THE "HOUSE OF GOD": THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND LITURGY IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF SACRED BUILDINGS

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Abstract: *The paper wishes to analyse the religious buildings, with special attention to the Christian ones, considering their transformation due to liturgical and religious reasons. The aim of the research relates to the needs of restoration and conservation of the buildings. The restoration and conservation work compels the understanding of all the historical construction phases of the building itself, and the reasons for them, in order to plan a good project, able to respect their real "authenticity", according to the Nara charter, established by ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) in 1994. The Nara document is inspired by the Venice Charter, approved in 1964 and adopted by ICOMOS in 1965, where, in chapter 3, is stated that: "The intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence." Restoration refers to the conservation of the historical evidence plus the historical meaning of the building. The traces, even if hidden, of the past, related to different conceiving of the building, must be transferred to the future and made available and comprehensible for everyone. The valorisation of the building, as it is defined by the Italian law of 2004 is a tool for the dissemination of culture, because the culture must be accessible to everyone. The religion and the places devoted to sharing spiritual values, in any geographical and political position and at any time, focusing on intercultural dialogue in a peaceful environment, must be accepted and the work of restoration must be connected with the transformation in order to ensure the respect of the cultural values of religious places. Starting from the re-transformation of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, from Museum to Mosque and the reception of the transformation from the history and history of art international environment, the paper has the intention to offer an overview, through different examples related to diverse times and places, of the role of the religion and liturgy in the transformation of the house of god and the connection with the cultural environment considering that the transformation has a strong connection with the restoration activities both on the decorative elements and spatial dimension of the religious buildings and their environment.*

Keywords: *Religious Building, Multy-Faith, Liturgy, Interreligious dialogue, religious and Cultural Heritage Valorisation.*

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Introduction

Since the second half of the 19th century, anthropologists have urged us not to look at religions with the sole criterion of European judgment, to avoid forms of misunderstanding that can lead to the belief that there is no religion in certain societies.

Tylor, way back in 1871, urged not to consider religion as something too similar to the idea that Europeans had of it, because otherwise the majority of humanity could hardly be considered "religious" humanity. (Fabietti, 2010, pp. 398-399

The exhortation must also go in the direction of an important form of empathy that allows knowledge, understanding, dialogue and conservation of cultic and liturgical traditions, despite the fact that not only cultic renewals can start in a place or a building within the same religion, but also transformations due to the use of the same building for a different cult.

In social contexts where subjects with different cultural and religious traditions meet within the same geographical space, the spatial component, as Franceschi (2019) points out, becomes particularly important.

Therefore, the research carried out in the field of architecture and urban design also becomes equally important, in order to establish spatial, compositional and artistic criteria capable of satisfying particular needs, without denying, but encouraging the necessity and pleasure of dialogue and encounter.

The sacred construction

It is considered necessary to start with a general overview about the definitions of what is a sacred construction:

Templum(anth. Templo) s. m. [from lat. Templum] "is a sacred building, a place consecrated to the worship of a divinity and mostly conceived as a permanent or temporary residence of the divinity itself which can be represented there by an image. The word indicates the building dedicated to worship in ancient pagan religions and in some oriental religions, and is used absolutely, and with a capital letter, to indicate the temple of Jerusalem, and generically, the synagogue. It meant an area of the sky defined by the priest for his collection and interpretation of the omens. Later, by a projection of this area onto the earth, it came to signify a piece of ground set aside andconsecratedto the gods. At first such areas did not contain sacred buildings, but there often were altars on such sites, and later shrines.The sacred building is not, and universal phenomenon and it is connected with specific types of civilisation and cultures."(https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tempio/, Translation from Italian by Lombardini)

Church, "Church, in architecture, a building designed for Christian worship.

Church Christian community, in Christian doctrine, the Christian religious community as a whole, or a body or organisation of Christian believers."(https://www.britannica.com/topic/church-Christianity)

Liturgies: a fixed set of ceremonies, words, etc., that are used during public worship in a religion."The religion it is inseparably woven into all aspects of human civilisation. Political and social institutions (such as, for example, royalty or the family), economic institutions (hunting, agriculture, various professions), arts, techniques, customs, invariably have historical connections, if not even the roots themselves, in religion; even the vision of nature, the environment, history among individual peoples is rarely free of connections with religious ideas." (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/religione/. Translation from Italian by Lombardini)

This, invariably, implies that the respect dedicated to religion takes on a very profound civil meaning.For this reason every transformation in which a sacred place is built or not, must start from a

sense of understanding with respect to its first meaning, as happens for each building, with respect to which, the theory of Italian restoration and conservation reiterates the necessity of compatibility as a fundamental element to activate an action that respects the materiality of the good, in this case of a sacred construction, always and in any case seen as the first fundamental testimony of its historicity.
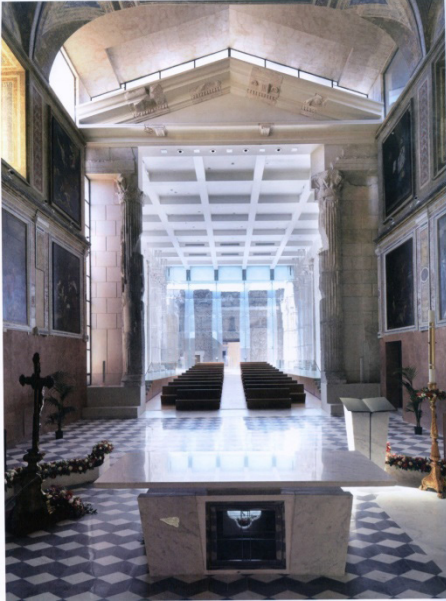
Restoration of Tempio Duomo, the cathedral of Pozzuoli, Naple. Architectural restoration and project by prof. Marco Dezzi Bardeschi. (Photo by https://fondoambiente.it/luoghi/rione-terra?ldc)

The anthropisation of places almost necessarily implies their transformation.

Social, cultural, environmental, natural changes, induced by temporal, warlike (therefore mainly desired), catastrophic (therefore mainly unforeseen) factors, lead to radical changes in both the built and the natural environment, anthropised or otherwise, of which it is necessary to maintain memory as they represent traces of the identity of the man-environment system.

This identity is the result of a specific reading of a heritage that is understood as cultural as it is an expression of that civilisation.

"Heritage can be envisaged as a knowledge, simultaneously a cultural product and a political resource. In Livingstone's terms (1992), the nature of such knowledges is always negotiated, being set within specific social and intellectual circumstances. Thus, key questions include: why is a particular interpretation of heritage being promoted? Whose interests are being advanced or retarded? In what kind of milieu was that interpretation conceived and communicated? If heritage knowledges are situated in particular social and intellectual circumstances, they are time-specific and thus their meanings can be altered as texts are re-read in changing times, circumstances and constructs of place and scale. Consequently, it is inevitable that such knowledges are also fields of contestation that are neither fixed nor stable." (Graham, Ashworth, 2008, p. 5).

Like Rana P.B. Singh (2008, p. 126) argues: "Sacrosanct built forms possess at least four attributes: external (for example, architecture); internal (for example, images); external (for example, universal message); and manifest (for example, adherents' beliefs). But the transferability from one to another always seems to be a painful contestation."

Since ancient times, religion has been exploited by power, always in its own favor and this has influenced or favored the conservation or radical change of places, up to the point of definitive destruction.

The denial of the religious rites and symbols of a community represents an equally symbolic, albeit violent, way of denying their existence.

Today, in the Western Christian world, both Catholic and Protestant, a new phenomenon is taking place, namely that of the abandonment of churches for which new uses are being sought and, also, new forms of management if not even new owners.

A place of worship is built in relation to the liturgy that must take place there.

Every sacred place has a configuration which, beyond its stylistic-compositional resolutions, must allow for specific rites and must contain and display the symbols that distinguish it.

Former Church of St. Cristoforo, Mantua - Italy
(Photo by N. Lombardini 2023)

It is necessary to remember that a change in liturgy can also imply substantial changes to a place of worship.

The reasons why a transformation of a place of worship must take place, up to its destruction, may be due to doctrinal issues intrinsic to the religion itself, with a consequent change in the liturgy; to political issues, which can compromise the most intrinsic meaning of religion itself; to "cultural" changes that influence the approaches, also in social and not just cultural terms, to the use of the sacred place by a community.

The change in the liturgy, due to the factors listed above, can cause profound transformations in the place of worship, from changes in furnishings to radical transformations, which in modern times have led to real restorations with distributional and structural changes in the architecture, up to the partial or definitive destruction of the site with the reconstruction of new structures.

As Petrosino (2018, p. 11) states, it is possible "to use the term "religiosity" to indicate man's particular way of being. The human being exists in a very particular way, different from the existence of any other existent and from the living of any other living being. Man's identity, in fact, in addition to always being relational like that of every other living being, is also always open-to, or rather, exposed-to an otherness that he cannot in any way avoid or to dominate".

The otherness referred to also includes tolerance and understanding.

Aesthetic acceptance of the temple means acceptance and not destruction. The elimination of the symbols involves a radical transformation of the meaning of the temple which was conceived for those symbols.

Every religion must be respectful of its symbols and its liturgies, grafting a new religion, with new liturgies into another temple means imposing new symbols, perhaps only hiding the previous ones.

Not all temples lend themselves to any transformation.

Monotheistic religions usually end up grafting onto each other, even peacefully. And this up to the conception of two new temples in which some religions share spaces.

The two experiences highlight how built space can influence meeting and dialogue and how the denial of dialogue can also come from the disfigurement and denial of these spaces.

There are many forms of rejection: from voluntary destruction to voluntary abandonment.

Starting from these contexts, what does restoration mean, the putting back into operation of a religious place.

Obviously, it is a restoration that takes into account the ritual to which the place is dedicated, in this case Christian Roman Catholic.

Recent interventions have highlighted how it is possible to underline the stratification of architectural styles that recall pagan places of worship. This stratification highlights the historical and artistic value of the place, without compromising its current religious significance. Artistic value can sometimes prevail over the desire for destruction: this partly happened in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul when the Greek Orthodox church became a Muslim temple.

Discovering of the Christian images at the Mosque of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

(Whittemore, 1936, plate III)

The restorations that Ataturk's secular government brought about gave the possibility of rediscovering, if the previous Christian iconographies, while respecting the overlapping Islamic symbolism.

It is not yet possible to speak extensively about multi-faith spaces: religion has a political value, while in multi-faith spaces we would like to find a more social and community meaning. "Multifaith Spaces (MFS) have no precise definition; existing only in the eye of the beholder. They are places where a range of faith-based or spiritual activities can be undertaken, where in each user should find something of appeal."(https://cargo-collective.com/wwwmulti-faith-spacesorg#:~:-text=What%20are%20MFS%3F,at%20many%20 sizes%20and%20scales. Accessed on 01/04/2024).

On this principle the research of multi-faith spaces from the architectural and urban design point of view are improved in order to interface the needs of a research of peace in a new society concept. It is possible to mention the David Adjaye's New Interfaith Complex Welcomes All in Abu Dhabi

The blockbuster project unites a mosque, church, and synagogue with three distinct exteriors (https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/david-adjayes-new-interfaith-complex-welcomes-all-in-abu-dhabi. Accessed on 01/04/2024). "The Abrahamic Family House is a collection of three religious spaces "As an architect I want to create a building that starts to dissolve the notion of hierarchical difference – it should represent universality – something higher, that enhances the richness of human life. - David Adjaye" (https://www.adjaye.com/work/the-abrahamic-family-house/. Accessed on 01/04/2024)

Moreover, "in 2016, the Universalist Ecumenical Temple was inaugurated in the Serra da Lousã Biological Park, in Miranda do Corvo (https://www.theportugalnews.com/it/notizia/2021-12-27/un-tempio-dove-tutte -religions-live-in-peace/64238; https://www.poros.pt/pt/content/fundacao-ad-fp_114/ Accessed on 09/01/2024. Translated by Lombardini)

"In this space there is the "Observatory of Religions" where, through interactive modules, it is possible to obtain references and information on 15 different religions from all over the planet."

(https://parquebiologicoserralousa.pt/index.php/parque/visitas/fotos; https://www.laregione.ch /estero/estero/1514032/berlino-germania-religioni-tre-luogo#:~:text=Si%20chiamer%C3%A0%20 %22House%20of%20one,%3A%20Judaism%2C%20Christianity%20e%20Islam; (https://www.do-musweb.it/it/architettura/gallery/2021/05/13/il-luogo-sacro-inclusivo-di-kuehn-malvezzi-di-avvici-na-alla-costruzione.html. Accessed on 01/04/2024. Translation from Italian by Lombardini) "After the victory in 2012 of an international architecture competition, the construction site of the House of One designed by the Kuehn Malvezzi trio in Berlin is finally about to begin, with the laying of the foundation stone on May 27, 2021. With an estimated investment of 47 million euros, the building is conceived as an inter-religious place of worship, which will combine a mosque, a synagogue and a church."; the Room of Silence in the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin (http://www.raum-der-stille-im-brandenburger-tor.de/english/index_en.htm. Accessed on 01/04/2024. Translation from Italian by Lombardini).

Conclusion

The temple, as a specially conceived place of worship, is not a universal phenomenon. Not all religions use a special space to express themselves. Also, in this case it is necessary to grasp the spiritual value and religious sense of the places.

It ispossible to remember the role that artistic value plays in relation to religion. Many religions have made use of art to express themselves and communicate.

The art itself, together with the historical value, can be a reason for the conservation of the building or religious place, maintaining the meaning and memory of the religious sense of the place with the conservation of the art symbols.

The restoration of a religious building can (and must) include the conservation of its historical stratifications, passing on the history of its liturgy and the religious message it wanted to convey, beyond its current liturgical use.

The transformations of architectural buildings with a view to respect contribute to the knowledge, understanding and respect not only of the different historical eras of the building or religious place, but also of the different meanings, including liturgical and cultic ones.

A fruitful interreligious dialogue can also be based on these profoundly cultural approaches.

Since ancient times, cultural heritage as the bearer of the memory of the past of each people or nation has been the object of offense.

From the destruction of Troy to Belisarius' letter to Totila to spare Rome, up to the most recent offenses, such as the destruction of Warsaw and Syria, and the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the destruction of Damascus and Palmyra, the bombing of Sarajevo's residence a people with all the symbols of its civilisation is considered an element of disfigurement and *damnatio memoriae* to which the defeated enemy is subjected.

The erasure of the past and memory is part of the strategy adopted to facilitate domination and to make the recovery phase for the vanquished more difficult.

From an anthropological point of view, human actions can oppress cultural heritage, both intangible, by imposing its cancellation and attempting to oblivion it, and tangible, through its physical elimination. (Lombardini & Fioretto, 2021).

The removal of the symbols of a civilisation means destroying the culture of those who consider themselves enemies or of those, however, they want to eliminate.

The cancellation is not (only) *damnatio memoriae*, it is precisely the desire to offend in the name of the elimination of "something else" to exalt the prevarication of the victorious.

Therefore, it is normal to ask ourselves who the other is, as Marc Augé titles his recent study, which states that "no identity can be built without otherness, no present without a past or future".

From here it follows, almost apodictically, that without otherness identity cannot exist, which, in turn, must be defined. AsRemotti (2008, p. 5, Translation from Italian by Lombardini) states: "Having an identity. What does it mean: to be an absolutely individual and unrepeatable entity or to belong to a well-defined class of objects? …. Identity… does not inhere in the essence of an object; instead, it depends on our decisions." If we assume the hypothesis that identity is not an "a priori" to be recognized, but is constructed, this identity cannot and must not be constructed to the detriment of the other. But identity is also an "a priori" because we recognize each other by common characteristics. What must be accepted is the mutability of identity.

The statement according to which religions and the places of the religions, as part of cultural heritage's assets, can be a sign with identity value is valid. In intangible heritage one can find traditions that identify a group. The tangible, and especially the built and the architecture, takes on a greater symbolic meaning which can be ideological and religious. It can represent the sense of communion if

it is associated, as happens with archaeology, with a certain civilisation, in which one or more groups can identify.

Almost as if intercultural dialogue should be part of those prevention actions that today, in Italy and Western Europe, are hoped to be applied to the management of the cultural heritage itself.

It is necessary to find a correct strategy that allows us to trigger a correct intercultural and interreligious dialogue capable of arousing the right empathy at any social level. The desired strategy must, in fact, make up for the impossibility of everyone reaching comparable levels of knowledge of the cultural heritage, history and religions of "everyone".

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