

The New Italian way of death. Consequences on spaces for funeral rituals of secularization and emerging multi-faith society.

Luigi Bartolomei

Alma Mater Studiorum - University of the Bologna, Italy

luigi.bartolomei@unibo.it

Introduction

Two different trends are acting in Italy and changing its traditional religious profile and its relationship to death and burials.

The first is the rise of secularization, gradually increasing its strength with urbanization and industrialization (Acquaviva, 1961) emphasizing the differences between towns and countryside, and, above all, between the northern and southern parts of the country (Cartocci, 2011).

In addition, a second factor recently emerged in Italy to radically change its social and religious landscape is the massive phenomenon of migration, totally nonexistent before the second half of the 1980's and now visible and pervasive in all sectors of social and economic life, thus updating the historical multiculturalism of Italian society (ISTAT, 2007; Caritas Migrantes, 2012; Bombardieri, 2011). This article summarizes preliminary research conducted within Bologna and Ravenna, a town which deserves particular attention in relation to sacred architecture of new religious groups in Italy.

Farewell Room

Both secularization and emerging multi-faith groups beg for new spaces to celebrate lay farewell and new religious funeral workshops with dignity. The same demand comes from all religious groups recently arrived in Italy following contemporary migration patterns which were previously negligible and/or absent in the country. The lack of adequate space for atheist or non-Catholic citizens for funeral rituals risked to be perceived as a mild form of discrimination towards these groups. This prompted a change in regional laws¹ which allowed and promoted "Sale del Commiato", namely "Farewell Rooms", beginning with Lombardia, (L.R.22/2003) and Emilia-Romagna (L.R. 19/2004)². "Farewell rooms" are places in which only a closed casket is accepted and rituals can be celebrated. In Bologna (in Emilia-Romagna), a "Farewell Room" has been fitted out in the ancient elliptical Pantheon of Certosa Monumental Cemetery with artistic work by Flavio Favelli (Bartolomei-Praderio, 2010). In Ravenna (also in Emilia-Romagna), as in many other recent funerary architecture³, a farewell room is connected with the new crematorium, close to Candiano Canal, in an evocative architecture by Bruno Minardi which recalls the one of local ancient fishing-cabins dressed up with Cor-Ten steel panels (Bartolomei, 2012).

In both cases, the communication of a sense and a meaning to these spaces is not due to

¹ The matter of the protection of health is attributed by the Constitution to the State – which sets out its basic principles – and to Regions which lay down the rules of retail. Emilia Romagna, L.R. 19/2004; Marche, L.R. 3/2005; Puglia, L.R. 34/2008; Veneto, L.R. 18/2010; Piemonte, L.R. 15/2011; Friuli Venezia Giulia, L.R. 12/2011; Abruzzo, L.R. 41/2012; Campania, L.R. 7/2013.

² See also: Sereno Scolaro, 2013

³ The same solution in Bologna crematorium, in a different architectural style (Bartolomei, 2012 b)

religious symbols but indeed only to art (Bartolomei, 2011a). Art strengthens the versatility which is requested of these new spaces for funeral rituals with regards to both symbols, and spatial configurations. Farewell rooms can indeed act as scenography for different religious rituals and also for lay ones whose liturgy changes from time to time in the attempt to adhere to and celebrate the historical and psychological personality of the deceased (Bartolomei-Praderio, 2010).

“Case funerarie” or “Funeral Homes”

The growing incomprehension of the anagogical and esoteric language of the liturgy, specifically the Christian⁴ one, can be considered one of the main reasons for the need of new liturgies to customize the last farewell. What is required is the possibility to celebrate the specific personality of the deceased (Sozzi, 2001), and thus inevitably reflect the contemporary trend in a renewed attention to the body, which is without doubt one of the most evident tracks of the singularity of each individual life.

Hence, farewell rooms immediately reveal their limits since the casket must be closed; furthermore this is already possible in any public or private space, upon authorization from the municipality.

It is because of this attention to the body that more and more obituaries and morgues recently became spaces for prayer, rituals, sharing of intimate feelings and emotions although these spaces were originally developed for the scientific observation of corpses. In these new conditions, they suddenly show their completely inappropriateness, both in relation to their size and their ambiance⁵.

Within an urban context, the average apartment does not allow for a traditional farewell space within the home. Thus, it has become common practice to bring the deceased to hospital morgues. In addition, most deaths typically occur in hospitals (Pinkus, Filiberti, 2002; Monti, 2010). It is because of these conditions that many private funerary enterprises are building “Funeral Homes”. This is undeniably the most relevant news in the Italian market of funerals and in the taxonomy of architectural Italian typologies. In fact, for the first time in Italian history, funeral homes are private buildings which absolve the functions of observation previously typical and proper only of public institutions. Despite the fact that all regional laws introducing “farewell structures”⁶ underline that they must be open to everyone, funeral homes are indeed the first private structure for rituals in Italy. Inside these structures it is possible to celebrate those rituals which were once celebrated inside the home as, for example, funeral wakes, or lay last sight to the dead. The funerary Mass however, is not allowed in such spaces, as the Bishop of Modena established as soon as one of the most prestigious funeral home in Italy opened in his Diocese (Bartolomei 2011 b):

“To celebrate the funeral it is required to go into the Parish of the deceased [...]” and, in any case, “it is not possible to celebrate funeral rituals in mortuaries or burial chambers [...] or in other spaces also used for non-Christian or lay rituals”⁷.

⁴ Already denounced by the Italian Conference of Bishops (CEI) in 1983, that is twenty years after Sacrosanctum Concilium (CEI, 1983)

⁵ As it has been recently shown by a 2009 research on hospital morgues, coordinated in Piemonte by Rossana Becarelli, available at <http://www2.aress.piemonte.it/cms/umanizzazione-documenti.html>

⁶ Only Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and Abruzzo have now a legislation which distinguish funeral homes from farewell rooms.

⁷ Antonio Lanfranchi, Vescovo di Modena e Nonantola, *Istruzione sul luogo di celebrazione dei Funerali*, 24

Completely unknown in the Italian landscape until 1995, there are now more than 100 Italian Funeral homes, the majority within the northern part of the country, conquering sub-urban or industrial areas, declaring a general reference to an unspecified American model of management but without the same possibility of customization. many cases are merely simple extensions of industrial warehouses where funerary companies store their cars. Furthermore, there is a complete separation between the obituaries spaces and the ritual ones, and yet even examples which attempt a more elevated design, often present a collection of bourgeoisie decor.

image 1: Actual distribution of Funeral homes in Italy (2014) in relation to regions. (Source www.casefunerarie.it)

?

3 . Transformations in cemeteries

Secularization and multi-faith societies are challenging the architecture and the organization of cemeteries, which in Italy, for the most part belong to municipalities (Bertolaccini, 2004). Urban cemeteries are becoming mosaics of different burial traditions, organizing themselves in a “Cluster geometry” (Bartolomei, 2012). The main cause of this new fragmentation in the inner space of ancient cemeteries is due to the possibility offered by the National Law (DPR 285/1990)⁸ to foreign communities and to all religious groups other than Catholic to ask municipalities for special burial places in cemetery zoning. This law appears to favor minority groups since it is assumed that Italian cemeteries will remain predominantly catholic. However, this is not the case in Italy today, due to both secularization and the waning political power of Catholicism which has

Giugno 2011

⁸ DPR 285/1990, art. 100 : “1. Cemetery zoning [...] may provide special and separated wards for burial of dead people professing a religion other than Catholic. 2. To foreign communities who claim for a special department for the burial of the bodies of their contrymen, an appropriate cemetery area can also be given in licence by the mayor”

definitively lost its qualification as State Religion in 1984 with the revision of Lateran Pacts (Cavana, 2009).

Karl Scheffler seems to be almost a prophet when, in his 1913 work “The Architecture of Metropolis”, states: “soon there will be no Catholics, Protestants or Jews cemeteries at all but only civic central cemeteries, as soon as epochal tendencies will gain the upper hand. The Church loses more and more its dominion over the cemetery, since, instead of the blessing of the priest, seeks only the public display of the body. Municipalities get the upper hand on the legacies”⁹.

If, on one hand, the fragmentation of cemeteries reflects that of towns, from another point of view it collaborates to reduce their cultural and spiritual identity, discouraging their use and favoring new rituals and places for burial. On the other hand, if within lay spirituality, the private custody of ashes or their dispersion in nature can be interpreted in several cases as an escape from unsatisfactory burial alternatives; catholic parishes have begun to demonstrate a particular care for mortal remains and special places for urns within churches. This option is of particular interest with respect to theological and liturgical considerations (Chenis, 2006) because of the evidence and somewhat visible closeness you might perceive between the living Church and the celestial one in the same place of Eucharist.

This choice to favor ashes chapels could be promoted by other religious groups or lay associations hence re-introducing the dead inside towns and permitting again the living to dwell closer to the tombs of the fathers, thus re-discovering an ancient tradition.



image 2: The new crypt for ashes in San John The Baptist Parish in Montecalvo (Bologna – Photo by Luca Melechi)

⁹ Scheffler, Karl. *L'architettura della metropoli e altri scritti sulla città* (Milano: Franco Angeli ed., 2013, p. 125) [orig. Ed. Berlino: Bruno Cassirer Berlag, 1913], work already wellknown in Italy thanks to M. Cacciari's essay “Metropolis. Saggi sulla grande città in Sombart, Endell, Scheffer e Simmel”, ed. Officina, Roma, 1973



image 3: Architecture for ashes inside St. Joseph Church in Aachen (Germany - Photo by Tino Grisi)

4. Conclusions

Despite their different origins, vocation and identity, which this paper would like to focus on and distinguish, both farewell rooms, new Italian funeral homes and colombariums for ash storage, converge in rejoining the city of the dead with the one of the living. This inverting trend which since the time of Enlightenment, ostracized dead from urban boundaries, founding death as one of the most significant taboo in European Society (Aries, 1975).

The indirect results of secularization and of new emerging multi-faith societies allude to the reconciliation between death and life which is the most important result of this new way of Italian death.

References

- Acquaviva, Sabino. *L'eclissi del sacro nella civiltà industriale* (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1961)
- Aries, Philippe. *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en occident: du moyen age a nos jours* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975)
- Bertolaccini, Laura. *Città e cimiteri: dall'eredità medievale alla codificazione ottocentesca* (Roma: Kappa, 2004)
- Bartolomei, Luigi e Giorgio Praderio. *New architectures for funeral houses in contemporary secularized Italian society. Premises and results of an interdisciplinary university research activity*, in "Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica" (Alba Iulia: Special Issue 2/2010, pages: 469/480, 2010)
- Bartolomei, Luigi (2011 a). *Places for a cult of memories in the Italian post-secular city*, in "Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica" (Alba Iulia: Special Issue, 2011)
- Bartolomei, Luigi (2011 b). "A Modena la seconda Funeral Home italiana", in *Il Giornale dell'Architettura*, (Torino: Allemandi editore, Ottobre 2011, n.98, p.5)
- Bartolomei, Luigi (2012 a). *Evoluzioni contemporanee nell'architettura funeraria* (Bologna: CSO, 2012)
- Bartolomei, Luigi (2012 b). "A Bologna il nuovo Crematorio", in *Il Giornale dell'Architettura*, (Torino: Allemandi editore, Dicembre 2012, n.99, p. 3)
- Bombardieri, Maria. *Moschee d'Italia: il diritto al luogo di culto. Il dibattito sociale e politico* (Bologna: EMI, 2011)
- Caritas e Migrantes. *Immigrazione: dossier statistico 2012: 22° rapporto sull'immigrazione*, (Roma: IDOS, 2012).
- Cartocci, Roberto. *Geografia dell'Italia cattolica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011)
- Cavana, Paolo. *Mutamenti culturali ed evoluzione legislativa in Italia*. In Strada, Gabriele (ed.) *La morte e i suoi riti per una celebrazione cristiana dei funerali. Atti del convegno regionale di Imola 1-2 giugno 2009*. (Reggio Emilia: edizioni san Lorenzo, 2009, pp. 51-53)
- CEI- Episcopal Commission for Liturgy. *Il rinnovamento liturgico in Italia*, 23 Settembre 1983, also available on <http://www.chiesacattolica.it/>
- Chenis, Carlo. *Evangelizzare la cremazione per una icona della Chiesa. I termini della legge 130 del 30 Marzo 2001*, in *Rivista Liturgica*, n.5, pp. 756-780. (Padova: edizioni il Messaggero, September/October 2005)
- Istat, *Indagine conoscitiva sulla immigrazione e l'integrazione*, inquiry presented at the *Audizione dell'Istituto Nazionale di Statistica presso il "Comitato Parlamentare italiano di Controllo sull'attuazione dell'Accordo di Schengen, di vigilanza sull'attività di Europol, di controllo e vigilanza in materia di immigrazione"*, Roma, 21 febbraio 2007.
- Lanfranchi, Antonio (Bishop of Modena and Nonantola), *Istruzione sul luogo di celebrazione dei funerali*. In Modena, June 24th 2011, also available on <http://www.webdiocesi.chiesacattolica.it>
- Monti, Daniela (ed.). *Che cosa vuol dire morire* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010)
- Pinkus, Lucio and Filiberti, Antonio (eds.). *La qualità della morte* (Milano: Franco Angeli ed, 2002)
- Sozzi, Marina (ed.). *La scena degli addii: morte e riti funebri nella società occidentale contemporanea: atti del convegno svoltosi a Torino il 24 e 25 settembre 1999*. (Torino, Paravia Scriptorium, 2001)
- Scolaro, Sereno. *Manuale di polizia mortuaria. La disciplina nazionale e regionale*, (Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli ed., 2013)