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in the “Sagrada Familia” (Barcelona)
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Performing and
Staging Translations**

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Performance as Translation. The Representation of the Sacred in the “Sagrada Familia” (Barcelona) by the Interaction of Architecture, Visual Arts and Liturgy

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Abstract: An instructive perspective of translatology is that of examining translation as performance. Here, key questions are for what purpose a translation is made and how it was prepared for that purpose. Regarding method, however, it would be an original move if one looked at the performance itself in its translational dimension. Following such a perspective, this essay examines how performative actions can translate the transcendent or invisible ‘sacred’ into an aesthetic experience. The authors explain their approach by looking at a significant event, the dedication of the church of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona (2010) together with the homily of Pope Benedict XVI. The main reason for that choice is that the liturgy is not only an issue of theological reflection, since it also allows one to examine translational processes in a polysemiotic-performative way. Indeed, in the liturgy the rite, text language, art and architecture work together harmoniously into an integra-

tive action that can shape the aesthetic experience of the “sacred”. As a transdisciplinary study, this essay seeks to provide further perspectives for future research in many areas of the humanities.

Keywords: Performance, Translation, Arts, Sacred architecture, Liturgy, Preaching, *Sagrada Família*, Barcelona.

1 Introduction

The relatively recent approach to translation as performance has already achieved good research results (cf. Agnetta/Cercel 2021). But the reverse approach, namely performance as a translational phenomenon, has not yet received much attention. This is not surprising, since “performance as translation” cannot be the domain of translation studies alone, since it is a research subject that needs the cooperation of several interacting disciplines.

This article, therefore, applies a transdisciplinary method. It deals with the Catholic liturgical rite as a paradigmatic event. Considered closely, liturgy is a multidimensional phenomenon of the interaction of ritual, text language and architecture that crosses the boundaries of individual disciplines. The issue of liturgical rite is one of the many complex problems that cannot be solved by a single discipline alone. For appropriate research, a transdisciplinary approach is necessary. Therefore, in this article an art historian, a liturgist and a linguist work together to shed light on translational processes of the liturgical celebration as a performative action.

As a starting point for their study, the authors have chosen a significant event on 7 November 2010 in Barcelona: the dedication of the church and altar of the *Sagrada Família*, together with the homily of Pope Benedict XVI (cf. Bonet i Armengol 2011/²2014: 94–95; Carlotti 2012: 6–7, 68–70). During that dedication Mass, the three following performances and

representations could have been experienced in an especially vivid concentration:

- a. the church architecture with its pictorial program,
- b. the meaningful homily of Pope Benedict,
- c. the particular rite of dedication of the church and altar.

In his homily Benedict XVI delivered a classical address as proclamation, at the same time referring to both the architectural environment in its artistic and religious dimensions, enacting the rite of dedicating the church, celebrated just after (cf. Benedict XVI 2010/2011). His homily was thus a performance and also a meta-performance. We therefore take this homily as a starting point and pivot of our considerations, because it allows us to set the focus of our research clearly. Two other reasons were important for our choice: the location of this homily was inside the church building itself and, according to Catholic understanding, “the homily is an integral part of the liturgy, it is not only an instruction, it is also an act of worship” (HD 2014: 532). Due to the latter reason, the performativity of the homily acquires new nuances: in fact, it possesses a “sacramental significance” by which “Christ is present in the assembly gathered to listen to his word and in the preaching of his minister, through whom the same Lord who spoke long ago in the synagogue at Nazareth now instructs his people” (ibid.).

The main question of this study is: How do the three elements (art, homily, rite of dedication) as performances interact with each other? That question concerns the visual communication of the architectural space with its pictorial program; the sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration; the words of the homily, both proclaimed and listened to. Our interest is how exactly was *translatio* accomplished during the rite of dedicating the church together with the homily inside the artistic setting of the architecture?

To answer this complex question, we will proceed as follows: First, the terms *representation*, *performance* and *translation* are defined in more detail according to the authors' understanding (see section 2). Then the event of dedicating the *Sagrada Família* is analysed and contextualised in order to understand the multidimensionality of the homily (see section 3). Finally, a rhetorical analysis of the interaction between art, text language and rite in its performative-translational dimension is carried out (see section 4)

2 The concepts of performance, representation and translation

We start from the observation that every communicative act is a kind of performance. Performativity has a strong transformative potential: What is done does not stand as a sign for something, but is that something.

According to Fischer-Lichte (2015), there is a crossing of boundaries, such as the one between art and life. This is the case with the staging of political or sport events or (art) performances that are intended to have a political effect. Moreover, an aesthetics of the performative deals with the relationship between the arts to each other and to the different cultures. The border becomes a threshold.

While art and cultures (sports, politics, etc.) have been studied to some extent, less attention has been paid to the intertwining of art, preaching and liturgy. But it is precisely in this triangulation that one can clearly recognise a special feature of performance: in the liturgical action, the boundary between the sign and its realisation, so often drawn in performance studies, brings the tension between the physical medium, the interpreter and the ultimate referent to its peak because, according to the faith-guided conviction, the sign does not just refer to

an abstract meaning, it also mediates the invisible presence of the Risen Christ. As we will explain later, his hidden presence doesn’t dissolve the mediation of the sign, because the liturgy implies sacramentality (presence mediated through signs) and not physical evidence. The sign acts as a subtle veil that both conceals and reveals the non-empirical presence and action of someone who lives in a world that transcends the limits of human empirical perception.

In the following, when we speak of visual “representation” in artworks or architectures, we mean that persons, things, or ideas—which themselves are absent, transcendent, or abstract—are made substitutionally present (cf. Goeller 2005: 1177). In the liturgical performance, however, understood as a ritual mediation between the divine presence and the human response, the focus is on signs, and moreover: on the interrelation of several signs. The liturgical homily is a performative event. It is a particular act of speech intended to mediate the encounter between God and the faithful through the “reflection” on the ritual action in which the homily itself takes place. According to Catholic understanding, the performativity of the homily requires the gift of supernatural faith and its exercise by both the preacher and the faithful (listeners). Thus, liturgical preaching (the preaching event) is more than the verbalization of some religious ideas. In its interaction with the place where it is pronounced (polysemioticity), the homily is a “representation” that makes possible (but never automatically guarantees) the encounter between the living God and the faithful.

Representation is understood here as the process by which a subject A (in this case, the preacher) makes something perceptible through the activation of the senses and the personal interpretation of subject B (in this case, the faithful attending the preaching). Because representations are meant to

make something perceptible that is beyond the sensory level of perception, they require “signs”. Liturgical signs are understood here as performative actions that involve the interaction of physical mediums such as images, spaces, sounds, gestures, etc. (polysemioticity) in order to make accessible to the senses something beyond their natural object. In this sense, to produce a sign is to enact a process of selection and interpretation that can be called a “translational process”. Once the sign is given, its dialogical potentiality remains in the physical configuration of the medium (the building, the images, the recorded sound, etc.) and it is actualized and enriched each time a subject B enters into dialogical contact with it. That is why liturgical representation, as we understand it here, requires “realization”. Realization implies a hermeneutic process, namely an action by which (a) the “sign” is given to the subject and (b) the subject comes into contact with the “translated” reality through a process of disclosure of the “sign”. Only when this dialogical process is at work, can we speak of “representation”. In our case study, the reality that the subject encounters is not an idea, but a living person (God), the sign is the preaching event, and the subject B designates the faithful.

Therefore, the liturgical homily can be understood as a particular form of representation. Since representation is a particular translational process that includes the historical context, the personality of the preacher and the faithful, and the effects of transfer processes, and since we don't have access to the effects and interpretations of those who were present at the event, we will focus our study on the preacher's contribution to the process of interpretation. Philologically, the term “polysemioticity” is used to denote the interrelation of several sign systems. According to Agnetta (2019: 508–510), polysemioticity is the co-presence of different sign systems between which manifold sysemiotic relations exist, these being particularly

recognisable in the visual artworks. The polysemioticity of art, text language and ritual action in the light of faith helps discover fundamental aspects of the incarnate God and the mystery of man. It is an *evidentia* (cf. Gil 2022: 99–101) that, rhetorically speaking, leads to seeing with the inner eye what is heard, and also to grasping and penetrating more deeply what is signified by the ritual signs. Already art is *mimesis* in which both the matter and also viewers and listeners are involved (cf. Malo 2004: 46). But the polysemioticity of the liturgical action might even exceed the mere cultural dimension of the performance because the actors involved can encounter God, experience his beauty and sublimity, and thus open themselves more easily to the sanctifying grace of the sacraments.

This understanding of *performance* and *event* from the perspective of crossing boundaries leads to the concept of *translation* used in cultural transfer research. For this, reference should be made to the helpful overview by Poppe (2015) and to his detailed and well-documented monograph (2019), both of which are sources for the following considerations. According to Poppe (2015: 19–20), our current differentiated concept of translation contrasts with a very broad understanding of *translatio* deeply rooted in European cultural history. And this concept of *translatio* from cultural transfer research could complement, even enrich, today’s translation studies. In the different forms of *translatio imperii, studii, religionis* etc., the reception or rejection of elements from the various religions, denominations as well as political and economic systems is examined in detail for individual cultures.

The components of these creative processes of translation constitute and resume different phenomena (such as the historical context, the personality of the translator and his/her understanding of translation or the effect of these transfer processes). Through this, it is not just the final product of a con-

crete translation that is considered a *translatio*, it also concerns its historical importance.

In this regard, the present research will discern three translational dimensions of performance in the homily of Pope Benedict XVI during the dedication Mass in the church of the *Sagrada Familia*:

- Architecture and visual arts as translations of the transcendent “sacred” in its material and visible mediation.
- The homily as a liturgical translation of the Word of God into the here and now of those present and of the Eucharistic celebration.
- The rite of dedication as a translation of invisible persons or actions into visible forms.

In what follows (section 4), the performative-translational dimension of the homily will be examined. Its text is our reference point, because it includes proclamation and also reflections on art, architecture and rite. But first (section 3) the multidimensional contexts of the homily will be explained in detail

3 The multidimensional contexts of the homily for the dedication of the *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona (2010)

In the text of the homily delivered by Pope Benedict XVI during the dedication of the church of the *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona, we initially discern two aspects of the interaction between representation-performance-translation in the architecture, visual arts and liturgy:

- (1) Observations on how the church architecture represents the invisible “sacred”,
- (2) Reflections on the liturgical rite of dedicating a church.

We deal first with architectural issues because the location and reason of that homily was the church building itself. Even before the liturgy began, the visual performance of the *Sagrada Familia* was already effective by preparing for a better understanding of the homily and the rite.

3.1 Observations on how the architecture represents the invisible “sacred”

Benedict XVI called the church of the *Sagrada Familia* a “magnificent achievement of engineering, art and faith” (Benedict XVI 2010: s.p.). To understand the implicit meaning of this and other statements of the Pope’s homily, it is necessary to outline the history of construction and the artistic originality of that building.

3.1.1 Construction history and artistic originality of the Sagrada Familia

The *Sagrada Familia* is an expiatory church dedicated to the Holy Family (cf. Regàs 2009; Roe 2012: 181–204; Hensbergen 2017). Today it ranks as a landmark of Barcelona. Construction began in 1882. In 1883, when the first architect Francisco de Paula del Villar resigned, Antoni Gaudí took over as main architect. He presented his entire project in 1906, but by 1926 he had finished only a part of the huge building (Regàs 2009: 6–45; Carlotti 2012: 9–18; Bonet i Armengol 2011/²2014: 4–11; Lahuerta 2021). His original designs and the architecture built until today reveal that Gaudí invoked and paraphrased Gothic structure and style, especially that of churches in Northern Spain and of French cathedrals. At the end of the 19th century, these were seen by many as a culmination of the history of sacred architecture. Gaudí began to build the *Sagrada Familia* on

a cross-shaped ground plan with a five-aisled nave measuring about 90 m, a three-aisled transept, and finally a chancel surrounded by an ambulatory with seven radiating chapels. However, it is clear from the elevation that Gaudí implemented innovative construction principles, such as slanted, tree-like columns and bent surfaces (cf. Carlotti 2012: 51–58). Outside and inside, he designed the entire architecture with vegetal features (cf. Bonet i Armengol 2014). It reveals Gaudí's preference for stylized nature motifs and intertwined drop shapes (cf. Regàs 2009: 132–151). The exterior walls seem to be rock-like housings which hold sculptures as if in nests. Inside the *Sagrada Família*, the columns, walls and vaults seem to “grow together” and become a kind of one organic whole (Bühren 2008: 50–52).

Additionally, there are iconographic innovations. The crossing tower, 172 meters high, is flanked by seventeen other towers. Above each of the eastern, western and southern facades are four towers, which together represent the twelve apostles and have a golden cross with the name of the respective apostle. Four other towers symbolize the evangelists, two more symbolize Jesus Christ – as main tower above the crossing – and the Virgin Mary (cf. Regàs 2009: 112–131).

Gaudí projected a large pictorial program of the Christian history of salvation on the facades of the two transepts and the main facade. His architecture and sculpture should represent the Christian mysteries of faith and of the Church. In 1891–1900, Gaudí built the facade (*Facada del Nacimiento*) of the eastern transept in front of four towers. Its detailed sculptural program (*Birth of Christ*) depicts realistic scenes from the life of Jesus, and the three portals represent faith, hope, and love (cf. Regàs 2009: 56–83).

In 1918, Gaudí designed the facade of the west transept with its sculptural program (*Passion of Christ*), but he could not

complete the west facade. In 1926, he died in hospital after being tragically hit by a tram in a Barcelona street. Many citizens accompanied the funeral procession of Gaudí’s body to its last resting place in the crypt below the *Sagrada Família*. In 1927–1930, the three last towers of the church’s eastern facade were completed. After construction was interrupted by the Spanish Civil War and World War II, work continued since 1952 following Gaudí’s plans. The architecture of the west facade (*Fachada de la Pasión*) with three portals was completed in 1954–1985. In 1978, the nave began to be built. In 1987–2009, Josep María Subirachs sculpted the *Passion of Christ* on the Passion facade, which is supported by six slanted and bone-shaped columns. In contrast to Gaudí’s sculptural program on the east facade, with its vegetal style, Subirachs designed the west facade in geometric and austere forms with large figures in a minimalist style (cf. Regàs 2009: 84–105). Some critics considered this stylistic change to be a clash with the original plan of Gaudí. In 2000, the main nave was covered and in 2010 the entire church. This allowed the dedication and liturgical use of the building. Since 2022 the “Glory” facade to the South is still under construction (cf. Regàs 2009: 106–111). The *Sagrada Família* was scheduled to be completed by 2026, the 100th anniversary of Gaudí’s death, but this plan has been delayed.

Regarding artistic originality, the *Sagrada Família* differs much from conventional neo-Gothic buildings. From far away, the round towers resemble termite mounds, and the interior looks like a forest of tree-like columns. As a source of inspiration, Antoni Gaudí used nature for both structure and ornament to develop an organic style of construction (cf. Oliveras 2003). In his homily, the Pope referred to these features (cf. Benedict XVI 2010). The *Sagrada Família*, as a major work of Catalan Modernism (1885–1920), can be rated as an original modification of the European *Art Nouveau* style.

3.1.2 “Per visibilia ad invisibilia” –

The spiritual meaning of the Sagrada Familia

In a second step we will understand that the organic construction style of the *Sagrada Familia* includes a spiritual meaning. Gaudí made this translational achievement, effectively that of rendering the transcendent visible, firstly by means of the iconographic program, secondly by using the verticality of space, and thirdly through the atmosphere of light inside the church.

In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI dedicated the *Sagrada Familia* in front of a liturgical assembly of 6,500 people, with another 50,000 people outside the church participating in the celebration (cf. Carloti 2012: 6–7, 68). During this ceremony the building was “dedicated”: it received a purpose which corresponds to the meaning intended by Gaudí and his institutional patron. We could accordingly say that the architecture and artworks hold an *intentio operis* which includes practical functions and a spiritual meaning. The spiritual meaning of the *Sagrada Familia* becomes evident in the metaphorical imagery, the Pope used in his homily (cf. Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.). He followed a long tradition when he implemented the Roman Catholic rite of dedicating a church. In terms of this tradition, it was essential to use the analogy between heaven and earth, and also between church architecture and the hierarchically structured Church. This is already true for the first mention of a church dedication, the cathedral of Tyre in 314, by Eusebius of Caesarea. And it applies even more to the dedication ceremony for the new abbey church of Saint-Denis (1140–1144) described in the writings of Abbot Suger and recorded in the 13th-century anniversary liturgies for the feast of Saint-Denis’ church dedication (cf. Meyer 2003: 69–97). During the 18th century, homilies for church dedications (and their anniver-

saries) referred frequently to the “Heavenly Jerusalem”, as, for instance, in southern Germany: 1724 in Freising, 1739 in Dissen and 1766 in Ottobeuren (cf. Telesko 2016: 271–272).

The statement of Pope Benedict XVI that the *Sagrada Familia* “stands as a visible sign of the invisible God, to whose glory these spires rise like arrows pointing towards absolute light and to the One who is Light, Height and Beauty itself” (Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.) should be considered in this tradition. It cannot be ruled out that Gaudí intended the *Sagrada Familia* to be a symbolic representation of the New Jerusalem (cf. Puig i Tàrrach 2011: 124–182). Regarding the history of Christian art, spanning 1700 years, we can see how architectures and pictures could grant aesthetic access to spiritual meanings. Christian art gives the transcendent or divine a visual form (cf. Bühren 2021). As regards the history of theology, the argument based on the Incarnation was decisive in discussions about the possibility of the visible representation of the invisible God. Since the divine Word became flesh in assuming human nature (John 1:14), the mystery of God could be represented visually. God’s self-disclosure in Christ himself was rich in imagery and parables. Hence, already the biblical and liturgical texts of early Christianity are full of metaphorical expressions enabling one to describe transcendent or spiritual realities. Since these texts were considered authoritative, they guided the faithful in the production and reception of their pictorial imagery, including the metaphorical figures of these texts (cf. Bühren 2021: 623–624).

Gaudí was aware of this tradition because he was a faith-based artist, taking great interest in liturgical questions (cf. Bergós Massó 1999: 42–44, 71; Puig i Tàrrach 2011: 30–44). Thus, using aesthetic references to transcendence were common for him. A core issue for theologians, since the Middle Ages in particular, was the spiritual movement from sensory perception to

comprehension of the invisible (cf. Rudolph 2014; Brodbeck/Poilpré 2019). Hugh of St Victor was a protagonist of the idea that from perceptions of the visible the invisible reality of the divine could be revealed (cf. Hamburger 2006: 397). During the Renaissance and the Baroque period, the visual rhetoric of pictorial revelation shaped the ways of viewing images as vehicles of imagination and devotion. 16th- and 17th-century artists deployed illusionistic forms to convey the experience of the invisible divine (cf. Bühren 2021: 630–633). As for our present time, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) supported this approach (cf. Bühren 2008: 215–251). Artworks inside the liturgical space should be “suitable for sacred use”; they require transcendent references as “signs and symbols of things supernatural”, declared *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (nos. 111, 122, 124, 127), the council’s constitution on the sacred liturgy (cf. Flannery 1996: 152, 156–158).

Now, the decisive question is how the *Sagrada Familia* actually represents the invisible “sacred”. In his homily Benedict XVI spoke of “the three books which nourished” Antoni Gaudí “as a man, as a believer and as an architect: the book of nature, the book of sacred Scripture and the book of the liturgy. In this way he brought together the reality of the world and the history of salvation, as recounted in the Bible and made present in the liturgy” (s.p.).

First to be mentioned is the architecture’s spatial and material *verticality*. On the exterior and interior of the church we find towers and pinnacles, and the walls with pointed windows are vertical elements as well. Inside, the tree-like columns and other vegetal features suggest that somehow everything is “growing” upwards. All these *vertical* features correspond to the liturgical meaning of the “sursum corda” (“lift up your hearts”), the opening dialogue to the “Preface” of the Eucharistic Prayer. Secondly, outside and inside the *Sagrada Familia* we

find narrative and symbolic *pictures*, whose main source is the Bible. They represent the characters and events of the history of salvation, particularly on the exterior. Pope Benedict accordingly said that Gaudí “brought the sacred images outside so as to place before people the mystery of God revealed in the birth, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”. The iconographic program of the *Sagrada Familia* we could call a “visual storytelling” or “visual performance” (2010/2011: s.p.). The pictures are intended to stimulate the memory and imagination of the viewers. Thirdly, at certain hours, the incidence of light “from above” transfigures the walls and vaults, indeed the whole church’s interior. Fourthly, and although this is perhaps not evident in our fast-paced times today, the whole architecture ‘embodies’ a time-transcending reality because it was projected to be, and in fact built as a large-scale project intended to last for many subsequent generations.

All these elements are visual “signs of transcendence”. They represent symbolically the celestial and divine. *Sagrada Familia* itself is not sacred, but it visually signifies and refers to the divine. It is this semiotic character and representative power that provide the performative potential of the *Sagrada Familia*.

3.2 Reflections on the liturgical rite of dedicating a church

The rite for the dedication of a church is considered to be among the most solemn of liturgical services. As the “Rites for the dedication of a church” state, the architectural building “stands as a special kind of image of the Church itself, which is God’s temple built from living stones” (The Rites 1991: II, 346). In his homily, Benedict XVI theologically clarified the dedication of the church by explaining two aspects.

Firstly, the dedication rite makes visible that *Christ is the foundation of the Church*: “He is the rock on which our faith is built.” This metaphor of Christ as the cornerstone constitutes the centre of the imagery of the “Rite of blessing and dedication of the first stone” (in use in 1882, when the first stone of the *Sagrada Familia* was laid). Christ is invoked as “*lapis angularis de monte sine manibus abscissus*” in reference to Daniel 2:34 (Pontificale 1997: 292 n. 468), “*lapidem probatum, angularem, pretiosum in fundamento fundatum, de quo dicit Apostolus, Petra autem erat Christus [1 Cor 10:4]*” (Pontificale 1997: 293 n. 469). The reference to the stone anointed by Jacob as the place of communication between heaven and earth in the antiphon that precedes the deposition of the blessed stone is also meaningful (cf. Pontificale 1997: 294 n. 474). In today’s rite of the Catholic Church, the image of Christ as cornerstone continues to occupy a central place: “Lord, you built a holy Church, founded upon the apostles with Jesus Christ its cornerstone (cf. The Rites 1991: II, 350). The text of the present blessing echoes the images of the book of Daniel and of 1 Cor 10 (cf. The Rites 1991: II, 355) underlining: (a) the *acheropita (sine manibus)* character of the liturgical space, namely the fact that it is a reality given by God to men, and not only the result of a human effort that tries to win the favour of the divinity; (b) and that the symbolic system of the building encompasses the whole history of salvation resumed by Benedict in a three-step revelation: the revelation of the Word of God, the humanity of Christ and the Church. For Benedict, “in this way he [Gaudì] brought together the reality of the world and the history of salvation, as recounted in the Bible and made present in the liturgy” (2010/2011: s.p.).

Secondly, the dedication rite *symbolises the friendship between Christ and the people*. Benedict recalled: “As we consecrate the altar of this church, which has Christ as its foundation, we are

presenting to the world a God who is the friend of man and we invite men and women to become friends of God” (2010/2011: s.p.). This friendship is the result of the divine initiative, and it is accompanied by human correspondence. To the gift of revelation by which God makes himself accessible to humankind and allows himself to be “expressed” through artistic language corresponds the human movement of self-giving to God. The people’s self-giving acquires “symbolic form” in the offering of the material edifice. Benedict underlined the character of the symbolic “offering” of the building as an expression of the gift of faith: “What do we do when we dedicate this church? In the heart of the world, placed before God and mankind, with a humble and joyful act of faith, we raise up this massive material structure, fruit of nature and an immense achievement of human intelligence” (2010/2011: s.p.).

The offering of the building through the rite of dedication “translates” the offer that the Church, and each member of it, makes of herself. For this reason, the celebration of the eucharist, in which the Church is offered in the offering she makes to God (Augustine: 310) is considered “the most important and the one necessary for the dedication of a church” (The Rites 1991: II, 362). Nevertheless, in accordance with the tradition of the Church in both East and West, a special prayer of dedication is said. This prayer *traduces* in ritual language the intention to dedicate the building to God and asks for his blessing. Benedict referred to the final part of this prayer when he explained the service this building will bring to humanity. There “the poor may find mercy, the oppressed true freedom and all men may take on the dignity of the children of God” (2010/2011: s.p.).

The rite of dedication includes some explanatory rites, i.e. the anointing, incensing, covering and lighting the altar. These rites “express in visible signs several aspects of the invisible

work that the Lord accomplishes through the Church in its celebration of the divine mysteries” (The Rites 1991: II, 362). The homily only refers directly to the anointing of the altar with chrism:

[...] as I dedicate this splendid church, I implore the Lord of our lives that, from this altar, which will now be anointed with holy oil and upon which the sacrifice of the love of Christ will be consumed, there may be a flood of grace and charity upon the city of Barcelona and its people, and upon the whole world. (Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.)

According to Catholic understanding “The anointing with chrism makes the altar a symbol of Christ, who, before all others, is and is called ‘The Anointed One’; for the Father anointed him with the Holy Spirit and constituted him the High Priest so that on the altar of his body he might offer the sacrifice of his life for the salvation of all” (The Rites 1991: II, 362–363). The here mentioned priesthood of Christ has two dimensions: an ascending one signified by the rite of incense (“Incense is burned on the altar to signify that Christ’s sacrifice, there perpetuated in mystery, ascends to God as an *odor* of sweetness and also to signify that the people’s prayers rise up pleasing and acceptable, reaching the throne of God”; *ibid.*: 363), and a descending one signified by the dressing and lighting of the altar. Benedict alluded indirectly to this descending dimension when he prayed that “there may be a flood of grace and charity upon the city of Barcelona and its people, and upon the whole world” (2010/2011: s.p.). In fact, the dressing of the altar “signifies that it is at the Lord’s table at which all people joyously meet to be refreshed with divine food, namely, the body and blood of Christ sacrificed”, and the lighting of the altar “reminds us that Christ is ‘a light to enlighten the nations’; his brightness shines out in the Church and through it in the whole human family” (The Rites 1991: II, 363).

The last aspect to be emphasized is the position of the homily within the general structure of the rite for the dedication. The introductory rites are followed by the liturgy of the Word. After the proclamation of the Gospel the “bishop gives the homily, in which he explains the biblical readings and the meaning of the rite” (The Rites 1991: II, 376). The Prayer of Dedication and the explanatory rites happen after the Creed that concludes the Liturgy of the Word. This means that the homily has a decisive rhetorical function in activating the memory and the perceptive capacity of all the celebrants. By anticipating the meaning of some segments of the rite through language, the homily becomes a service to the celebrants’ receptivity for symbols because the rites of dedication are not a dramatized translation of the *message* of the homily. On the contrary, the homily prepares for the ritual gesture which, as a performative act, transforms a series of gestures and material elements (the building) into a *tangible translation* of the mystery of the Church.

In this sense, the homily has a double function. Firstly, it is a performative action, since it participates in the sacramentality of the Word: the homily partakes in the performativity of the event that is made present through the proclamation (cf. Benini 2020, 386–387). Secondly, the homily has a mystagogical function since it is designed to enhance the performativity of the rites of dedication. This mystagogical function is not limited to a mere anticipation of the *meaning* of the ritual gestures. In fact, it facilitates the subjective appropriation of the event (aesthetic experience of the liturgy) by influencing the expectations, dispositions and ultimate purposes of the action that the celebrants will perform (cf. Kerner 2020), and also by framing the imagination of the celebrants (cf. Rego 2012: 258–259).

4 Rhetorical analysis of the interaction between art, language and rite in its performative-translational dimension

Finally, to evaluate the multidimensionality of our research subject, namely the interaction between architecture, rite and language, we need to look at those aspects of the homily in which Benedict XVI referred to the means of visualisation—*evidentia* in rhetorical terminology. For this purpose, the research background will first be sketched out, based on Gil (2008).

Evidentia is not just a cognitive ability to imagine something that is well-expressed linguistically; it also involves performativity. In the classic handbook of rhetoric by Lausberg (1990), *evidentia* is classified under the “affective figures” (§ 808ff.): the vividly detailed description gives rise to “the simultaneity experience of the eyewitness: the speaker puts himself and his audience in the position of the eyewitness” (our translation). It is therefore not so much a narrative as a performance (§ 810). In the relevant scholarship, the several levels of these accounts are finely differentiated: Kemmann (1996: 40), for example, distinguishes the “procedures of vivification” or the visualisation of the absent under the Aristotelian concept of *enargeia*. The *enargeia* basically aims at achieving clarity and brilliance in order to move people to concrete action.

According to Lausberg (§§ 813–817), the important means by which to achieve *evidentia* in the broader sense are *isocolon*, *distributio*, use of the present tense, adverbs of place and pronominal stems, address of the persons appearing in the narrative, and direct speech (of natural persons or personified objects). Dachsel (1995/2003: 85) adds the *antithesis*, which represents “a movement from reflective thought into pathos” on the one hand, and, on the other, the repetitions (cf. *ibid.* 94).

The latter contribute to *amplificatio* insofar as the emotional effect is intensified by the stringing together of the same and similar. The recurrence makes a phrase more powerful, i.e. more appellative than denotative.

In the following, selected parts of the homily will be examined closely according to these and similar means of visualisation. Two strategies of visualisation can be identified: the cognitive activation of the listeners, and linguistic visualisation as such.

4.1 Cognitive activation of the listeners

The audience was encouraged to reflect by means of two following procedures:

Questions. The homily’s statements were not simply made, but rather first formulated as a question encouraging the listeners to reflect: “What do we do when we dedicate this church? In the heart of the world [...] we raise up this massive material structure, fruit of nature and an immense achievement of human intelligence which gave birth to this work of art” (Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.).

Focusing strategies. The element that is important to the sender, the preacher, is prepared or introduced accordingly, i.e. excitingly: “In this he accomplished one of the most important tasks of our times: overcoming the division between human consciousness and Christian consciousness, between living in this temporal world and being open to eternal life, between the beauty of things and God as beauty” (Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.). “Overcoming the division” is the more important statement for the preacher. This is focused, and hence made more visible, by the sender preparing it with the introductory phrase “one of the most important tasks of our times” and

then specifying it through repetition: “between (...), between (...)” (ibid.).

4.2 Linguistic visualisation as such

Several times the homily tries to visualise by way of two important linguistic devices: antitheses and metaphors (or comparisons).

Antitheses. The contrast has the effect of sharpening the profile of the concepts that are juxtaposed in a narrow space. A few examples will suffice. The church of the Sagrada Familia “stands as a visible sign of the invisible God”. Making the invisible present is illustrated by the antithesis *visible – invisible*.

He made stones, trees and human life *part of the church* so that all creation might come together in praise of God, but at the same time he *brought the sacred images outside* so as to place before people the mystery of God revealed in the birth, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.)

The longer juxtaposition linguistically reflects and theologically suggests what people inside and outside the church building see, or else it makes them aware of this visual reality they have perceived but perhaps have not yet recognised in its meaning. Mystagogically, Pope Benedict wanted to send out his audience to proclaim the correct image of God. He draws this all the more sharply through antitheses: “This is the great task before us: to show everyone that God is a God of peace not of violence, of freedom not of coercion, of harmony not of discord” (2010/2011: s.p.). Peace, freedom and harmony as attributes of God become more clearly comprehensible through their juxtaposition with their opposites (violence, coercion and discord).

Metaphors and comparisons are the most effective means of visualisation, because they make abstract concepts that are dif-

difficult to imagine concrete and accessible. Pope Benedict made frequent use of them, in fact. By comparing the church towers to arrows pointing upwards to the light, for instance, God becomes more imaginable as light, height and beauty: “to whose (of God) glory these spires rise like arrows pointing towards absolute light and to the One who is Light, Height and Beauty itself” (Benedict XVI 2010/2011: s.p.). Gaudí as an architect and artist depicted the beauty of God not with words but by his architectural and artistic work. Then, beauty as a natural necessity of human beings is made meaningful through metaphors in an isotopic chain: root – trunk – fruit: “Indeed, beauty is one of mankind’s greatest needs; it is the root from which the branches of our peace and the fruits of our hope come forth” (ibid.). Following the rite of dedication, Christ is metaphorically presented as the rock on which faith is based: “He is the rock on which our faith is built” (ibid.). The building itself is seen as a gift from God and a sign of the whole Church. The rite of dedication is perceived as a personal offering to God by the members of the Church, an offering that includes a cosmic dimension. The altar is seen as an image of Christ’s priesthood, through which God’s grace is bestowed on the people, and also man’s thanksgiving and praise are addressed to the Father. Inspired by the dedication rite’s language, full of metaphorical imagery as it is, and by the artistic beauty of the church building, the preacher interpreted the Church and its mission in the world with three metaphors (icon, flame, path): “to be an icon of divine beauty, a burning flame of charity, a path so that the world may believe in the One whom God has sent (cf. Jn 6:29)”.

In summary, we can say that during the examined dedication ceremony, the preacher used various procedures of *evidentia* to more vividly refer to the other semiotic elements of architecture, art and ritual that already translate the invisible into

the visible, thereby reinforcing their translational function of the “sacred”.

5 Conclusions and research perspectives

The present study was prompted by a question concerning whether the performance itself has an essential translational dimension. For Octavio Paz (1983/1985: 305), for example, using language is translating (“quien dice lengua dice traducción”). We have pursued this question by examining the performative aspects of Catholic liturgy, exemplified in the dedication ceremony of the church of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona on 7 November 2010, because in this event different sign systems interacted. We have tried to explain how this interaction of three performances did not work side by side, but complementarily together as a kind of semantic polyphony or *Gesamtkunstwerk*—to use Wagner’s term. Regarding the nature of that interaction, it can be said that it is precisely their translational function which connects art, ritual and language: Each contributes in its own specific way to the task of translating the invisible into the visible, the abstract into the tangible, the transcendent into the terrestrial. The homily is key to this, as our essay has demonstrated, because it is part of the liturgical action, and so has a sacramental character. Yet the homily is also a moral or doctrinal instruction: it is a performative sign by which Christ is present in dialogue with the Church.

Benedict’s homily explained the readings of the mass, and also some ritual segments of the dedication. By doing so, the homily facilitated the personal appropriation of the event and framed the imagination of the celebrants. By referring also to the spiritual meaning of the Sagrada Familia as architecture and artwork, the preacher put the translational achievements of Gaudí into words: the building and its pictures visually signify

the “sacred”. The fact that the homily dealt with the performances of both the dedication rite and the church architecture fits well with the purposes of our research. That is because the spoken word brings about a translation and meta-*translatio* at the same time and so potentiates the action of rite and art in their translational function.

The present study provides, we hope, new perspectives for future research in many areas of the humanities. First and foremost, the possibilities and limits of transdisciplinarity became evident: single disciplines interacting with each other initially speak their own language and follow their own method. It is difficult to avoid these differences even in the ways we write and conduct scholarship. Communicating with each other to solve a common question requires great openness and flexibility as well as active listening to the arguments of others. In that regard, our transdisciplinary essay dealing with the liturgy should have also included music, even though many liturgical ceremonies are celebrated without music. However, extending the disciplinary spectrum by including music is certainly a desideratum for future research. Additional aspects that would importantly contribute to our disciplinary interaction are, for instance, the difference between the precision of a ritual performance and the possible spontaneous actions of the celebrant, the difference between a Mass in a magnificent cathedral and a modest village church, or even in a natural setting, as on a mountain side with a dreamlike scenic backdrop. As regards the homily, there are other aspects that we could have explored in depth, e.g. the difference between a thoroughly prepared homily and spontaneous speech, the vocal expression of inwardly and liturgically felt solemnity and how that is related to one’s physical way of moving inside the architectural space.

Again, it should be emphasised that the homily has a mystagogical function. It introduces believers in the invisible mystery of God, that is, the God's ongoing plan of salvation. The whole liturgical celebration is seen as a performance in which that plan of divine salvation is translated and carried on. Art and architecture also follow a performative approach. The preacher therefore referred to the Sagrada Família as having been created—among others reasons—for mystagogical tasks. The building “tunes” the attending people to the “sacred” through the visual communication of its space and images. Here, the liturgical celebration includes a call awaiting a response from the believers. It therefore also has ethical implications. The moral life of the participants after the rite can edify the *real* Church of which the church architecture of the *Sagrada Família* is just a symbolic image. For this reason, our research will eventually have to complete itself in the study of the performative effects of the liturgy, which is a matter of exploring how the spiritual life of Christians can grow according to the structure and metaphorical imagery of the rite for the dedication of a church building.

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