

From the Chalice to the Smart City: Attraction and Repulsion within Sanctified Space in the 21st Century: Projects in the New Urban Centres

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Abstract

Which are the issues posed for the construction of a church in the urban fabric of the third millennium? Which are, currently, the places of worship -- more or less visible -- capable of attracting the faithful, not just the inhabitants but also migrants or visitors in transit? What kind of conflicts can the construction of a church, or more generally of a *sanctified space*, create in a neighbourhood and, which could be the conditions to avoid it? In some cases, places of worship contribute to reinforce the feeling of belonging and/or identity. They are also points of orientation in the cities, which exceed the scale of their communities, opening up to other confessions, also. They participate in urban life through many events (concerts, kermesses, theatrical plays) that we can qualify within culture.

This paper interrogates the notion of *sanctified space* from the spatial point of view, through the analysis of the *sanctified space* built in Rome in the new place of urban centre, but also from the standpoint of individual and collective representations. Between tradition and future, attractiveness and repulsion, beyond the symbolic dimension (brand) of the *sanctified building*, the text places the question of methodological processes that lead to the construction of a space, both real and virtual. In the final argument, the comparison between the Italian and French experiences can help to identify the differences between the two systems -- of a technical and sociological nature -- in order to identify the manner in which we can overcome the mono-functional and restrictive use of the worship sites, in favour of multi-functional uses, both internal and aggregated, thereby allow a wider ownership of these spaces, in the present era where the churches are gradually becoming more and more empty.

Keywords: *Sanctified space*; sacred space; forms of sacred; churches; brand; project; attractiveness/repulsion; rituals; arts; culture; tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore the issue of the sacred space, in relation to the building of places of worship in the new urban centralities of “smart” cities, tackling the many problems that underlie the awareness of the complexity of this subject. It highlights how a type of building with which communities, and indeed, cities can be identified as the result of a cultural process, is currently undergoing a profound identity crisis. Churches and holy places, in general, have lost the driving role that they have played throughout their history.

Creative Space
Vol. 1, No. 2
January 2014
pp. 215–229



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So, based on the experience built up over the years, the author has developed a project based on the concept of the sacred space as a dynamic action, bringing together various competencies that can -- first and foremost -- improve the quality of the liturgical space, and ultimately of church architecture, beginning with a “formal design” and working towards a “meaning-based design”. This follows a process that focuses on the different competencies involved in architectural design.

When exploring the issue of the *sacred* one can easily lose one’s way in a complex maze of themes and issues, accompanied by a corollary of incomprehension and misunderstanding. This, at times, can boil over into heated discussions¹ or even violence², in which religion becomes the pretext for clashes which, it may be argued, have nothing to do with the sacred, with the people concerned forgetting that they all worship the same *God* and probably mistaking him with their own personal and subjective idea of *godhood*.

THE ISSUE OF THE SACRED

The idea of the “sacred” has taken on a broadly trans-cultural role, no longer exclusively confined to the religious sphere, a fact which inevitably leads us to focus on its many aspects that encroach on contemporary culture in general. It has been observed that the focus has increasingly shifted from Catholic belief and religion to Catholic culture. This has happened as a result of the changes taking place in contemporary society, with opposition growing, to the point of repulsion even, against forms of religious conservatism, or against different religious beliefs. This situation that is not new, also having been highlighted many times by Voltaire in the 19th century, in relation to the frequent signs of intolerance within the society of that time.

Today, however, there is a substantial difference. The situation has increased in complexity, following the secularisation of society and the spread of virtual reality. The hostility generated by the former is exemplified by the referendum on minarets in Switzerland, the contentious issue (in Italy) of displaying crucifixes in public places, the violent demonstrations against the staging of the play *Sur le concept du visage du fils de Dieu* in Paris, and

1 Such as the ones regarding the power of symbols in the recent referendum called in Switzerland on the construction of mosque minarets, or the problems related to the display of the crucifix in public spaces.

2 For example, as seen in the French *banlieue* riots of 2005 or the troubles at the Théâtre de la Ville de Paris in 2011. (From 20 October 2011, date of the debut performance of *Sur le concept du visage du fils de Dieu*, by Romeo Castellucci, there have been violent demonstrations by Catholic fundamentalists to prevent the play being staged). <http://www.altritaliani.net/cultura-e-cultura/teatro-danza/article/romeo-castellucci-sul-concetto-di>.

the Muhammed cartoon controversy in Denmark. The latter tends to prevent people from distinguishing between reality and fiction, between the sacred and the worldly, whether it is the advertising campaign broadcast by the Sky TV channel, or the concept of the “sacred” nature of a football pitch, not to mention the Sunday service, which can now be followed from the comfort of one’s living room. “*For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them*”³ is interpreted in a contemporary virtual way, without astonishment.

Against this background we need to start better defining the issue by giving meaning to words. Sacred is a word closely associated with ancient Greek polytheism. So, to distinguish themselves, the Early Christians preferred the word “Holy”, the use of which, moreover, was reclaimed by the Vatican II Council, which spoke of a “holy” rather than a “sacred” assembly. Another consideration revived by the Council was that God does not have a “house”, so to speak, but is in all places, as a result of which it is misleading to call the church space a sacred space, but it can be more effectively defined as the place where the Holy assembly gathers to celebrate the paschal mystery.

The best formula comes from Saint Peter: “*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house*” (I Philippians 2.5). Therefore, the true Christian temple, the “House of God”, is not an actual building, but a spiritual community built of “living stones”, which will find its place in the Heavenly Jerusalem, where the Eucharist is not attached to any “sacred space”.

“*Very few people realised, immediately after the Vatican II Council, the Copernican revolution introduced by liturgical reform in architecture.*” [...] “the reform debated, likewise in this and in that, between formalism and functionalism: a bipolarity, in buildings, dualistically induced by the Modern Age, in the reflection an ambivalence that was badly inferred from the *Sacrosantum Concilium* 123-124” (Boyer, 1967, Preface).

This first reflection is necessary before discussing or tackling the religious issues, above all, to provide designers with the right “coordinates”, or guidelines, before the design process proper, to ensure that the outcome is not, as mentioned above, a purely formal architectural exercise, but a place in which the focus is on “meaning”. Nor should we neglect the reflection on the proper “location” for a sacred space to be built, which, as pointed out by Marcel Roncayolo, should possibly feature a persistent historical and geographical continuity, in order to increase the possibility of attracting people to gather there⁴.

3 The Gospel according to Mathew 18.20

4 Marcuccetti, A. Doctoral thesis, “Building the Sacred Space in the 21st century, in Italy and France: between tradition and future, attraction and repulsion. Church designs after the Great Jubilee: the examples of Rome and Paris.” Sapienza Roma-Université Lille 1. page 231.

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Many people believe that the Vatican II Council⁵ only concerned the religious environment. In actual fact, it embraces multiple aspects of our society and various interdisciplinary fields, from the social to the urbanistic, raising issues such as the choice of geographical location, the relationship between church and urban environment, and with the other religions, which are increasing in significance, as a result of the social changes under way⁶. This process of social transformation, however, is still not very visible in Italy, where immigration is a recent trend and mainly concerns Christian communities, unlike in France where most immigrants come from a Muslim background.

Italy			France		
Country	Visas	%	Country	Visas	%
Romania	42,322	80.4	Algeria	713,334	13.4
Albania	23,530	21.9	Moocco	653,826	12.2
United States	20,231	3.1	Portugal	580,598	10.9
Morocco	17,343	27.4	Italy	317,260	5.9
China	13,621	20.9	Spain	257,315	4.8
Ukraine	7,925	39.7	Turkey	238,862	4.5
India	7,222	24.2	Tunisia	234,669	4.4
Philippines	6,953	56.8	Cambodia/Laos/Vietnam	162,684	3.0
Yugoslavia	6,297	40.0	UK	147,954	2.8
FYROM	5,429	27.7	<i>Source: Insee, recensement 2008, exploitation principale. Immigration and Caritas/Migrantes. Based on data provided by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005</i>		
Tunisia	4,977	39.9			
Peru	4,557	30.4			
<i>Source: Statistical Dossier</i>					

Regarding religious multiplicity in Italy, the large-scale increase in immigration from Eastern European countries, which mostly belong to the Orthodox faith, has ensured that Christians account for almost half the total migrants (49.5%), followed by Muslims (33%). The faithful of Oriental religions are only about 5%, while the other groups are very small indeed (Jews, for example, account for only 0.3%). The matter becomes complicated if we consider irregular immigration, with estimates ranging from 200,000 to 800,000 irregular immigrants. The inspections carried out by the Pension Service and the Ministry of Labour, and the dedicated survey by the Central Statistics Office

5 The Second Vatican Council, informally known as the Vatican II, was the twenty-first and latest Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, 1962-1965. It consisted in a gathering of the Catholic bishops from all over the world to discuss matters relating to the life of the Church.

6 The revolts under way in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, in 2010, will inevitably lead to migratory flows towards Italy and Europe and will contribute to the gradual transformation of the make-up of our society.

ISTAT, however, have confirmed the scale of the phenomenon, stressing either the failed payment of pension contributions or the lack of a residence permit⁷.

Nor should we underestimate the problems arising from the cohabitation of different communities in certain urban areas. In cosmopolitan Paris, for example, we find different situations: the occupation of the public space in front of a church (*parvis*) does not, as a rule, create problems, except for pedestrians or for the worshippers leaving the church after a service. Pedestrians are generally tolerant, despite the inconvenience caused, for example in the 16th *arrondissement*, which features a majority of Catholic residents⁸. The situation, however, may change in other districts, such as the 19th *arrondissement*, for example, which features a more varied ethnic make-up⁹. Two places of worship, such as the Catholic church of Notre Dame des Foyers¹⁰ and an Islamic mosque and cultural centre, are very close to each other and face on the same public space, thus creating a new and peculiar situation (Benkoula, 2005). In the same *arrondissement*, near the Buttes Chaumont park, the use of the *parvis* of the church of Notre Dame de Colette, and the installation and use of the bell, have created a certain degree of tension among the residents¹¹.

The Sacred Today: Understanding and Misunderstandings

The way we perceive the sacred today is going through a period of identity crisis. In a society, such as ours, which has been historically shaped by Christianity, a religion that, over the centuries, has turned into a focal point for and a driver of our culture, is faced today by declining church attendance -- another aspect that we should not underestimate (Table 1).

Our society today is characterised by a Catholic culture in which, however, the church no longer plays a driving role. The idea of the sacred is still one of the pillars of our culture, but it has changed codes and has become secularised. We tend to increasingly mix up or, rather, confuse the sacred and the profane¹², arousing the surprise and fear of those who do not accept such an attitude¹³.

7 Source : www.istitutosup-gavirate.it/studenti/immigrazione/geografia.html

8 Information provided by the Parish of Saint François Molitor.

9 Communities formed primarily by immigrants from North Africa, the Antilles, native French and ultra-orthodox Jews, where religious contrasts often boil over into violence. <http://focusonisrael.wordpress.com/category/antisemitismo/page/14/>

10 Built in 1966 at 18 rue du Tanger, 19^{ème} *arrondissement*, Paris.

11 An area predominantly inhabited by Jewish and Muslim communities.

12 For example, we call "*Sancta Santorum of music*" a concert hall or hear people say "*soccer is a faith/religion for us*".

13 We all remember the tensions sparked by the Muhammad cartoons published in Denmark, both outside Europe and in our increasingly digital, multicultural and multi-religious society

Table1: Survey on Church Attendance in Italy, based on Istat 2006 data *

Regions, Geographical Districts, Types of Local Authority	Attend a place of worship at least once a week (b)	Do not attend a place of worship (b)	Regions, Geographical Districts, Types of Local Authority	Attend a place of worship at least once a week (b)	Do not attend a place of worship (b)
Piemonte	29,7	17,9	North-west	33,2	19,1
Valle d' Aosta	21,9	19,7	North-east	31,3	21,9
Lombardia	36,4	18,8	Centre	27,3	20,1
Trentino Alto Adige	35,8	14,5	South	40,1	10,4
Bolzano	31,6	13,6	Islands	33,4	14,8
Trento	39,8	15,2			
Veneto	37,8	15,6	Communes at the heart of a Metropolitan Area	29,8	24,5
Friuli Venezia Giulia	25,1	24,2	Periphery of Metropolitan Area		
Liguria	25,0	23,6	Up to 2,000 inhabitants	31,7	17,3
Emilia Romagna	24,7	30,2	Between 2,001 and 10,000 inhabitants	33,3	14,4
Toscana	22,0	25,5	Between 10,001 and 50,000 inhabitants	35,4	14,9
Umbria	29,2	16,7	More than 50,001 inhabitants	35,4	14,8
Marche	39,8	14,6			
Lazio	26,9	18,5	Italy	31,7	18,9
Abruzzo	36,1	10,6			
Molise	33,7	12,6			
Campania	42,8	09,4			
Puglia	40,3	10,7		33,4	17,2
Basilicata	38,0	12,3			
Calabria	36,2	11,9			
Sicilia	35,6	13,8			
Sardegna	26,8	17,7			

* http://www3.istat.it/dati/catalogo/20071106_00/inf0712_La_vita_quotidiana_2006.pdf

Football loyalty has become more of a unifying factor for communities than religious belief. The former, in fact, can easily cross cultural, ethnic and religious boundaries, which is a much harder or impossible task for the latter.

Developments in art, for example, have always been inspired by the Catholic religion. Sacred art used to dictate the rules of taste and culture. Today, instead, it is a niche art, appreciated by very few. The sacred is used merely as an excuse in contemporary artworks. Orlan¹⁴, for example, combines religious symbols and football loyalty, David La Chapelle¹⁵ uses a scene from the Gospels to make a portrait of a singer, while Jean Fabre¹⁶ contaminates religious imagery with sports subjects, or the cross with insects.

14 The pseudonym of Mireille Suzanne Francette Porte, a French body artist.

15 A US photographer working in the fields of fashion, advertising and art photography. Appreciated for his surrealist and often humouristic style, he is considered one of the most ingenious photographers of all times.

16 Belgian artist, choreographer, stage director and set designer.



Figure 1: The 2011 TV ad campaign by Sky Italia

At the 2011 Venice Biennale, the Golden Lion was awarded to the German Pavilion, where the artist Christoph Schlingensiefel¹⁷ used the sacred to disparage the sacred, as a way of manifesting his state of mind regarding his existence and the disease that would eventually lead him to his death. In the Italian Pavilion, the sacred was used by Gaetano Pesce¹⁸ as an artistic expression for his work, as in the installation for the town of Salemi.

The recent advertising campaign by Sky uses the devotional aspect of the sacred, and the miracles described in the Gospels, to sell TV subscriptions. This denotes how, today, secularisation has led to a muddling of the sacred and the profane, mixing and confusing them, clouding their meaning and obfuscating their recognisability (Fig. 1). Banksy's work¹⁹ provides food for thought by showing up contemporary secularised society, which accepts the increasing conversion of former places of worship, no longer used due to the lack of practising communities, for other activities (Fig. 2).

This reflection, which photographs the present attitude of contemporary society towards the sacred, should not be forgotten or neglected. It is necessary to start tackling this issue in a coherent and effective way, because it inevitably influences our perception of the sacred, which we now view through the lens of a secularised society.

17 German artist, playwright, stage, opera and film director, as well as performance artist and television presenter

18 Italian architect, designer, experimenter with languages.

19 A British artist and, one of the most renowned street artists

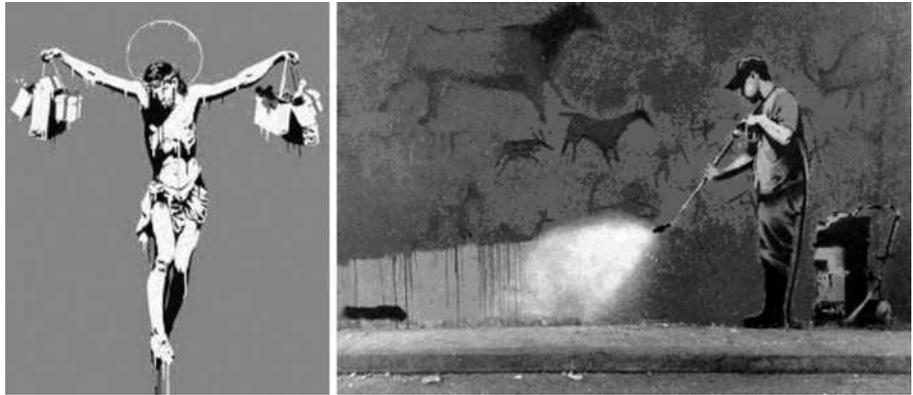


Figure 2: Street-art works by Banksy 2011.

Shelters and Meeting Places in Significant Urban Spaces

As we have seen, France, and Paris in particular, stands out for the way in which it welcomes other communities and religions, also involving them in the decision-making process regarding the construction of the places of worship of other religions. As already documented, the reflection on social change, after World War II, has altered the relationship between buildings and cities. The churches built in the new collective urban spaces have created and create new aggregating religious centralities.

The chapels in railway stations, such as at Montparnasse and the Gare de Lyon in Paris, are places of worship also serving a social function, doubling as shelters for people living on the margins of society who flock to and gather to these connection nodes. The West Terminal of the Orly Airport houses an interconfessional prayer room for the three monotheistic religions (Fig. 3), while the South Terminal features separate prayer rooms for Muslims and Catholics. These places, however, are often hard to identify and can easily be missed, especially in the South Terminal, where the mosque is close to the car park and has been built, as in Rome, for policy rather than for conviction.

Hospitals also feature prayer rooms and chapels for patients and visitors, such as at the Hôpital Bretonneau. In schools too, attempts are being made to provide places of prayer for the students, as at the Lycée Rocroy Saint Leon, in Paris, where a prayer room has been opened using part of an old chapel (Fig. 4), while, in an opposite trend, the chapel of Notre Dame de la Providence at Enghien-les-Bains, located inside a school, can be transformed, by removing the altar and the ambon, into a venue for meetings and a music room, thus becoming the heart of the school (Fig. 5).



Figure 3: Interconfessional chapel in the airport of Orly West, and the Catholic chapel, airport of Orly South. (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti, 2011).



Figure 4: Catholic chapel in the Lycée Rocroy Saint Leon School at Paris. (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti, 2011).



Figure 5: Catholic chapel of Notre-Dame in the Collège Lycée Notre-Dame Providence at Enghien-les-Bains. (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti, 2005)

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Figure 6: Interconfessional chapel in the Leonardo da Vinci Airport in Rome (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti, 2011)



Figure 7: Chapel at Corviale, exterior and interior (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti, 2007)



Figure 8: Church for the community Roma and Sinti, Rome (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti, 2004)



Figure 9: Chapel on the Costa Concordia cruise ship, and, the ultramodern “House of the Lord” in PVC, a portable church 2009 (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti).



Figure 10: Portable church of San Martino for the homeless by the British artist Dave the Chimp, and, the Kapelle Nepomuk Oberrealta in Switzerland (Image Source: A. Marcuccetti).

The new collective urban spaces have, therefore, increased in number and variety. At weekends, the community would come together, while today it tends to drift apart, thus altering the make-up of the local communities. Places of prayer have started to appear on the flow pathways -- motorways, railway networks and airports, the focal points of modernity where large numbers of people converge. They have been opened in motorway service areas, (such as the *Chiesa dell'Autostrada*, Motorway Church by Giovanni Michelucci) and the railway stations, as in Roma Termini, where the prayer room is located in the underground shopping forum. In the Gare Montparnasse and Gare de Lyon in Paris, there are two churches, which, in the latter case, also serve as a shelter for the needy. In airports, such as Fiumicino “Leonardo da Vinci” and Paris “Orly West and South”, the type of solution and the location leave a lot to be desired, being hard to reach and badly designed, especially the mosque at Orly South and the interconfessional centre in Rome Fiumicino (Fig. 6).

Important focal points, such as hospitals, schools and shopping centres, which attract increasing numbers of persons, even if they are not run by Catholic or religious organisations nevertheless host prayer rooms or places of worship, such as the Umberto I Polyclinic in Rome, and the place of worship opened in the subsidised housing complex of Corviale in Rome, which also serve as shelters and places of prayer open to everybody (Fig. 7), or as places of religious attraction, where people can come together to create stronger centralities, such as at the Divino Amore complex, which features a church for the Roma and Sinti communities (Fig. 8). Today prayer rooms are also being created on means of transport, such as cruise ships, and in leisure facilities, such as beaches (Fig. 9). Or they can be easily set up in any location, such as the portable church designed by the British artist Dave the Chimp, or built in inaccessible locations, such as the Kapelle Nepomuk Oberrealta, built in 1994, at Cazis, designed by the architect Rudolf Fontana (Fig. 10).

CONCLUSION

In view of the above, the conclusion is that, to date, the focus of the vision of the smart city of the future is primarily on nourishing the body. Suffice it to mention that the technological development in trade (which is a key component and driver today of any form of development and attractive capacity of the new centralities), and nourishing the mind through information and training, are being constantly linked up in real time with everything around us. All this while, nourishing the spirit has been neglected and kept outside any form reflection but is capable of triggering, as we have seen, very serious and dangerous issues, a spark that can cause unforeseeable effects, with regard to the other two forms of nourishment.

Religion, despite being viewed as a “collateral effect”, has nevertheless gradually integrated itself. The sacred component has lost its generating and organising role in society and culture, blending with the so-called profane and losing the distinctive features that have always characterised and ordered our history. This aspect had already been foreseen in France, as reflected in the places of worship in the new urban collective spaces designed and built soon after World War II.

During the fast large-scale post-war urbanisation process, with the construction of new towns and the expansion of the suburbs of towns and cities, we have witnessed the birth and development of a new phenomenon, tourism: weekend tourism, summer and winter holidays. This has led, at the end of the 1950s, to a failed reflection that has further led to an overhauling of the traditional concepts at the base of town planning and architecture.

If, as we have seen, a church can follow its faithful, and that places of worship are now being increasingly built in the proximity of the pedestrian, vehicle, rail and airport flows, in the interchange hubs. Places of worship can be found along motorways, in railway stations and in airports, such as at Orly (Houtard and Rémy, 1968, p. 45), where people may go to pray, albeit hurriedly, while at the Montparnasse station, in Paris, the chapel built in 1969 is habitually attended by the faithful.

Along with the development and widespread use of motor cars, a network of so-called “*église de route*”, the road churches (Brion, 1970., p. 65) has been designed and built along the main roads and motorways. However, not as many of the so-called “road churches”²⁰, as had been hoped by the Church have actually been built. Today, in fact, not many can be found along the motorways, although a pioneering role, in this field, has been played by Società Autostrade

²⁰ The erection of little shrines and tabernacles along the roads has been common in Italy since ancient times.

Italiana, which, between Milan and Rome, provided for a place to service the soul, as well as many service areas for the needs of the body, building the church dedicated to Saint John Baptist at Campi Bisenzio (Florence); in France, the many studies and estimates carried out have not produced an equal number of results, while in several other European countries the situation is much better, with networks of road churches being found in several places²¹.

At the end of the 1970s, in connection with the construction of the “*Villes Nouvelles*”²² (New Towns), the policy was to avoid building places of worship included in the Master Plan beforehand, because this was seen as a form of imposition on the residents and communities, preferring to leave it to the faithful, as the “*living stones*” of the Church, to formulate their own architectural proposals. Meanwhile, the assemblies would gather in meeting halls and the “*maison de quartier*” (neighbourhood halls), which the town planners had already designed for this purpose. The parish priests, in fact, refused to build any permanent churches until a stable community of faithful had been formed.

However, we are under the impression that, in certain situations, in Paris, for example, there is more interest for the matter than in Rome. As in the case of schools, such as the Lycée Rocroy Saint Leon and the *Collège Lycée Notre-Dame de la Providence* at Enghien-le-Bains, especially in the latter case, the place of worship is not used only for religious purposes and has become a focal point for the entire school.

Instead, in airports, such as in Rome, for example, places of worship are built in marginal, hard to reach locations. They are poorly signposted and there is little or no attention to the quality of the space. The impression is that they have been opened purely for image purposes rather than to serve a social function. There’s no other explanation as to why these have been built in such confined and secluded locations.

There is a growing conviction that it is beneficial to open prayer rooms in hospitals too, for the patients, visitors and the hospital staff as well. An interesting example of this trend can be found at the Hôpital Bretonneau in Paris.

There have been significant attempts at providing solutions to the religious problem in the new urban spaces, although they are still few and far between. A question we will be required to answer sooner or later, given the present political and religious situation, however, is this: is the sacred element in

21 German and Swiss motorways are very present and well marked, for those who wish to have a more quiet and not as rapid as possible, as often happens. www.autobahnkirche.de

22 Five “new towns” were being built in the Region of Paris: Cergy-Pontoise, Evry, Marne la Vallée, Melun-Sénart, Saint Quentin en Yvelines.

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