THE PRESERVATION OF THE RELIGIOUS CULTURAL PATRIMONY

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ABSTRACT: The present article analyzes the preservation of the religious cultural patrimony of the Catholic Church, whose collection is of great size both in tangible and intangible assets. It is based on concepts related to the patrimony, in accordance to Brazilian law and to deals stablished between Brazil and the Holy See, aiming the universal interest in protecting, promoting and valuing the religious, historical, artistic and cultural patrimony. It showcases local realities of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales in Brazil, specially of the Salesian Province in São Paulo, and of the Salesian Province in Campo Grande. These actions contribute to the historical, artistic and cultural preservation by perpetuating the memorable facts of the church
to future generations and by cooperating to spread the knowledge as to correspond to the learning and comprehension of the contexts of each historical period. The preservation of the territory (building/church) has the collective participation and is solidified through religious experiences linked to the sacred place.

**KEYWORDS:** patrimony, preservation, memory, catholic church, cultural assets, Brazil.

**RESUMO:** O artigo analisa a preservação do patrimônio cultural religioso da Igreja Católica, detentora de um considerável acervo histórico de bens materiais e imateriais. Trata de concepções relacionadas ao patrimônio, com o exame da legislação brasileira e acordos estabelecidos entre o Brasil e a Santa Sé, tendo em vista o interesse universal de salvaguarda, promoção e valorização do patrimônio religioso histórico, artístico e cultural. Apresenta realidades locais da Congregação Salesiana São Francisco de Sales no Brasil, especificamente, da Inspetoria Salesiana de São Paulo a da Inspetoria Salesiana de Campo Grande. Tais ações contribuem com a preservação histórica, artística e cultural, especialmente com a perpetuação de fatos memoráveis da igreja para as próximas gerações, assim como cooperam com a difusão do conhecimento, a fim de corresponder com a transmissão dos saberes e compreensões dos contextos correspondentes a cada período histórico. A preservação do território (prédio/igreja) conta com a participação coletiva e se solidifica através de experiências religiosas vinculadas ao lugar sagrado.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** patrimônio, preservação, memória, igreja católica, bens culturais, Brasil.

**RESUMEN:** El artículo analiza la preservación del patrimonio cultural religioso de la Iglesia católica, que atesora un considerable acervo histórico de bienes materiales e inmateriales. Se trata de concepciones relacionadas con el patrimonio, con el examen de la legislación brasileña y de los acuerdos establecidos entre Brasil y la Santa Sede, teniendo presente el interés universal de salvaguardar, promover y valorar el patrimonio histórico, artístico y cultural religioso. Presenta las realidades locales de la Congregación Salesiana São Francisco de Sales en Brasil, específicamente, la Inspectoría Salesiana de São Paulo y la Inspectoría Salesiana de Campo Grande. Tales acciones contribuyen a la preservación histórica, artística y cultural, especialmente con la perpetuación de hechos memorables de la iglesia para las próximas generaciones, así como cooperan con la difusión del conocimiento, a fin de corresponder con la transmisión del conocimiento y la comprensión de la contextos correspondientes a cada período histórico.
La preservación del territorio (edificio/iglesia) depende de la participación colectiva y se solidifica a través de experiencias religiosas vinculadas al lugar sagrado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: patrimonio, preservación, memoria, iglesia católica, bienes culturales, Brasil.

1. Introduction

This research aims to bring forth the relevance of cultural patrimony, especially religious ones, given that the Catholic Church retains a vast and valuable historical collection of tangible and intangible assets, which cooperates with historical, artistic and cultural preservation, as well as with the spread of knowledge, seeking to fulfill the duty to enable a better understanding of historical periods through analysis, interpretation and comprehension by mediating the present and the past.

For that, the Catholic Church relies on prepared and capacitated religious scholars to constantly preserve and organize the religious cultural patrimony; in addition to these, non-religious can apply to the same activity, preferably when having a bachelor’s or proven skills related to the activity.

That being said, in the first section, entitled ‘Cultural Patrimony and State-Church Correlation’, the discussion is centered in the universal interest for the preservation of the cultural patrimony, both in political and religious spheres, focusing on the Brazilian legislation and treatises signed by the State and the Church.

According to the same reasoning, the second section is entitled “Brief Concepts Regarding Material and Immaterial Patrimony”, which explains the definition and classification of the concepts aforementioned.
Lastly, in the third section the main theme are “The Different Aspects of Religious Patrimony” based on local projects of material and immaterial cultural preservation promoted by the Salesians of Don Bosco or the Society of Saint Francis de Sales – they are part of an international community of consecrated religious, both brothers and priest, founded by Saint John Bosco – in particular by the Salesian Province of São Paulo – Mary Help of Christians, through the Museu da Obra Salesiana no Brasil (MOSB)¹ and the Salesian Province of Campo Grande – St. Alphonsus Liguori, with the historical restoration of the Saint Francis de Sales Chapel and the maintenance of the Dom Bosco Cultures Museums (MCDB).

2. The Cultural Patrimony and the State: Church Correlation

The Cultural Patrimony of a nation, region or community is composed of its tangible and intangible assets, including the environment.

In its ethnologic meaning, the word ‘patrimony’ refers to a group of tangible and/or intangible assets that tells the history of a people and their relationship with the environment. It is their inherited legacy that keeps on moving forward towards future generations.

In the Brazilian legal system, through the Federative Republican Constitution (1988), the articles 215 and 216 from the sections about culture, it is stated that any assets that comprise the Brazilian cultural patrimony should be taken care of and preserved by the government itself and the people; therefore, it is up to the local development agents and the citizens to reinforce the need and to demand the constitution to be implemented.

The main characteristic of a patrimony safeguard is that its conservation is of public interest, be it for its correlation with memorable

¹The name of local, in loose translation, would be: Museum of Salesian Work in Brazil.
facts of the history of a place or community, or for its archaeological, ethnographic, bibliographic and artistic values.

Besides the community and the government, the clergy have a special care with religious patrimony, hence the deal signed by Brazil and Santa Sé in 2018, in Vatican City as to ordain the Judicial Statute of the Catholic Church in Brazil. Therefore, the decree 7.107 clarifies that both signatories:

acknowledge that the historic, artistic and cultural patrimony belonging to the Catholic Church, as well as the documents taken into custody in their files and libraries, constitute a relevant part of the Brazilian cultural patrimony; and that shall continue to cooperate do preserve, value and promote the fruition of assets, both immovable or moveable, under the Catholic Church ownership or any other ecclesiastic legal entities that are considered by Brazilian government as part of their cultural and artistic patrimony (Brazil, 2010, art 6\textsuperscript{th}, our translation).

In order to continue the task to preserve cultural assets of the Catholic Church in Brazil, a Technical Cooperation Deal was set between the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) and the Institute for the National Historic and Artistic Patrimony (IPHAN). The event held for the signing of the deal was broadcast through CNBB’s youtube channel on July 16th, 2021, in which Dom Joel Portella Amado, General Secretary of the CNBB signed representing the first part; and Larissa Peixoto, chief of IPHAN, signed representing the second one. Therefore, the event symbolized the establishment of Technical Cooperation Deal as well as the importance of both parts working together in order to present and value the historic, artistic and cultural assets of the Catholic Church (CNBB, 2021).

This deal ensures means for identification, assessments, planning, incentive for conservation, production of instructional material, capacitation of agents for preservation, promotion and protection of cultural material assets of the Catholic Church, that represent 32\% of all assets listed by the National Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN). With this deal of Technical Cooperation, the Institutions involved will set collaborative processes, spurring actions to preserve and to contribute for an effective appropriation and
comprehension of the meaning and possibilities to manage the cultural patrimony (CNBB, 2021, youtube, our transcription and emphasis added).

This cooperation is extremely relevant for the preservation of the Brazilian cultural patrimony, given that the country built, from the early days of colonization, one of the biggest collections of cultural, historic and artistic assets belonging to the Catholic Church.

According to Silva (2001), the protection of cultural patrimony is a universal concern. Each country seeks to establish norms for protection for it transforms into both a way to build a national identity and to pay respect to the identity itself, which, in its turn, identifies itself with the idea of nationality.

Continuing with Silva’s reasoning, globalization does not tend to unite cultures, but impose on them a standard pattern according to the global system. Therefore, a people manifests their culture and make themselves known through their speaking, writing, drawing, painting, singing, dancing; their fashion and their eating habits.

And so, when it comes to culture, ‘patrimony’ refers to the heritage of a society, that is, to the amalgamation of efforts and realizations made throughout their history.

The question of ‘identity’ is being vigorously debated in social theory. In essence, the argument is that the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject. The so-called ‘crisis of identity’ is seen as part of a wider process of change which is dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world. (Hall, 1996, p. 596, our translation).

In a cultural perspective, ‘patrimony’ refers to tangible and intangible assets that compose the collective memory of a people. However, tangible
or intangible signs (objects, buildings, behavior etc.) can only be considered patrimony if the community or someone assign value to them.

3. Brief Conceptions About Tangible and Intangible Cultural Patrimony

The concept of patrimony is complex because it encompasses everything that builds a community culture and is intertwined with heredity. For that reason, patrimony is a group of tangible and intangible assets connected to identity, culture and history of a collectivity. The communal approach of the term ‘patrimony’ gained prominence in the 19th century after the French Revolution, when citizens elected buildings, monuments and symbols to reinforce historical events. With that, these monuments since then started expressing great deeds or important facts. Funari and Pelegrini (2006, p. 19, our translation) write about nationalism and patrimony the following way: “In plain French Revolution, amid violence and civil conflicts, a commission responsible for the preservation of national monuments was being created, whose goal was to protect the monuments which represented the incipient French nation and its culture”.

With that, in the 19th century the concept of ‘material patrimony’ represented the actualization of local identity, related to a group of aesthetic and artistic symbols. That way, artistic and cultural productions could evoke the identity and the past of popular classes, excluded before; the material patrimony was praised with high artistic value and prominence to the beautiful, which led to a misuse and misappropriation of other peoples’ patrimony after both the First World War and Second World War.

Nonetheless, many of the works of art and material patrimony that had been in museums and exhibitions far from their place of origin were repatriated. This situation sheds light on the importance of a patrimony to a
nation, especially for its historical aspect, which enables the recollection and a new understanding of past facts and power dominance.

Based on that, it is possible to acknowledge the importance of the cultural patrimony of a nation – especially the artistic, aesthetic, historic, touristic and archaeological – for its perpetuity, hence the importance of its preservation by the citizens, who should know it well in order to better preserve it.

There is a lot to be done, but we can confirm that the patrimonial experience in Brazil has been assimilated in its most complex way, in synchronicity with the collectivity and from anthropological, sociological, historical, artistic and archaeological guided by specialists. The implementation of patrimonial educational courses, the organization of workshop schools and collective effort constitutes fundamental actions of high importance in the participation of the masses. This effort, when articulated with the stimulus to collective responsibility, will contribute to consolidate social-inclusive policies, rehabilitation and sustainability of our country patrimony (Funari; Pelegrini, 2006, p. 55, our translation).

The IPHAN establishes that the Brazilian cultural patrimony is made of not only works from the past, but also of a diverse and living culture due to the rich Brazilian cultural plurality. This vast cultural patrimony is composed of tangible and intangible assets, according to the precepts found in the heading of the 216th article of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (Brasil, 1988, our translation), whose text is: “It should be considered Brazilian cultural patrimony the assets of tangible or intangible nature, taken individually or as a collective, bearing reference to the identity, the action, the memory of varied formative groups of Brazilian society”.

However, long before the Magna Carta (Brasil, 1988, our translation), the Decree-Law Nº 25, from November 20th, 1937, organized the protection of the historical and artistic national patrimony and, with that, highlighted the importance of tangible patrimony in representing a group of cultural assets recorded in four ‘Livros do Tombo’, namely: “1. Archaeological,
Thus, they are divided into “real estate, such as urban centers; archaeological sites and landscaped; individual properties as well as personal property, such as archaeological collections; museum collections; documents; bibliography; archives; videography; photographic and cinematographic” (IPHAN, our translation).

The intangible patrimony, besides being secured by legal determinations found in the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988, our translation), was also established by the decree nº 3,551, from August 4th, 2000, which “institutes the Register of Intangible Cultural assets that constitute the Brazilian cultural patrimony, [it also] creates the National Intangible Program and states some guidelines”. The first paragraph of article one of this decree institute the record book, such as:

I. ‘Livro de Registro dos Saberes’, in which will be inscribed knowledge and the know-how of a community;
II. ‘Livro de Registro das Celebrações’, in which will be inscribed rituals and celebrations that compose the identity and the collective work of a community, as well as its religious beliefs, entertainment and other social activities;
III. ‘Livro de Registro das Formas de Expressão’, in which will be inscribed literary, musical, artistic and playful activities;
IV. ‘Livro de Registro dos Lugares’, in which will be inscribed markets, fairs, sanctuaries, squares and other places that contribute to the reproduction and making of collective cultural activities ² (Brasil, art. 1º, § 1º, our translation).

In march 2006, Brazil became State-Parte of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), event in which the Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Patrimony, established in 2003, was reinforced. The convention defines intangible cultural patrimony in the following terms:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and techniques – alongside instruments, objects, artefacts and associated cultural spaces – that the communities, the groups and, in some cases, the individuals acknowledge as part of their cultural patrimony. This intangible cultural patrimony, which is passed on generation by generation, is constantly recreated by the communities and groups according to the environment, to their interaction with nature and their history, building a sense of identity and continuity, and contributing to promote respect towards cultural diversity and human creativity (Brasil, art. 1º, 2006, our translation).

The aforementioned convention highlights, in article 2, that the intangible cultural patrimony can be found in “a) traditions and oral expressions, including the language as a means for the patrimony; b) artistic expressions; c) social practices, rituals and festivities; d) knowledge and practices related to nature and to the universe and; e) traditional artisanal techniques (Brasil, art. 2º, 2006, our translation)”.

Therefore, continuous analysis and observation regarding both tangible and intangible patrimony be it nationally or internationally, allows further and effective protection due to new discoveries enabled by preservation.

4. Religious Patrimony and its Aspects

With all this plurality and wealth of the Brazilian cultural patrimony, the religious one stands out. When one, for instance, enters a religious temple, the experience is not restricted to faith only, but it is also an invitation to appreciate its art and culture. However, while spaces of various experiences – or maybe because of it – the works of art of the Church need protection so as not to deteriorate over time, allowing future generations to enjoy as much of these pieces.

According to Castilho (2009, p. 84, our translation):

The endogenous religious organization of the sacred in a territory is built on a fluid dynamics in space. The parish is also a symbolic place where the catholic develops a religious identity with the place. The
symbols found in sacred places – the church – can also represent the conquest of an individual, representing their lives by conveying what words cannot express, but which is alive and, therefore, contains energy, forces that, when reawakened, materialize into images, emotions and sounds, retelling the inner life of an individual and their hopes for a better world to live in.

When it comes to religious cultural patrimony, they are divided into a few categories, namely: immovable cultural material assets; integrated assets; movable tangible assets, besides intangible cultural assets. They are:

**Immovable cultural material assets**: chapels, churches, monasteries and cathedrals;

**Integrated assets**: altars, baptismal basin and sculpted ceilings found in colonial churches or in churches from the 19th and 20th centuries;

**Movable cultural assets**: polychrome wooden images, chalices in silver and gold, crucifixes, utensils and a variety of liturgical objects, besides paintings, books and rare documents;

**Intangible cultural assets**: it is related to the process of planning, celebrating, preparing, singing, chanting of a determined group or region, such as ‘folia de reis’, procession carpet, celebrations for a specific saint etc (Chaves, 2019, CNBB, our translation).

In an interview to the site of CNBB, the researcher Dener Chaves states:

These cultural assets are part of our history; they are a way to better understand our identity; they are part of our culture that is preserved by the faithful and members of the Church; many works, even unique ones, point to idiosyncrasies of a historical period and help us to understand and comprehend it better. Some movable assets were made by great masters and cost large sums of money, paid with work as well as donations from the faithful (Chaves, 2019, CNBB, our translation).

In the optics of preservation and actions of the Catholic Church the Salesians of Don Bosco, the most noteworthy are the ones of protecting the tangible patrimony of their communities, churches and parishes.
One of the actions that deserve recognition is the Seminário de Bens Culturais da Igreja³, first held in 2021 by the Museu da Obra Salesiana no Brasil (MOSB), in partnership with the Centro Universitário Salesiano de São Paulo (UNISAL)⁴ and the support of Vestes Ornatos. This activity continued to happen in 2022; in 2023, with its third edition, the main goal is to bring together any person interested in the theme, especially from academic, professional and school background, whose premise is the exchange of information and knowledge to the mutual awareness regarding the preservation of the assets, be it from a religious or cultural point of view (MOSB, 2023, our translation).

The Museu da Obra Salesiana no Brasil (MOSB), whose goal is to protect the history and the memory of the Salesians of Don Bosco is located in the Salesian Province of São Paulo, in São Paulo/SP, in School Liceu Coração de Jesus.

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³ The name, in loose translation, would be: Church Cultural Assets Event.
⁴ The name, in loose translation, would be: Salesian College of São Paulo.
According to data extracted from the Museu da Obra Salesiana no Brasil website, the MOSB schedule encompasses long and short-term exhibits, as well as lectures and courses; all of this in partnership with the Centro Universitário Salesiano de São Paulo, which allows a deeper contextualization of the objects in the Museum in subjects such as religious art, religious clothing etc.

The long-term exhibit tells the life of Don Bosco as well as of the first Salesians, especially the charisma toward the youth, prioritizing the poor and abandoned.

The short-term exhibit has as its theme “The Faces of Our Lady across the World”, constituted of more than 160 images that represent the plurality of the titles given to Our Lady in various cultures worldwide.

Figure 2. The Faces of Our Lady across the World.

Source: MOSB.

Another action from the clergymen of the Salesians of Don Bosco was observed in the Salesian Province of Campo Grande – St. Alphonsus Liguori in the effortful and dedicated work of historical restoration of the intern Chapel in the São Vicente Community. According to the history of this Chapel, in a painting located inside its own walls, it was inaugurated in 1951,
decorated by the father Ladislau Obora and a group of clergymen. However, in 1973, after a misinterpretation of the Vatican Council II, the Chapel was totally devoid of its decoration in order to fulfill the Vatican Council considerations.

Figure 3. St. Francis de Sales Chapel in process of historical restoration.

The restoration took approximately one year until its conclusion, on time for the commemoration of the fourth centenary of St. Francis de Sales, patron of the Salesian Society, as well as for the seventieth year of the chapel’s consecration.
Protecting the history and the memory allows the Christian faith to sustain itself, given that the religiosity is expressed largely in the culture of communities and has a meaningful role in the context of each locality.

The Salesians of Don Bosco, from the Province of Campo Grande, through the Universidade Católica Dom Bosco (UCDB)⁵, also maintain the Museu das Culturas Dom Bosco, Dom Bosco⁶ (MCDB), which, in turn, is a cultural patrimony of great value to the city of Campo Grande/MS, especially regarding national and international scope. In the category of academic museum, its plan of action centers around 3 axioms: teaching, researching and extension, focusing on highlighting and open spaces to the indigenous population, true owners of this great collection.

Castilho and Ferreira (2012, p. 68, our translation) assert the respect to the holy in the ‘expography’ at the Museu das Culturas Dom Bosco, that is to say:

The spiral is the vital energy in movement, and there the Xavante chose to represent their most important and religious passage rites. According to Valeriano Räiwí’a Werehitó, in change for the choosing

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⁵The name of university, in loose translation, would be: Don Bosco Catholic University.
⁶The name of museum, in loose translation, would be: Museum of Cultures Don Bosco.
of the theme and the distribution of the objects in the exhibition, for the Xavante the religious rites are collective acts that, from their introduction in each person’s life, are celebrated continuously and with no alterations.

Figure 5. Interior of the Museu das Culturas Dom Bosco – The Xavante Expographic Space.

The religiosity and the feeling of belonging to traditions are meaningful traits in traditional indigenous peoples, continually preserved by the Salesians in this Museum. In this context, the preservation of the cultural patrimony is emphasized at every moment, due to its being the essence of a space such as this, where identity and memory are of most importance.

5. Conclusion

Evangelization, education and culture are intertwined. Therefore, understanding the cultural assets of the Church is fundamental for the history of Christian society, given than valuing and preserving the cultural patrimony if a duty for every citizen.

The patrimonies are, in general, the identity of a people, because they are part of our lives. Thus, religious academics have been trying to establish an interdisciplinary dialogue needed to the preservation and conservation of the cultural assets of the Church. To make it happen, the clergyman invest
in and offer courses, seminars and debates, focusing in exchanging information with the society and in producing knowledge that favor awareness in people, be they religious or not, about the protections and spreading of these assets aiming both religious and cultural goals.

However important general society may be in the preservation of the cultural patrimony, the main agents are the Catholic Church, particularly the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, in the conservation of the memory and history, through the patrimony, be it tangible or intangible.

The expansion of the cities and of the real estate, the housing deficit and the environmental impacts make up some factors that challenge the public administrators to face eminent development with the necessity to minimize the environmental and social impacts and, for that reason, defending the conservation of an already built patrimony is an expensive and challenging task.

The preservation of the territory (building/church) has the collective participation and is solidified through religious experiences linked to the sacred place. It is perceptible that most part of religious buildings maintain their original characteristics.

The cultural patrimony should be consisted of the respect for the local identity, aiming the perpetuation of the history through the tangible and intangible patrimony which, in its turn, establishes the cultural identity and strengthen the feeling of belonging and, therefore, consolidates social bonding.

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