

## VALUING THE RELIGIOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE - THE WAY TOWARDS AN EUROPEAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACION

**Florentina Trif**

**Ph.D. Student, "Ovidius" University of Constanța**

*Abstract: In a world where dialogues and meetings between different cultures are certainly daily, but not always fruitful, it is essential to understand that the intrinsic nature of religious and sacred cultural heritage must have the opportunity to compare different authenticity, different meanings of spirituality, as well as knowing how to share knowledge and based on it, to build human values based on mutual respect, inclusivity and dialogue between communities.*

*The interculturality inherent in the religious cultural heritage thus intends to gather all the knowledge related to it and to put theology, through its multiple disciplines, the sciences of art and architecture, as well as the economic environment and the multiple cultural aspects that intervene in the individual contexts of the community. Moreover, in a rapidly changing world, this rich religious and cultural heritage plays an important role in the "cultural diplomacy" in which the centrality of the individual is fundamental and together with it the result of his activity.*

*These premises are important in trying to identify together a path to knowledge and improvement of religious cultural heritage, which is also sustainable in terms of conservation, functional reconversion and management issues, as shown by the numerous monumental complexes that characterize cities worldwide.*

*Keywords: Religious cultural heritage, religious cultural heritage, preservation of religious cultural heritage, cultural diplomacy, Christian art.*

### **Introduction**

History has always taught us that countless cultures are characterized by different styles and ways of life, by systems of diversified values and anthropological traditions, as well as by heterogeneous methods of protection and improvement of religious cultural heritage. This variety of cultural paradigms lays the groundwork for establishing a mutual knowledge dialogue on non-stereotyped policies and values, on the basis of which it is necessary to develop collegial reflections and in relation to the social and cultural changes of the different historical periods.

These are just a few of the points already announced in 2010 on the occasion of the United Nations International Year for the Approach to Cultures, topics that, in turn, relate to the topics discussed at ICCROM in 2003 within the Forum on the Conservation of Living Religious Heritage.<sup>1</sup> The question, elaborated on the occasion of the 2003 international forum, was: "how could the living religious heritage be different from the cultural heritage in general?"<sup>2</sup>

On this occasion, the contributions received from different countries and, therefore, from different cultural contexts, showed that it was not always agreed to identify the differences between religious heritage and cultural heritage, but rather congruences and complicities were identified so much, much that today we are talking about religious cultural heritage<sup>3</sup>.

These important experiences aiming at raising awareness and full respect for different cultures (UNESCO Convention 2005) allow us to present proposals on the need to reflect on that relationship

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<sup>1</sup> ICCROM and the Conservation of Cultural Heritage | ICCROM <https://www.iccrom.org> › publication › iccrom-an.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> L. Febvre, *L'Europa storia di una civiltà*, Roma, Editura Donzelli, 1999), p. 49.

that has always been established, in the context of heritage considerations, both in relation to its diversified values and the meanings it contains.

Nowadays, more than ever, the elaboration of a way of knowing the religious cultural heritage means to put man, his creativity, the countless syncretisms that generate this heritage in the center, the inseparable relationship between tangibility and intangibility, as well as the awareness that it is not possible to distinguish a religious heritage from a cultural heritage seen in its general sense<sup>4</sup>.

### **1.1. Cultural heritage of religious interest. Definitions and reflections**

The need to recognize the cultural values arising from the meeting between different cultures is also testified by the recent establishment, on March 7, 2017, in Paris (Charenton), of the International Scientific Committee for Places of Religion and Ritual (PRERICO). An ICOMOS committee laid the foundations for the research and provision of specialized support for the knowledge and capitalization of Monuments, as well as for Sites dedicated to religious functions and sacred rituals, including in them and in those places of global interest where the intangible contribution is particularly important. On the same days, the first international conference "Knowledge, preservation, improvement of religious cultural heritage was held"<sup>5</sup>.

Both meetings were an important cultural reference base for drawing concrete ways in which to focus the interests of the international community on the topic of intensifying and managing the monumental complexes of religious interest, an index of attention today and for the diplomatic content, to build ways of peace and open the borders to dialogue<sup>6</sup>.

This theme then found again in Florence, December 15, 2017 at the Santa Croce Opera, a significant opportunity for discussion that was accompanied by the constructive participation of numerous communities belonging to different religious contexts, as well as by scholars from different disciplinary fields. The theme of the Florentine meeting was "Florence and the cultural heritage of the religious heritage. For the sustainable development of the management of monumental complexes of religious interest, it appeared on the website of the UNESCO World Heritage Historical Center in Florence "and was intended to open a reflection on the occasion of the XXXV anniversary of the inclusion of the Florence Historical Center in the World Heritage list. UNESCO<sup>7</sup>.

The meeting was characterized by two introductory speeches, one by Carlo Francini on the Management Plan of the Historical Center in Florence and the other by a writer on improving the heritage of religious interest for an international cultural diplomacy. All participants were invited to participate actively in two dedicated work tables, conservation and management and communication respectively. The conservation table, coordinated by professors Giorgio Bonsanti and Francesco Gurrieri, aimed to analyze and share good practices in organizing and managing restorations, developing multidisciplinary studies and research on complexes of religious interest, as well as on the basis of finding funds for preservation of religious cultural heritage<sup>8</sup>.

The management and communication table, coordinated by professors Claudio Strinati and Timothy Verdon, addressed the exchange of good practices in the field of personnel management and training, the organization of visits to monumental complexes, the production of informational materials (both paper and digital) and the organization of events<sup>9</sup>.

The general objective of the meeting was surely to deepen and disseminate the plans and methodologies that will contribute to the improvement of the management practices adopted by the

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<sup>4</sup> D. Ferri, *La Costituzione culturale dell'unione europea*, Padova, CEDAM, 2008, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> A avut loc la Verona și Vicenza la 9-11 martie 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Francioni Così, *Protezione internazionale del patrimonio culturale: interessi nazionali e difesa del patrimonio comune della cultura*. Milano, Collana Luiss, 2000, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p.75.

<sup>8</sup> Smith R Craufurd, *Culture and European Union Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> D. Ferri, *op.cit*, p.78.

institutions involved, all the topics that will be summarized in the preparation of a first document that aims to integrate and highlight the legacy of religious cultural interest for the future. review also of the Management Plan of the historical center in Florence, as a good practice that has to be compared with other national and international realities<sup>10</sup>.

At the base of all the interesting communications are presented the tables of individual and more important discussions which are very important, and which are even defined, at international level, which are understood when we talk about the religious cultural heritage, the care of the theme is reflected in various published contributions, dedicate to the European Year of Heritage 2018<sup>11</sup>.

## 1.2. What do we call "cultural good" in the religious sphere?

The answer to the question refers to the meaning of the cultural good for the Church can only be seen in itself and, therefore, it is thinking of a definition of the legal lines of perimeter regarding the national territory, but involved in the necessary modification of the activity of research and reflection at international level able to clarify about the content, exists only in the different laws, but especially in the different religious cultures, the term "religious heritage" and "cultural heritage". This is evident from the fact that there has been much research in recent years in the West and East<sup>12</sup>.

In fact, it is not possible to give a generalized definition of the concept of "heritage" and "cultural good", this is precisely demonstrated by the approaches and the diversified paradigms of a methodology of reference and operations, and that it is possible to generalize or be is limited in terms of international law applicable to all<sup>13</sup>.

This is demonstrated by sites of restoration of the complexes of religious interests observed in different geographical and cultural contexts of the worlds. However, in this specific study, by restricting the cultural sector of reference, the offer of clarifications is not limited, especially for what can be implemented in religious culture and canon law in terms of the "cultural good"<sup>14</sup>.

To date, the concept of cultural property of religious interest does not find clear references, except for the provisions regarding works of historical and artistic interest. In the Italian Code of 1917 [Can. 1497 CIC of 1917] we find: «Dicuntur sacra, quae consecratione vel benedictione ad divinum cultum destinata sunt; pretiosa, quibus notabilis valor sit, artis vel historiae vel materiae causa» [It is said that things destined for divine worship, by gift or blessing, are sacred; Precious those things that have a considerable artistic, historical or material value]. Also, only in the 1983 code [Can. 1283 CIC of 1983], with reference to Title II on asset management, provides: "Before the administrators start their mission: [...] 2) a detailed inventory is carefully invented, which they must sign, regarding real estate, both valuable personal goods and, in any case, regarding cultural assets, and other things, with their description and esteem and to be reviewed after preparation"<sup>15</sup>.

Thus it can be stated that the legacy of parishes and eparchies and, in general, the one referring to Architecture and Art for worship, has always been recognized as an identity factor and capable of activating relationships even with different communities - cultural, ethnic and religious. For this reason, once these assets are endangered because they are not

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<sup>10</sup> Patrimoine culturel européen: coopération intergouvernementale, recueil textes, Strasbourg, Conseil de l'Europe, 2004, p. 501.

<sup>11</sup> Anul European al Patrimoniului 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Manzi Andreotti, „Il paesaggio massimo bene della cultura europea”, in Manzi (a cura di), *Beni culturali e territorio*, Roma, Editura Società Geografica Italiana, 2003, p.137.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Weiler, *The Constitution of Europe*, Cambridge, Publishing House University Press, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Consiliul de la Nicea II (787), *Definiție*, în *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, Bologna 1973, p. 131-136.

properly maintained and maintained or are damaged due to natural disasters, their value increases, and their insecurity or loss becomes incalculable damage to the entire community as well as for the whole European cultural space<sup>16</sup>.

The Church in close proximity to all EU countries, through Cultural and Pastoral Projects, has implemented a process of regeneration of these assets which, with proper planning of the necessary interventions, creates a long-term investment. This is due to the fact that it manages to activate the resources in the territories of its member states and at the same time to create new opportunities for economic and cultural development<sup>17</sup>.

### 1.3. Christian art - expression of European culture

There is an intimate symbiosis between religion, spirituality, culture and art. In fact, "culture and art are remembered by some and revealed to others. There is no historical moment rich in culture that does not flourish in an artistic production, just as a fruitful artistic period does not postulate a global cultural richness. But there is a very close relationship between religion and art, between religion and culture. There are countless works of thought and artistic masterpieces that are inspired by religious values"<sup>18</sup>.

Christian art, in fact, has a "theological" value, in the sense that, in its own way, it communicates a religious message: "Art has its own capacity to understand one aspect or another of the [Christian] message by translating it into colors, forms, sounds that support the viewer's intuition and listen"<sup>19</sup>. Art and cultural heritage in general "take on a specific meaning, as long as they are commissioned for evangelism, worship and charity"<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the artistic heritage in its multiple expressions has a liberal and, therefore, humanizing function, useful for human development and, therefore, is a preamble to evangelism: "Especially Christian art, a cultural asset as significant as ever, continues to perform a unique service, communicating with extraordinary efficiency, through the beauty of sensitive forms, the history of the covenant between God and man and the richness of the revealed message"<sup>21</sup>.

Therefore, these realities are significant "in the expression and inculturaty of the faith and in the dialogue of the Church with humanity"<sup>22</sup>, so they are privileged tools for the present evangelization, since they adhere intimately to the lives of people and at the same time correspond to the pastoral needs. Therefore, given the specific pastoral function of the religious heritage, it needs an adequate conception and management. In other words, these goods must be created, protected, preserved by the Church.

It is known that art, like other expressions of culture, in modern times, has been touched by secularism, which can be essentially defined as "a form of humanism characterized by the absence of God and often in opposition to it"<sup>23</sup>. We cannot ignore how contemporary art, because of its adherence to relativism and secularism, is often inadequate to express Christian values. However, the Church continued with all efforts through the

<sup>16</sup> Norberto Bobbio, *Politica e cultura*, Torino, Editore Einaudi, 1955, p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> Catellani Cattaneo, „Cultura e patrimonio culturale”, in Catelani, Cattaneo (a cura di), *I beni e le attività culturali*, Padova, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> G. Feliciani, *Moștenirea culturală de interes religios*, Bologna, Editura Il Mulino, 1995, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> A. Bucci, *Povestea juridică a bunurilor ecleziastice ale Bisericii*, Volturina Edizioni, Cerro al Volturno, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Marius Bălan, Emilian Iustin Roman (editori), *Patrimoniul cultural religios, Legislație și Jurisprudență*, Iași, 2018, Editura „Universității Ioan Cuza”, 2018; Stefano Zecchi, *Il brutto e il bello nella vita, nella politica, nell'arte*, Milano, Editore Momdadori, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introducere în spiritul liturghiei*, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2001 (orig. Germană 1999), p. 111-131.

<sup>23</sup> Mario Fiorillo, „Verso il patrimonio culturale di un'Europa unita”, in *Astrid*, n. 4/2011.

dialogue with the people of culture and especially with the artists, with the certainty that there are many more points in common than those that separate them: "Religious art, in fact, even beyond its expressions the most typical religious, when authentic, has an intimate affinity with the cultural world"<sup>24</sup>.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that, since the end of the twentieth century, the EU Member States have begun an important international research in order to identify the best methodology for managing religious heritage.

In fact, the need for an increasingly fruitful and constructive discussion on this topic at international level is emphasized, not to approve the actions to be taken, but rather to know and evaluate what has been proposed and in other cultural fields for the preservation and valorisation of the heritage of religious interest and based on this knowledge and good practices to give life to concrete programs and projects of management and capitalization regarding the respective cultures and objectives.

In order to achieve this goal, however, the dialogue between the ecclesiastical and the secular world will be fundamentally based, especially in the western sphere, on a dialogue that must be structured so as to analyze new and interesting perspectives, without giving up the founding values inherent in this heritage. extraordinary cultural, both material and intangible.

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