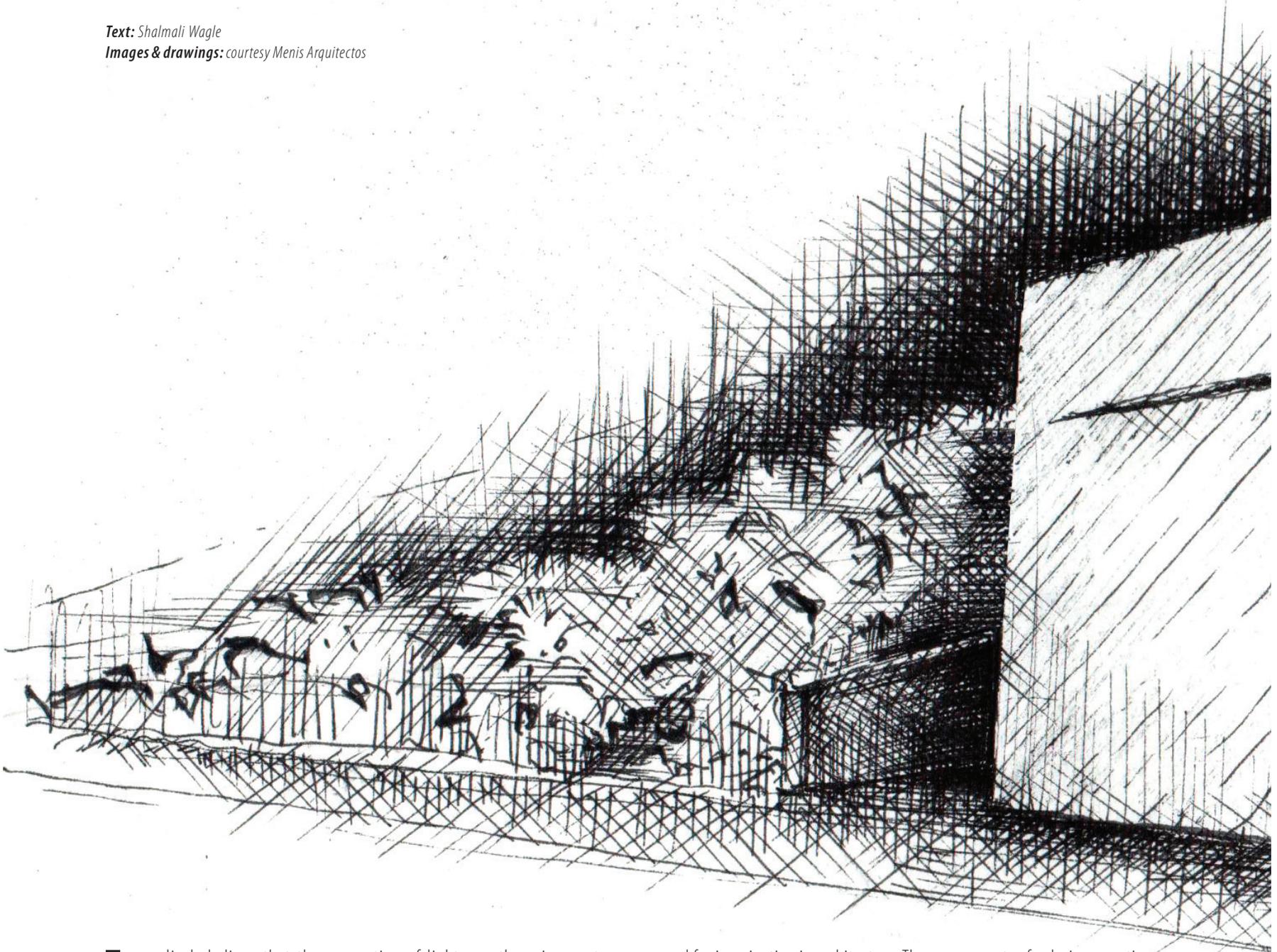


a symbiosis of dualities

Discovering a mystic dimension within stark simplicity, the Holy Redeemer Church in San Cristóbal de la Laguna, Tenerife, Spain by Menis Arquitectos is an expression of poignant religious architecture emerging from an impeccable harmony of synergetic dualities.

Text: Shalmali Wagle

Images & drawings: courtesy Menis Arquitectos

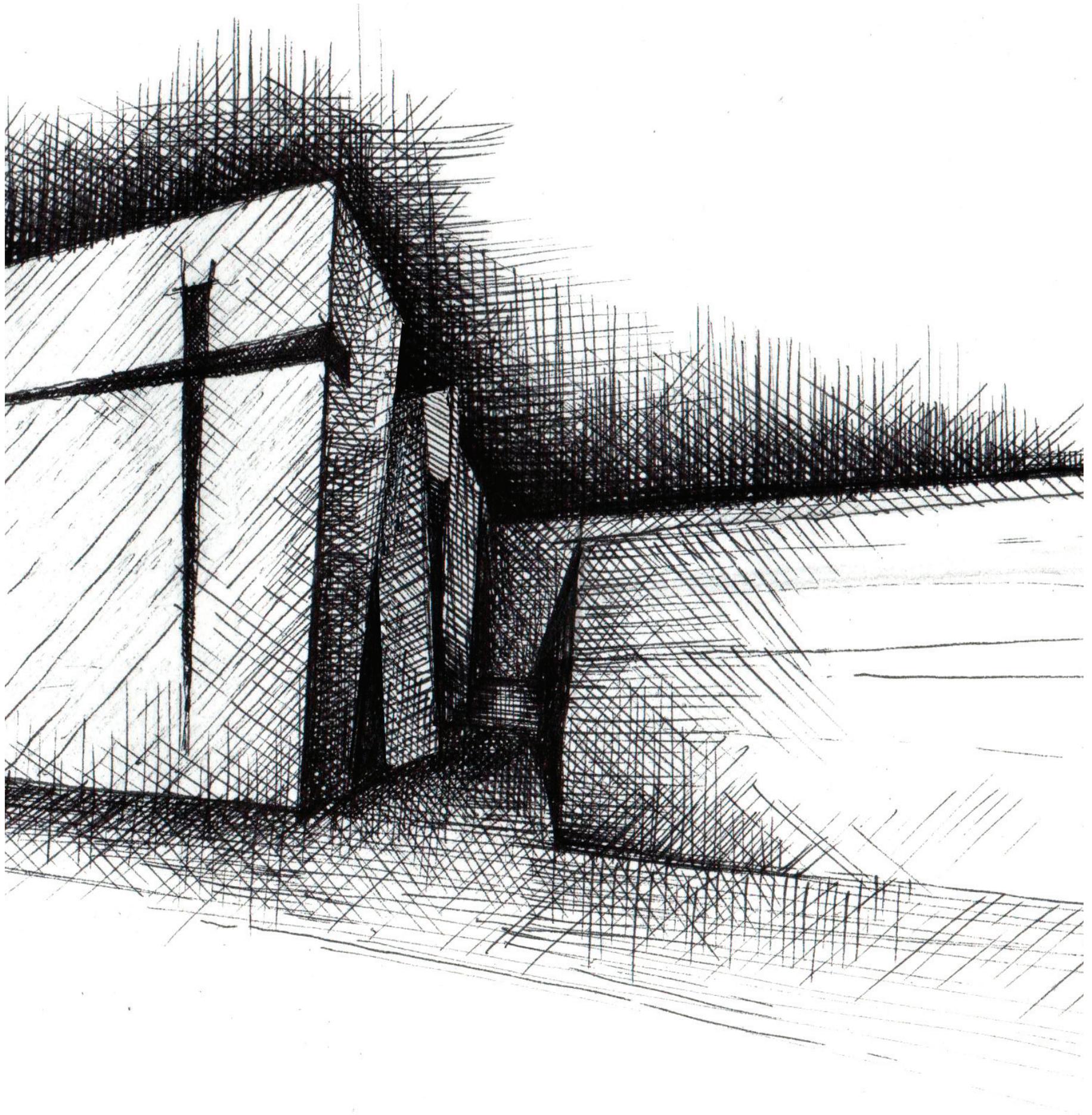


Evangelicals believe that the conception of light was the primary step in the creation of life. It is said that with the utterance of the words, “Let there be Light”, a formative spirit travelled through material and vacuum which, until then, uselessly existed in darkness and desolation. The spirit penetrated the soundless nights of the world guiding the process of creation to completion. What resulted was a combination of sphere and soul – a perfect ‘yin yang’ equilibrium!

Just as nature responds to matter through anti-matter for this equilibrium, an oppositional interplay of the tangible and the intangible provides balanced

ground for imagination in architecture. The unseen parts of a design equation inspire intuitive and synesthetic responses. Be it the voids between volumes, the shadows behind light or the invisible spirit of a space, it is the articulated dialectic, the unbroken tension of opposites that holds all creation together.

Odd, almost obscure intersections of such and similar essences vaguely echo behind the design of The Holy Redeemer Church in San Cristóbal de la Laguna, Tenerife, Spain by Menis Arquitectos. There is both spirit and creation as the powerful interactions of light and shadow within multiple layers of volume and void foster profound emptiness and timeless emotion.





Carved in concrete, an expression of poignant religious architecture.

A dominant visual reference within its urban milieu, the Holy Redeemer Church is located on a rather restrictive 550sqm site with intense topographical variation. Countering this sufficiently, an elaborate entrance ramp surrounds and swings around the seemingly impenetrable concrete composition, allowing access to an austere outdoor square and the levitating upper floors of the church housing an elaborate Cultural Centre.

Volume & Void

Conceived as a disorganised organisation of large independent rocks, the 1050sqm Church and Cultural Centre comprises of four substantial

reinforced concrete volumes, roughly lined with crushed volcanic rock and separated from one another by sliced openings. The four modules are treated as independent entities and built separately in phases. While the first two modules accommodate the Cultural Centre, the Library and its dependencies, the other two encompass the main Temple and the Altar. The building stands blatantly stark, stripped of any superfluous elements that may possibly distract from its inherent spiritual essence. Its minimalist exterior rejects any traces of religious paraphernalia, besides the two overlapping cracks in the end wall which abstractedly reminisce the traditional cruciform.



Module 1: The volume accommodates the dependencies supporting the Cultural Centre.



Module 2: The Library and Cultural Centre intersect a part of the silent temple.



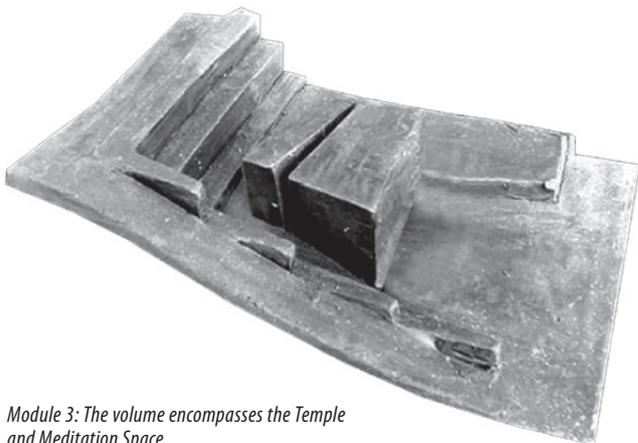
Concrete volumes separated by sliced openings.

"There was emptiness more profound than the void between the stars, for which there was no here and there or before and after, and yet out that void the entire plenum of existence sprang forth."

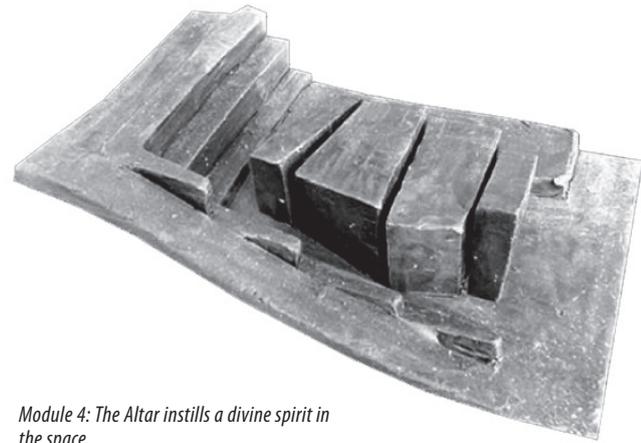
- Heinz R. Pagels

The voids between the concrete masses speak as much about architecture as the masses themselves. The hollows add depth to the otherwise crude and bulky volumes, connecting them as a structural whole, encouraging and limiting vision from within to what is beyond. The juxtaposition of these solids and cavities make the composition interesting, allowing the creation

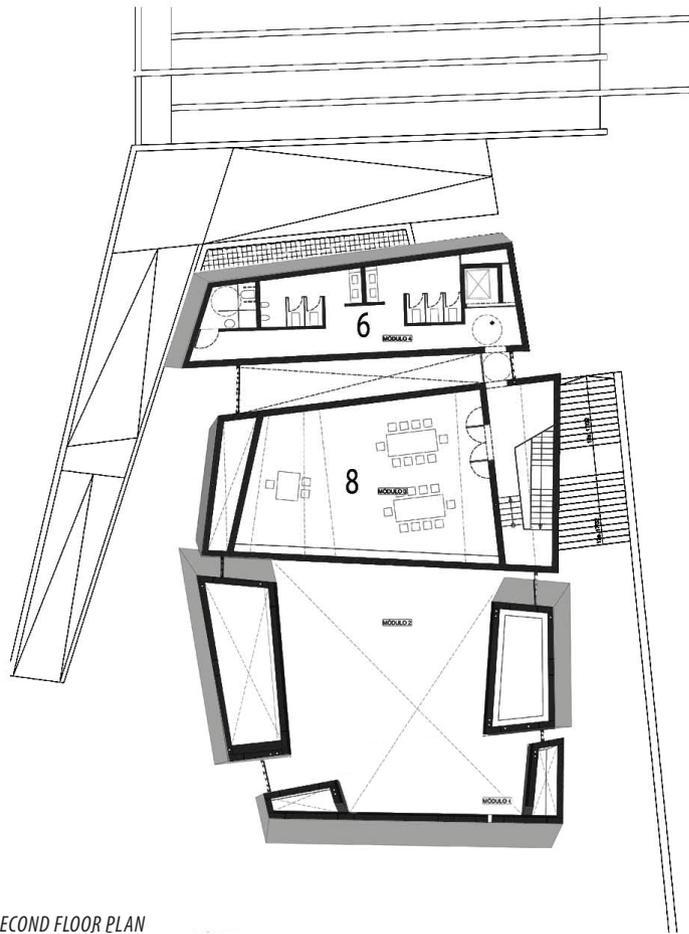
of a sensual space within from pure imagination. The design exploits the properties of concrete, its thermal inertia ensuring energy efficiency of the design. The hefty outer composition purposefully ignores the conventional notions of scale and proportion to create an effect of divine supremacy, a symbolic reference to the dominance of the highest authority. The balanced volumetric impact of the building along with its simplistic materials and textures thus, not only reflect the inherent design intent centred around sacred beliefs but also allow the optimisation of resources. The exterior, interior, structure, form, material and texture are inextricably fused by a complex study of concrete.



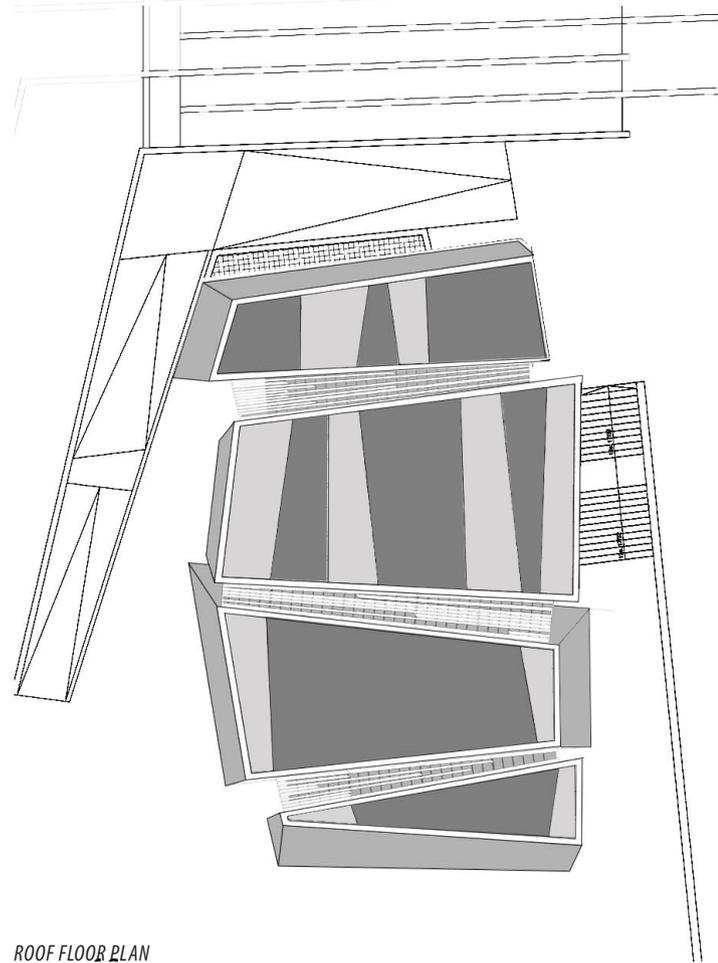
Module 3: The volume encompasses the Temple and Meditation Space.



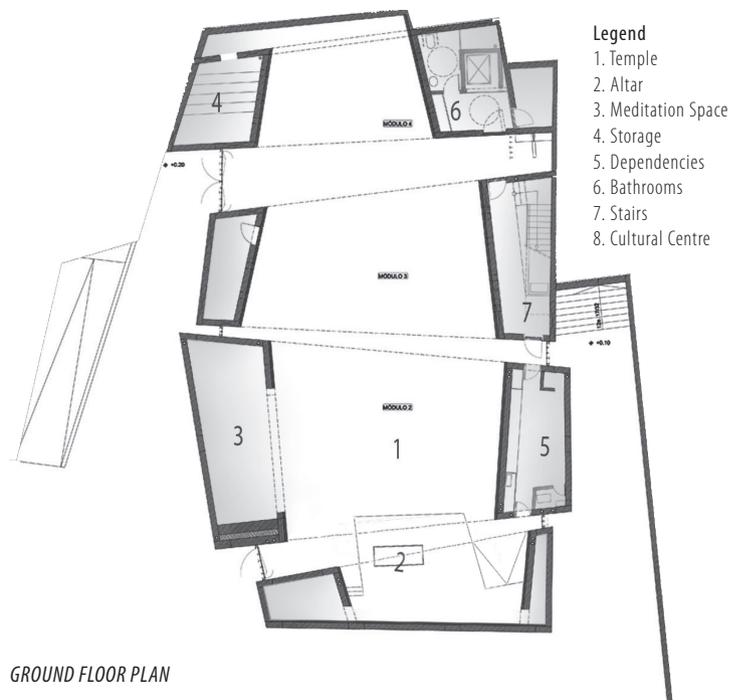
Module 4: The Altar instills a divine spirit in the space.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



ROOF FLOOR PLAN



- Legend**
- 1. Temple
 - 2. Altar
 - 3. Meditation Space
 - 4. Storage
 - 5. Dependencies
 - 6. Bathrooms
 - 7. Stairs
 - 8. Cultural Centre

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

The church comprises of four substantial concrete volumes separated from one another by sliced openings. The building stands stark, stripped of any superfluous elements that distract from its inherent spiritual essence.

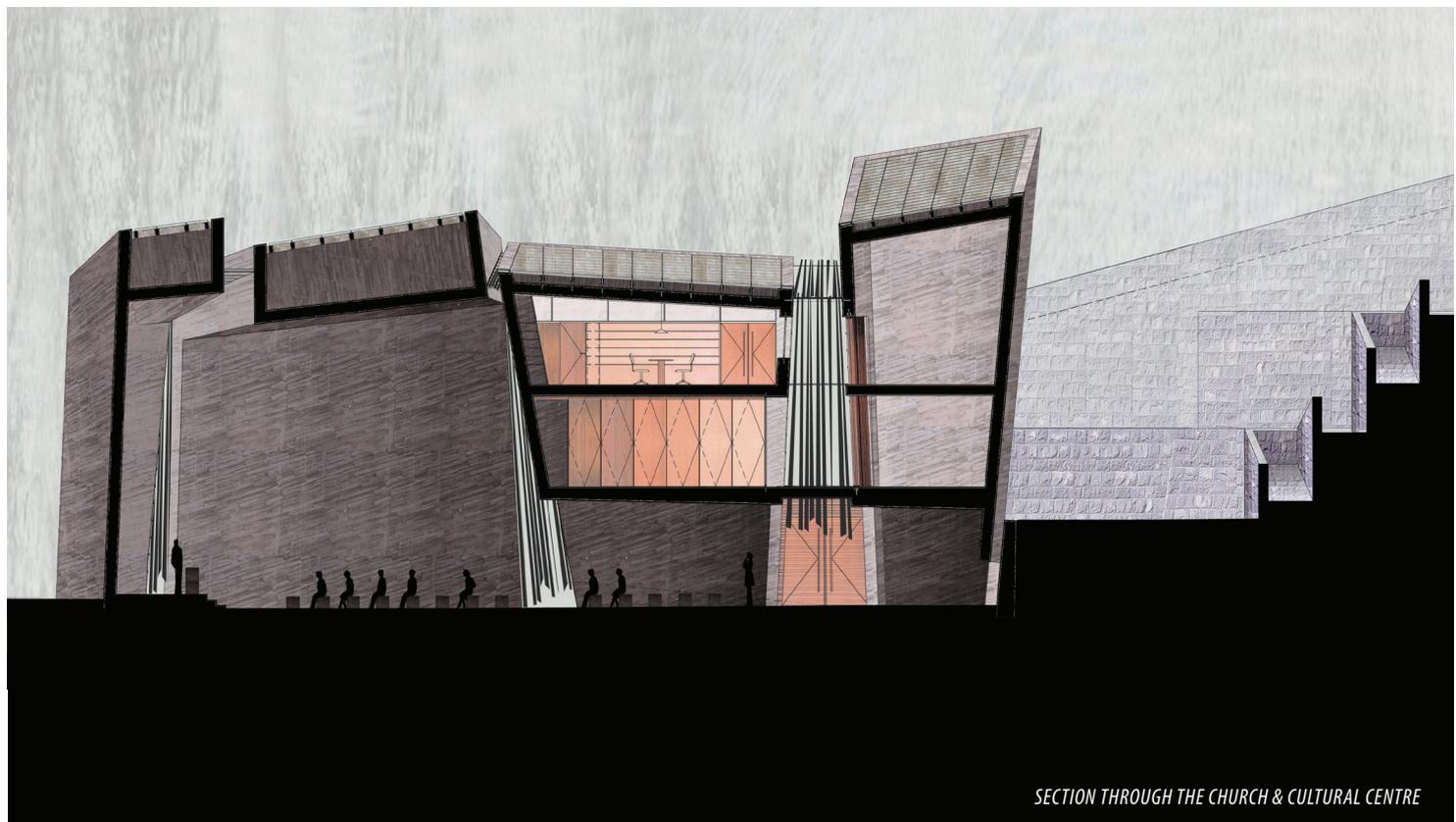


The drama of depth, darkness and mystery.

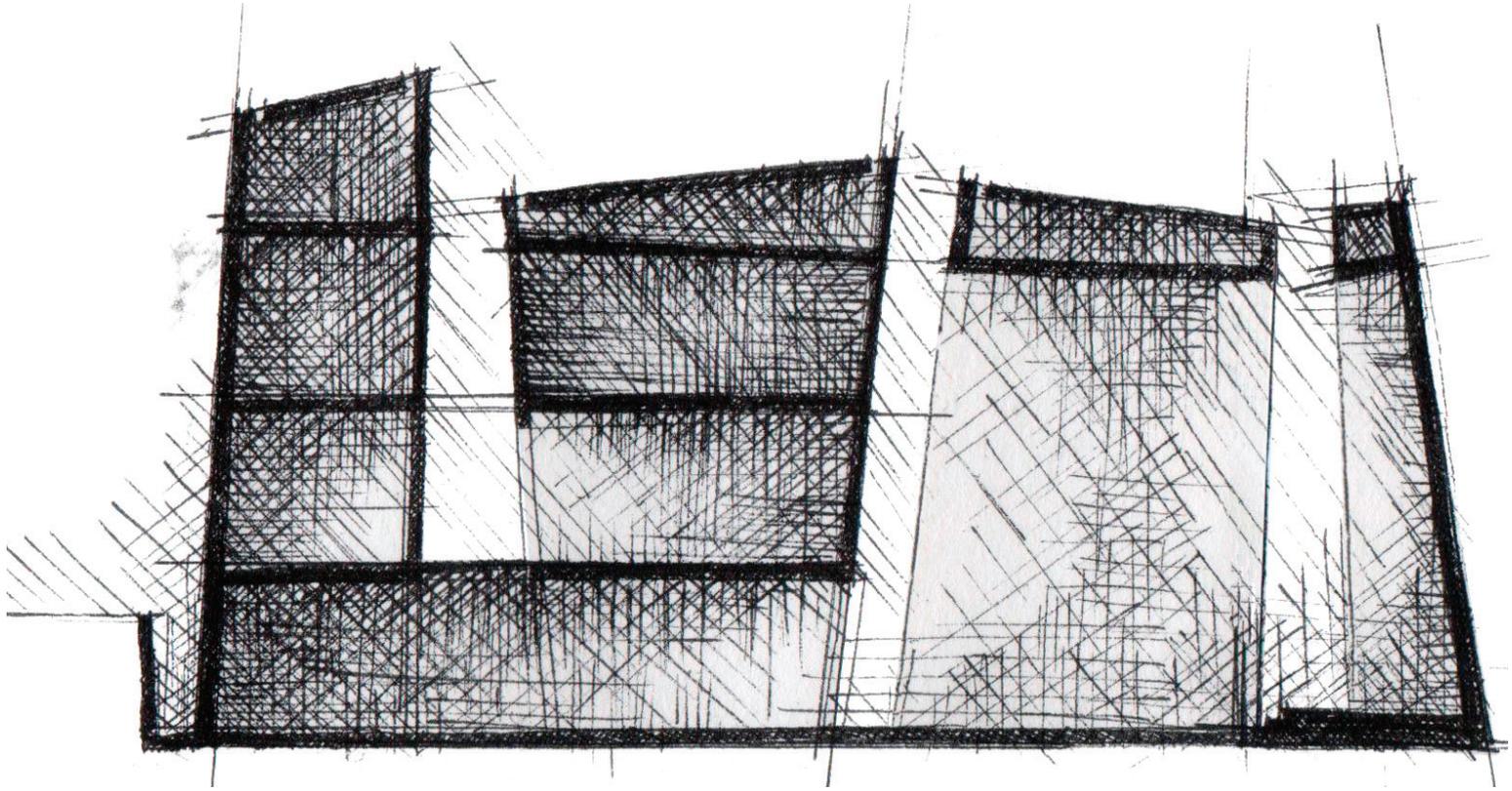
Discovering an experience in sheer 'nothingness', the main entry to the Church and Cultural Centre is an adroitly carved sliver between the concrete masses, transformed vividly with natural light and ventilation. All spaces are oriented towards these illuminated 'in between' slices created, making them ideal as connectors and circulation corridors. Cocooned within is an intrinsic meditation space encouraging reflection, where an individual can engage in holy-communion at the Temple or indulge in socio-cultural exchange with others at the Cultural Centre. While the main Cultural Centre and Library levitate on two floors above the main temple, the first module entirely houses the dependencies that support the Cultural Centre. Gabion walls create partitions between these appropriately segregated functional requirements in the interior.

Physical & Imaginary

The wonder of the space is not constrained merely to the visual realm. Rather, the combination of geometrical properties with lighting and acoustics creates an environment, which, though channeled through vision, manifests a complete sensual experience. Void and presence now entwine to surround one with attributes, though equally stimulating, distinctly different from the exterior. The translucent slices of void and the purposefully uneven juxtapositions of solids visually demarcate the separations, crafting a confident drama of depth, darkness, and mystery. A mute stillness is instilled by the visual heaviness of concrete and sound absorption owing to the combination of concrete and local volcanic stones called 'picón'. A blending of light and shadows with this composition brings the space to life, its revelatory aspect surfacing the intrinsic texture, depth, and form of the creation with all honesty. The space radiates raw beauty. It has a soul of its own that penetrates souls within, its noiseless walls creating an aura of serenity and conveying an intimate spiritual experience.



SECTION THROUGH THE CHURCH & CULTURAL CENTRE



THE POSITIONING OF OPENINGS AND THE PLAY OF NATURAL LIGHT.

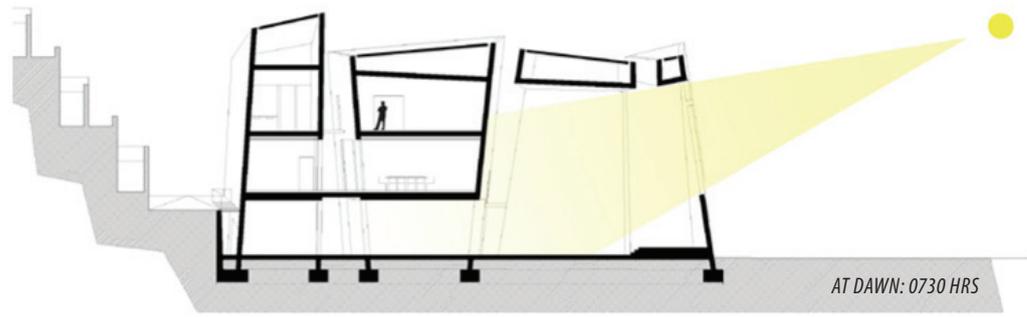
Light & Shadow

One of the most important elements in religion being light, the design is conceived so as to allow zenithal light as an additional mystic dimension in each of its interior functions. An exhaustive and rational study of light works in coordination with the strategic locations of ceiling voids to achieve an interesting drama of light and shadow within. Light penetrates the space as if to signify a higher meaning and inspire a tranquil sense of spirituality. It emphasises the neutrality of the space as a platform on which shadows accentuate surfaces, both morphing and enduring with time.

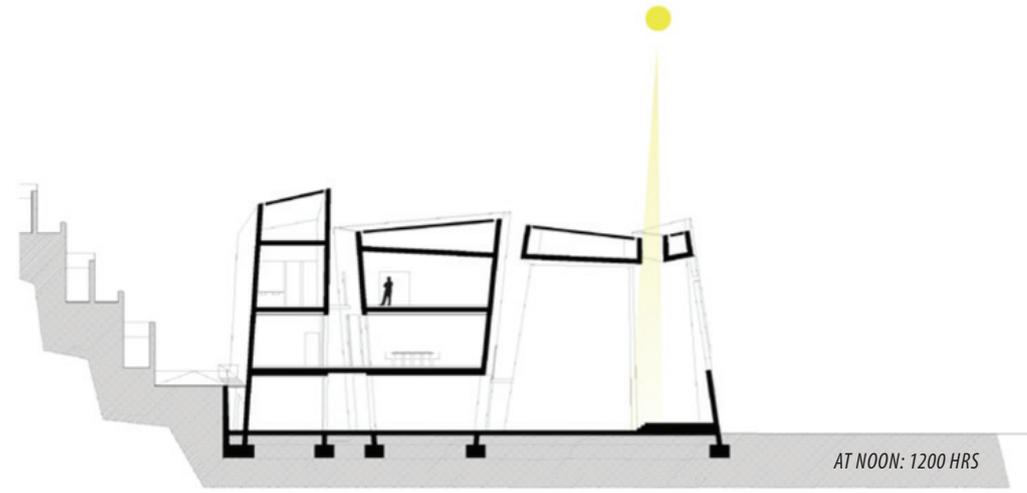
In Christianity, the seven sacraments or 'signs of the sacred' highlight what is holy, essential and important. The openings in the design synchronise with the movement of the sun to help emphasise each of the seven sacraments of the church, establishing deep theological roots. In this sense, at dawn, light filters in through the abstracted crucifix behind the altar symbolising the opening in the cave where Jesus was buried. This light illuminates the inscribed Baptismal font, 'The first light of the Christian'. At noon, across the ceiling, pours in a cascade of light focussing on the Confirmation and Eucharist and soon after, a brilliant beam brightens the Confessional font on the Sacrament of Penance. The openings on the ceilings achieve a similar effect on the Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders. One observes a gradual transition from darkness to light through the day symbolising the divine power of resurrection; from death to life.



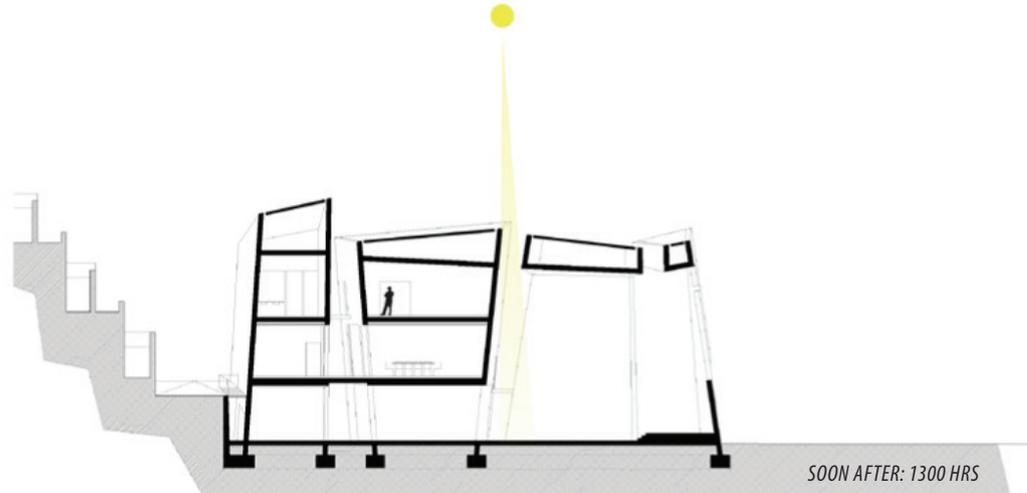
The volumes and voids control light and shadow.



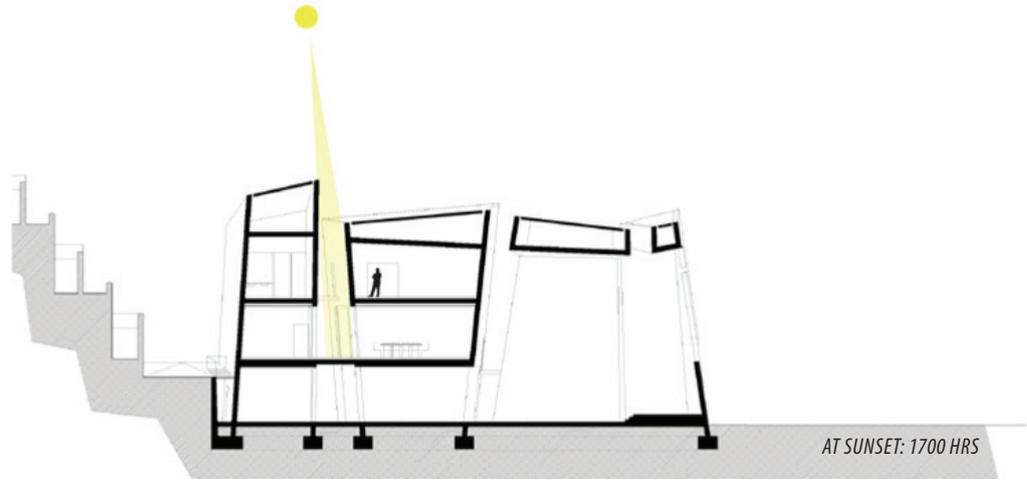
AT DAWN: 0730 HRS



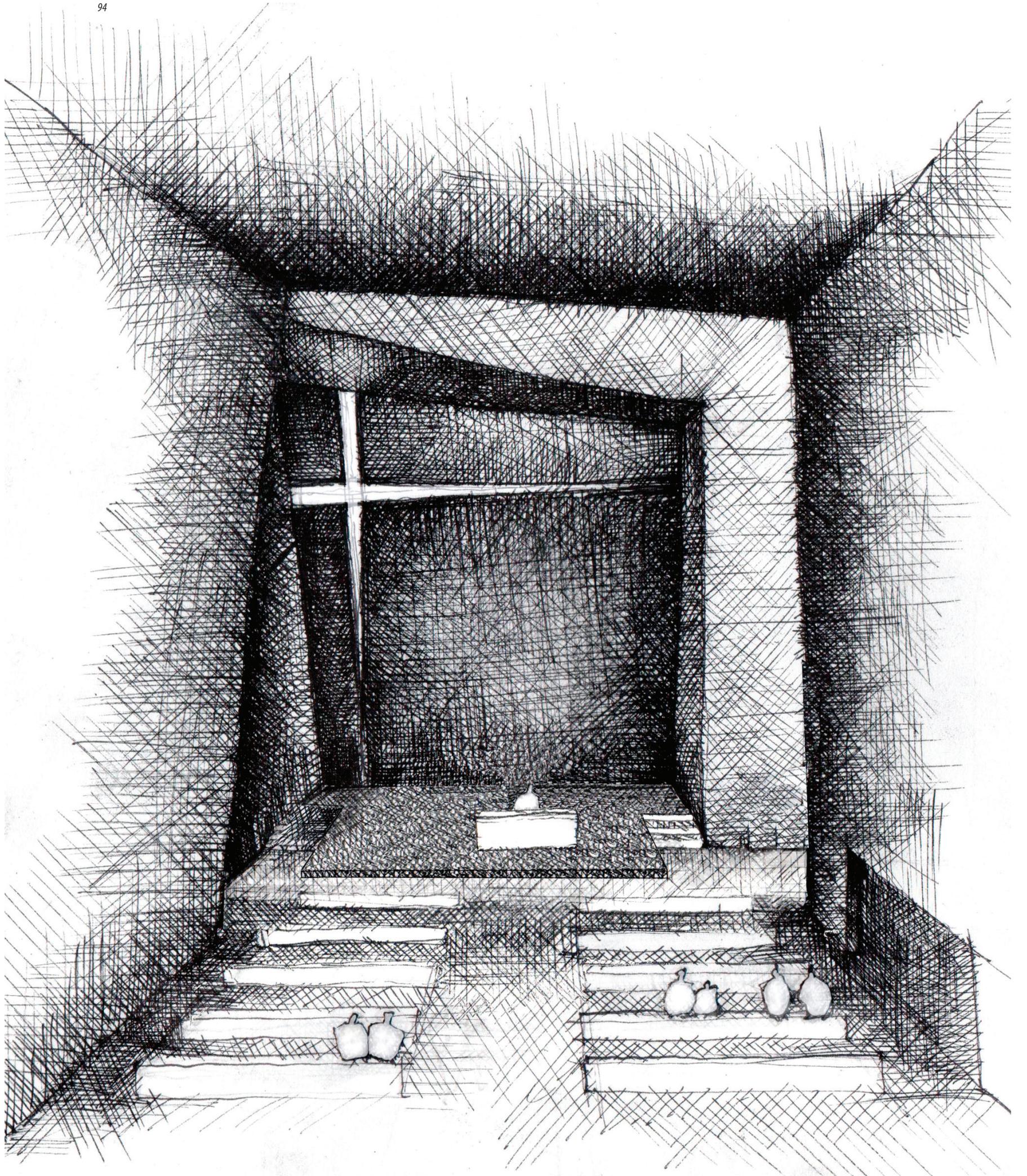
AT NOON: 1200 HRS



SOON AFTER: 1300 HRS



AT SUNSET: 1700 HRS





"Let there be Light."

Space & Spirit

The main Temple and its Altar, contained in the third and fourth modules respectively, too follow the previous grimness of surfaces and refrain from typical religious ornamentation. There are no gothic ceilings with soaring arches, no wooden crosses or impersonations of divinity and no stained-glass rose-windows illuminating elaborate depictions and inscriptions. The continuing drama of solemnity culminates here with the brilliant violence of a single abstracted crucifixion on the end wall of the Altar and the natural light entering through it. Light appears to symbolise its own self, authored by the creator, who is sometimes perceived in a comprehensive sense, as light itself: "God is Light". It imparts a sensation of divine presence, transforming the space with an indescribable spirit.

What one realises is that, though religious architecture is a typology commonly associated with sacred geometry, iconography and the use of

endemic semiotics such as signs, symbols and motifs, it does not necessarily have to follow prevalent trends, as long as it serves its religious purpose. True to its purpose, the church provides a space that kindles faith, promises hope and touches the soul with its psychological metaphors for the very first words, "Let there be Light"... ■

FACT FILE:

Project	:	Holy Redeemer Church
Location	:	Los Majuelos, San Cristóbal de la Laguna, Tenerife, Spain
Architect	:	Fernando Menis, Menis Arquitectos
Design Team	:	Juan Bercedo, María Berga, Sergio Bruns, Roberto Delgado, Niels Heinrich, Andreas Weihnacht
Client	:	Holy Redeemer Parish