

Chapter 128

The Catholic Church and Neo-Gothic Architecture in Latin America: Scales for Their Analysis

Martín M. Checa-Artasu

128.1 Introduction

The construction of churches, temples and cathedrals in the neo-Gothic style in Latin America was a constant during the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. The construction of these temples, beyond their architecture, became part of a solution serving the political and social needs of the Church. Through this idea we can understand these buildings as being symbols of the balance, sometimes conflicting, sometimes fully collaborative, between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the national governments which arose at that historical moment. In addition, those buildings are a reflection of the Catholic revival which occurred in the Western hemisphere starting in the last third of the nineteenth century, as they express attempts at the positioning, both social and territorial, of a Catholic hierarchy that was attempting to emerge after years of wars, conflicts, transfers of property and expulsions.

In this paper, I formalize the early stages of research on the extent and forms of neo-Gothic religious architecture in Latin America. This is an analysis which seeks to understand how the Catholic Church has taken this style and used it, directly or indirectly, as an additional element in a complex policy of integrating itself into societies of the then-new (nineteenth century) Latin American countries. Thus, we seek to go beyond both the simple listing of works and architects and the mere architectural and stylistic description of these places of worship.

To understand this phenomenon, we use the geographical concept of scale as the modulating element. It allows us to structure the role of the Church on the continent in the late nineteenth century, using the neo-Gothic architectural style as a pretext

M.M. Checa-Artasu (✉)

Department of Sociology, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana,

Unidad Iztapalapa, Mexico, DF, Mexico

e-mail: martinchecartasu@gmail.com

through three scales attached to geographical and political notions: the nation or the state, the territory, and the local. This analysis will also allow us to offer an outline of the spatial impact of the Catholic Church throughout the continent in the late nineteenth century.

128.2 The Concept of Scale as Related to the Catholic Church and Neo-Gothic Style in Latin America

Scale is a concept that has been used to explain various concepts emanating from geography that investigate the relationships between humans and space. This is not just a technical issue associated with a geometricized view of the world, but a concept with a more complex understanding with which we can associate humans with the series of objects or elements that exist or occur in space. The dynamics and links between humans, objects and scale and are also part of an ongoing geographical discourse (Batlori 2002:7).

In light of this thinking we can consider the Catholic Church to be an object in geographical space which is able to generate a certain territoriality that is mediated by a series of scales in which it interacts with humankind and from which different characteristics are derived which are susceptible to analysis in a study. This perspective explains why recent works that relate geography and religion consider the role of scale as important. It is also used as an explanatory concept that is useful in studying religion in a spatial context (Rosendahl 2005:12933; Stump 2008; Sack 1986:92–127).

Thus, for example, Brazilian geographer Zeny Rosendahl (1996:32) classifies this linkage between religion and geographic space into three main groups: *faith, space and time*, which incorporate the dissemination and area of coverage of a faith or belief in a given space; *the centers of convergence and irradiation* of the same, and *the sacred space and the perception* which considers the experience and symbolism which are derived from this relationship. American geographer Roger Stump (2008:221) also suggests the existence of three types of scales, which he calls: *communal, narrower and wider*. These define religious territoriality in a secular space. These scales, in turn, interact among themselves with the objective of defining a specific territoriality. In my view, the *communal* scale would be that which is determined by territoriality in the community spaces for practice of a particular religion. For the Catholic world, these include churches, parishes, shrines, chapels, convents and monasteries. The *narrower* scale would link the territoriality of the religious act with the person; that is, it would be confined to the body, the home, the family. The *wider* scale would be that which expresses territoriality from institutions with a religious bias, but that coexist with social and political structures, which may be secular or of other religions (Stump 2008:224). For the Catholic religion, we would be referring to categories such as the diocese or archdiocese. The scales can also be categorized within themselves in terms of actions that believers of one religion or another perform. For example, the action of prayer, worship or meditation confers a specific territoriality that coexists with different actions

performed in the same scale or in a different one. For example, in one Catholic church, a person may be praying, while another may be walking around, varying the sense of scale if the person walking around is a tourist who arrives in this building with the intention of seeing it or if the traveller is someone who completes a pilgrimage to make a request to a particular saint.

In this regard, the geographer Robert Sack (1986:92–125) tells us about territorialization, which has evolved over time in the Christian church in various forms since its origins, all which are attached to the church hierarchy and with a clear economic component mitigated by the processes of reform, the emergence of industrialization, capitalism and liberalism. For Sack, this reasoning aids in our considering the Catholic Church to be a traditional institution, since it has clung to a territorial distribution which, while it has been diluted by the development of other economic powers, continues to be a notion creating contingent spaces which contain the sacred: the temple, the church and the cathedral, all which also support it in an exclusive manner with other spaces that do not contain it. From this perspective, Richard Kieckhefer (2004:15) limits the scale analysis to the sacred space of a temple because it incorporates concepts such as liturgical use, which consists of spatial dynamics or the central focus and a desired response and where both the ascetic impact and symbolic resonance are considered. This interpretation considers the spatiality of the temple and how humans unfold in it, not only from a mobility standpoint, but also how that space stimulates and recreates perceptions, feelings and events relating to connectivity with the sacred or turning that space into a socio-cultural production of the first magnitude.

128.3 Scales of Action

The brief theoretical framework outlined above helps us, using the context of the neo-Gothic architecture of different Catholic churches, to determine the role of the Catholic Church in Latin America between the last third of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the 20th. These were years when this type of architectural style had a high degree of significance on the continent. Neo-Gothicism was one of many emerging historicisms which arose at that time, it was used by architects both because of personal taste or their formative influences, as well as due to the wishes of their clients, that is, members of the Catholic hierarchy, who had a fondness for this style based on its symbolic and ecclesiological nature. This school of architecture can be traced back to previous times of grandeur in the Church in socioeconomic terms. But it also had a versatile mystical component, since Gothic architecture was associated with the idea of a heavenly Jerusalem and a transcendent approach to the sacred.

Nevertheless, Gothic architecture was a foreign and imported style into Latin America, which looked at the American universe through different lens. This fact alone places it in an ambivalent logic. For certain Latin American political constituencies, it was synonymous with a necessary grandeur attached to a concrete modernity that linked it to processes justifying the construction and consolidation of the State, and

which, in addition, were also blessed by the Church. For this view to be realized, especially for the Church's hierarchy, it represented the style that suggests a return to a glorious past where the Church had an axial role in society. Neo-Gothic, perhaps like no other architectural style, hid the desire for a return to the past. It was associated with nation-building and at the same time, it proposed a different access to modernity (Gil 1999:24–25). Thus history and modernity met in local environments; cities and towns and were viewed within the construction or restoration of Catholic churches in the neo-Gothic style.

These architectural features, which reflect diverse and complex decisions, can be analyzed considering different scales where space, humans and objects interact and generate different processes with and among each other. This diversity scale, for the case in question, can be grouped into three broad categories.

128.3.1 First Scale: Church vs. State (Nation)

The role of the Catholic Church in Latin America throughout the nineteenth century can be considered to be as complex as it is multifaceted (Krebs 2002:315–320). This paper does not seek to analyze that occurrence, but it is useful to address some issues that connect this period with approaches used in this research. Specifically, during the second half of the nineteenth century, new trends arose beyond the already familiar defensive attitude of the Church. These were translated into diverse developments, including the review of approaches regarding religious pluralism and the spread of Protestantism on the continent, the development of positivism among the intellectual and political elites or state royalism, Romanization with the establishment of a formal agreement between the Holy See and the nations in the Americas and the reliable dissemination of papal encyclicals as well as other directives. Also, the consolidation of an Ultramontane church (it asserts the superiority of Papal authority over the authority of local temporal or spiritual hierarchies) in various nations, which was then fighting not only against liberalism, but also with other phenomena such as Protestantism or secularism and a notable extension of the action of the religious orders associated to the development of social Catholicism. Some orders like the Jesuits were reinstated in Latin America after the expulsions in the eighteenth century. Other, newly created orders were the Salesians and the Vincentians and more ancient including Discalced Carmelites and the Franciscans.

It should be noted that the Jesuits were expelled from the Spanish and Portuguese colonial dominions between 1754 and 1767. After that their role in structural social and economic terms through the Jesuit traditions vanished. The Society of Jesus would not return to Latin American until the last third of the nineteenth century.

This development explains the nineteenth century religious revival which covered the entire Catholic world, and especially Latin America. This revival was not without violence, exiles, the disposal of properties and even war; for example, the well-known conflicts between Church and state or between liberals and conservatives throughout the nineteenth century.

It is precisely this confrontation that led the Church to the renewal of education of the clergy in new seminaries, some of which were coteries of Ultramontane positions, forming most learned priests. It also involved improving the internal management and organization of the church, and especially the expansion of its geographical distribution. Thus, new dioceses and parishes as well as synods and episcopal conferences were created, with the most prominent example being the Latin American Plenary Council held in Rome in 1899. These conferences provided structure to and revitalized the social and evangelizing mission of the Church, which in some cases, evolved into active roles in politics, forming parties of Catholic inspiration that were blessed by the hierarchy in order to combat ongoing secularism.

It is in this context that we must understand the extension of neo-Gothic revival, its role beyond architecture and its nature as a milestone on the scalar action of the Church in the Americas. The sense of that milestone was evident in the many neo-Gothic religious buildings constructed and their role as shapers of new landscapes. Most of these structures reflected a dialogue between the political and economic elites and also the Catholic Church, all who played important roles in national building in the American republics. When we examine these dialogues, we discover new and refined invocations that justify general policies made by governments, always in key of national construction. The power of justifying these invocations would be defined by the sacred attributes that gave the Church, through its first voice, the Pope, much respect on such matters.

None of these developments ignored the diverse and complex relationships between church and State which occurred throughout Latin America. These issues were often core political issues throughout the nineteenth century in many states were experiencing, including being subjected to riots, revolutions and coups.

An example of the aforementioned is the use of the invocation of the Sacred Heart to consecrate cities, regions and even entire nations, all during the same period of emergence and distribution of neo-Gothic architecture. It should be recalled that in 1856, Pope Pius IX established the liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart and in 1899, Leo XIII consecrated the entire human race to the Heart of Jesus, explaining this action in the encyclical *Annum Sacrum Pos* (1899). The dedication, however, had its origin in 1675 with the unveiling of a statue of Jesus with an open heart which speaks of the ingratitude of humans before the love emanating from Jesus Christ to the religious of the Order of the Visitation of St. Mary: Saint Margarita María Alacoque (1674–1690). It should be noted that this invocation arrived in the Americas in the early decades of the eighteenth century by the Jesuits. After their expulsion in 1767 from Spanish America, the dedication remained, but was taken up with renewed vigor with the return of the Society of Jesus and other religious orders (Díaz Patiño 2010:97). It is from this source that the idea of a blessing or dedication should focus on the spirituality formalized by an institution and one which proposes a relationship good faith. It was also a blessing that included the construction of methods of persuasion, domination and submission, through which members of a community believed they were really represented (Díaz Patiño 2010:99). This explains why the consecration of a territory or a nation is understood as an act of collective efforts, where the Catholic faithful, the community formalized in a



Fig. 128.1 Basilica del Voto Nacional in Quito, Ecuador, the result of the consecration of Ecuador to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was designed by French architect Emile Tarlier in 1883 (Photo by Martín Checa-Artasu)

territory, and in some cases, a nation, recognized the harmful effects against the Heart of Jesus and by extension, the Church, and made prayers both to mitigate this grief and to seek atonement (Capelluti 2007:240). To undertake this change would necessitate the construction of large Catholic churches, which were not exclusively neo-Gothic in style, although most were in that style.

The most emblematic example of Neo-Gothic faces is certainly that of the *Basilica del Voto Nacional* in Quito, Ecuador, the result of the consecration of Ecuador to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Kingman, 2003:101–105) (Fig. 128.1). This structure was instigated by the pro-Catholic government of General Gabriel García Moreno, president of the country in two periods from 1861 to 1865 and from 1869 to 1875. He saw it as a justification both of his policy and of the nation-building process in Ecuador throughout the nineteenth century (Ayala 1981:145–151). Suffice it to say that García Moreno had established excellent relations with the Holy See through an arrangement in 1863 which gave considerable privileges to the clergy, the Jesuits and other orders who were included as an integral part of the power structures. His government, ruled by a conservative Messianism, was also an example of shifting movements, which at times was the extremes between political ideologies of conservatives and liberals in Latin American countries in the nineteenth century.

The Quito basilica was promoted by a group of Quito citizens, headed by the representative and priest José Julio María Matovelle Maldonado (1852–1929), who proposed the construction of a large National Temple to the Sacred Heart with the Andean nation taking advantage of the devotion conferred by Pope Pius IX by a

Conciliar Decree from August 31, 1873. Ten years later, on June 23, 1883, the government decreed the building of a National Basilica to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The 1884 Convention approved it in the February 29 meeting, granting 12,000 sueres (the same equivalent as the U.S. dollars at that time) to construct it (Larrea 1976:117–119; Egas et al. 1994:57; Matovelle 1934). This example illustrates perfectly the process described, viz., a dedication to which the papacy granted a number of attributes to those who adhered to its policies and results in support for a large cathedral or temple, the conciliator and protective role attributed to it in a nation. In turn, the structure becomes an urban landmark in the nation's capital, associated with political power and granting the Catholic Church exceptional visibility for endorsing the power which continued to maintain its role as a moral protector and beacon for the faithful in society. Today the Catholic Church serves as an element of political reconciliation in the interest of nation building.

128.3.2 *The Second Scale: Church vs. Territory*

The second scale, Church versus territory, considers the fact that many countries in the Americas, at the same time as the spread of neo-Gothic style, developed strategies for the expansion, domination and control of territories, referred to as “deserts” or “empty” space. These territories were not yet under effective state control, since the state had scarcely exercised its presence and, in many cases, even though it had acquired this contact since colonial times. For those expansionist strategies, the religious orders that were again allowed in Latin America, beginning in the last third of the nineteenth century, would play a major role. The religious orders introduced their evangelizing efforts and socioeconomic strategies in large areas where there was much modernization and development. These efforts helped integrate these territories into the nations to which they belonged. All of these initiatives were associated with the construction of hospices, hospitals, schools, craft and trade centers, agricultural institutes, universities and, of course, churches and chapels, where neo-Gothic became a predominant style to help to shape symbols on the landscape. They would also provide evidence of the construction and modernizing actions for the state from the Church.

There are several examples of the above church-state relationship which occurred in all types of spaces, whether urban or rural. One of the most striking examples was in Colombia. The architectural model focused on the civic work of a Spanish and Discalced Carmelite friar: Andrés Huarte Arbeloa who made some Gothic temples in Medellín, notably the church of *Señor de las Misericordias* (1921–1931) (Vélez White 2003:51–53; Osorio Gómez 2008:108) and also in other villages in the Antioquia department. In Frontino, in northwestern Antioquia, in the jungle region of Urabá, Arbeloa designed the *Basílica Menor de Nuestra Señora del Carmen* (1914–1929) with the help of Father Daniel García Puelles (Elejalde Arbeláez 2003:105). This basilica is the centerpiece, due to its symbolism, of the Carmelite mission of Urabá de los Katíos, the name being associated with the Discalced Carmelites in the region (Miranda Arraiza 2003:47). That mission was a major component of a

“colonization” operation of the northwest Antioquia indigenous subregion promoted by the Colombian government given the intense activity of gold mining that was linked to the elites’ interests the area (Piazzini 2009:195). The Carmelites, many of them coming from Spain, proved to be the vehicle which the Catholic religion extended its mantle of civilization. In 1916 they began promoting the construction of Frontino as the capital of the Apostolic Prefecture of Urabá. It was an ecclesiastical jurisdiction governed by a prefect appointed directly by the Vatican; it was granted independence from the diocesan system. The jurisdictional hierarchy worked diligently in line with the territorial scheme of the Colombian state. This arrangement explains that while the Prefecture existed (1916–1941), there were tensions between the order of the Carmelites and the clergy of Santafé de Antioquia, the nearest diocese (Gálvez Abadía 2006:83 and 90). The two Carmelite Fathers, García Puelles, who was a member of the mission of Uraba and builder of the temple, and the other, Andrés Huarte, a Medellín resident who made the plans, designed the neo-Gothic temple. Their thinking was that the “modernizing” impact of this architecture style in a jungle context and in the framework of the prevailing socioeconomic organization, which the monks sought to develop in that territory, was protected by the Colombian state. Puelles and Huarte also required the “pacification” of that territory within the context of the emergence of gold mining and the attraction of national and foreign capital that it required.

128.3.3 The Third Scale: Church vs. Local

The third scale, which I call *Church versus local* analyzes the role that is played in urban spaces, specifically where there is the construction of new churches and parishes, many in neo-Gothic styles. The role of the Church goes beyond the construction itself and considers the position of these new places of worship within the context of the growth of cities and towns. Here again, we need to consider a multi-scale relationship between the Catholic Church with the city, but also with humankind. There are several scalar arrays which illustrate this relationship. The first architecture is inside the church itself, which will be determined by the series of sections and architectural components of the building, all which encourage the believer, man or woman, to provide the full range of functions associated with a connection to the sacred. A second scale array will be in the external environment closest to the temple, where the interaction between humankind and the temple is marked with functions inherent to the relationship itself: belief, faith or prayer including processions, novenas, coronations or Via Crucis. The third scale brings us close to the relationship between the church and the city, that is, through building elements that contribute to what the architecture represents to the public. The atrium, the square in front of the church, is the main element of this scalar dialectic. This feature invites the access of both the believer and the citizen. It can also be extended and integrated into the city and acquiring, depending on the size of the plaza, a new centrality. Thus, civic spaces were created, which are susceptible to being used in many different ways and with diverse functions by residents



Fig. 128.2 Templo del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Leon, Guanajuato, started in 1921 and designed by Mexican architect: Luis G. Olvera (Photo by Martín Checa-Artasu)

(leisure, tourism, belief, etc.). The towers, steeples and the volumetric structure of the temple also enhance the connection between the sacred and the city. The monumentality derived from those elements makes the cathedral or temple a symbol of the city, an icon of it and of its economic, social and cultural development.

An example of the above symbolism is the series of monumental neo-Gothic churches started in the late nineteenth early twentieth century in western Mexico: the *Templo Expiatorio del Santísimo Sacramento* in Guadalajara, designed by Italian Adamo Boari in 1901 (Moya Pérez 1998:207), the Church of *San José Obrero* in Arandas, Jalisco, started in 1902 (Checa-Artasu 2012), the *Santuario de la Virgen de Guadalupe* in Zamora, Michoacán from 1898, and the *Templo del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús* in Leon, Guanajuato, started in 1921 and designed by Mexican architect: Luis G. Olvera (Fig. 128.2) (Checa-Artasu 2011a, b). These are large churches which have maintained this internal and external scalar set, reinforcing it after long periods of construction and enduring all types of economic and political shocks and which today, have revived it through tourism and city marketing. Similar examples are seen in other large neo-Gothic churches located in cities on the continent, such as the *Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Luján* in Luján, Argentina, where the aforementioned scale set is enhanced with the annual pilgrimage, which reinforces the symbolic value for a broad community with a national nature (Hadad and Venturiello 2007:34–36). Another example of this symbolism which is both urban centrality and evidence of the city's growth, is of a specific historical monument, represented by the *Igreja de la Sé*, the neo-Gothic cathedral of São Paulo (Gonçalves et al. 2006:84–86) (Fig. 128.3).



Fig. 128.3 Igreja de la Sé, the neo-Gothic cathedral of São Paulo in Brazil built from 1913 by German engineer Maximilian Emil Hehl (1861–1916) (Photo by Martín Checa-Artasu)

It was through this set of scales that a number of agents interacted to promote, build and develop the church and surrounding community. Among these agents were the priests and pastors appointed by the hierarchy to meet the needs of worship, in many cases of newly established or growing populations. There were also members of religious orders with functions similar to the above, but with a greater capacity to generate civic and social infrastructure that are mediated within the urban territory. They played an important role in building temples of neo-Gothic features, town halls and accompanying buildings and also decisions about the construction of colleges, technical schools, hospitals, infirmaries and universities. These decisions were made by many of the same religious officials who often came from the same European countries as the major religious orders; in short, they would bring

medieval-art styles with them. There are many examples of the above structures throughout the continent. In Bolivia there is the prominent work of neo-Gothic facies of Spanish Jesuit Eulalio Morales (1837–1907) in La Paz (Menacho 2001:2738). In Quito and also in various other provincial cities of Ecuador, there is a notable Central European Gothicism of Pedro Humberto Brüning (1869–1938), a German priest of the Congregation of the Mission (Cevallos Romero 1994).

In Argentina, the Italian architect, Ernesto Vespignani (1861–1925), member of Salesians of Don Bosco, is associated with important projects in medieval style, between Gothic and Romanesque, throughout the country and even in Uruguay, Peru and Bolivia (Cufre Pedro 2009:309; Gil and Wichepol 2004; and Petriella and Sosa Miatello 1976; Bruno 1984). In the Colombian piedmont there is the Salesian, Giovanni Buscaglione (1874–1941), disciple of Vespignani, with works related to that order throughout the country (APRAARQ 2004:45–60; Roza Montaña 2000; Carrasco 2004:137–168; Del Real 1942; Patiño, Patiño de Borda 1995:114). Among the most outstanding works of this Salesian is the Santuario Nacional de Nuestra Señora del Carmen in Medellín. This temple was designed mainly by Buscaglione, an imitation of the Buenos Aires Church of San Carlos Borromeo, designed by Vespigni a few years before. Buscaglione built it between 1927 and 1938. Its facade is a Gothic style with traces of Florentine influence and Arabic tones and has exuberant external chromatic decoration, which place it in the category of a relevant urban structure in the La Candelaria Barrio, where it is located. The decoration and architecture reinforce its character as a civic and religious symbol. Suffice it to note that the Colombian Congress approved it in 1926 as national temple. This fact justified the continuation of very important following to the Virgin del Carmen in the city and also was the excuse for channeling the river San Agustín that allowed for the urban development of the area (Vélez White 2003:39–40; Saldarriaga Roa 2007).

Residents in these church communities are also agents based on their religiousness. It is not uncommon to find examples where the owner of an undeveloped plot of land transferred it to the Church so that it can build a temple considered necessary for that community. Also from an ecclesiastical perspective the transfer was justified with a miracle or a mystical sign. Finally, the architect or secular master of works would build the temple, adhering to the desires of the main client, whether the parish priest, the hierarchy or the parishioners.

All of these constructions coincide with the migration patterns from European countries that reached Latin America at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the next. Among them were architects and engineers, who brought their knowledge of styles such as Gothic and Romantic, as well as masons, carpenters, cabinetmakers, blacksmiths and artists, all who participated in the design and construction of many types of buildings, including churches. Numerous examples tying immigrant architects and neo-Gothic architectural achievements abound. We cite three examples: Maximilian Emil Hehl (1861–1916), a German engineer who moved to Brazil to work as a mining technician, later developing an extensive work, which includes three Catholic temples with neo-Gothic features: the Metropolitan Cathedral and the Church of Consolation, both in São Paulo, and the Cathedral in Santos (Malta Campos and Simões Júnior 2006:32 and 77; Francia Cerasoli 2010;

Niccoli Ramirez and Lindenberg 2010). Belgian engineer Agustín Goovaerts (1885–1939), who arrived to Medellín after World War I and developed extensive construction projects, notably some churches resembling Gothic styles, even though this technique included numerous influences of Art Nouveau. Among these are the following: in Medellín: the church of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús began 1923 and the construction in the Antioquía Department of several churches: Nuestra Señora del Rosario in Donmatias, designed in 1926; the Inmaculada Concepción in Caramanta, both done with the architect Tomas Uribe and Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, in Montebello (Vélez White 1994; Molina Londoño 1998). Another example of a professional who fled old Europe due to WWI was Italian architect, painter and photographer, Augusto Cesar Ferrari (1871–1970), who after arriving in Buenos Aires in 1914, did several religious works, inspired by and imitating the French Gothic style, such as the Church of Sagrado Corazón in Córdoba, which began construction in 1928, and the parish of Nuestra Señora del Carmen in Villa Allende (Aliata 2003).

In addition to the specialized migration or church architects, we must mention local professionals educated in their countries or elsewhere. One example of many is the Costa Rican Lesmes Jiménez Bonnefil, a mining engineer educated in Louvain, Belgium, and designer of the most notable neo-Gothic examples in that Central American nation, the Church of La Merced in San José, San Isidro in Coronado, and San Rafael in Heredia (Fig. 128.4). These integrate the use of structures and cast-iron frames with brick; stylistically they have a clear resemblance of



Fig. 128.4 Costa Rican Lesmes Jiménez Bonnefil, a mining engineer designed the neogothic Church of La Merced in San José in 1894 (Photo by Martín Checa-Artasu)

German Gothic style (Vargas Cambronero and Zamora Hernández 1999; 123; Sanou and M. Ofelia 2001:140–143). These include constructions, all done in a governmental context marked by a hard-lined liberalism that would strain Catholics' political action and which was seen in those temples as a stronghold of the Church-State confrontation. It was not resolved in Costa Rica until well into the twentieth century (Troyo Calderón 2002:13–15).

128.4 Conclusion

As stated above, this paper analyzes the multifaceted role of the Catholic Church in Latin America at the end of the nineteenth century, using as an example the construction of churches in neo-Gothic styles. This task justified the use of a modular element, viz., geographic scale, in order to understand these religions and political processes. In this way, we are able to provide an analysis through three scales: the nation or the state, the territory, and the local context. Each offers a number of possible future contributions. This study has provided us a perspective on the social impact the Catholic Church at the end of the nineteenth century across Latin America; it goes beyond traditional specific disciplinary boundaries of geography, history and architectural history.

In this study, architecture and art, as George Kubler stated well (1988:79), becomes a socio-cultural construct, viz., a signal that explains actions and processes proper to each period of time that go beyond form and style. We observe that it also includes religious, political and social elements as being integral parts in understanding the geographical distributions of such features. We also believe that this study opens the doors for others to explore the historical, religious and architectural interfaces.

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