

The Church of Notre-Dame-de-Fatima of Jonquière

A modern style inspired by Amerindian tradition



Aerial view
Photo : François Brault

An architectural renewal

During the course of the 20th century an entirely new style of architecture has appeared in Québec, as elsewhere in the world. In Québec, one of the principal fields for the development of modernism has been religious architecture. It has also been the subject of numerous debates. A new wave of thinking in the nineteen-twenties led to this change. Those who followed this way of thinking were strongly influenced by French rationalism and denounced anything which was false or imitative of the architectural styles of previous centuries.

Instead they favoured the functional quality of buildings. This preoccupation with function gave rise to a new language in architectural forms which laid more emphasis on the structural than on the artistic qualities of the building.

Towards the end of the nineteen-forties, an important debate allowed religious architecture to take a new direction. It was however in the nineteen-sixties that religious architecture evolved quite dramatically as a result of the liturgical and other reforms brought about by The Second Vatican Council. This important event in religious history which aimed to 'update' the ideology of the Church, also ushered in a time of reformation in architectural styles which once again gave to architects the opportunity to give expression to their creative skills.



Light-well
Photo : François Brault

Notre-Dame-de-Fatima of Jonquière - an example of formal renewal

The Church of Notre-Dame-de-Fatima was built in 1962 by the architects Léonce Desgagnés and Paul-Marie Côté. Its ground plan shows a complete break with tradition. The church is organised around a central point and is composed of two white concrete half cones. A band of coloured glass covers the space between the two sections and the spire is placed at the highest point of one of them.

According to Claude Bergeron in *L'architecture des églises du Québec 1940-1985*, it is likely that inspiration for this church was derived from the Chapel of Dawn in Brasilia, by Oscar Niemeyer. Moreover, the works of this architect influenced several religious buildings in Québec during the nineteen-sixties.

The interior is a structure with rounded walls which converge towards the light-well at the top of the conical form. The band of coloured glass is filled with geometrical shapes in primary colours and is in vertical alignment with the top of the cone. The interior walls are built of concrete covered with a layer of grey asbestos emphasising the effect of the raw material. The absence of ornamentation is another contributory factor which emphasises the purity of the form.

The style of the church is undoubtedly an example of the renewal of architectural form of the second half of the 20th century. The use of new construction methods together with the desire to break with tradition is patently obvious. However, in addition to innovating with plastic and statuesque forms, several features of the building illustrate its symbolic value.



The glass covering
the light-well
Photo : François Brault

The band of coloured glass incorporated into the structure increases the sense of height; and the whole construction is reminiscent of the Amerindian tepee. This has been done with the deliberate intention of focussing attention on the ethnic background of the region and it is important to grasp this in order to understand the history of this part of Quebec. In other cases the new influences led to the use of certain shapes which are to be encountered fairly frequently in Québec architecture.

Claude Bergeron in *L'architecture des églises du Québec 1940-1985*, speaks of the importance of the concentric plan in modern churches in Québec. In the nineteen-sixties it was already in common use throughout the province.

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