

José Manuel Almuzara

Architect, President of the Pro-Canonisation
of Gaudí Association and Secretary of the
Asociación Amigos de Gaudí.

Symbology in the Expiatory Temple of the Sagrada Familia (I)

Catalunya Cristiana has asked me to write some articles on the symbolism of the expiatory temple of La Sagrada Familia. Knowing my limitations and that I am but an instrument, I want to thank Gaudí for his life of dedication, his love of work well executed, of family, and others and, particularly, his love of God, manifested in his architecture, in his many details of faith, of hope and of charity, through words and especially through works of art and symbols, and I place myself in his hands so that he may lead me in this task commissioned unto me.

For some years I have accompanied people of different origins, ages and interests, in their visits to the expiatory temple of the Sagrada Familia, and to write these articles I have opted for describing the route I follow with them through the temple, stopping at various places that I believe can show us Antoni Gaudí i Cornet in the service of God in his spiritual and human dimension through symbology.

Catechism in stone

We enter the temple by the Passion facade (calle Sardenya) and we head for the museum, the starting location for my explanation. Before a great panel we can find the most important dates in relation to the temple. For example: in the year 1866, Josep M. Bocabella founds the Asociación Espiritual de Devotos de San José; in the year 1882, the laying of the first stone, etc

The initial design plans for the temple are exhibited, produced by the architect Francesc de Paula del Villar, who would shortly thereafter resign and commission the continuance of the building work to Gaudí; from this moment on, the museum includes photographs, in chronological order, of the lower building work in the temple and more of Gaudí's work in the upper section.

Further on, of note is the reproduction of the Sagrada Familia altarpiece, created by the sculptor Josep Llimona in collaboration with Gaudí. It is a scene that moves me; I encourage my companions to contemplate it. It is a scene of everyday life: Jesus kisses the hand of his father Joseph, who carries the tool of his trade in his other hand, and María watches on, seated with her hands occupied with sewing. The frame, the work of Gaudí, highlights the scene with *Amen, Amen, Amen*.

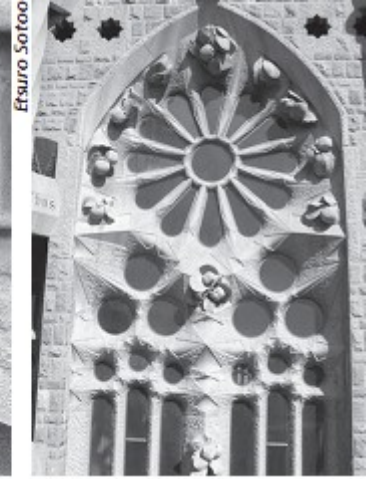
On page 76 of his book *The Temple of the Sagrada Familia*, published by Ediciones de Nuevo Arte Thor, fourth edition, 1982, the architect Isidre Puig Boada says: "Gaudí sought to give a specific and comprehensible message in each and every element of the temple, leading them to their didactic purpose, at all times remembering the text of the Gospel: "I tell you, if they (the disciples) keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Lc 19,40)."

This is the temple, a catechism in stone.

"The temple of the Sagrada Familia is a hymn in praise of God intoned by humanity and in which each stone is a verse, sung with clear voice, both powerful and harmonious. Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Hosanna in excelsis, Amen y Al-leluja sing its stones, with their insistent voice rising to the heights. It is an explosion of joy in the blue Barcelona sky." (Isidre Puig Boada, architect).



Symbol of the artisan carpenters



Detail of the large window with the gifts of the Three Kings

Eighteen towers

We follow our tour around the museum. There are many photographs, models, plans and objects which I explain to a greater or lesser degree depending on the characteristics of my listeners and the time available. An interesting stop takes place before the reproduction of the floor plan of the temple, a Basilican building of five naves with triple transept, forming a Latin cross, enveloped within the cloister. The arms of the transept correspond with the Nacimiento (Birth) facade and the Passion Facade and at the end of the main nave, the Gloria facade. The two sacristies and the Asunción Chapel are of particular note.

Twelve towers which represent the apostles, four towers which symbolise the evangelists, one dedicated to the Virgin and another to Jesus Christ. In total, eighteen towers of which we can currently see eight finished. Gaudí bore in mind the duplicity within one same character of being an apostle and an evangelist, therefore, he does not dedicate two towers to same; in addition, one apostle was a traitor and therefore not worthy of a tower and he also bore in mind Saint Paul, as one of the pillars of the Church instituted by Jesus Christ.

The end result we can see in the reproduction of the floor plan of the temple building.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh

We continue on, and find ourselves before the 1:10 scale model of the naves of the temple. Prior to passing under the model, I stop before a plan which represents a detail of the outside wall of the naves, a large window between two pillars the bands of which bear the following inscriptions: a flask and the words *myrra* and *sacrifice*; a thurible and the words *thus* and *oració*; and a chest and the words *aurum* and *almoína*.

We are reminded of the adoration of the Three Kings for Jesus in Bethlehem and the delivery of their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gaudí represents them respectively with alms, prayer and sacrifice, necessary for the construction of the temple (and, I believe, necessary for our own construction).

On the lower part of these walls which support the large windows, in the keystone of the arch, Gaudí sought to pay homage to the artisans who collaborated in the construction of the temple, representing one of them on each keystone, with their most characteristic tools and the initials JMJ (Jesus, Mary and Joseph).

A homage to the workers, of whom Gaudí said the following: "Work is a result of collaboration and this can only be based on love. The architect knows how to take advantage of what the workers know how to do and can do. He must take advantage of the preeminent quality in each of them. In other words: integrate, combine all efforts and extend a hand to them when they run aground; by so doing they work with pleasure and with the peace of mind that comes from trust in the organiser. In addition, we must remember that no-one is useless, everyone is useful (although not all with the same capacity); the question is to find what each one is useful for."