

Intervening in Built Religious Heritage in Response to Contemporary Requirements: A Literature Review on the Typology of Heritage Interventions and Analysis of Selected Reference Projects

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Abstract: Built religious heritage is part of the architectural and cultural memory of territories. Its conservation must today respond to changing uses, safety, accessibility and comfort requirements, as well as changes affecting religious practices and social life. The issue is therefore no longer limited to preserving the material characteristics of an old building, but also involves determining how it can evolve so that it can continue to be used without losing the values attributed to it.

This article presents a literature review of the different ways of intervening in built religious heritage when it must respond to contemporary requirements. The review first examines the notion of built heritage and the main requirements that may influence its evolution. It then considers several existing forms of heritage intervention and compares a number of reference projects.

The review shows that these interventions do not rely on a single solution. Choices depend in particular on the condition of the building, its heritage characteristics, its uses and the constraints it must address. Adaptation therefore requires a balance between the preservation of the existing building and the transformations necessary to maintain its use.

The state of the art nevertheless reveals several limitations. Research often focuses on the religious building considered individually, whereas some buildings form part of larger complexes comprising other buildings and outdoor spaces. In addition, many of the interventions examined concern built religious heritage that is no longer in active use. Furthermore, the literature reviewed appears to be more strongly structured around urban and, to a lesser extent, rural contexts, while intermediate situations, particularly semi-rural territories undergoing transformation, are less clearly documented.

Keywords: Built Heritage; Religious Heritage; Heritage Intervention; Restoration; Rehabilitation; Adaptation; Contemporary Requirements; Architecture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ancient religious buildings occupy a particular position within the territories in which they are located. Their

significance does not derive solely from their architecture or age. It is also related to religious practices, collective uses and the history of the communities that have used them over time. Their evolution therefore raises a specific question when

conditions of use change while the characteristics that give them heritage value need to be preserved.

Over time, these buildings may face needs that did not exist when they were constructed. Safety and accessibility requirements may require transformations. Religious practices themselves may evolve, leading to changes in the organisation and use of spaces. Depending on the situation, the building may retain its religious function, experience a decline in activity, or cease to be used for its original purpose.

Intervening in such heritage therefore involves determining to what extent the existing building can be preserved, modified or supplemented. Conservation and restoration are notably addressed within the principles established by the *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, known as the Venice Charter, adopted in 1964 [1]. The literature also identifies other forms of intervention through the study of several projects, including rehabilitation, renovation and restitution. These approaches correspond to different levels and objectives of intervention. Their implementation depends in particular on the condition of the building, its heritage characteristics, its use and the constraints to which it is subject.

The question may also arise at different scales. Some religious buildings are isolated structures, while others form part of complexes comprising several buildings, including their outdoor spaces. In the latter case, the relationships between the different components of the site may influence adaptation choices. The territorial context is also a factor to be considered. The projects identified in the literature mainly concern urban and rural contexts, whereas intermediate situations, particularly territories undergoing urban transformation, appear to be less documented.

It is from these observations that this article proposes a literature review devoted to interventions in built religious heritage in response to contemporary requirements. It seeks to clarify the main forms of intervention, identify the requirements likely to influence the evolution of religious buildings, and compare several reference projects. The review also aims to highlight situations that are less studied in the literature, particularly those involving active religious complexes in semi-rural contexts.

II. METHODOLOGY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is based on a structured narrative literature review, supplemented by a comparative analysis of several reference projects.

The literature review includes several types of documents: doctrinal texts, normative documents, institutional documents, specialised publications and documents devoted to architectural projects.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: BUILT HERITAGE AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

➤ *Evolution of the Concept of Built Heritage*

The concept of built heritage has gradually expanded. It no longer concerns only monuments considered exceptional, but may also encompass groups of buildings and sites presenting historical, architectural, artistic, cultural or religious interest. “The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO “in 1972, distinguishes monuments, groups of buildings and sites among the categories of cultural heritage [2].

This distinction is important for the study of religious heritage. It makes it possible to consider the building itself, but also, where justified, the relationships it maintains with other buildings or with its environment. A religious building can therefore be studied as an autonomous architectural object or as a component of a larger complex.

The concept of heritage is not limited to material elements either. The 2003 UNESCO Convention defines intangible cultural heritage through practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and know-how recognised by communities, groups or, in some cases, individuals. It includes, in particular, social practices, rituals and festive events [3].

This distinction between tangible and intangible heritage is particularly relevant to religious heritage. A building may possess its own architectural value while also being associated with practices, rites, collective habits or local memory. In such cases, heritage value does not rest solely on the physical characteristics of the building. The way in which it is used and perceived by the communities concerned is also an important consideration.

Built heritage can therefore be understood at several levels: that of the individual building, that of the relationships between several buildings when such relationships exist, and that of the uses and practices associated with them. This approach avoids reducing heritage studies to the sole conservation of the built fabric.

➤ *Specific Characteristics of Built Religious Heritage*

Built religious heritage has a particular dimension because of the relationship between architecture, religious practices and the symbolic values associated with it. The buildings concerned may take different forms depending on traditions and historical periods: churches, chapels, cathedrals, monasteries, convents, sanctuaries, mosques, temples or synagogues. Their heritage significance may be related to their architecture, history, religious function or the practices that take place within them.

In the case of Catholic buildings, spatial organisation is notably related to the requirements of the liturgy. The nave, sanctuary, altar, ambo and sacristy correspond to distinct functions. The arrangement of these spaces is therefore not merely a matter of architectural composition; it contributes to

the conduct of worship.

This relationship between liturgy and space can evolve. The liturgical reform resulting from the Second Vatican Council notably led to changes in the organisation of Catholic liturgical spaces. The architect, researcher and heritage specialist Tullio Poli shows that this evolution affected spatial relationships within churches and the way in which their organisation was conceived [4].

The word *parish* derives from the Latin *parochia*, meaning a group of houses. During the Middle Ages, it referred to a village, hamlet or neighbourhood forming the territory served by a priest [5]. A parish therefore does not correspond, strictly speaking, to a building. It first refers to a community organised around religious and pastoral life in a place of gathering.

Conversely, Canon 1214 defines a church as a sacred building intended for divine worship and accessible to the faithful for the exercise of worship [6]. This distinction is useful for the proportional analysis: the church constitutes a building, whereas the parish refers to a group of buildings.

In view of the above, religious heritage can therefore be divided into two categories: individual religious buildings and religious complexes comprising several religious buildings and the outdoor spaces associated with them. Their characteristics obviously vary according to the religion concerned.

➤ *Religious Heritage and Uses*

Religious heritage cannot be separated from the uses that give it a function within the territory. A single religious building may accommodate many forms of worship-related activity. However, the intensity and nature of these uses may change over time.

Such changes may affect existing spaces. Changes in attendance, transformations in religious practices, the emergence of new needs, or changes in safety and accessibility conditions may lead to adaptations to the building. The issue of intervention therefore concerns not only the physical condition of religious heritage, but also its ability to remain relevant over time and to maintain continuity. It is therefore important to determine how it can be adapted to new changes so that this heritage can continue to remain in use.

IV. CONTEMPORARY REQUIREMENTS FOR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

The adaptation of a religious architectural complex should enable the building to continue functioning despite changing conditions. This issue can be related to the principles expressed by Vitruvius in *De Architectura* through the triad *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas*, corresponding to structural soundness, usefulness and beauty in architecture [8].

These three dimensions make it possible to consider the building from the perspectives of stability, functionality and architectural qualities. In the case of religious complexes, however, they must be related to the particular characteristics associated with worship, the rules governing their operation and the needs of the communities that use them.

In this study, four categories of requirements are therefore considered in analysing the conditions for adapting religious architectural complexes: religious, institutional and technical, and social requirements. Together, they provide a framework for considering ways of adapting built religious heritage to changing conditions.

➤ *Religious Requirements*

Religious requirements refer to the practices, prescriptions and values associated with the religious function of the building. They are particularly important when the building is still used for worship, since transformations must allow religious practices to continue under appropriate conditions.

When a building is still dedicated to worship, it is important to determine whether its configuration remains consistent with new religious practices. In Catholicism, where practices are guided by religious texts that have evolved through canon law, the Church has not adopted any particular architectural style as its own. Rather, according to the character and conditions of peoples and the requirements of different rites, it has accepted the artistic forms of each period, producing over the centuries an artistic heritage that should be preserved with the greatest possible care [7]. This means that Catholic religious architecture can evolve according to the needs associated with rites and according to each historical period. This evolution can notably be observed through the liturgical reforms initiated by the Second Vatican Council, which sought to strengthen the participation of the faithful in the Mass.

Religious requirements therefore contribute to defining the status, use and spatial organisation of the place. Their importance in an intervention project depends in particular on whether the religious function is maintained.

➤ *Institutional and Technical Requirements*

Intervention in a heritage building is governed by different texts and reference frameworks dealing with conservation, construction, safety, accessibility, the environment and building-use conditions. These provisions do not all operate at the same level. International texts mainly establish principles for heritage conservation and management, while national regulations specify the obligations applicable to buildings within a given context.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972, constitutes a major reference in the field of cultural heritage protection. It assigns States responsibility for the identification, protection, conservation and transmission of heritage falling within its scope. It also provides mechanisms for international cooperation and assistance [2].

Its scope must nevertheless be clarified. The Convention concerns cultural and natural heritage considered to possess outstanding universal value and falling within the system established by the Convention. It is therefore not a technical regulation applicable to all religious buildings. For the present study, its relevance lies primarily in the principles it establishes concerning heritage protection, conservation and transmission.

The Venice Charter, adopted in 1964, constitutes another important reference. It establishes principles for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites, particularly with regard to maintenance, respect for existing fabric, preliminary study of interventions and documentation. It also considers restoration as a specialised operation that must respect existing elements and, where necessary, make contemporary additions distinguishable [1].

These principles place limits on transformations carried out in the name of current requirements. Upgrading an old building does not necessarily mean replacing its elements with new systems. The solutions adopted must take account of the existing structure, the materials used and the elements that contribute to the heritage value of the building [1].

Safety concerns both people and the assets preserved on religious sites. Some of these places contain objects, works of art, archives or other elements of heritage interest. The guide devoted to securing religious heritage published by UNESCO recommends, among other measures, identifying and inventorying assets, analysing risks specific to the site and implementing appropriate protective measures [9].

Technical requirements also concern the everyday functioning of the building. Structures, roofing, electrical systems, fire-safety devices, lighting, ventilation and sanitary installations may require maintenance, repair or upgrading. For an old building, such work cannot be separated from its existing construction characteristics. The nature of the materials and assemblies must in particular be considered before technical solutions are defined.

Accessibility is also an important consideration. Entrances, circulation routes, changes in level, sanitary facilities and reception areas may require adaptations to enable their use by people with different physical abilities. In a heritage building, the challenge is to improve accessibility without removing or altering elements that possess heritage value.

Environmental and sanitary conditions also influence the evolution of buildings. Depending on the situation, they may concern energy consumption, water management, hygrothermal conditions, materials, waste or noise. The World Health Organization's guidelines on environmental noise consider exposure to noise to be a public health issue and provide recommendations aimed at reducing its effects on health and well-being [10]. In places of worship, this issue can be considered in both directions: limiting users' exposure to external noise and controlling the nuisances generated by activities taking place on the site.

In Cameroon, these different concerns must be considered in relation to national regulations concerning, among other areas, urban planning, the environment, electricity, accessibility and nuisances. International reference frameworks may provide complementary guidance where a particular area is not sufficiently addressed by national regulations. However, they do not automatically replace the applicable Cameroonian provisions.

Institutional and technical requirements therefore constitute a first framework for intervention. They are nevertheless not sufficient to determine the transformations to be made to a religious building. The building also remains connected to a religious function, practices and an organisational structure that are specific to it.

➤ *Social Requirements*

Social requirements concern the relationships between the religious building, its users and the activities taking place within it. They relate in particular to reception, accessibility, comfort, gathering conditions and the specific needs of the community using the place.

Attendance at a religious building is not necessarily constant. In addition to regular celebrations, there may be special ceremonies, gatherings, meetings, training activities or other community activities. Space requirements may therefore vary according to the size of the community and the organisation of each parish.

Capacity should therefore not be assessed solely on the basis of the original dimensions of the building. It must also be related to actual attendance and to the different uses of the site. Demographic change or an increase in certain activities may lead to a reconsideration of the organisation of spaces. Conversely, a decline in attendance may result in the underuse of certain parts of the building or site.

Accessibility also has a dimension that extends beyond the purely technical response. It concerns the conditions under which different users can access the place, move within it and participate in the activities organised there. It therefore connects the technical requirements discussed above with the issue of participation in collective life.

The needs of a community may also require spaces that are not directly dedicated to worship. Depending on the situation, a parish may have reception, meeting, training, administrative or other community spaces. Their presence is not, however, a general characteristic of all religious sites. It depends on the functioning of each community and the configuration of the site.

The relationship between the community and heritage is also an element to be considered in intervention decisions. The values associated with a place cannot always be reduced to its architectural characteristics. People who use the place may attach particular memories, practices and meanings to it. Contemporary approaches to religious heritage therefore give a place to dialogue with communities, religious leaders and other actors involved in the conservation and management of

sites.

This dimension is particularly important when the building is still in use. An intervention defined solely from technical constraints may not respond to the actual conditions of use. However, the needs expressed by users cannot by themselves justify every transformation. They must be considered in relation to the condition of the building, its heritage characteristics and the other applicable constraints.

Institutional and technical, religious and social requirements are therefore not independent of one another. Their importance varies according to the characteristics of each building and its evolution over time. Identifying them constitutes a preliminary step in determining the forms of intervention compatible with the situation under study. The following section therefore examines the main forms of intervention identified in the literature on built heritage.

V. TYPES OF INTERVENTION IN BUILT HERITAGE

➤ Conservation

Conservation aims to maintain the characteristics of a building that possess heritage value and to limit their deterioration. The Venice Charter gives an important place to the conservation and maintenance of monuments. It emphasises in particular the need to carry out these operations while respecting their substance and historical characteristics [1].

Conservation therefore relies on actions intended to maintain the condition of the building and prevent the emergence or worsening of deterioration. It may concern structural elements, materials, roofing, joinery, decorative features or certain movable elements when they possess heritage significance. Such interventions require prior knowledge of the condition of the building and of the factors that may affect its conservation.

St Paul's Cathedral in London also provides an interesting example for observing the conservation of religious heritage.



Fig 1 St Paul's cathedral, London.
Source: alltrippers.com, 12 october 2018

St Paul's Cathedral in London constitutes a documented example of conservation intervention on a historic religious

building. A major programme of works, carried out over several years with the architectural practice Purcell, involved different parts of the cathedral, including structural repairs to the dome peristyle, reconstruction of the western steps, and repair and cleaning of the stone masonry. The project was carried out while the cathedral remained in operation and received a RIBA Award for Conservation in 2012.

➤ Restoration

According to the Venice Charter, restoration is an exceptional operation intended to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historical values of a monument while respecting its historic fabric and relying on authentic documentation [1]. It therefore requires sufficiently established knowledge of the building, its transformations and the elements that are to be preserved or reinstated [1].

This approach means that restoration should not be based on a hypothetical reconstruction of the building. On the contrary, it requires prior knowledge of its history, transformations, construction techniques and materials. The availability of materials compatible with the existing building and an understanding of its construction methods are also elements to be considered when defining the project.

Restoration may also concern structures when they present deterioration that threatens the conservation of the building. ICOMOS principles concerning the analysis, conservation and restoration of architectural heritage structures emphasise the need to study the existing structure before defining the interventions to be carried out [11].

The restoration of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris following the fire of 15 April 2019 provides an example. The works addressed the parts affected by the fire while seeking to preserve the main architectural characteristics of the building. The case also demonstrates that intervention in a heritage building may require extensive studies, structural works and the use of materials and techniques compatible with the existing fabric [12].

For a religious building, restoration may also concern elements directly associated with worship, such as certain decorative features, furnishings or devices related to the organisation of the space.



Fig 2 Photographic Exhibition on the Construction-Site Hoarding During the Restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris.
Source: JCDecaux, 6 January 2020.

This case shows that restoration depends to a large extent on knowledge of the building's history. When successive transformations of the building or a lack of documentation make it impossible to clearly determine its former state, it becomes difficult to establish which elements should be restored and how far the intervention should go.

While the Venice Charter establishes principles mainly concerning conservation and restoration, the realities encountered in historic buildings may require other forms of intervention, including rehabilitation, restructuring and extension, potentially extending into more extensive renovation.

➤ Rehabilitation

According to CREBA, rehabilitation makes it possible

to adapt an existing building to contemporary needs without compromising its heritage character. It differs from an intervention intended to completely eliminate what was previously there. Rehabilitation instead seeks a balance between the new and the existing [13].

The Sacred Heart Church in Geneva underwent a transformation project following a fire on 19 July 2018. The project provided for a complete reorganisation of the interior spaces in order to create a what is call *Maison d'Église*, comprising pastoral and administrative services of the Roman Catholic Church in Geneva, the French-speaking Sacred Heart parish, the Spanish-speaking Catholic community and various spaces accessible to the public. The façades of the building, however, were preserved.

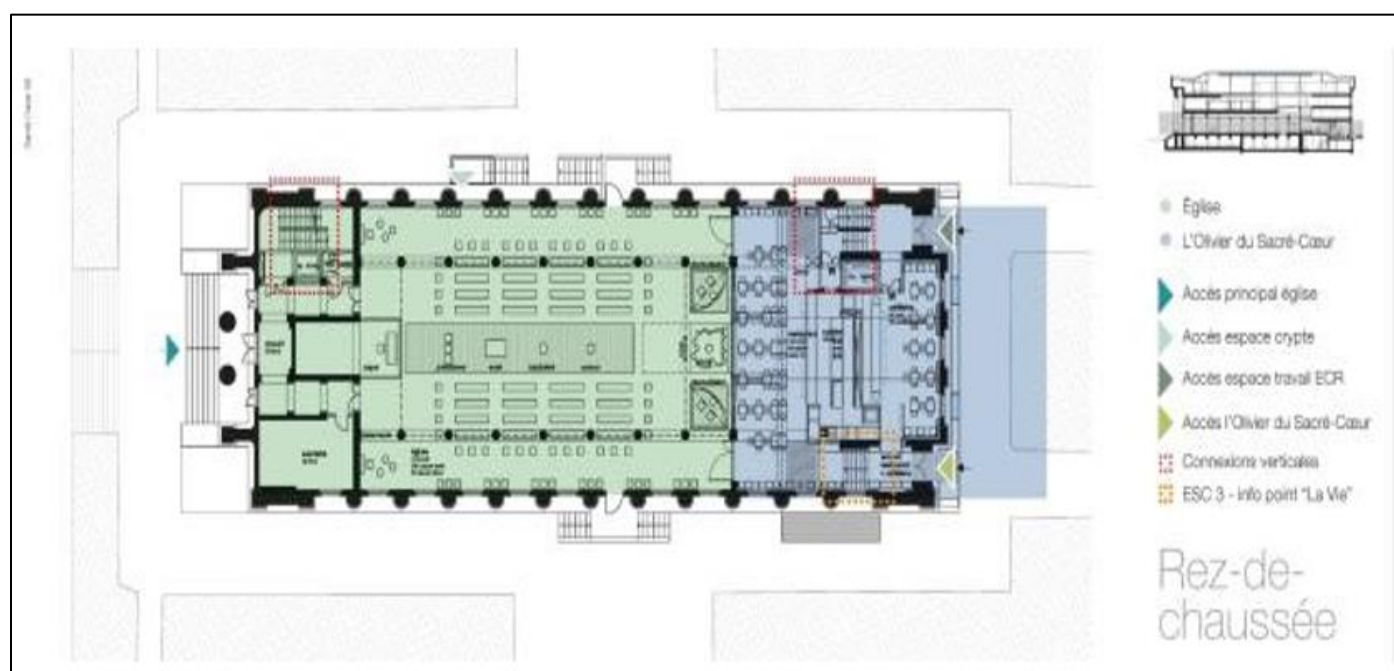


Fig 3 Rehabilitation of the Sacred Heart Church in Geneva, Switzerland.
Source : Atelier Ribo+ SA, via Schweizer Kirchenbautag- Universität de Berne, 2021



Fig 4 View of the Main Façade of the Sacred Heart Church in Switzerland.

Source: eglisecatholique-ge.ch ,04 June 2024

➤ Restitution

According to Tony Marchal [14], restitution is the process of bringing a building back to its original state. It can involve removing later additions and rebuilding parts that have disappeared or been demolished, including elements that had only been planned but were never built. Restitution therefore relies on historical evidence to recover the original form of the building.

The Notre-Dame de Réconciliation Chapel in Lille, France, illustrates this approach. Between 2018 and 2019, the southern aisle was rebuilt to restore its original dimensions and form. This work was part of the restitution process, while the work carried out on the roof and façades was undertaken as part of the restoration programme.



Fig 5 Southern Aisle of the Chapel of Notre-Dame de Réconciliation in Lille Before Restitution.

Source : D. Cense, Archéopole, 2022



Fig 7 Main Façade of Saint Luc Church in Njombé-Penja During Renovation Works.

Source: Author's photograph, 2025.

Figure 7 highlights several renovation operations on Saint Luc Church in Njombé-Penja. The secondary metal door, indicated in the photograph, differs clearly from the main wooden door, whose appearance and characteristics suggest greater age. This difference in materials and design suggests that the metal door may not correspond to the original arrangement, but rather result from a later intervention intended to introduce a new element.

Some interventions may give a building an old appearance without actually taking its history into account. Such interventions may be described as *fictitious recomposition*, when elements are added or modified in order to create an image of the past that does not correspond to the actual history of the building.

VI. REFERENCE PROJECTS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The study of projects carried out in different contexts makes it possible to identify several ways of intervening in religious heritage or in its environment. The selected projects are not considered models that can be directly transferred to Akok Ngomedzap. They are used to compare different situations, intervention scales and strategies.

A. St Mary's Church, Lübeck, (Germany)

St Mary's Church in Lübeck provides an interesting example for understanding the difficulties associated with intervention in a religious building strongly marked by its history. The building was severely damaged during the bombing of Lübeck in 1942: a large part of the vaults, roofs and interior furnishings was destroyed. Reconstruction works undertaken after the war gradually restored the church, with the main reconstruction completed in 1959. Some parts of the

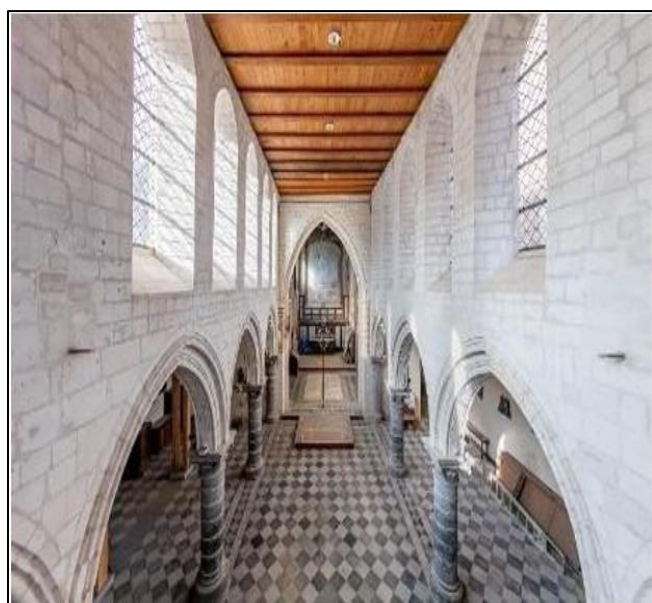


Figure .6. Southern Aisle of the Chapel of Notre-Dame de Réconciliation in Lille After Restitution.

Source: D. Cense, Archéopole, 2022

These images respectively show the side aisles of the church before and after the restitution. A comparison of the two states shows that the furniture previously occupying the side aisles was removed as part of the restitution process, with the aim of recovering the original spatial arrangement of the church.

➤ Renovation

Tony Marchal said, renovation consists of creating something new from the old and may lead to the complete removal of existing elements when necessary; in this approach, the old serves the new, while a few non-obstructive remnants may be retained to provide an appearance of historical character [13].

building were reinstated on the basis of their previous state, while the interior arrangement was redesigned using the elements that had survived. Medieval paintings discovered after the fire were also restored, leading to disagreements concerning how the surviving parts should be completed. Interventions that were not sufficiently based on available historical evidence notably resulted in the creation of fictitious paintings, which were subsequently removed.

This project shows that restoration of an old building does not necessarily consist of completely reproducing its former state. When certain parts have disappeared, the project must determine what can be reinstated on the basis of reliable documentation and what should be treated differently. In Lübeck, reconstruction therefore combined the reinstatement of certain historical characteristics with contemporary choices for parts that could no longer be preserved or restituted in a sufficiently documented manner. The case thus highlights the importance of historical knowledge of the building before any intervention and the need to distinguish documented elements from hypothetical reconstructions. This issue is directly related to the restoration of religious heritage, where intervention must take into account both the conservation of existing elements and the limits of what the available sources actually make it possible to know [15] [16].

B. Project for the Enhancement of the Historical and Religious Heritage of Akono: Parish of Akono, Cameroon

The project for the enhancement of Akono's historical and religious heritage constitutes an interesting reference for studying the adaptation of religious heritage at the scale of a complex.

The evolution of the site across the different periods studied shows that the functions of a religious complex may progressively change through the addition of new facilities and the reorganisation of uses. The project combines the rehabilitation of existing buildings, their reassignment to new uses and the development of activities related to heritage enhancement.

This operation also demonstrates the value of an approach that goes beyond the scale of the individual building in order to consider relationships between the different buildings, outdoor spaces and community activities. It nevertheless shows that heritage enhancement alone does not guarantee adaptation to contemporary requirements. Questions of accessibility, safety, comfort, maintenance and future development must also be integrated into the project [17].



Fig 8 Catholic Church of Akono.
Source: Balisto bleu, 17 October 2012.

C. Former Saint-Louis Church-Le Phare, Tourcoing (France)

The restructuring project of Saint-Louis Church in Tourcoing shows that an existing religious building can be adapted to new needs while retaining its main architectural characteristics. The intervention prioritises the conservation of the existing building and introduces light and flexible interior arrangements to accommodate different cultural, social and community activities. Its implementation in stages also makes it possible to distribute interventions over time according to available resources and changing needs.

Saint-Louis Church had been decommissioned before its conversion. Its transformation therefore involved a significant change of function, which limits its direct application to a religious building that remains associated with worship. The duration of the project, shaped by financial and administrative constraints, also constitutes a limitation of this approach. Nevertheless, the case provides several useful principles: preserving existing elements, limiting transformations, planning adaptable arrangements and considering interventions progressively. Their application must, however, be adapted to the continued religious function of the site, the values of the former church and the conditions specific to the local context [17].



Fig 9 Exterior View of the Former Saint-Louis Church in Tourcoing, France.
Source: vpah-hauts-de-France.fr, 09 december 2020

D. “ Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, New Delhi” (India)

The Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, carried out in New Delhi, demonstrates the value of an intervention that does not focus solely on heritage buildings but considers the site and its surrounding environment as a whole. The programme combines the restoration of historic monuments with the improvement of streets, squares, gardens and pathways, as well as improvements to rainwater management and collective spaces. The project also relies on local craftsmen and traditional know-how, encouraging a participatory approach and enabling local communities to become involved in conservation and enhancement activities. Tourism also provides a source of revenue that can contribute to economic activity within the neighbourhood and to heritage maintenance. For the Sainte-Thérèse parish of Akok Ngomedzap, this experience therefore suggests the value of combining heritage enhancement, improvement of the landscape and collective spaces, participation of local actors and the pursuit of economic benefits in order to contribute to the long-term continuity of the site [21].



Fig 10 View of Nizamuddin Basti from the Barapullah Nallah Watercourse Before the Renovation of the Housing and Treatment of the Watercourse.
Source: Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2008.

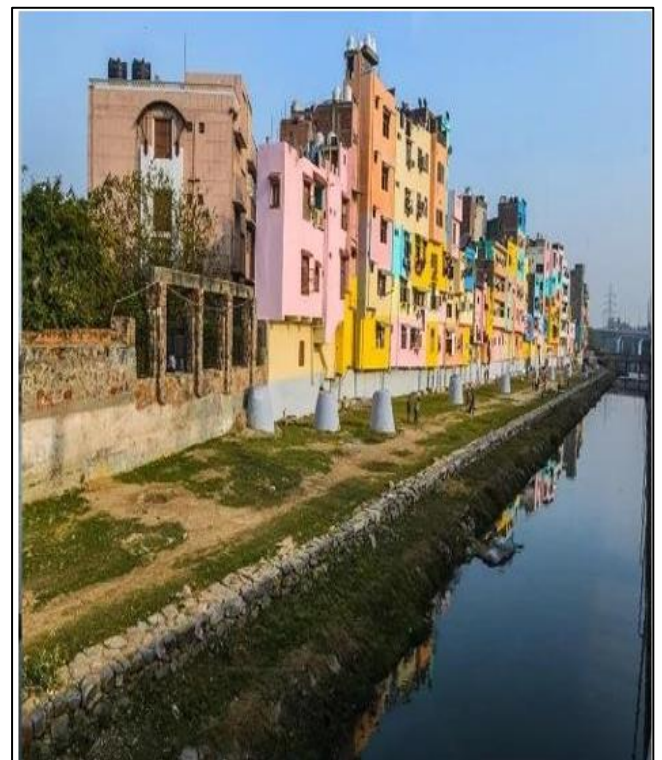


Fig 11 View of Nizamuddin Basti from the Barapullah Nallah watercourse Before the Renovation of the Housing and Treatment of the Watercourse.
Source : Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2008.

VII. COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS OF THE PROJECTS

The comparison of the projects reveals several levels of intervention.

Table 1 Comparative Synthesis of the Reference Projects

Projet	Situation principale	Échelle d'intervention	Apport pour la recherche
St Mary's Church, Lübeck	Restoration	Building	Documentation, knowledge of the existing building and continuity of use
<i>Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs Church, Akono, Cameroon</i>	Rehabilitation	Building	Consideration of the Cameroonian context
Saint-Louis Church, Tourcoing	Restructuration	Building	Distinction between adaptation, change of use and change of function
Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative in New Delhi, India	Renovation Restoration Requalification	Architectural group	Relationship between heritage, public spaces, infrastructure and uses

This comparison shows that intervention situations differ considerably. Restoration projects place greater emphasis on knowledge and conservation of the material fabric. Conversion projects focus more strongly on adaptation to a new function. Projects carried out at the scale of a complex integrate public spaces, infrastructure and everyday uses.

None of these projects can therefore constitute a model for Akok Ngomedzap on its own. Their value lies in the combination of several principles: understanding the existing building, identifying the characteristics that underpin its heritage significance, considering the relationship between heritage and uses, organising complementarity between old and new, ensuring compatibility between interventions, and taking the building's environment into account.

This assessment reading shifts the question of adaptation away from a simple opposition between conservation and transformation towards an evaluation process. For each proposed intervention, it is necessary to determine what should be preserved, what can be adapted and, where necessary, what can be transformed, according to the values of the building, its uses and the constraints to which it must respond.

VIII. DISCUSSION: TOWARDS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEXES

The comparison of the studies and projects selected reveals three points that limit the scope of possible comparisons:

the scale of intervention, the use status of the sites studied and their territorial context.

The first point concerns the scale of intervention. Most of the studies examined take the religious building as their main object of study. This approach makes it possible to understand the transformations carried out on the building, but provides less information about architectural complexes comprising several buildings and outdoor spaces. In the case of a monumental site, the analysis is therefore more complex

because it must address the relationship between the built fabric and its external environment.

The second point concerns use status. The interventions identified mainly concern religious sites that are no longer in active use. This situation differs from that of a building that continues to accommodate religious practices. In such cases, works must be carried out while taking into account the functioning of the place and the continuity of its activities. The choice of interventions therefore depends not only on the condition of the building and its heritage characteristics, but also on the uses that are maintained there.

The third point concerns the territorial context. The projects studied are mainly located in urban areas and, in some cases, in rural areas. No case clearly situated in a semi-rural context was identified in the corpus studied. It is therefore difficult, on the basis of the projects selected, to directly compare intervention approaches in this type of territory. A religious site located in a semi-rural territory may provide an opportunity to anticipate deterioration and develop an intervention strategy.

The absence of a semi-rural case does not mean that the principles identified in the literature cannot be applied there. Rather, it shows that their implementation must be confronted with the characteristics of the context under study. Similarly, the scale of the site and the continuation of religious use may modify the conditions under which an intervention is considered.

The literature examined therefore does not lead to the selection of a single mode of intervention. Conservation, restoration, rehabilitation or restitution may respond to different situations depending on the condition of the building, its heritage characteristics, its use and the conditions of its location. These elements must therefore be examined before determining the transformations that may be introduced into the existing building.

The interest of a study focusing on an active religious site located in a semi-rural territory therefore lies in the possibility of confronting these principles with a situation that does not appear in the corpus studied. Such an analysis would also make it possible, where the site requires it, to take into account the relationships between the religious building, the other structures and the spaces that contribute to its functioning.

IX. CONCLUSION

This research has examined the different forms of intervention that may be considered when built religious heritage must respond to contemporary needs. The literature review focused on the characteristics of religious heritage, the requirements to which it may be subject and the principal forms of intervention identified in the works consulted. The study of several reference projects then made it possible to relate these different approaches to concrete situations.

The projects analysed show that intervention depends primarily on the characteristics of the heritage concerned and the conditions under which it is used. The history of the building, its state of conservation, its heritage values, its use and the needs to which it must respond influence the possible choices. Conservation, restoration, rehabilitation and restitution are therefore not interchangeable responses. Their relevance must be assessed according to the situation under study.

The comparison of the projects also made it possible to identify three aspects that are less represented in the corpus. Interventions at the scale of complexes comprising several buildings and spaces are less numerous than those concerning an individual building. The projects identified also mainly concern religious sites that are no longer in active use. Finally, no case clearly situated in a semi-rural context was identified in the corpus studied. These three findings show that the scale of intervention, use status and territorial context must be considered when analysing an adaptation project.

Based on the literature examined, five dimensions have therefore been selected for the study of the case: heritage characteristics, religious and symbolic values, the uses and needs of the community, technical and regulatory requirements, and environmental conditions. Their consideration should make it possible to better determine the possibilities for intervention before defining the transformations to be made to the existing heritage.

The case of Akok Ngomedzap presents a particular situation in this regard. The former church known as “La Belle Dame”, built in 1935, is located within a parish where a more recent church now accommodates the main religious activities. The study therefore does not concern only the former building, but also its relationships with the other components of the parish and with the spaces that contribute to its functioning. The continuation of religious activity and the location of the site within a semi-rural territory undergoing transformation are also factors that must be considered.

The study of the Akok Ngomedzap case will therefore make it possible to examine the conditions for intervention in an active built religious complex by comparing the elements identified in the literature with the specific characteristics of the site. This stage will make it possible, on the basis of the existing-condition assessment, to determine interventions capable of responding to the needs of the site while taking its heritage characteristics into account.

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