickly and which we humans evidently need to help us survive. Not every situation grants us time to make up our minds on whether or not we like something or whether indeed we might be better heading off in the opposite direction. Something inside us tells us an enormous amount straight away. We are capable of immediate appreciation, of a spontaneous emotional response, of rejecting things in a flash (. . .).*

*A question. A question I put to myself as an architect. I wonder: what is this [Magic of the Real]—Cafe at a students’ hostel, a thirties picture by Baumgartner. Men, just sitting around—and they’re enjoying themselves too. And I ask myself: can I achieve that as an architect—an atmosphere like that, its intensity, its mood. And if so, how do I go about it? And then I think: yes, you can. And I think: no you can’t” (Zumthor 2006)<sup>6</sup> (Figure 19).*



**Figure 19.** Student hall of residence in Clausiusstrasse (1936). Hans Baumgartner, photographer.

This effect, or rather, this acknowledgement of the complexity of experiencing space, contrasts with the previously mentioned desire for objectivity. Admittedly, architecture can be designed in one piece, but the experience of it is diverse and changes according to the different lights over a day or a year, but also to our own internal lights, that is, our moods, circumstances or attitudes. This reality does not refer to relativism, but rather to complexity. Things are what they are, but our perception of them is constantly changing. Our times are more in line with Heraclitus than Parmenides. This is a swing of the pendulum and, in the light of that longed-for objectivity sought by the modern orthodoxy of the avant-garde, which we see today as both heroic and naïve, these days, we are ruled by fascination with change, by the vibrations transmitted by space, which never stays the same (Figure 20).



**Figure 20.** Kolumba Museum in Cologne (Germany, 2007) and Thermal Baths in Vals (Switzerland, 1993). Peter Zumthor, architect.

Finally, when a person steps into the interior of the World House project, they will get the impression of a common space, without any corners, made of a single material—ceramic brickwork that conveys warmth and unity—in which the specific aspects of each religion, whilst recognizable, will be subordinate to the unifying dimension and character of the space that is bathed in the shared, zenithal light.

The arrangement of the material, brick—although it could also be the layered stone used by Peter Zumthor in, for example, the Therme Vals complex, or other materials with similar qualities—which is constrained, as if it were trapped by its own heaviness in a sequence of countless rows, conveys its weight and, at the same time, gravity. The vibration that is characteristic of brick walls also contributes to make us aware of the pressure that gravity exerts on the material. The cylindrical geometry is defined by the endless vectors that point to the verticality of the weight, that constant on the stage where the architects work, which keeps us on the surface of the Earth.

This phenomenology of the material leads us to the enormous flow of energy that architectural construction sets in motion. It makes us aware of the overwhelming extent that, against all odds, has become the focus of attention for artists such as the Aragonese Lara Almarcegui, who, for certain buildings, has achieved her aim of quantifying the measurement—weights—of their components or has displayed them as mere piles of inert matter (Almarcegui 2013) (Figure 21).



**Figure 21.** Construction Materials (2010). Lara Almarcegui, artist.

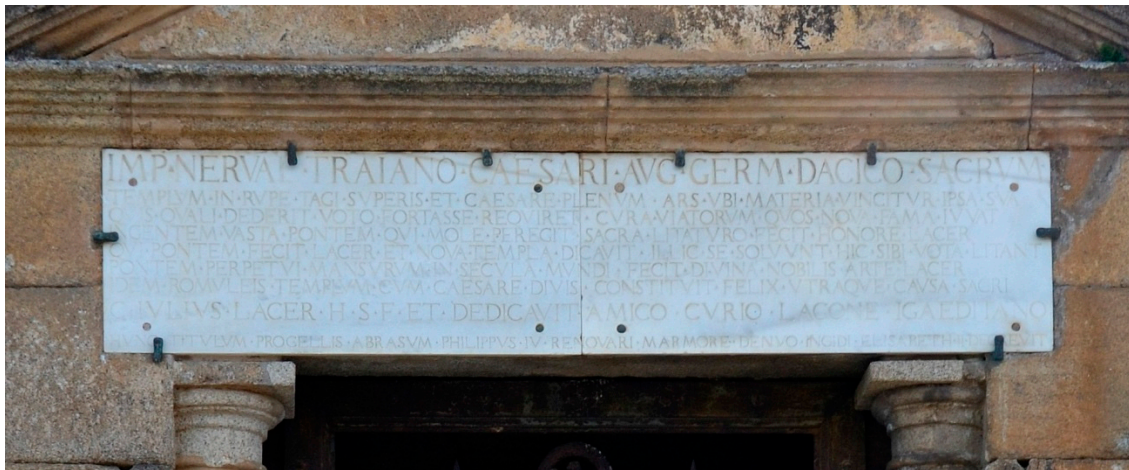
In turn, this experience of weight is inextricably linked to our own corporality. Our body is heavy, but it does not collapse under this weight: numerous internal forces keep it upright with respect to the horizon, separating itself from rawer nature and also distancing itself from its surroundings through its awareness of space, of the forces that may influence it.

Nature cannot rebel against the force of gravity. But humankind can. Architecture is not just an expression of this rebellion. Behind all human attempts to inhabit the world, to live in, look at and think of the world as a built universe, behind the transformations that architecture effects in living arrangements, we find this rebellion against gravity.

For Louis I. Kahn, “man through his consciousness senses inside of himself all the laws of nature” (Wurhman 1986; Kahn 1969). But, at the same time, he admits that there is an essential difference between humankind and nature, which is the difference between the conscious and the unconscious. From that conscious force of humankind, from that inspiration, this irrepressible desire for expression, arises architecture, as “nature does not

build a house, nature does not make a locomotive, nature does not make a playground. They grow out of a desire to express” (Kahn 1986).

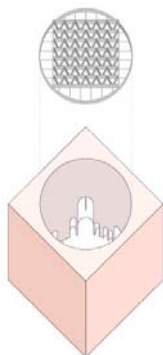
Hence the inscription on the Alcántara Bridge on the River Tagus—by the Roman architect Caius Julius Lacer—which anticipated the American master’s statement by almost 20 centuries and reads, “Ars ubi materia vincitur ipsa sua” (Art in which matter overcomes itself) (Figure 22).



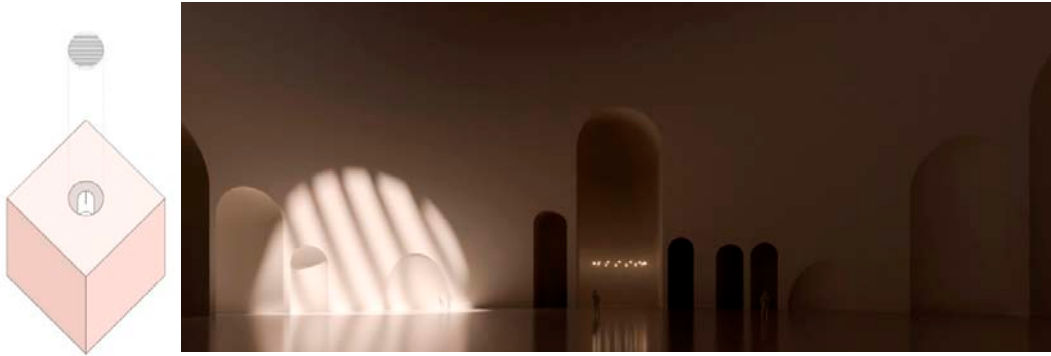
**Figure 22.** Inscription on the Alcántara Bridge (Extremadura-Spain, 103–104). Caius Julius Lacer, architect.

This annotation reveals the condition of architecture, its very nature, in a manner of speaking. It suggests overcoming the raw state of the material to subject it to a new law that, without flouting the laws of nature, uses it to benefit human desires, ambitions and dreams, a new order that takes the material to a higher level by means of a will endowed with intelligence. It could be said that it is the human who lends their ingenuity to materials so as to construct, by using their most secret and distinctive properties and making them work together, a new type of nature, a habitat that is artificial but tailored to human beings. The more beautiful it is, the more architectural it becomes.

The nature of the roof in the World House project—in principle inaccessible to ordinary users—would be different from the walls. The initial solution was based on a more complex design, as befits its structural character, with sunlight and starlight permanently shining through it. However, this configuration produced an excess of light. Only once the “right light”—to use the inspired expression coined by the architect Rafael de La Hoz Arderius—had been determined, could the necessary atmosphere for the project be created: a single beam of light, moving slowly but constantly, which only a keen eye can detect and which creates a new gleam and a myriad hues where it comes into contact with the ordered materiality (Figure 23).



**Figure 23.** Cont.



**Figure 23.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Studies of natural light.

A similar strategy was devised as part of a project designed with the visual artist Javier Viver for an ephemeral chapel at the Feast of the Holy Family in Madrid (2012). On that occasion, the novelty of a mobile altarpiece was introduced by using a projection on a hemispherical cinema screen. However, this movement was imperceptible—just like the passing of time in the hands of a clock—a movement that imitated the solar cycle—from dawn to dusk and the passing of night until a new dawn—in barely seven minutes (Figure 24).

In the new space, and despite several small openings for natural light in the wall—in the style of medieval loopholes—and points of artificial light at chosen spots in each religion’s space, the illumination for the complex depends on the roof and, therefore, so to speak, it breaks upon us:

*“(.. .) Because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those sit in darkness and death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace”.* (Canticle of Zechariah, “Benedictus”, Lc 1)

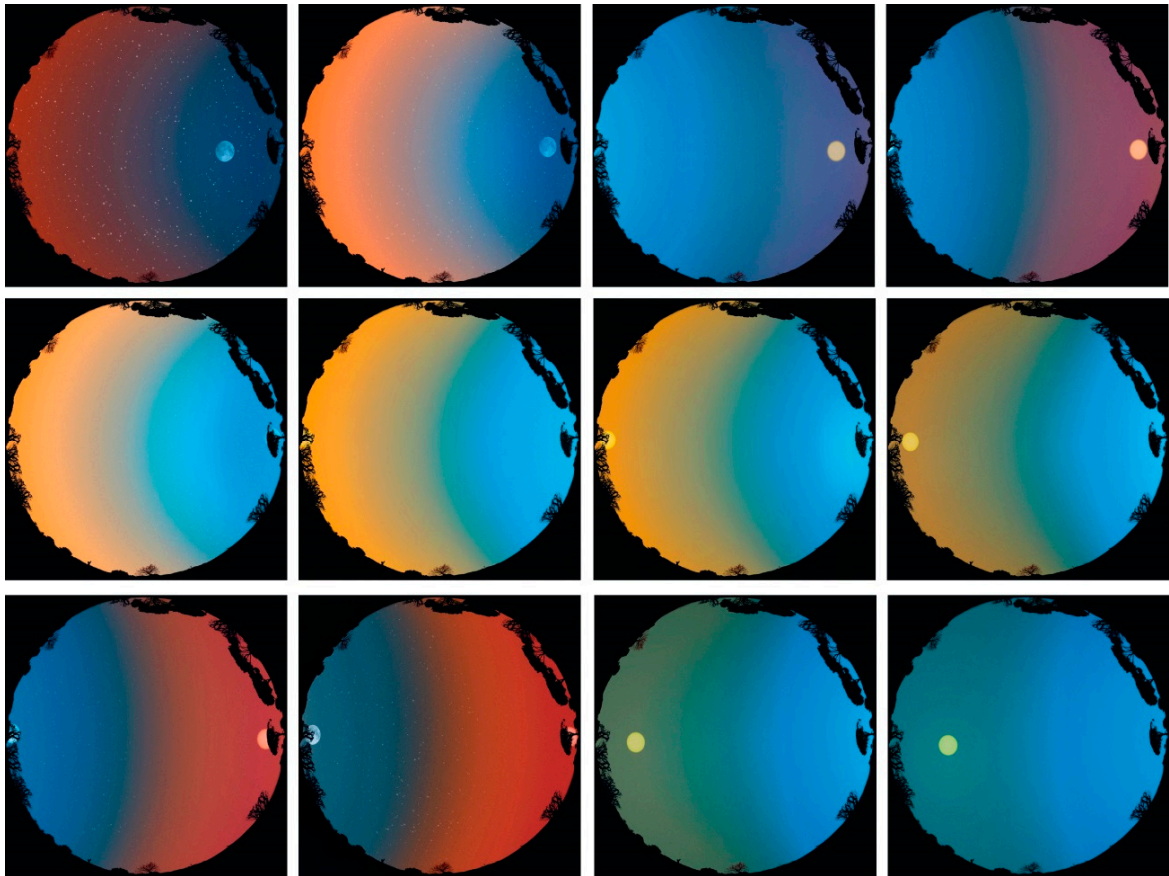
This contrast between matter—ordered but raw—and the changing light of days and seasons recalls the words of Professor Alberto Campo Baeza, who has been asserting the prevalence of light as a construction material for decades (Campo Baeza 1996):

*“Light, material but always in movement, is precisely the only one capable of making the spaces formed by the shapes built with gravid material float, levitate. It makes gravity fly, disappear. It defeats it. The unbearable heaviness of inevitable and indispensable matter can only be overcome by Light.*

*The imposing mass of the Pantheon, whose ideal spherical shape makes clear the overwhelming power of this space, rises in ineffable movement as if it were levitation under the spell of the sun that pierces the magnificent oculus. Light overcoming Gravity summons sublime Beauty”.*<sup>7</sup> (Figure 25)

This is also the case with the World House project. Light would activate the space by producing ever-changing atmospheres, constantly presenting the users with fresh experiences. This game of light is one of the constants in sacred architecture throughout history, strategies to represent the one known as “Light from Light”.<sup>8</sup>

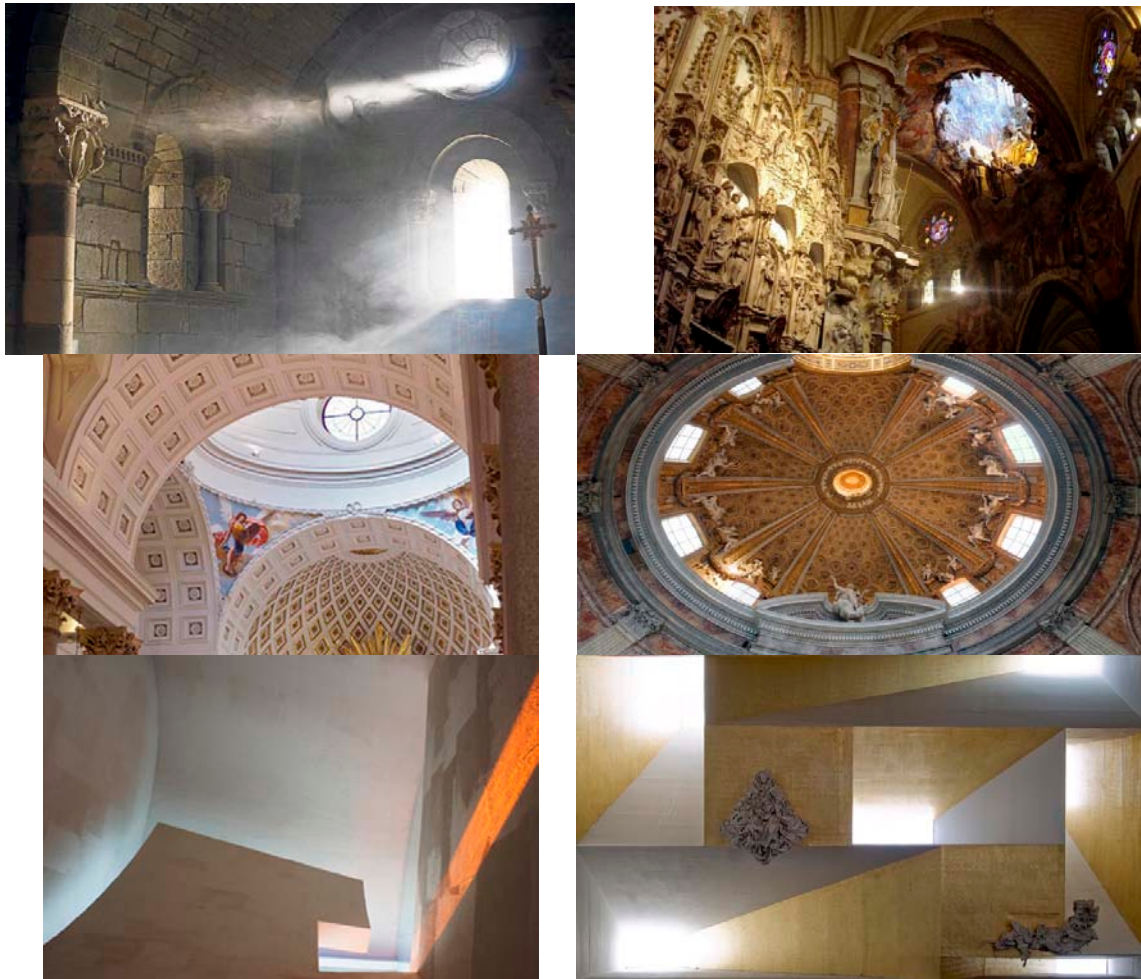
At this point, we should make an excursus on the specific issue of illumination as a characteristic resource in sacred architecture: from Romanesque constructors to Narciso Tomé,<sup>9</sup> from Juan de Villanueva to Steven Holl, from Gian Lorenzo Bernini to Ignacio Vicens (Figure 26).



**Figure 24.** Interior and stills from the projection in the chapel for the Family Festival (Madrid, 2012). Eduardo Delgado Orusco, architect, and Javier Viver, artist.

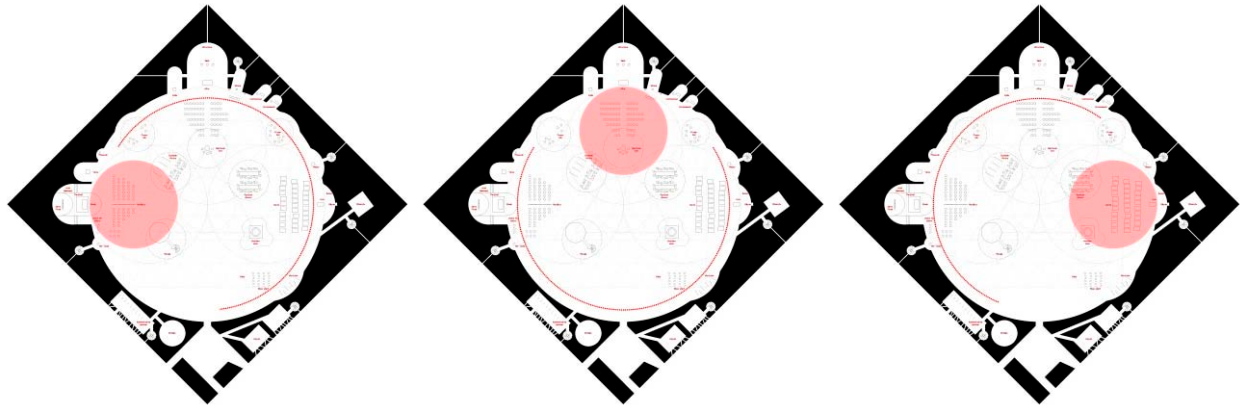


**Figure 25.** Interiors of the Pantheon (Rome, c. 126) and Caja Granada (Granada, 2001). Alberto Campo Baeza, architect.



**Figure 26.** Church of Santa Marta de Tera, (Zamora-Spain, s. XI). The Transparente in the Cathedral of Toledo (1720–1734). Francisco Tomé, architect. Royal Oratory of Caballero de Gracia (Madrid, 1782–1795). Juan de Villanueva, architect. Dome of the Church of Saint Andrew at the Quirinal (Roma, 1658–1670). Gian Lorenzo Bernini, architect. University Chapel of San Ignacio (Seattle, 1994–1997). Steven Holl, architect. Parish Church in Rivas (Madrid, 2008). Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos, architects.

The arrangement of the ritual spaces as recesses in the inner perimeter of the volume—or scratches as they were termed earlier—allows for the inclusion of a type of drape at a certain distance from the wall that can be used to temporarily conceal, if necessary, the spaces for each religion, perhaps to avoid simultaneous celebrations. It is also a subtle way to avoid overlapping conflicts. The distance of the drape from the wall would also create a sort of ambulatory around the perimeter (Figure 27).



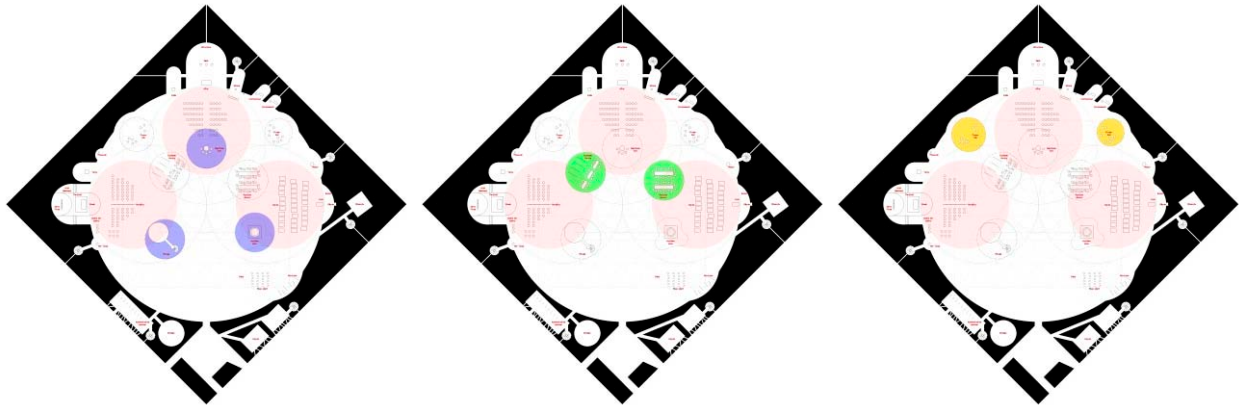
**Figure 27.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Diagrams of position of drapes for the multi-faith space.

In any case, and apart from the more specifically ritual spaces, the intention has been to create other, strategically located spaces that are associated with each of the religions but could also act as an invitation to the faithful of other confessions, such as the Genizah, or Jewish library, which contains the origin of the common history of the three great Abrahamic religions, or another, more festive meeting space, linked to the Muslim suppers held during Ramadan (Figure 28).

Again, it is intended as a kind invitation to shared cultural events or even festive moments within one’s own traditions.

Other possible spaces for encounters would be the areas related to water, which have different nuances in each religion but share a common character: the Jewish Mikveh and the Muslim Sabil, both oriented to ablutions or purification baths, together with the Baptismal font, which has an initiatory function for Christians, are part of a somewhat healing program. These three spaces are close to the geometric center of the ground plan, once again with the aim of achieving a rapprochement between practices that are profoundly human and, therefore, common to all (Figure 28).

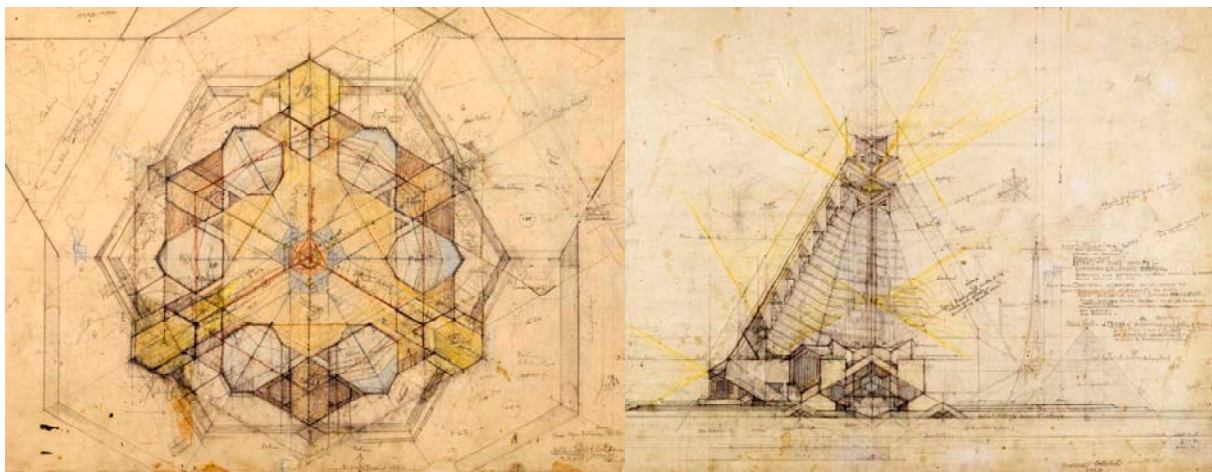
Finally, open areas have also been considered for shared prayer, halfway between the spaces dedicated more specifically to each religion, to provide proximity and create new openings in the walls to shelter and accompany the worshippers. They are shared spaces between the ritual aspect and the innermost desires of the faithful—the possible participants in shared prayer. These spaces also open onto a large common area and will plant the seed for the hoped-for, even dreamed-of, shared liturgy (Figure 28).



**Figure 28.** Multi-Confessional Space Project for our “World House” (2022). Diagrams of the spaces involving water (baptismal font, Mikveh and Sabil), Genizah (Jewish library) and area for Ramadan suppers, and spaces for shared prayer.

There are not many precedents for this willingness to share that, if we forget old quarrels and hostilities, seems elemental. This idea of coexistence and respect is relatively recent and has hardly been put to the test, not even as a project. An exception in the modern tradition would be Frank Lloyd Wright’s proposal in 1926 of the “Steel Cathedral” in New York City for William Guthrie, the rector of the Episcopal church of St. Marks-in-the-Bowery. In his project, Wright linked all religions around a large space of light. Each of them looked out onto a kind of balcony, sharing this axis mundi, a beautiful proposal of 756 feet high topped with a bell tower (Figure 29).

*“This approach was used by Wright to achieve a design that integrated all faith symbols and details into one holistic project. In addition, this approach linked the building with its surroundings and merged the interior and exterior of the structure into one Project”.*  
(Geva 2012)



**Figure 29.** “Steel Cathedral” (New York, 1926). Frank Lloyd Wright, architect.

Another project that can be remembered here, proposed as an operational reality—and currently under construction in the city of Berlin—is known as “The House of One”. This project proposes three temples—a synagogue, a church and a mosque—isolated from one another and only connected by a large, external space that all three share, under the motto, “Three religions. One house. Four rooms” (House of One). The initiative dates from 2001, in the heart of the Protestant community of St. Petri-St. Marien, which was joined by Berlin’s Jewish community, the rabbinical seminary Abraham-Geiger-Kolleg and the

Muslim initiative for interreligious dialogue Forum Dialog e.V. In 2012, the project was opened up to an international architectural competition that was won by the Berlin-based architectural studio Kuehn Malvezzi, founded by Simona Malvezzi, Wilfried Kuehn and Johannes Kuehn (Figure 30).



**Figure 30.** “The House of One” (Berlin, 2012). Simona Malvezzi, Wilfried Kuehn and Johannes Kuehn, architects.

Pastor Gregor Hohberg—who leads the initiative along with Rabbi Andreas Nachama and Imam Kadir Sancı—described it in the following terms (Hohberg and Stolte 2014):

*“This square, where the city first came into existence and where its first church stood, is now to be home to the future. From the foundations of the old churches will grow a new place of worship, one that will allow people of different faiths to pray side by side. The people who come here will remain true to their own religion, continue to draw from its power, and engage in peaceable dialogue with one another and with members of the city’s secular population. This house will be home to equality, peace, and reconciliation”.*

And, although these initiatives are still a minority, it is safe to say that this sensitivity is part of the spirit of our time, and we should expect to see it grow. It could be summarized as the determination to overcome differences in order to find common ground. Poetically, it would be the desire to build bridges that connect by going beyond the walls constructed in the past.<sup>10</sup>

A novel example that makes this dream a reality would be the “Tri-Faith” project in Omaha (Tri-Faith Initiative), an initiative that does not seek a renouncement, rather the opposite, in fact. This complex brings together a synagogue, a church, a mosque and an interfaith center on 38 acres in the heart of the American Midwest. The desire to be a better believer of your own faith while respecting and appreciating the others is beautiful and the right approach. These three examples—the steel cathedral in New York, the “house of one” in Berlin and the “Tri-Faith” project in Omaha, Nebraska—speak of a common yearning for peaceful coexistence. A coexistence born of knowing that we are creatures of the same God. So does the “World House”, although this project brings the novelty of a shared space, a common space with changing orientations, understood as an operative invitation to this common prayer. This is undoubtedly a bold but necessary step.

It would be a center focusing on the worship of, and prayer to, one single God, a building touched by holiness and by mystery, where individual concerns dissolve in the face of the common calling to come before the one God. It is respect that issues this

call, and we are in no doubt that this demonstration of coexistence would illuminate the whole world.

The geometry chosen, a circular ground plan, would admit the inclusion of other religions without distorting the configuration. In fact, the initial proposal of these three religions is not intended to be exclusive or restrictive, quite the opposite. The greatest ambition of this idea, of this project, would be to include as many religions as possible, always in an atmosphere of respect, genuine interest and trust. This expansion would require an increasingly large space precisely to maintain a respectful distance between the different spaces (Figure 31).

Not long ago, in a conversation with Professor Juan Herreros, I heard him talk about the extent to which the situation is changing in all areas—social, cultural, economic, et cetera—and raised the question of what we, as architects, can do, what we should do, so that our work, architecture, does not become irrelevant. This is the aim of this project, to respond to and help build a world that is possible but that has not become a reality yet, a reality that Humanity has always dreamed of, at least humans of good faith, conceived by architecture but transcending it.

As a crowning touch, the following is a summary of the objectives and intentions of our World House. This is the report that accompanied the ideation and the first presentation of this project:

*The project is posed as a longing, a utopia if you want.*

*But it can also be read as the consequence of understanding that the three great monotheistic religions pray to the same God. The project proposes the desirable approach of the faithful through the experience of the same common space, capable, broad, open and where it is possible to share experiences and celebrations.*

*An analogous project has already been rehearsed in the city of Berlin, “The House of One”. In that case the three temples were affirmed—synagogue, church and mosque—isolated from each other and only united by a large common space but external to the three.*

*Our proposal goes further: one God, one space. This project needs to overcome fears, develop trusts, give up rules, dream a common prayer that will be received by that one God.*

*The space—the project—is presented with a clear geometry and full of symbolism. Its sacred character—that is, segregated from the mundane and offered to God—is represented with a compact and ideal architecture. The access threshold is unique and broken, a preparation. The interior is tremendously bright, with a light coming from Heaven through a unique skylight, which takes advantage of geometric conditions, to offer its own lighting—although at the same time shared—to each of the areas of the complex. Each religion has its specific spaces within a particular area but not closed.*

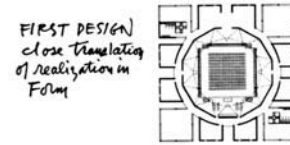
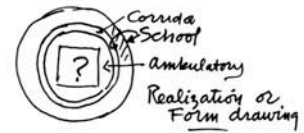
*Those spaces are carved into the wall but open to the common space in a kind of invitation. The material element—the building—is understood as the institution; the interior space is the life of human beings. The more to the center, the more human, the more common.<sup>11</sup>*

*However, there is also a textile limit, a kind of curtain, three meters away from the interior wall that will allow the perimeter, all of it or certain sensitive areas, to be veiled at will. The corridor formed would function as a private ambulatory if necessary.*

*Possible affinities have been studied in the unfolding of the spheres of each religion: water—purifier for Jews, initiatory for Christians, cleanser for Muslims—forms a common sphere—a liquid triangle—in the center of the space. Invitations that are not necessarily ritual are also displayed, such as Ramadan dinners or the Jewish library that keeps a common history.*



- 01. Alberto Campo Baeza's drawing rereading Utzon: *think with the hands*.
- 02. Louis I. Kahn's sketch "Not a design".
- 03. Simplified Copernicus heliocentric system. Extract from *De revolutionibus*.
- 04. Architectural drawing by Louis I. Kahn: plan of the First Unitarian Church, Rochester.



04

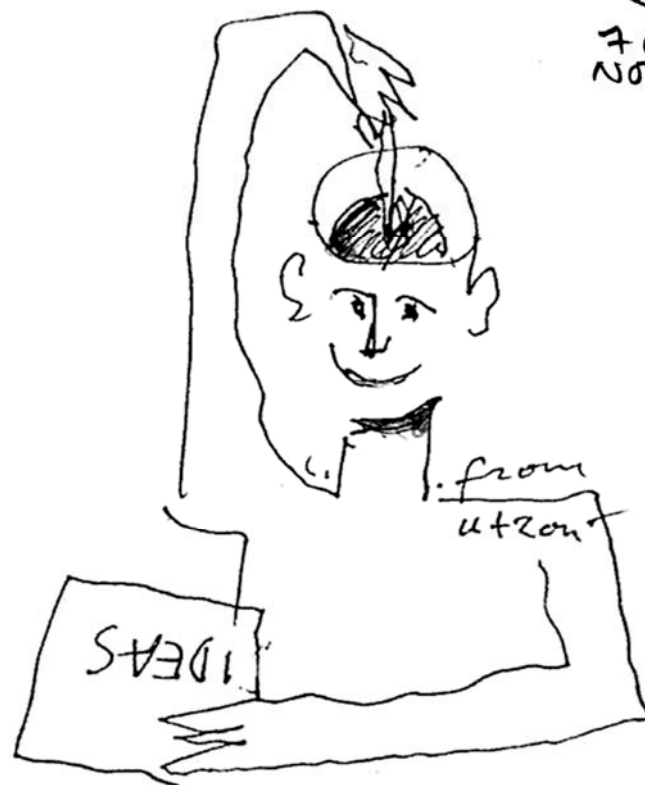


03



Form Drawing,  
NOT A DESIGN

02



01

Figure 32. Multi-Confessional Space Project for our "World House" (2022). Original panel 1.

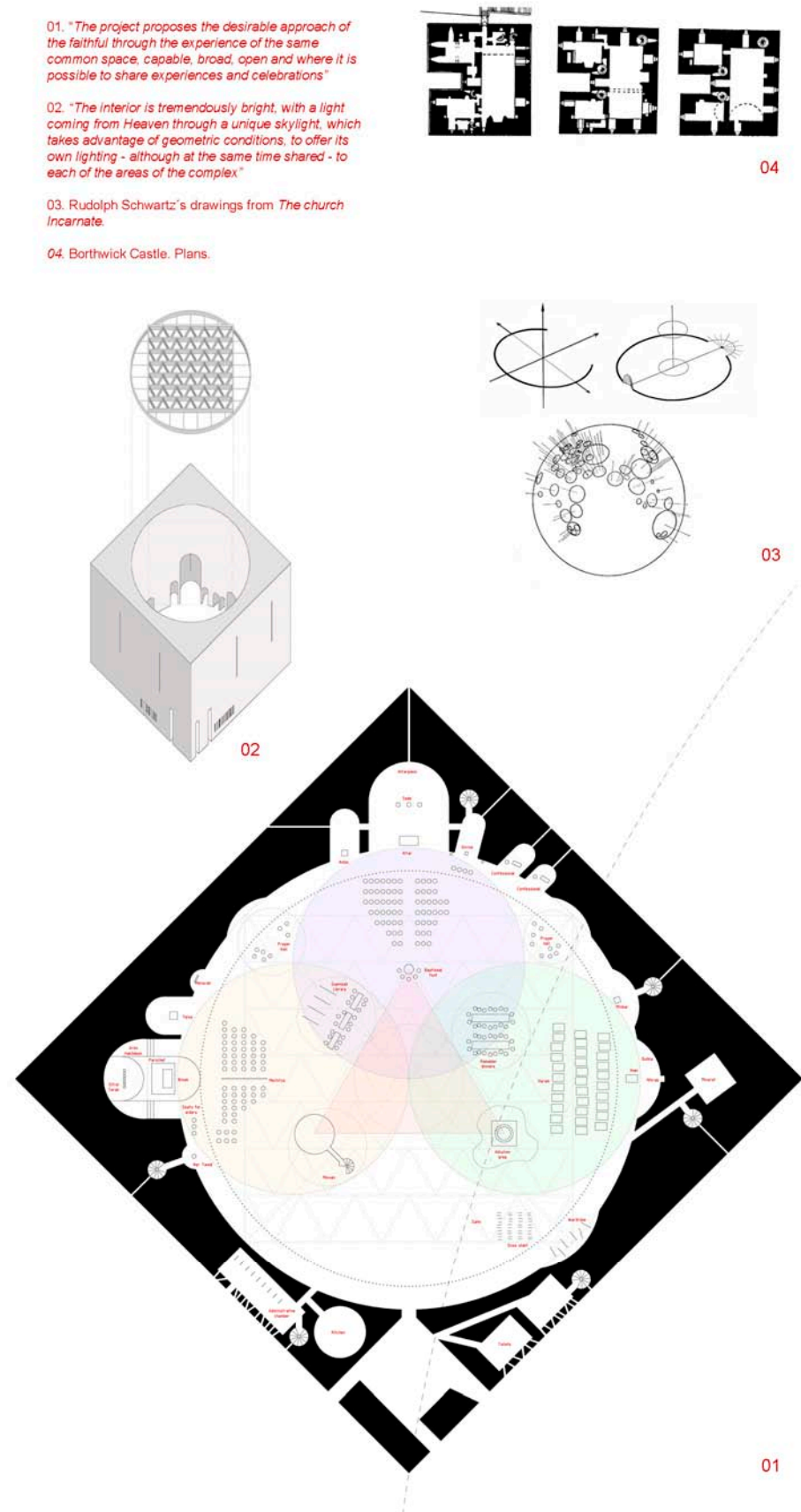
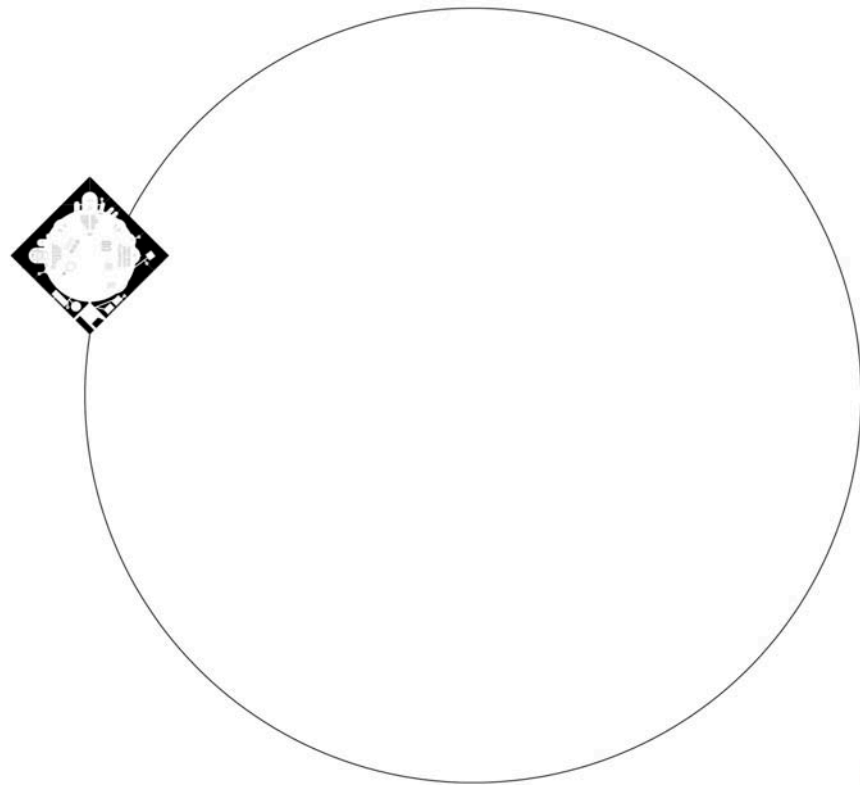


Figure 33. Multi-Confessional Space Project for our "World House" (2022). Original panel 2.



02

01. Camille Flammarion (1892), *La Planete Mars et ses conditions d' habitabilite.*

02. "The volume of the set is located on the perimeter of a large garden - Paradise - which serves as a threshold and as a door"



01

Figure 34. Multi-Confessional Space Project for our "World House" (2022). Original panel 3.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- 1 To understand this hermetic text more fully, it may be helpful to consult. (Taylor 1967).
- 2 With this observation, Professor Campo refers to the fact that the circle dominates the geometry of at least three of the seven projects contained in this publication—the extension to the San Pedro Regalado Monastery in La Aguilera for the Iesu Communio religious community (Burgos, 2008–2011), the proposal for a cemetery and public park in Yebe (Guadalajara, 2009) and the Eucharistic chapel for the Feast of the Holy Family (Madrid, 2012). This design could also be assigned, although undoubtedly to a lesser extent, to the oratory for a retreat center in Parquelagos (Madrid, 2000).
- 3 Ersilia is one of the “Invisible Cities” described by Italo Calvino in his book of the same name. It is a city characterized by the action of its inhabitants: “In Ersilia, in order to establish the relationships that govern the life of the city, the inhabitants lay threads between the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or whitish-black according to indicate relationships of kinship, exchange, authority, representation”. (Calvino 1983)
- 4 The reform promoted by the Council in this field, contained in the [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy “Sacrosanctum Concilium” \(1963\)](#), could be considered to be the most radical and far-reaching in the entire existence of the Catholic Church over twenty centuries, which, along with the technical development of construction science, explains the profound transformation of space in temples during the second half of the twentieth century.
- 5 It is certainly no coincidence that the always well-informed Rafael Moneo entitled his article in the journal *Arquitectura*, “A la conquista de lo irracional” (Mastering the irrational); in it, he aimed to explain the search for new work paradigms in the mid-1960s (Moneo 1966).
- 6 The bold type used in the original publication to highlight the keywords in the explanation is preserved.
- 7 Text read at the Symposium dedicated to Alvar Aalto held in Jyväskylä (Finland). Professor Campo ends this text with an observation related to materials: “And it is curious, or not so curious, that the two technological inventions that have made the revolution in Architecture possible are directly related to Light and Gravity: flat glass in large dimensions and steel alone or reinforcing concrete”. (Pirkko 1995).
- 8 The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the dogmatic declaration promulgated by the First Council of Nicea (325) and enlarged by the Council of Constantinople (381), which sought to define Christian faith, in particular relating to the divine nature of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. ([Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed \(325\) n.d.](#))
- 9 Baroque architect responsible for the marvelous Baroque “Transparente”, a kind of skylight in the Gothic chevet in the cathedral of Toledo.
- 10 The “House of One” initiative shared its values at a Conference of Multireligious Houses held in November 2020, as a first step towards creating a worldwide network of multireligious institutions. The first institutions to join were from German-speaking countries: the House of Religions–Dialogue of Cultures in Bern (Switzerland); the House of Religions in Hannover (Germany); the Campus of Religions in Vienna (Austria); the House of Cultures and Religions in Munich (Germany); the planned House of Multiple Religions in Wilhelmshaven (Germany); and, although it is in Georgia, the Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi.
- 11 “The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle), that the use of the wheel depends. Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. (...) Therefore, what has a (positive) existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for (actual) usefulness”. (Lao Tse n.d.)

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