

Architecture for Man in No Man's Land –

Helmut Striffler's Church of Reconciliation at Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

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1. Introduction

German architect Helmut Striffler, born in 1927, had already planned various sacred buildings in post-war Germany when he received an assignment that in hindsight would not only constitute the most renowned work of his professional career, but a personal turning point as well: "For me there is a life before and after Dachau", he would later recognize.

The concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager*, KZ) close to the village of Dachau, just 20 kilometers north-west of Munich, was the very first detainment facility for political opponents that the Nazi regime built almost immediately after Adolf Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. It served as a model site for the system of slave labor and extermination camps the Third Reich later established throughout Europe. While in the beginning the prison population consisted mostly of Germans conflicting ideologically with the regime, at a later stage European Jews and other persecuted people from Nazi occupied countries were transferred to Dachau. More than 2,700 clergymen of all faiths –though mostly Catholic priests– were incarcerated in special barracks¹. It is estimated that when the US Army liberated the camp in April of 1945, out of 200,000 inmates around 41,000 had been killed in Dachau².

In the early 1960s, discussions within the German Protestant Church over whether to erect a monument for the perished or to build a church at the site ensued. Hence, the construction history of the Church of Reconciliation reflects the incipient of public debate regarding the appropriate dealing with the Nazi legacy in the recently founded Federal Republic of Germany: The widespread collaboration between members of the Protestant Church and the National Socialist (NS) regime initially seemed to rule out any project for a sacred building. Controversies arose not least because the place was (and still is) a "no man's land" in the original sense of the words. The physical site contains its own negation, both in past and present: the humans that passed through Dachau were denied their very condition of humanity; also, the

¹ Berben (1975, p. 276-77).

² According to KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau.

memorial exists today to remind us that it never should have existed in the first place. Pressure from former Dutch inmates finally resulted decisive. Construction works began in 1964 and were finished in 1967. Martin Niemöller, a Pastor held prisoner in Dachau, preached the first sermon at the newly erected church.

The Dachau Protestant Church was internationally regarded as a milestone building within its typology - and still is today. The intensity of its architectural and spatial gesture remains unmistakably clear and continues to fascinate. Only rarely, if ever, feelings such as guilt, shame and punishment, but also hope, reconciliation and confidence have been translated into the language of architecture and spatial planning so successfully in such a "tainted" place. It is a place for the living to remember the dead; it is a place that urges to form a community at a site where the individual was brutally atomized (see Illustration 1).

Illustration 1 View from the Entrance



Source: Luca Savini, flickr. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Almost immediately after completion, the building made the front pages of (scientific) journals in Germany and abroad.³ The British architecture critic Peter Blundell-Jones wrote about Striffler's Church of Reconciliation:

³ Cf. Striffler (1967b) and Informes de la construcción (1969).

[...] his masterpiece at Dachau is a building of world significance, confronting one of the toughest programs an architect has ever had to face. At a time, when much architecture across Europe had descended into a banal utilitarianism, this chapel's purpose was almost entirely representational, and that representation was of the most difficult kind imaginable: the remembering of and attempted reconciliation of the worst mass murder in history. Of all the works in this book, it has the greatest right to be called ‚poetic‘, because of the dual appeal to head and heart, its evocation of an appropriate mood under the most difficult conditions, and its great economy of means, with every detail contributing to the impact of the whole [...]⁴.

Today, more than 50 years after its dedication, critics still speak of the “emphatic power”⁵ that Striffler's building emits.

However, any interpretation of the Church of Reconciliation relying exclusively on an architectural, biographical, historical, or even political approach is doomed to fail. To fully appreciate the deeper meaning of Striffler's work at Dachau, one has to deal with a series of fundamental questions of 1) anthropological (“the idea of man”), 2) epistemological (“truth and the limits of understanding”), and 3) ethical (“the dignity of man”) nature – which in turn means that any scientific approach of interpretation must take these questions into account.

Helmut Striffler's Church of Reconciliation therefore is, in our opinion, a “site” (both physically and as an object for analysis) that is open for a dialogue between faith, reason and science. In this article, we aim to establish an analytical framework that embraces the above-mentioned scientific traditions and its toolkits while putting the human dimension at the center of analysis. It is the “human experience” (understood as an “experience of the genuinely human”) in its present and past context that makes Striffler's Church of Reconciliation an outstanding building.

2. KZ Dachau and Dachau Memorial Site

After Adolf Hitler was sworn in as chancellor on January 30, 1933, the NS regime immediately sought to consolidate its power via the detention of (alleged) political opponents. Due to overcrowded prisons, the regional police force of Bavaria chose the site of an abandoned gunpowder factory in Dachau built in the 1920s as a location to set up a detention camp. The construction of the euphemistically called „protective custody compound“, partly carried out

⁴ Blundell-Jones, P. (2013, p. 89).

⁵ Pehnt (2018, p. 68).

by the prisoners themselves, commenced in March 1933 and was mostly concluded by 1938. From April 1933 on, the Nazi party's elite police force *Schutzstaffel* (SS) took over the control of concentration camp Dachau. The larger site –separated by an electric fence and watchtowers from the prisoner's compound– included SS-barracks, houses for officers and their families, training facilities, workplaces where inmates were forced to slave labour, and two crematoriums. A gas chamber built in 1942 remained unused.

The concentration camp was initially planned for 5,000 inmates. Thirty-four barracks with an individual layout of 100 x 10 meters divided in four housing units each were to house prisoners. The maximum capacity of 208 persons per barrack was regularly exceeded. Some prisoners' groups were concentrated in special barracks: members of the International Brigades who fought in the Spanish Civil War, prominent regime opponents, and clergy, which would be sent to Dachau from 1940 on. The camp's main street (*Lagerstrasse*) split the barrack compound in two. At its Southern end, prisoners had to present themselves at the roll call site (*Appellplatz*) for counting before and after work assignments. Behind the Appellplatz laid a service building housing the kitchen, basic sanitary installations, the laundry etc. Here new inmates received their prisoner uniform. The building today hosts the Dachau memorial museum. In the rear, the infamous *bunker* was located, where camp guards carried out punishments and executions.

During the first years of the camp's existence, the regime's propaganda used Dachau as a model institution aimed at re-educating "asocial elements". When Heinrich Himmler, chief of SS and the police in Bavaria, managed to gain definitive control over the NS security apparatus, the Dachau "example" –both architecture of the camp and its general regulations– served to subsequently set up a system of concentration and extermination camps in Germany and occupied Europe. Although Dachau was originally designed as a deterrent for the opposition against the regime and, later, to exploit the inmates' workforce by slave labour for the arms industry, executions, torture, and mistreatment were part of the camp's daily life from its very opening. Sanitary conditions deteriorated by time, with diseases striking the camp especially in the last years of the Second World War.

The piles of corpses found on the camp's grounds shocked the American troops that arrived in Dachau on April 29, 1945. Due to lack of coal and the advancing front line, the crematoria had been out of service for weeks. From its liberation on, the camp served to display the NS-regime's horrendous crimes to the international public. Top military personnel from the

allied forces, politicians, and journalists visited the camp and interviewed inmates. At the same time, the joint camp administration, consisting of the American occupation force and a prisoner's representative body (Comité International de Dachau, CID), had to deal with undernourished inmates and typhus fever. During the four weeks from liberation until the end of May, approximately 2,000 inmates died as a consequence of their imprisonment.

In a second phase, the location of the former concentration camp became a site of justice. German prisoners of war, SS-members, and war criminals were detained there. Some were later tried in the "Dachau trials" that took place at the detention camp. In the autumn of 1947, Bavarian authorities took over the administration of the site.

The third chapter in the history of the site lasts until the mid 1960s, when the Bavarian state used the camp to house refugees and displaced people, especially from the former German territories in the East. In 1954, 1,800 people lived here.⁶ Although the barracks were reconditioned to improve living conditions, the former protective custody compound maintained its original structure.

The German administration for a long time did not consider the possibility of converting the campsite into a memorial. So, it was only a special clause in the Paris Treaties (1955) regarding the graves of NS-victims that prevented plans to demolish the crematorium, where former inmates had installed a museum. It was mainly this group that lobbied for the conversion of the refugee camp into a memorial site.⁷ Though the CID favoured a conservation of the site as true to the original as possible, the public plan for the "Dachauer Gedenkstätte" (Dachau Memorial) foresaw the demolition of all barracks except two. Today, only their fundamentals remain, and thus does the outline of the former *Lagerstraße* lined by poplars. In the two remnant barracks, visitors can evidence the deplorable living conditions inmates suffered. Watchtowers, fences and other topographic obstacles were reconstructed. The museum moved from the crematorium, which was restored to its original condition, to the former service building. It opened in 1965. Three years later, the CID memorial at the former Apellplatz was inaugurated.⁸

Religious Sites at KZ Dachau

Although Dachau is one of the few examples of former concentration camp sites that integrate religious buildings in their memorial concept, sites of worship already existed from the moment

⁶ Hoffmann (1998, p. 46).

⁷ Cf. Rost (1956).

⁸ For a complete account of the early history of the Dachau Memorial see Mensing (2016).

the camp was set up. Barrack 26, where Catholic and Protestant clergy held their services in a chapel from the year 1941 on, even is a topic in popular culture⁹. After liberation, German priests lobbied for the construction of a Church or monastery of atonement so that the crimes committed in the camp should not be forgotten. However, the first sacred building to be constructed after liberation would be a church “for penetrators built by penetrators” - the Catholic Church Heilig Kreuz was completed in 1945 by German SS-members awaiting trial in the POW camp. Remarkably, the person responsible for their pastoral care was Father Leonard Roth (1904-1960), who had been held prisoner in Dachau himself. Additional places of worship were needed for the refugees and displaced persons that subsequently arrived in Dachau, with the Protestant Gnadenkirche (Church of Mercy) built on the Eastern side of the roll-call square in 1952.

It was the Catholic auxiliary bishop of München and Freising Johannes Neuhäusler, special prisoner in Dachau from 1941 until April 1945, who –in cooperation with the CID– developed plans for a religious memorial site on the compound’s Northern extension towards the end of the 1950s. As a result, the Catholic Mortal Agony of Christ Chapel’s construction was completed just in time for it to be dedicated during the 37 International Eucharistic Congress held in Munich in 1960. Four years later, Neuhäusler dedicated the Carmelite Convent of the Precious Blood, located just outside the northern boundary of the camp. The Carmelites see their mission in Dachau to atone through sacrificial prayer. In 1967, a Jewish Memorial was built on the Mortal Agony of Christ Chapel’s Eastern side, and in 1995, the Russian Orthodox Resurrection Chapel was completed. Together with Striffler’s Church of Reconciliation, these four sacred buildings remain today at the Dachau Memorial¹⁰.

3. The Author

Helmut Striffler was born in Ludwigshafen in 1927. His early professional career was deeply influenced by his personal war experience as a student in secondary school:

At the age of 16, I was drafted for military service. As air force helper, I served in Holland, in the labor service I was sent to anti partisan operations in Croatia, and as a soldier I was moved to the Burgenland where the Red Army advanced at this time¹¹.

⁹ Cf. Haase, Schlöndorff (2004).

¹⁰ For a complete analysis of the religious buildings at the Dachau Memorial Site see Kappel (2010).

¹¹ Paetz, gen. Schieck (1993, p. 115).

While operating anti-aircraft devices he witnessed the death of some of his fellow comrades. In this context, the topic of a protective furrow in an otherwise plain landscape became an important aspect in the architectural design of the Church of Reconciliation in Dachau¹².

After the war, Striffler completed his secondary education obtaining his *Abitur* in 1947. Before making first contacts with architecture and construction during an internship at the chemical company BASF's building department, he worked for two years as a bricklayer. For that reason, he started his studies in architecture at Technische Universität Karlsruhe at a relatively late stage, aged 23. In Karlsruhe he met his mentor and the already famous architect Egon Eiermann. Other teachers that influenced the student were Otto Ernst Schweizer and Otto Bartning, a specialist in sacred buildings and creator of the "emergency church" (*Notkirche*) concept.

As a young architect in Eiermann's office, he gained first on-hand experience with the design and building process of Protestant churches. The Matthäuskirche (1951-1953) in Pforzheim was his –still being a student– first project in Eiermann's office. The building, constructed with exposed concrete enriched with debris and glass elements, immediately attracted public attention as it defied conventional expectations of what a sacred building should look like. Regarding his later experience with public tenders, Striffler would state, "politicians want art and architecture to express grandeur and to serve personal edification, that means to cause placation or even intimidation. This implies the scarification of true reality, i.e. the concealment of truth"¹³.

His first building as an independent architect was the Trinitatiskirche in Mannheim (1956-1959). Along with Eiermann's Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche in Berlin, the building is regarded a starting point of "brutalist"¹⁴ style in church design. Today the Trinitatiskirche forms part of the German list of national monuments. The church is also an example of the symbiotic relationship between light and space that is characteristic for Striffler's later work. He wrote in 1959, "all material appear bare and in their natural appearance. The succinct contradictions

¹² Cf. Vollmar (2015, p. 35)

¹³ Striffler (1987, p. 111)

¹⁴ For a discussion of the contested term, see von Buttlar (2017). As examples for sacred buildings in the brutalist style, he lists St Agnes Church in Berlin-Kreuzberg, built by Werner Düttmann, Le Corbusier's monastery in La Tourette, Hans Schädel and Friedrich Eberts' Maria Regina Martyrum near the NS execution site Plötzensee in Berlin, and Gottfried Böhm's pilgrimage church Maria Königin des Friedens in Neviges.

between stone, glass, wood, and metal dominate the building and grant it with dignity. Petty condiment is absent. This may help us to step outside our daily life's artificial atmosphere"¹⁵. The next sacred buildings in his portfolio are the Church of Reconciliation (Versöhnungskirche) in Mannheim-Rheinau (1961-1965) and the Protestant Church in Ilvesheim (1963-1964). In 1964, Striffler –aged 37– won the first prize in an architectural competition organized by the German Protestant Church Conference for a sacred building at the site of the former concentration camp in Dachau, putting competitors such as his mentor Eiermann and other established architects like Dieter Oesterlen in the shade. After designing four churches and participating in political debates about the role the institution should play in public life, the Dachau project “arrived at the appropriate moment in [his] career for him to raise to the challenge¹⁶. From 1969-1974 Helmut Striffler was professor for building theory and design at the Hannover Technical University, and from 1974 until his retirement in 1992 he taught at Technical University Darmstadt.

Helmut Striffler belonged to a generation of German post-war architects who were profoundly opposed to the time's mainstream understanding of architecture's functions and purposes. The non-institutionalized group shared the diagnosis of a process of asthetical “destitution of our cities”¹⁷ marked by the principle of “demolition and reconstruction” (*Kahlschlagsanierung*), desertification of city centres, and urban sprawl. The chosen material to compensate reigning formalism and the creative deficits of the time were exposed concrete and brick. Individual buildings with a function for the wider community (town halls, theaters, museums, etc.) should constitute a counter point to mass constructions.

Against this backdrop, Striffler's architectural language is determined by archaic gestures, oscillation and the "non-orthogonal".

In the so-called post-war modernism the banal rule of the right angle was sold as a production-related logic. [...] Gradually, however, I discovered that the relation of space and human beings does not ‘naturally’ lead to the abstract rationality of the orthogonal, but that it also points at a reciprocal interaction: the dialogue of space and our senses¹⁸.

¹⁵ Trinitatiskirche (2015) [translation AK].

¹⁶ Blundell-Jones (2003, p. 92)

¹⁷ Cf. Alexander Mitscherlich's (1965) programmatic publication.

¹⁸ Helmut Striffler's farewell lecture at TU Darmstadt on October 28, cit. in Paetz, gen. Schieck (1993).

In Dachau, the absence of the right angle at the Church of Reconciliation serves as a counterpoint to the prisoner camp's barrack design.

Against the background of the author's biography, it becomes apparent that the building is and will remain a product of its time. That said, Helmut Striffler managed to incorporate ageless elements in both planning process and construction works. These are intrinsically linked to the basic human experience of architecture that, in his credo, should resemble a "sensual context of construction as a primordial experience"¹⁹. Consequently, Striffler's personal mission as an architect, "to develop an art of building that brings forth the elemental connection between man and space in its most beneficial way"²⁰, is well reflected in his signature work that will be analyzed below.

4. The Building

Since auxiliary bishop Neuhäusler's 1959 proposal, hesitation towards what would be the first Protestant memorial at a former KZ site (in predominantly Catholic Bavaria) dominated in the Protestant Church of Germany (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, EKD), which searched for options elsewhere or preferred the erecting of a simple cross of atonement. Thanks to the lobbying by an organization of former Dutch inmates under its president Dirk de Loos, who finally convinced high-ranking EKD officials, the EKD Council announced its plan to build a Church in Dachau to commemorate all victims of National Socialist rule in a ceremony at the camp's Gnadenkirche on the *Reichskristallnacht* anniversary on 9 November 1938. While the former foreign inmates were also able to prevent the EKD concept of a Church of Atonement, they did not succeed at putting their preferred architect, Piet Zanstra, in the top position after the architectural competition had been celebrated²¹.

As mentioned before, the sketches Striffler presented at the architectural competition for the Protestant church in Dachau defined a completely different set of parameters than the usual design pattern at that time. Looking at the ground plan (see Illustration 2), the conscious renunciation from the right angle strikes the viewer's eye immediately. Striffler planned his church to be a counter-point within the camp compound, which is dominated by what he

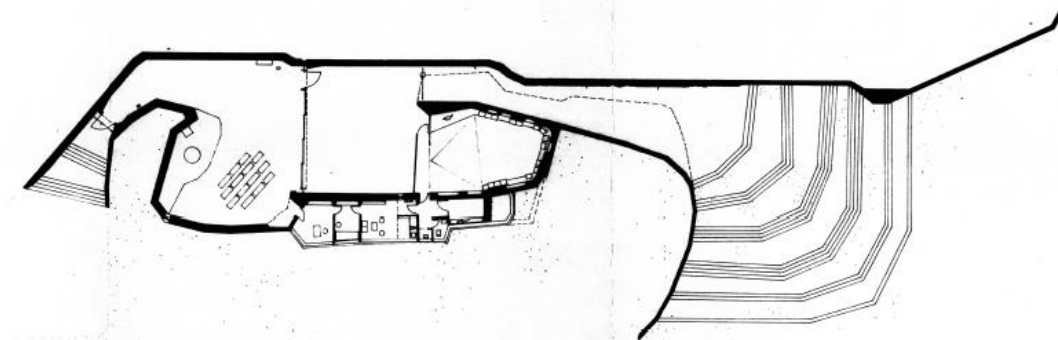
¹⁹ Striffler (1991, 376).

²⁰ Kühn (2015).

²¹ Kappel (2010, pp. 48-51). Proposed names for the Church included Church of Expiation and Supplication, Church of Judgement and Grace, and Jesus Christ Church.

identified as the barbaric and relentless force of the concentration camp layout, still perceptible today (see Illustration 3).

Illustration 2 Ground Plan



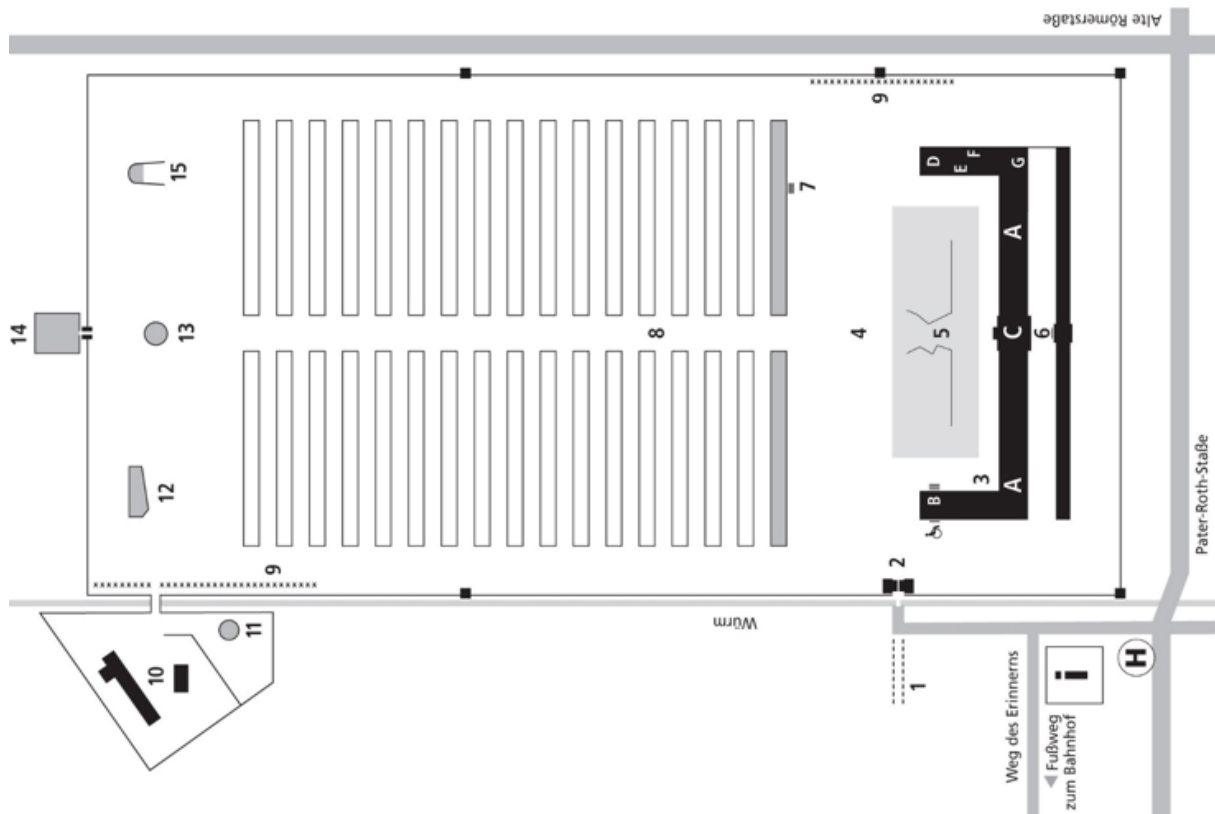
Source: Archive Striffler+Striffler Architekturbüro

A few years later he would give a more detailed account on this position in a programmatic article titled "Bullets Fly Straight": "[...] the German KZ-camps had become a murderous product of primitive rationality. Bullets fly straight. With just a few Machine Gun posts along the camp's four straight fences, KZ Dachau established a deadly perfection of control"²². After describing the various elements of punishment and torture made possible thanks to the compound's layout, Striffler concludes, "[...] the monotony of the camp's schematic rectangular layout is an insistent symbol of its deadly policing order"²³. As the initial sketches for the project evidence, anti-orthogonality is the creative leitmotif of the building. In combination with Striffler's own wartime experiences (see section 2), his "underground church" resembles the sought-for protective furrow, a hiding place where the lethal logic of the camp's layout is suspended.

²² Striffler (1985).

²³ Ibid. Translation Blundell-Jones (2003, p. 95).

Illustration 3 Ground Plan Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site



Source: Gedenkstätte Dachau.

The visitor, who typically would begin exploring the memorial through the Journey entrance in the southern part of the compound and –after visiting the museum– would move north towards the sacred buildings, is invited to encounter moments of silence and recollection at the Church of Reconciliation. The entry into the church, sunken in the ground, reminds us of a shielding hideout. The imminent darkness that embraces the visitor once they make the last steps down into a narrowing roofed hallway both invokes silence and quietness, the basis for contemplation and reflection. However, the unusual entrance for a sacred building (a descent instead of the common rise) is open for a second line of interpretation: The access would then evoke associations of the entrance into a crypt, with the darkness hindering orientation, leaving the visitor with a rather uncomfortable feeling.

The light increases while moving toward a small court located at the center of the building, which is open to the sky. Here the community spaces –the altar room and a communal center– are located. The former’s seating arrangement follows a diagonal positioning in the room. Different Churches of Protestant confession donated the circular altar, the communion vessel, and the organ. Thanks to glass walls, both rooms (and its respective occupants) are open

to interaction. The camp is not visible from the courtyard. Striffler intended to grant a “helpful gesture of a short period of relief” [...] as “a bodily coming-to-rest is the prerequisite for reflection and prayer”²⁴.

Due to the (ascending) exit located at the Western part of the building, visiting the Church of Reconciliation means embarking on a path. The art works that can be found along the way support this impression - although only a reduced number challenge the overall rough-shuttered concrete wall aesthetics. In the entrance section of the Church, concrete reliefs resembling humans are cast into the wall. Designed by Hubertus von Pilgrim, they reinforce the impression of entering a catacomb. The corridor is separated from the courtyard by a steel door made by the Berlin based sculptor Fritz Kühn. Donated by the Protestant Churches of East Germany, it shows a quotation of psalm 57 (“In the shadow of your wings I seek refuge”) in German, French, Dutch, and Polish.

In an intention to “overcome a mere parallel existence”, the entrance spatially embraces the Agony of Christ Chapel and the Jewish memorial. Ecumenism, practiced actively both in the KZ and in today’s memorial, here finds a creative equivalent.

The superficial simplicity of the building with its two continuous walls, its archaic use of materials, and its lack of ornamental variety may be interpreted as a referral to Striffler’s beginning career as an architect in post-war Germany. In his “Bullet” article, he cites his mentor Otto Bartning’s famous dictum about the (im)possibility of reconstructing destroyed German cities: “Reconstruction? That is technically and economically impossible; what do I say, spiritually impossible. But simple rooms can be constructed on the basis of the existing foundations and usable debris”²⁵. Bartning here formulates an architectural version of the *Stunde Null* (“zero hour”) motif, which generally refers to Germany’s ideological and moral break with the past and beginning of a new era after WWII. In this sense, the austere beton brut style may be seen as a reference to May 1945, when Striffler reached adulthood and his mentors developed their architectural programmes.

Ulrich Conrads wrote on the Church of Reconciliation:

[It] carries calmness, peace and solace in a place where the bottom burns through the soles of our shoes, even if we had never entered it. The building I am talking about is Helmut

²⁴ Blundel Jones (2003, p. 98).

²⁵ Striffler (1985). The original article is Bartning (1946).

Striffler's church in the grounds of the leveled concentration camp in Dachau. There neither is nor was a comparable building task before, and - God help us - there will not be one again in the future.

[...] The fact that this building had silenced all the previous criticism, that chased away all the irony, that turned all the vanity of speech into nothing, and that denied all description, indicates a new dimension of building. It points to more than just functional performance and purpose. It points to the new home of man, to which the architecture of our days has to contribute²⁶.

5. Conclusion: Architecture for Man in No Man's Land

Striffler intended to create "a site of encounter with God and man in confidence in reconciliation's merciful grace"²⁷. In our opinion, he achieved this aim not only by having masterfully taken the interaction between historical site and his church into account, but also by having created a building/path which invites visitors to both engage in an inner dialogue and to have a communal experience. The underground Church of Reconciliation offers protection against the camp's plainness; at a place where individuals were assembled by force at the roll call square, it offers space for a community to meet freely; its austere aesthetics remind us that a safe haven needs no luxury.

Revealing these tensions, uncovering the dialectics of site (camp and church) and personal experience, is Striffler's central merit. Therefore, one cannot fully understand his work in Dachau without having asked some fundamental (or "last") questions. A first "set" of these questions relate to the church's name, which for some is doubtlessly a provocation: Is reconciliation, of all things at the site of a former concentration camp, possible, considering the horrendous crimes that were committed – here and at other places? Can victims be expected to forgive their torturers? Can there be atonement for mass murder and genocide? How could future cohabitation between victims and perpetrators possibly work? Ultimately, these concerns remit to the subject of the forgiveness of sins. Martin Niemöller took on some of those anthropological topics while reflecting on Mt 25:40 ("Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"). Only in hindsight did he understand that the people he witnessed being killed in Dachau were "a question that God asked me"²⁸. This question still

²⁶ Conrads (1967). Translation Blundell-Jones (2003, p. 100).

²⁷ Striffler (1967a).

²⁸ Neupert (2017, p. 3).

stands today. The Church of Reconciliation itself does not offer an ultimate answer, but rather opens up hopeful perspectives.

The church's path concept invites visitors to explore the building independently at first. Eventually, however, any individual will meet others in the central part of the building. At a site where human beings reduced other humans to numbers, questions about the relationship between the individual and community are ripe. Prisoners were detained because of their belonging to a group, but were isolated to be murdered. The dignity of man was neglected at Dachau. Nevertheless, there are various examples of courageous KZ prisoners that paid a high price for maintaining their or the dignity of others in inhumane circumstances. Is it possible to uphold human autonomy in the face of oppression? Is there a place for solidarity when one's survival is at stake? Have the more experienced (older generation) an obligation to support the new arrivals (younger generation)? And, more general, what was the sense of all the suffering in the Nazi camps?

Striffler hoped for the Church of Reconciliation to be a place where "youthful nonchalance"²⁹ raised their questions. In an epistemological sense, what happened in Dachau and other KZs deeply challenges the human sense of understanding. Both the crimes perpetrated as well as occasional examples of unconditional solidarity between inmates push us towards the limits of our capacity of understanding. In this sense, and thanks to a lively interreligious cooperation, the Dachau memorial religious sites are suitable places to reflect on the concept of truth and the limits of our capabilities to understand.

²⁹ Striffler (1967a, p. 3).

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