

The Cemetery Church dedicated to St. Karl Borromäus (Lueger church)

- An example of a “Gesamtkunstwerk”

The monumental building of the church is a “**Gesamtkunstwerk**”, a unique art ensemble that reflects **mortality**, the problem of death and life, against the background of **time and eternity**.

With this **unique cemetery church** the architect Max Hegele draws an **arch** from the contemporary **art nouveau** back to the **ancient Christian architecture** (Karl’s church in Vienna, St. Peter in Rome, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul) and to the **temples** and the **pharaoh tombs** in ancient **Egypt** – the old Egyptians also believed in life after death.

The **monumentality of the church**, built in the middle of an “ocean of death” (the Vienna Central cemetery, the so-called “Zentralfriedhof”, was at that time the biggest cemetery in Europe), should represent the almightiness of God which is more powerful than death. The church was designed as the crown of the vast cemetery complex.

On the outside façade an **Egyptian handled cross** can be found, a sign of eternity.

The inscription of **turret clock** reads “TEMPUS FUGIT”, pointing out to our evanescence.

The **church layout** is a circle and a cross, referring to eternity and redemption.

The three big entrance stairs theologically represent ways “up” to God: the way of the Holy Scriptures, the contemplation of Creation and the contemplation of the goodness and beauty in the world.

Practically, the stairs are a platform for wreaths and display the coffin of the deceased and the funeral procession.

The vestibule is used to install the condolence book and for the display of flower gifts. The apleness of the church hall allows for “big” funerals with plenty of attendees.

The central corridor between the pews leaves ample space for placing the coffin.

The raised chancel permits a good view on the funeral service for all attendees .

There are **four epitaph chambers** where memorial tablets, commemorating the deceased who are buried in the Austrian crownlands.

The **baptismal font** in the vestry refers to the beginning of eternal life.

The **lower church** and the **columbaria** on the left and right side of the church can accommodate a great number of crypts.

The **iconography** inside the church depicts the salvific history of God and humans from Adam and Eve to the Last Judgement.

The display of a **starry sky** in the cupola is an Egyptian symbol of the presence of God.

Above the high altar non-biblical **paintings** portray the message of salvation in a realistic and striking way.

On the left painting, there are two angels:

The **kneeling angel** puts his hand on an **hourglass** – an equivalent to the turret clocks with the inscription TEMPUS FUGIT.

The **hour glass** is a symbol of mortality, for **time** running out.

The **scythe** symbolizes **death** (the Grim Reaper).

When time is up, **death** comes. Man dies and is buried – open grave, between the angels.

It is the **skull** that remains the longest.

The **standing angel** holds an extincted **torch**, referring to the scripture of prophet Jesaja who says about the upcoming Messiah: *“He will not break the bent pipe and he will not extinguish the smoldering wick until he has brought justice to victory”* (Jes 42, 1-4; Mt 3,17) and to the implementation of it in the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt 12,20). This points out to the fact that life which seems to end with death is not extinct with God.

The **painting in the middle** is a **sequel** to the left painting.

A man whose time is up, who is deceased, whose body has been buried and whose skull has remained the longest, comes to Christ as **pilgrim**. On his **hat**, there is a **scallop**. He has laid down his **pilgrim stick** and his **water bottle** (which is unfortunately concealed by the bronze-coloured arch of the high altar) on the steps of Christ’s throne. He does not need them anymore because he has reached the end of his journey. Christ who sits on his throne the backrest of which is adorned with the signs of **Alpha and Omega**, is receiving the pilgrim and an angel is bringing a **palm leaf**.

The palm leaf symbolizes victory and eternal life.

However, Christ’s **glance** and his **spread arms** are not directed at the pilgrim but at the church hall, at the **church visitors**. This means that **everyone** who wants to come to Christ **is invited**.

The **right painting** (*“The city of Vienna honours the dead”*) shows **Vindobona**, impersonating the city of Vienna. She is kneeling down, holding the newly built cemetery church in her hands. She is presenting the church to Christ in the middle painting. Next to Vindobona, there is Dr. Karl Lueger, the **mayor** of Vienna. In the background, there is an **angel** with folded hands directing his eyes towards heaven, begging God to benevolently accept the church.

The cemetery church consists of an **upper church**, which is at a level 3 meters above the cemetery, and a **lower church** which serves as burial vault.

The Latin inscription above the high altar **“ERGO SUM RESURECTIO ET VITA”** – *I am resurrection and life* – is a concise summary of the overall message of the cemetery church.