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Chapter 37

The Ecclesial Reuse of Catholic Heritage: The 2018 Guidelines of the Pontifical Council for Culture

ANDREA LONGHI

Since the early public life of Christianity, the arts have been instruments of apostolate and cultural formation for local communities. Wherever the different Christian denominations root, a wealth of architectural and artistic works rose up to express pastoral needs and ecclesiological visions, according to the cultures of each place and time. These needs and visions have been constantly revised and updated throughout the history of Christianity. Consequently, the impressive heritage stratified over time has undergone processes of reuse or abandonment, alienation, and destruction, according to different legal, political, and cultural contexts.

Since the early 2000s, the phenomenon of the redundancy of church buildings has manifested itself with particular intensity in the secularized West; it has challenged the ecclesiastical hierarchies and the communities that are most exposed and affected. To ensure that the issue is not sidestepped, the Vatican agency responsible for culture and cultural heritage—the Pontifical Council for Culture[1]—promoted in 2018 two international enquiries (one ecclesial and one academic), culminating in the international conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University (November 29 and 30, 2018), which led to the drafting of *Guidelines*, approved by the delegates of the Episcopal Conferences concerned, and issued a few weeks later by card. Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture,[2] accompanied by a pronouncement by the pope (Capanni 2019: 19–22).

Cardinal Ravasi himself remarked in 2019 upon the document, emphasizing the fact that the problem of decommissioning and reuse has to be approached both from a historical perspective and with thorough attention to different contemporary spiritualities. In his words, decommissioning and reuse are a "constant and multidirectional phenomenon" and question the relationship between the acceptance of a certain "desacralization" and the rejection of radical "desecration" (Traversa 2018). This reveals theological questions underlying the practical problems addressed by the Pontifical Council; above all the relationship between the sacred and the profane: how much can a church—even after canonical deconsecration—become a profane

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space? And how much can any church—albeit consecrated—be inhabited and put to uses that are not liturgical or devotional?

The 2018 *Guidelines* and the pope's message were the first statements by the Vatican on the matter, but why were they necessary and how are we to interpret them? This chapter attempts to answer these questions in two directions. First, there will be a brief historical contextualization of the document, which will also be useful for professionals and scholars who are unfamiliar with Catholic theology and Magisterium. It offers a brief exploration of the theological culture of architecture, on the relationship between ecclesiastical institutions and preservation practices, on the relationship between canonical regulations and the social dynamics of ecclesial heritagization.

Second, the institutional process that led to the drafting of the document is explained, with a presentation of its structure. Particular attention is paid to the themes of resilience, sustainability, and planning, which are the mainstays of future local experiments: the *Guidelines* have no immediate legal value, but will be the tools with which local Catholic communities will work for the next few years, in a participatory and shared way.

Overall, this chapter presents an exploration of the guidance offered by the Vatican for Catholics grappling with the growing challenge of managing their churches both as sites of heritage and as homes for living communities.

Adaptivity and Resilience in the History of Christian Architecture

Long before churches become objects of heritage, they are objects of everyday use by communities. It is therefore useful to consider the relationship between architecture and social practices in the ecclesial context, in order to understand how the adaptability of churches—now discussed in terms of reuse—is deeply historicized in Christian architecture. The theme is mentioned in several paragraphs of the *Guidelines* (in particular nos. 8–9, and 24[3]) and deserves some introductory considerations.

A first question concerns the relationship between ecclesial life, architecture, and remembrance. The processes of liturgical reordering and recurring adaptation of pastoral spaces characterize the history of Christian architecture. Architectural transformations follow changes in ecclesiological models, rites, devotions, and community sensitivities; they are punctuated by councils and reforms but also affected by incessant daily transformations. Churches bear a variety of testimonies and memories that illustrate the wealth of architectural forms taken by the principle of incarnation, on which the message of the Gospel is based. The stratifications of European religious heritage narrate the "official" history of Christian denominations and the multiple histories of local communities. This vast heritage constitutes a functional asset for pastoral activities when churches are active, but it becomes a theological problem when churches acquire value as heritage in a secularized context: what meaning can the constructive activity developed by the Church throughout its history have today? And which values does this immense material heritage currently represent? Awareness of the material dimension of memory is the main prerequisite for adequate conservation strategies for places of worship, considered as heritage sites.

While the theology of liturgical space is widely present in religious literature and in the ecclesiastical Magisterium (Chenis 1991), to the point of being able to define architecture as "theology in stones" (Kieckhefer 2004), a theological vision of the significance of the built

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 341 31-Aug-23 20:01:14

environment was not a priority in the history of Christian thought. Attention to a supposed sacredness of the material consistency of buildings has always taken second place to attention to the celebratory dynamism of liturgical assemblies. Has this implied a lack of interest in the material aspects of churches? Of course not. The metonymic superimposition of the "church of stones" and of the "church of the faithful" (the "pétrification" of the church; Iogna-Prat 2006: 609) has bestowed theological thought on the materiality of architecture and its relationship with the sacred. The most monumental forms of the sacredness of places are clearly represented by early Christian *Martyria*, but, according to artistic historiography, the divine sacred presence is widely and pervasively entrusted to the material culture of Christian places of worship (Hadley 2015). In the current debate on the decommissioning and reuse of churches, the material mediation of the divine is an important dimension, as it is an integral part of community practices and memories.

Another matter concerns the relationship between form, rite, and reuse. Liturgical action and rites have always theologically shaped churches, but not determined their forms (De Blaauw 2016: 555–6). In every different culture, Christian communities have identified architectural forms hospitable for liturgy, which were also able to absorb the subsequent changes in the rites: inclusive architectures, capable of renewing themselves, while offering continuity of memory. Now, can this traditional sense of liturgical hospitality become a new form of hospitality, inclusive of other new ecclesial, social, and cultural functions, without losing or betraying the religious history of the community?

In short, the stability of the memorial aspect and the dynamism of the celebratory aspects have, until now, defined the two poles between which the resilience of buildings of worship has been expressed. On one hand, the adaptive and resilient nature of churches guarantees the possibility of liturgical and artistic transformations, along with the adaptation to new social practices. On the other hand, attention to the preservation of selected material and memorial aspects defines the recognizability and permanence of churches, their stability albeit in a theological system of "temporariness" and "temporality" (Longhi 2022b).

The resilience of churches also becomes the support of the resilience of local communities faced with social, environmental, or political transformations, whether in the form of traumatic events (revolutions, schisms, earthquakes, epidemics, floods, etc.) or everyday stress (demographic or migratory dynamics, economic crises). The resilience of buildings of worship is a key value in ensuring community resilience; adaptability fosters perpetuation.

Heritagization Processes and Ecclesial Life

So, what is the actual relationship between resilience and heritagization in ecclesial life? Is the theological framework outlined above in history compatible with current conservation practices as outlined in the *Guidelines*?

The dialectic between conservation and continuous transformation is the basis for the processes of heritagization, which began to take hold in the Roman Catholic Church in the seventeenth century (Roca De Amicis 2015). However, this transformative expression of living communities came into conflict with the affirmation of state protection of artistic heritage between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the historical stratification of churches was almost sacralized by the secular protection authorities, precisely when the integrity of the churches was threatened by secularization and anticlericalism. The lay doctrines of church restoration were secularly

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 342 31-Aug-23 20:01:14

constructed and self-validated outside of theological doctrines or ecclesial involvement: religious heritage was protected only because of this intrinsic artistic value, not for its religious legacy. The knowledge of the forms had become detached from the awareness of theological, liturgical, and social values that had constituted their raison d'être, and which the Church itself had always recognized and protected. At the same time, there was "a sort of deliberate process of self-exclusion of the Church from the debate on the matter and regression to a-historical stances" (Carbonara 2018: 340).

Two contradictory dynamics appeared. If Christian communities remained active, the necessary liturgical and social renewal activities were considered with suspicion by the state preservation services for historic buildings. If, by contrast, churches were abandoned, secularized, or desecrated, the final liturgical layout of the building had to be conserved as a sort of museum, due to its artistic value, making subsequent reuse activities less compatible or affordable. On one hand, there was the "civil scandal" of monuments' alteration, in the name of a functional update; on the other, there was the possible "religious scandal" caused by disrespectful uses of "sacred" buildings (Musso 2017). The "ethical jurisdiction" over reuse processes was contested between ecclesiastical institutions and institutes for monuments protection. What is the outcome of this conflict of values between governments and the Church, a conflict that the 2018 *Guidelines* aimed to prevent and avoid in the future?

Every country defined its own legal framework during the twentieth century to manage both liturgical adaptations (where communities are alive) and to govern the processes of disposal and profane reuse, as well as transformation into museums. After all— and quite paradoxically— imposing volumes of religious heritage have been saved precisely because of processes of nationalization or privatization and secular reuse, which nonetheless demonstrate "a long tradition of reallocating religious building" (Coomans 2019: 65). Adaptive reuse is not an emerging theme or a trend, but the constitutive nature of religious heritage, just as resilience is not a recent challenge, but the way of life of Christian communities and their heritage.

Ecclesiastical Rules, Magisterium, and Sociological Interpretations

Practitioners and worshippers are now faced with guidelines and unprecedented Vatican statements about heritage, and these documents have rightly aroused public interest because of their novelty. However, the Church has a long juridical tradition regarding the care of art and architecture, of which the recent documents are only the latest—and by no means final—step.

Indeed, Pontifical legislation on the protection of antiquities has, since the fifteenth century (Emiliani 1978), been the regulatory instrument used by the Church to bear witness to the role of art, monuments, and remembrance in the institutional and cultural history of Christianity. The papal laws form a *corpus* that constitutes the main repertoire of protective norms from which modern national states have taken inspiration since the nineteenth century (Bedin, Bello, and Rossi 1988).

After 1870, the reduction of the Papal States to the Vatican alone reduced the ability of pontifical offices to engage in heritage protection, but widespread attention to Christian art did not cease, and it increasingly became a topic of broad ecclesial interest, through the establishment of specific institutional bodies. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the attention of the Church was focused primarily on the production of new Christian art, on its liturgical and pastoral value in comparison with the artistic avant-garde (de Lavergne 1992).

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 343 31-Aug-23 20:01:14

The pastoral dimension of heritagization processes finds its place in the ecclesial Magisterium in the second half of the twentieth century, when the decommissioning and the de-heritagization of historical churches in many contexts had already begun. While the production of new art and new churches did not stop (think of the "young" Christian communities outside Europe, or of the metropolitan suburbs), the abandonment of historical churches became evident in Western Europe as of the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, in many Eastern bloc countries state atheism led to the closure—and sometimes demolition—of religious heritage.

Even in Italy, a country where Catholic culture and art are a widespread and popular phenomenon, the abandonment and possible profane reuse of historic churches have been clearly tackled since the 1960s by the PCCASI (Central Pontifical Commission for Sacred Art in Italy) (Gruppo esterno 1967). At the international level, in 1971, a circular sent by the Congregation for the Clergy to the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences—fearing hasty liturgical reordering after the Second Vatican Council (1963–5)—stressed the "testimonial" value of the heritage and stated that "ecclesiastical buildings of artistic value should not be neglected, even if no longer used for their original purpose. Should it become necessary to sell them, preference should be given to people who are able to take good care of them" (Sacra Congregatio pro Clericis 1971). The matter of the abandonment of historical churches was analyzed by the studies collected by the PCCASI (Fallani 1974) and by the first document on heritage issues of the Italian Episcopal Conference in 1974 (Conferenza 1974).

According to shared interpretations, the phenomenon of decommissioning was due not only to secularization, the decline of church attendance, and sacramental practice but also to demographic and migratory movements, and consequently to the depopulation of rural and mountainous areas, or the abandonment of decaying historical town centers. The situation has been exacerbated by a combination of other factors, such as the lack of reconstruction after disasters and events (earthquakes, floods), reduced availability of funds for maintenance work, and therefore the dependence on uncertain public resources, as well as the variety of legal ownership and management systems, and so on (Bartolomei et al. 2017). The idea, however, that religious heritage can be used not only for worship but also for cultural and civil functions emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century. The 1983 *Codex Iuris Canonici* establishes the rules for deconsecration, disposal, and reuse on a universal level.

The expansion of canonical norms in pastoral terms was proposed in 1987 by the PCCASI, which drew up a *Charter on the use of ancient ecclesiastical buildings*, legally valid for the Italian territory, but which took on wider resonance (the document is also referred to in the introduction to the *Guidelines*, no. 3). It is perhaps no coincidence that the Council of Europe in 1989 approved a resolution about redundant religious buildings, promoting systematic surveys and in-depth investigations (Council of Europe 1989). Some European Episcopal Conferences have recently begun to address the problem, suggesting possible cultural and social reuse if communities are no longer able to ensure adequate maintenance of their redundant churches.[4]

While the documents of the Magisterium are still infrequent and concise, a broad spectrum of sociological and anthropological interpretations is developing within the sphere of ecclesial reflection (Diotallevi 2020). They range from the most defeatist self-representations to the most positive readings of the signs of the times: the desacralization of Christianity has been seen as a return to the centrality of assemblies and the liturgy, within the framework of a brave

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 344 31-Aug-23 20:01:14

rethinking of the division between sacred and profane, extended to the "secular use" of churches (Davies 1968).

Moreover, ecclesial vitality continues to require new churches in areas of dynamic Christianity, or in metropolitan areas lacking social and pastoral facilities. Reuse and new constructions will coexist in the twenty-first century: "Will the walls, roofs, windows and doors of those new or refreshed churches be able to communicate—to both people inside and people outside—that people outside are not excluded and that people inside do not hold the power and are not authorized decide the difference between inside and outside?" (Diotallevi 2019: 48). This relationship between new places of worship, historical religious heritage and social inclusion is especially evident in countries where various Christian denominations have been very active throughout architectural history and where secularization and a wealth of different religions now coexist (de Wildt et al. 2019).

The complexity of the challenges makes it clear that the canonical norms alone (specifically mentioned by the *Guidelines* in nos. 12–16) are not sufficient to manage the decision-making processes: the communities show growing challenges in consciously discussing the problems, due to a widespread artistic and religious illiteracy (what is more, also recorded in those who claim to be Christian), and widespread pedagogical attention to the issue is urgently required (Gerhards 2019: 138). When communities are called upon to make choices about heritage, in the absence of shared lexicon and criteria they risk a "selective protection" without analytical and critical foundations (Coomans 2019: 63), and the application of canonical norms alone cannot give persuasive answers: this is the risk that the *Guidelines* wish to avoid, by offering guidance rather than new prescriptions.

Religious Communities and Heritage Communities

The debate on the value and use of religious heritage, besides considering canon law and the laws protecting cultural heritage, cannot underestimate the social context in which the interventions take place. Which social stakeholders are addressed by the 2018 *Guidelines*? Not only the clergy or the ecclesiastical owners of religious properties. The different owners (not just Church bodies but also governments, municipalities, or private individuals) are not necessarily also the managers or users. Who are the local stakeholders to be engaged in dialogue with? Only worshippers involved in liturgical or pastoral activities?

The transformation of ecclesiastical heritage is also the result of a profound transformation of a plurality of ecclesiastical subjects, commissioners, and clients. Redundancy, therefore, exists in many cases from the origins of building processes—"since construction" (Mace 2014)—as an expression of different ecclesial agencies, lay patrons, and policymakers, and not only as a result of liturgy and pastoral needs. Actual redundancy of religious heritage originates, therefore, from the extinction of a number of founding bodies (lay guilds and congregations, religious orders, etc.) and the reduction of competent and proactive bodies currently able to take care of it. This reduction has strongly concentrated the management responsibilities in the hands of the diocesan clergy, who are themselves now scarce or busy on many pastoral fronts. A historical overabundance of grace—alluding to the lexicon of St. Paul—now entails an overabundance of concerns.

Redundant cultural properties of religious interest can therefore survive only thanks to the initiative of new bodies that can take care of them. To use the words of the Faro Convention

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 345 31-Aug-23 20:01:14

(Council of Europe 2005, mentioned under no. 21), heritage communities in many contexts no longer correspond to any territorial religious communities.[5] Consequently, new communities must be based on new criteria and values. Religious properties attract the attention of scholars, tourists, and lovers of both art and landscape, and do not necessarily include only the faithful or those involved in pastoral activities. Christian communities, on the other hand, do not necessarily appreciate and use historical structures to promote current initiatives, due to their maintenance costs and their fragility; in any case, the focus of their activities is usually on social and pastoral issues, not historical-artistic aspects. The regeneration of heritage, however, can bring together different sensitivities and new types of religious communities. Such new communities will not necessarily be of a territorial-parochial kind, but of an elective nature (specific spiritualities or charisms) or referred to the various Christian diasporas (linguistic and regional migrant communities).

New types of heritage communities can only be built on shared values; the prerequisite for this process is a careful exploration—neither ideological nor dogmatic—of the religious and civil values on which the ecclesial heritage has historically been built and recognized (Longhi 2022a), and an in-depth knowledge of local social practices, mentalities, and personal experiences (Kilde 2008: 200). In any case, the discussion of decommissioning and reuse cannot avoid community

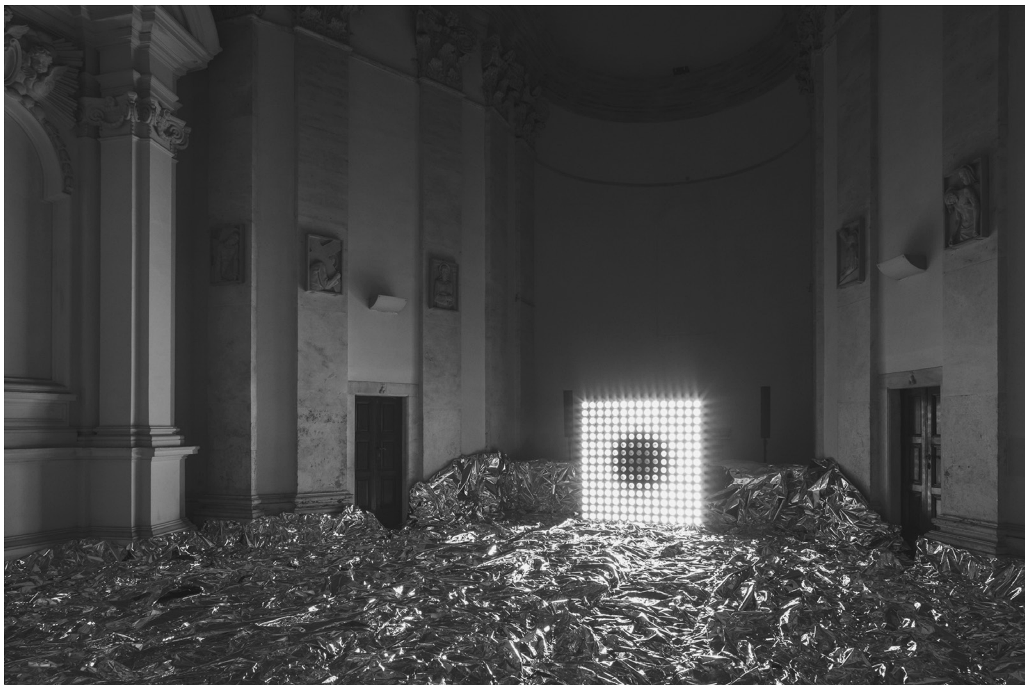

FIGURE 37.1 Sala Santa Rita, former Church of Santa Rita da Cascia in Campitelli, Rome (seventeenth century, rebuilt 1940); winning photo, by Francesca Viganó, of the photography contest #nolongerchurches, initiative accompanying the international conference “Doesn’t God Dwell Here Anymore?”, held in Rome, November 2019. At the time of the shot, the building housed the installation “Genesi” by NONE collective.

Source: Francesca Viganó.

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 346 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

conflicts; while legal relationships can always be formalized, dialogue is still essential in order to heal the inevitable lacerations of personal and collective memories (de Wildt and Plum 2019).

Two Surveys, a Conference, and the *Guidelines* (2018)

The complexity of the dynamics at work and their different geographic declinations led the Pontifical Council for Culture, in 2018, to implement an international survey in the most secularized regions (Europe, Canada, the United States, and Australia) with the aim of identifying practices to reactivate an ecclesial use of underused religious heritage, through new players, stakeholders, and patrons. The historical religious heritage is proposed therefore not only as a container of new functions but as a framework of meaning and community values.

The survey involved the Episcopal Conferences of the various countries to identify the specificities of their respective ownership and laws for the protection of heritage. It also understood the study of the geographies of the phenomena, to enquire, for example, whether decommissioning is more frequent in rural areas or towns and cities. (Capanni 2019: 155–249) This ecclesiastical survey was accompanied by a survey of scientific literature, which revealed the most studied topics in the academic world, such as research into design methods related to the reuse of historic buildings, the relationship between sacred buildings and landscape, and the economic and environmental sustainability of reuse. The responses served as the basis for a call to scientific research centers engaged in the field[6] to select and highlight the most promising programs and to facilitate collaboration between local communities and scientific communities (de Wildt et al. 2019); an international photo contest (#nolongerchurches) accompanied the approach to the event (see Figure 37.1). The outcome of the surveys, the activity of the scientific committee, and the debate during the international conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University led to the drafting of *Guidelines*, discussed, amended, and approved by the delegates of the Episcopal Conferences concerned and issued on December 17, 2018.

Discernment Criteria and Decision-Making Processes

In view of the need to respond to a very diverse range of juridical and social frameworks, the document intends to consider discernment criteria rather than propose new norms. Moreover, the existing canonical norms deal primarily with the right of believers to the *cura animarum*, rather than with the fate of buildings (except for the aspects of material sacredness envisaged by the *Codex Iuris Canonici*).[7] Canonically speaking, once disposed of, churches become "mere buildings devoid of their destination for divine worship … meaning that decommissioned churches are withdrawn from the control of ecclesiastical authority" (Malecha 2019: 49). Ecclesiastical institutions are therefore deprived of the tools to govern further transformations and the social dimension of the phenomenon, which concerns more the collective memory than the theological dimension. Regional surveys record a variety of situations of de facto or de jure disposals, with or without the sale of the property, with hybrid uses or with radical reuses. Uncertainty does not, therefore, so much concern law, but pastoral experience. For example, deconsecration rites continue to be infrequent, because sometimes hierarchies do not sense the urgency of formalizing de facto abandonment. However, proper use of the rite would not only

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 347 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

be a legal or liturgical formality, but also a form of pastoral care intended to help parishioners cope with the loss of their church building (de Wildt 2020), a form of mourning for the loss of a space of life and memory.

The *Guidelines*, therefore, do not reconsider the legal aspects of divestment and reuse, but propose a preliminary reflection, for example, the definition of shared methods of historical interpretation and assessment of religious heritage that precede and guide the decision to divest or decommission. They propose the management of shared processes to help communities read the signs of the times "not with anxiety," as suggested by the pope himself.[8] The document encourages the intersection of pastoral planning, community participation, and professional skills, envisaging a planned social use in a unified territorial vision. In societies that risk the affirmation of incompetence and improvisation, it is clearly stated that professional expertise and community participation must come together, each with its own goals and methods.

The document is structured in five chapters: (1) The socio-pastoral context of the decommissioning of churches; (2) The sphere of canon law; (3) Points for reflection in the international norms on cultural heritage; (4) Guiding criteria for heritage of sacred buildings; and (5) Guidelines for movable heritage: fittings, fixtures, and associated heritage other than buildings, followed by eleven final recommendations.

The reflection about building moves from a broad view of history, time, and the relationships that make a place "habitable":

> The cessation of the liturgical use of a space in no way automatically brings about its reduction to a building devoid of meaning and freely transformable into anything different; the significance it has acquired over time and its real presence within the community are not, in fact, reducible to technical or financial statistics. The challenge of its transformation is expressed then in terms of the re-composition of a "promise of indwelling," without overlooking what was the primary use of the space. (no. 24)

Local communities—both religious and civil—can once again inhabit the places of their history that have remained temporarily uninhabited "with discernment in the dialectic between faithfulness to memory and faithfulness to their own time" (no. 25). The reuse is religious in method and spirit, not solely in terms of a new function, and will always be "people-centered" in keeping with the Christian tradition and also with recent stances of international institutions.[9]

In this perspective, the Christian identity in architecture will not therefore be the preservation of something fixed, or the re-proposition of something assumed to be original—often mythicized or idealized—but a dynamic journey, an uninterrupted narrative experience. According to Walter (2014: 645) "seeing a building as an ongoing and developing narrative is to acknowledge the relevance of the community's story to date—the buildings' biography—but also invites us to wonder where the 'story' might go next." Therefore, any proposals for reuse can become a further transformative perspective, subsequent to the many previous transformations that have already taken place: "The identity of the church will then result from the constitutive set of elements that are the fruit of successive transformations, alterations, and choices made by communities or individuals over time" (no. 26).

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 348 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

Four keywords summarize the reflection and the method mentioned above: resilience, sustainability, co-responsibility, and planning. The category of *resilience* may help understand the balance between permanence of recognizability and response to change by cultural heritage.[10] Resilience is, indeed, a category that can be applied to religious heritage not only to cases of reconstruction following disasters but also as an everyday response to the social, economic, and cultural pressures that generate abandonment. The document enhances to foresee, for historical churches, "a state of dynamic equilibrium that is not identical to their starting point, but which has recognizable foundational elements" (no. 27a).

The second key concept is *sustainability*. If buildings for worship—whether in use or decommissioned—are subject to the same energy and environmental sustainability criteria as all the other types of built heritage, special attention must be paid in terms of social and economic sustainability (Fusco Girard and Gravagnuolo 2018), which could run into difficulties as a result of the demise of collective interest in the recovery process. Consequently, every operation shall be planned not on the wave of enthusiasm generated by spontaneous popular action, but "on the basis of agreements that identify precise responsibilities and interests, cases of articulated use over time and space, control by competent managers, and clear rules of use" (no. 27b).

Two more key concepts are underlined by the document: *co-responsibility* and *planning*. Participatory processes are the best tools for gaining an in-depth knowledge of both the resources of a territory and the different levels of responsibility for the governance of heritage and institutions. Participation makes it possible to systematize the needs that emerge spontaneously from communities and stakeholders, often expressed in a fragmented or sporadic manner. The comparison between the needs and the potential of the context becomes the basis for large-scale planning, which identifies both the most appropriate functions for each building and the related responsibilities, time schedules, and necessary resources. The document underlines the pluralism of ecclesial stakeholders that may be held co-responsible: churches that no longer have pastoral care over their territory "in light of a vision of co-responsibility and diversification of strategies, could be entrusted to lay aggregations (associations, movements etc.) that would guarantee churches remain open and with better management of the heritage" (no. 27c).

Experiences such as the *Church policy plans* drawn up in Flanders in partnership between the Church, government, and local communities (Collin and Jaspers 2019; Donkers et al. 2019) can become a legacy of replicable experiences, even in different regulatory contexts. Moreover, the participatory dimension does not imply unanimous agreement at all costs, but identifies dialogue (Longhi 2013) as an instrument of resilience for communities: debate can reasonably lead "to achieve a natural and sustainable dissensus" (Lens 2017: 167), which nevertheless consolidates the validity of participatory processes. The bravest choices shall be supported by a farsighted and long-term "unified territorial vision" (no. 27d and 34.4) that includes assessments of social dynamics, pastoral strategies, and conservation emergencies, the latter being particularly serious in cases where the territory shows numerous signs of vulnerability (natural or anthropic, such as hydrogeological, seismic, or fire hazards), representing risks for the cultural heritage and settlements.

Outlook

The dissemination of the contents of the *Guidelines* has just begun (Longhi 2019; Santi 2019), but it is important to remember that the implementation of the *Guidelines* is now entrusted to

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 349 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

national episcopal conferences, in order to assume a more cogent juridical relevance in each different ecclesial context.[11] Although the implementation is left to the Church bodies, the document encourages the protagonist role of ecclesial communities in consciously guiding the transformation of their heritage. The reflection particularly invites us to carefully consider the numerous diversities that will characterize Europe in the coming decades, religious, social, and even juridical and economic diversities. The creation of new heritage communities represents an opportunity to diversify the range of stakeholders and cultural values involved, develop inclusive mechanisms in relation to different forms of spirituality, and cultivate deep dialogue.

If—as Richard Vosko proposes with regard to new church buildings—art and architecture can be used as a way of coming to a common ground, this is even more true for religious heritage: the sharing of social activities, pastoral initiatives, and maintenance programs will lead even more effectively to "personify" church buildings "as one body that welcomes, forgives, heals, unites, and remember" (Vosko 2019: 181). Nevertheless, the complexity of such phenomena requires an investment in study and research that cannot come about without essential cooperation between owners, administrators, and scientific institutions—secular and religious, public and private—working toward the identification of common values and criteria for the interpretation and activation of communities.

Notes

1. The Pontifical Council for Culture has inherited the tasks of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage (1988–2012), international follow-up of *the Pontificia Commissione Centrale per l'Arte Sacra in Italia* (1924–88): Capanni 2018; Chenis 2002; De Marchis 2013.
2. The document *Decommissioning and Ecclesial Reuse of Churches* is available in Italian, English, and French in: http://www.cultura.va/content/cultura/it/pub/documenti/decommissioning.html (Capanni 2019: 257–87). The surveys and the symposium were organized in cooperation with Pontifical Gregorian University (Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Church, Department of Cultural Heritage of the Church, Rome) and the Italian Episcopal Conference (National Office for Cultural Heritage and Worship Buildings). The scientific committee of the initiatives was composed of: Carlos Alberto Moreira Azevedo (Pontifical Council for Culture); Ottavio Bucarelli (Pontifical Gregorian University); Fabrizio Capanni (Pontifical Council for Culture); Andrea Longhi (Politecnico di Torino); Paweł Malecha (Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, Città del Vaticano); Valerio Pennasso (Italian Episcopal Conference); and Lydia Salviucci Insolera (Pontifical Gregorian University).
3. The *Guidelines* are quoted from the official English version (see note 2), according to the official numbering of the paragraphs.
4. Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, *I beni culturali della chiesa in Italia. Orientamenti*, December 9, 1992, in particular § 35, *Mutamento di destinazione* (https://bce.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/1992/12/Orientamenti_Beni_Culturali_1992.pdfhttps://bce.chiesacattolica.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/1992/12/Orientamenti_Beni_Culturali_1992.pdf); Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Umnutzung von Kirchen. Beurteilungskriterien und Entscheidungshilkifen,* October 24, 2003; Conférences de évêques suisses, *Recommandations en cas de réaffectation d'églises et de centres ecclésiaux,* September 8, 2006 (https://www.schweizerkirchenbautag.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/fak_theologie/mico_kirchenbau/content/e547963/e825799/e825835/e825839/CES_Raffectation_ger.pdf); Conférence des évêques de Belgique, *Charte de bonne gestion des biens d'église*, April 6, 2017 (https://

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 350 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

www.cathobel.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/17-05-11-Charte-de-bonne-gestion-Contenu.pdf) (all sites accessed June 6, 2021); see also documents gathered by Secrétariat Général de la Conférence des Évêques de France in *Documents Épiscopat*, July 6, 2017.

5 About the responsibility of religious communities in heritage preservation see the documents of the *ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage* (Stovel, Stanley-Price, and Killick 2005) and the *Statement on the Protection of Religious Properties within the Framework of the World Heritage Convention* (Kiev, 2010, and following sessions of World Heritage Committee: https://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage).

6 The call for papers was organized in cooperation with Responsible, Risk, Resilience Centre of the Politecnico di Torino http://www.r3c.polito.it/project/decommissioning-and-reusing-churches-issues-and-research-perspectives (accessed June 1, 2021); the board was composed of Kim De Wildt (Ruhr Universität Bochum), Daniela Esposito (Sapienza Università di Roma), Andrea Longhi (Politecnico di Torino), and Sven Sterken (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven).

7 Canon Laws about the topic were recently summarized by Congregation for the Clergy 2013, and by two documents issued by the Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life in 2018: http://www.cultura.va/content/dam/cultura/docs/pdf/beniculturali/carisma/CORORANS_IT.pdf and http://www.cultura.va/content/dam/cultura/docs/pdf/beniculturali/carisma/CIVCSVA%202018_Orientamenti_Economia%20a%20servizio%20del%20carisma%20e%20della%20missione.pdf (accessed June 6, 2021).

8 From the *Message of the Holy Father Francis to participants at the conference:*

> The observation that many churches, which until a few years ago were necessary, are now no longer thus, due to a lack of faithful and clergy, or a different distribution of the population between cities and rural areas, should be welcomed in the Church not with anxiety, but as a sign of the times that invites us to reflection and requires us to adapt. It is what in a sense the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* affirms when, claiming the superiority of time over space, it declares that 'giving priority to time means being concerned *about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces*. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return'. (223). http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20181129_messaggio-convegno-beniculturali.html.

9 The *Guidelines* (nos. 19–21) refer to the *Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas* by (ICOMOS, Washington Charter 1987), the *Principles for Conservation and Restoration of Built Heritage* (Krakow Charter 2000), the *Xi'an Declaration on the conservation of the setting of heritage structures, sites and areas* (ICOMOS 2005), the *Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place* (ICOMOS 2008), the *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (UNESCO 2011) and the *Burra Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (ICOMOS Australia 2013). See the last Resolution 20GA/19 *People-Centered Approaches to Cultural Heritage* approved by the Twentieth General Assembly of ICOMOS (December 3–16, 2020).

10 The relation between resilience and cultural heritage is stated by recent international documents; see, that is, the outcomes of the conference *Heritage and Resilience*, organized in 2013 by ICOMOS, ICORP, and ICCROM (https://www.undrr.org/publication/heritage-and-resilience-issues-and-opportunities-reducing-disaster-risks).

9781350251380_pi-446.indd 351 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

11 Among the first documents published: Les Evêques de Belgique, *Le bâtiment d'église. Signification et avenir*, June 27, 2019 (https://www.cathobel.be/2019/06/le-batiment-deglise-signification-et-avenir/) (accessed June 1, 2021).

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9781350251380_pi-446.indd 352 31-Aug-23 20:01:15

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