

Article

Liturgy and Landscape—Re-Activating Christian Funeral Rites through Adaptive Reuse of a Rural Church and Its Surroundings as a Columbarium and Urn Cemetery

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Abstract: We present the design research for the adaptive reuse of the St. Odulphus church as a columbarium in the village of Booienhoven (BE). Surrounded by agriculture, the site is listed as a historic rural landscape. The small neoclassical church is no longer in use for traditional Catholic services and is abandoned. Positioned on an isolated “island”, it has the appropriate setting to become a place to remember and part from the dead. Instigated by the municipality, and taking into account the growing demand for cremation, we present topological research on three different liturgical and spatial levels: 1/the use of the church interior as a columbarium and for (funeral) celebration, 2/the transformation of the “island”, stressing the idea of “passage” and 3/the layering of the open landscape reactivating the well-spring and its spiritual origins. Based on the reform of the funeral rite after Vatican II, we propose a layered liturgy that can better suit the wide variety of funeral services in Flanders today, while at the same time respecting its Catholic roots. Rather than considering the reuse of the church a spiritual loss, we believe that it can offer the opportunity to reinforce and open up the traditional, symbolic and ritual meaning of the Christian liturgy to the larger community. As such, this case is an excellent example of how, in exploring new architectural and liturgical questions, religious sites can be transformed into contemporary places for spirituality.

Keywords: adaptive reuse; church architecture; ritual; liturgy; funeral

1. Rituals and Spaces—Introduction

In this article, we will describe the recent changes of funeral rites in relation to the adaptive reuse project of the St. Odulphus church in Booienhoven (Zoutleeuw), Flanders (see Figures 1 and 2). We will explore the potential relationship between the spatial properties of the design and the funeral rites that are to be (re-)introduced in the context of the adaptive reuse of the site. Nowadays, the burial of the deceased is taking on new and almost experimental forms, with the increase of cremation as a subtle sign of secularization. As a recently accepted practice (1963) in the Roman Catholic Church, it also raises questions on the spiritual function and meaning of a Christian funeral service in contemporary Western society. This is perhaps even more relevant in Flanders, since its secularization process has an ambiguous nature. The traditionally very Roman Catholic area is characterized by a strong adherence to “cultural Christianity”—people attaching value to certain elements of the Christian tradition, without identifying themselves as belonging to the institute of the Catholic Church (Billiet 2017).

In the light of the need for new rituals concerning death and mourning, we take the opportunity to rethink and expand the Christian liturgy of burial to include a wide variety of funeral services. Using

the exercise to design a central urn cemetery in Zoutleeuw as an example, we consider the creation of new sacred spaces and rituals that still connect to Christian tradition. We ask ourselves: *what form can the new rituals receive and how do they relate to the existing ones? How can the renewed funeral celebration be (re-)integrated in the adaptive reuse of the church and site and vice versa? In what way are ritual and space connected and mutually inspiring in this particular case?*

Inspired by the liturgical reform before and after Vatican II, we propose a “layered liturgy”, reflecting a wider and contemporary spiritual experience of burial rituals while at the same time respecting its Catholic roots. The approach developed here can be described as a “topological” reflection on the intimate and recurring relationship between rituals and spaces.



Figure 1. View of the St. Odulphus site with the ensemble of the church, the former rectory and the guild hall in the rural environment of Hageland Belgium.



Figure 2. Left: view of the current interior of the St. Odulphus church; right: a sketched impression of the transformation into a columbarium church (hand drawing by Saidja Heynickx).

2. Changing Funeral Rites

2.1. The Christian Funeral after Vatican II

After Vatican II (Second Vatican Council 1962–1965), the entire ritual repertoire of the Roman Catholic Church has been profoundly revised, in an attempt to close the gap between Church and society and to restore the liturgical life of the Church. In the aftermath of the Council, also the funeral

rite (*ordo exsequiarum*, 1969, see (Johnson 1993)) underwent some drastic revisions in comparison to the former, Tridentine rite, which was more or less unchanged since 1614. The character of the rite changed profoundly, taking much more the perspective of death as an Easter-event, whereas in the Tridentine rite the funeral liturgy was more focused on the fear of judgment and subsequent punishment for ones sins (Rutherford 1990; Quartier 2007). On the level of specific rituals, this transformation lead for example to the abolishment of traditional songs like the *Dies irae* and the *Libera me*. In accordance with already existing local practices, the “new” funeral rite of 1969 prescribes three different models (Johnson 1993, pp. 34–51). The first model has three ritual stages or “stations”: the house of the deceased for a short prayer, a first farewell and condolences, the church building for the funeral liturgy in combination with the funeral mass, and the graveyard for some last rituals and the final farewell. The second model has two ritual places: the chapel on the graveyards grounds, where the basics of the funeral liturgy are executed, but without funeral mass, and the grave itself. The third model is a short model for a domestic rite, often used in countries and regions with tropical climates. These models—and their differences—illustrate well how Christian ritual is very much bound to specific places. From its origins, Christian liturgy has been, and still is “station liturgy”, as it is mentioned in every manual on the history of Christian ritual.

In Flanders, the first model was more or less the standard during the last few centuries (Lamberts 2007). However, with the growing role of the undertaker in the funeral service and rituals, the first “station”—the home of the deceased—slowly disappeared from the ritual sequence or was moved to the mortuary. With the increasing de-Christianization, the second model became more and more popular in Flanders: a funeral liturgy without Eucharistic celebration in the church building or graveyard chapel and last rituals at the grave, often not even presided by a priest. This evolution goes hand in hand with the growing practice of cremation.

2.2. The Practice of Cremation

Contrary to various religious traditions that attach a spiritual value to the practice, the Roman Catholic Church considers cremation as a complex subject. One of the core texts of Christian faith, the Apostles Creed, holds as its eleventh of twelve articles that Christians believe in “the resurrection of the body”. Thus, for many centuries burning the body was considered sacrilegious. Burying the dead was very important for the biblical Jewish religion and became one of the twelve traditional works of mercy for pious Christians. In later ages and with the development of Christian anthropology, personhood became very much connected to the body. In its core, Roman Catholic faith attaches an intrinsic and even divine value to the body, declaring the human being as one, made of both body and soul.¹ In 1963, the first official opening to the practice of cremation was made by church authorities. In the instruction entitled “*Piam et Constantem*” it was declared that cremation was not against the Christian religion and thus was allowed for Christians, although burying the body remained the preferable option. This declaration still reflects the official position of the Roman Catholic Church in view of cremation today. In 1997, it was granted for the regional conferences of bishops to make provisions, meaning to develop a liturgy, to permit the presence of the cremated body at the funeral liturgy.² Before, the preferred and most common practice was to have the funeral liturgy first and the cremation afterwards, in most cases without a ritual at the grave, leaving out the last station of the funeral rite. In 2016, the Vatican again issued an instruction on the topic of cremation, *Ad resurgendum cum Christo* (CDF 2016). This document repeats the recommendation of burying the body “following the most ancient Christian tradition” (nr. 3) and at the same time allowing cremation, preferably after the funeral liturgy: “the Church, after the celebration of the funeral rite, accompanies

¹ Compare for example the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* nr. 14, the official edition can be found on http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

² See this statement of the American Bishops’ Conference: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/cremation-and-funerals.cfm>.

the choice of cremation, providing the relevant liturgical and pastoral directives” (nr. 4). The document mainly stresses the importance of the correct conservation of the ashes. The instruction expresses the importance of resting in “a sacred place”, both in view of tradition and in view of remembrance and community (nr. 5). Apart from exceptional cases dependent on cultural conditions, it forbids the conservation of ashes in a domestic residence (nr. 6) and the scattering of the ashes “in the air, on land, at sea or in some other way, nor may they be preserved in mementos, pieces of jewelry or other objects” (nr. 7).

In regard of the Flemish (Belgian) situation, figures show how the total number of cremations rises every year.³ In 2006, less than 50% of the Belgian deceased were cremated. In 2019, the number has risen to 62%.⁴ Almost 45% of the Belgians who die, still opt for a Roman Catholic Funeral.⁵ Although no figures are available on the percentage of cremations among these cases, it is safe to say that a substantial part of them have chosen the practice of cremation. In view of this, the Belgian bishops issued directions and guidelines for a funeral rite in the case of cremation. The most recent statements on this topic were made in 2008 and 2012, explaining the current policy and giving directions (ICLZ 2008), and a complete ritual ordo (ICLZ 2012). Two practices are tackled in these documents: funeral liturgy without the celebration of the Eucharist (Goyvaerts 2020) and funeral liturgy in case of cremation before the funeral ritual. In 2013, the Belgian bishops added a statement in which they ended the practices of church ministers being mandated to preside the funeral rite in the crematoria, distancing themselves as such from an eclectic character of many funeral rituals, and refocusing on the church building as the sacred space for liturgy.⁶ The underlying reasons are the recent commercial evolutions in the funeral business and the increasing lack of ties with Christian traditional liturgy. The bishops declare: “from a liturgical and ecclesiastical point of view, a ceremony in the crematorium cannot function as an alternative to the church funeral liturgy as offered in the parish churches” (Vlaamse Bisschoppen 2013, p. 2, trans. by authors).

2.3. The Columbarium Church as a Place for Ritual

The Roman Catholic ritual is still relatively popular in Flanders when it comes down to funerals, as the above-mentioned figures have shown. Beyond the funeral liturgy, church policy also attaches a lot of importance to the “place” where the ritual is performed. In view of this, both taking into account the ritual symbolism of the Roman Catholic liturgy and the complex situation of religious belonging in Flanders, we believe the columbarium church has potential as a renewed place for rituals. Rather than reducing the church interior to a mere indoor graveyard or storage for urn cases, we consider its historical qualities as a (sacred) space for conservation and memorial *and* as a ritual space, which can function both for Christian and more secular rituals.

The presence of graves in the interior of the church, the wish to be buried in the house of God confirming the sacred quality of the place, has been part of Christian tradition in the past. Nowadays, columbarium churches have already become general practice in Germany as so-called “Grabeskirchen” or “Gedächtniskirchen” (transl. grave or remembrance churches), (e.g., Figure 3). Although varying in quality and not always reflecting the dual role as mentioned, they aim to re-activate the church as a gathering place for family and friends and to remember the deceased with various events. As an alternative function with a spiritual charge, columbarium churches can provide an economic model for the conservation of the building. However, and perhaps similar to the historical examples to some

³ See <http://www.crematie.be/cijfers>.

⁴ Also compare: <https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/bevolking/sterfte-en-levensverwachting/sterfte>.

⁵ According to the annual report of the Belgian Roman Catholic Church, 2019 counted 48.407 church funerals. <https://www.kerknet.be/sites/default/files/Jaarrapport%20Bisschoppenconferentie%20NED%202019.pdf>.

⁶ Before, some priests and deacons had a special appointment and were available to perform the funeral rite in the auditoria and crematoria, but these official positions are all abolished. According to this statement a short moment of ritual prayer—comparable to the rite performed at the grave—performed by a Catholic minister is still possible, but not the entire funeral rite. (Vlaamse Bisschoppen 2013).

extent, it runs the risk of “privatizing” the ritual space and the funeral ritual by charging higher prices, making the church space effectively only accessible to a privileged segment of the population.⁷



Figure 3. Grabeskirche St. Bartholomäus, Köln-Ehrenfeld (DE) 2014, design by Hans-Peter Kissler: the transformation of the interior is characterized by a central ceremonial place surrounded by columbarium walls with urn cases (photograph by Christian Schneider, © Grabeskirche Sankt Bartholomäus Köln).

3. Reusing the Site of St. Odulphus

The St. Odulphus church is located in the village of Booienhoven, near the old town of Zoutleeuw (BE). It is part of an architectural ensemble surrounded by a moat, including a rectory and a guild house, built in neoclassical style in 1846 on the remains of previous settlements. The site is listed in 1994 as a historical rural landscape. Surrounded by agricultural fields with an open character, the church tower functions as a landmark in the touristic area of Hageland and Haspengouw. The history of the site goes back to the 12th century, its name derived from an ancient wellspring and a chapel nearby. It used to be part of a populated village settlement until in 1705 it was destroyed due to the siege of Zoutleeuw. Together with the relocation of the main road nearby, this explains the isolated and remote character of the site today. The combination of this condition with the increasing secularization after WWII has caused the reduced use of the church. No longer functioning for traditional Catholic services, the church is currently abandoned and under consideration for reuse.

The building has recently been part of the programme called *Projectbureau Herbestemming Kerken* (transl. Project Office for the Reuse of Churches), an organisation initiating feasibility studies for the adaptive reuse of various parish churches, under the guidance of the Flemish Government Architect. The *Projectbureau* was created in 2016 in reaction to the increasing obsolescence of parish churches in Flanders as addressed by the Flemish authorities in the 2011 concept note *Een toekomst voor de Vlaamse parochiekerk* (transl. A future for the Flemish parish church, (Bourgeois 2011)). In 2012, 8% of the Flemish parish churches were no longer in service, 60% only hosted limited services and only half of them are open during services (Aerts et al. 2014). Because of this ongoing evolution, many cities and municipalities face the question of adaptive reuse of church buildings. Currently 65 of 115 feasibility studies are finalised and the programme is foreseen to end in 2022 (Sels 2020). The aim of it is to give insight into possible future scenarios through “research by design” by different architects.⁸ The assignment for the St. Odulphus church was to study the potential of the interior

⁷ In the context of this article, we focus on the Flemish context and the case of the St. Odulphus site. A full and methodological comparison with German columbarium churches is not addressed here. For an in depth study of recent German columbarium churches we refer to (Leonhard and Thomas 2012) and (Fendler et al. 2014).

⁸ The project of the St. Odulphus church is one of the churches that has been investigated in this context by team TRACE, a consortium of UR architects, Architecten Broekx-Schiepers, Architect Saidja Heynickx and the research group *Trace-Adaptive*

to be transformed in a columbarium (Figure 4), a function that seems appropriate for the remote and calm setting. Given the scenic quality of the ensemble, its “island” character and the adjacent farmland and meadows, the design team decided together with the different stakeholders, to expand the study to the surrounding landscape. The ability to provide a central urn cemetery for Zoutleeuw with a sufficient capacity and the potential for a phased and gradual implementation allows for a soft transformation of the landscape taking into account and incorporating the history and heritage value of the site. (For an approach of this project in terms of funeral architecture and landscape see (Plevoets et al. 2019, pp. 173–84).

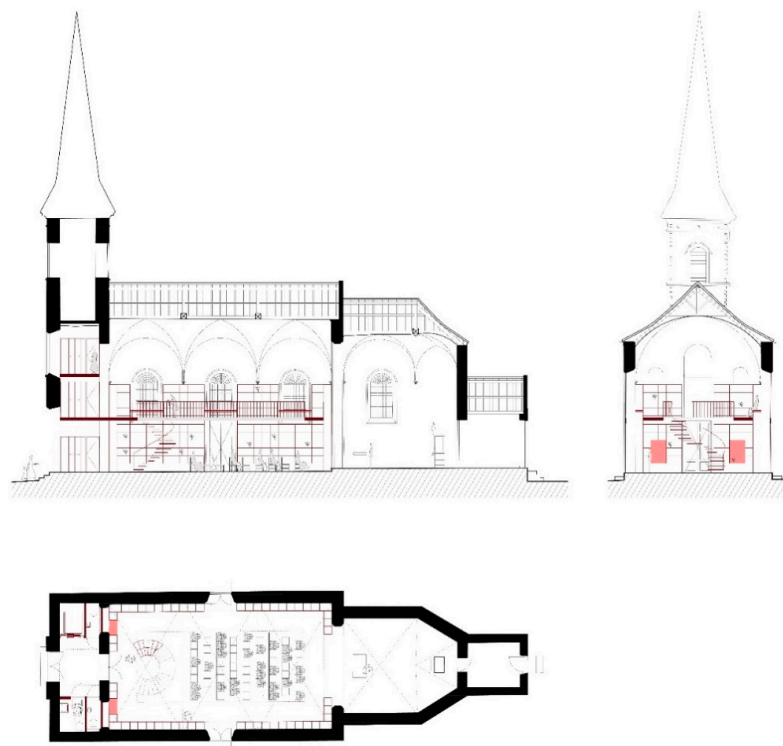


Figure 4. Columbarium church of St. Odulphus: floorplan ground floor with longitudinal and transverse section.

4. Site for a Layered Liturgy

Above, we described three different models of the Christian funeral. For the adaptive reuse of St. Odulphus, it was primarily the second model that inspired us, containing two stations: the chapel on the graveyard grounds and the grave itself. This is a model without funeral Eucharist, which in Belgium is not desired by the majority of people and even not standard practice anymore according to recent local church policy (Goyvaerts 2020). This model combined with the liturgical directions, symbols and possibilities for a funeral rite in the presence of the cremated body can suitably be applied to the St. Odulphus site in Booienhoven. In adapting the neoclassical church building and involving its surroundings, we believe some of the symbols and rituals inherent to the Christian funeral can obtain a topological quality in harmony with and extending to some of the contemporary ideas and evolutions with regard to funeral services. The adaptive reuse of the church building has the potential to reinforce its spiritual identity through the reinterpretation of different traditional practices used in the funeral rite. We strive for an open and layered quality of the liturgy, inviting rather than alienating

relatives and visitors in the event of a funeral. Below, we present topological research translating the layered liturgy in the spatial design on three different levels.

4.1. A Place for Celebration

The St. Odulphus church has a relatively small and modest interior consisting of a simple nave and choir. We seized on its almost domestic quality for the transformation in a columbarium. Rather than filling up the space and replacing the chairs by urn cases (e.g., Grabeskirche Liebfrauen in Dortmund, Germany), the proposal concentrates the urn cases on the edges of the space against the inside of the façade walls, over two floors with a walkway on the first floor, reachable through a spiral staircase in the front part of the nave. The design makes the deliberate choice to maintain the nave as an open space, to allow for a small gathering or celebration and to keep a degree of multi-functionality. Using oak panels for the construction of the urn cases enhances the intimate and solemn atmosphere, making the new interior reminiscent of old libraries and their contemplative character.

The space can be used in different ways. Figure 5a shows a traditional set-up, allowing for a range of activities that could deviate from the funeral service but are equally appropriate: memorial gatherings, small concerts or presentations, art projects connected to life and death, etcetera. The set-up in Figure 5b is defined by the central presence of a table, a strong Christian symbol confirming the intimate setting and the contemporary practice of a smaller ritual with family and friends. It is inspired by some architectural experiments by the Liturgical Movement preceding Vatican II (for example Figure 6, compare also (Debuyst 1997) and (Vande Keere et al. 2020)), resembling a domestic ritual, as part of Christian tradition and referring to the origins of its liturgy: ancient celebrations, with meals, prayer and gathering at the grave of beloved martyrs.⁹

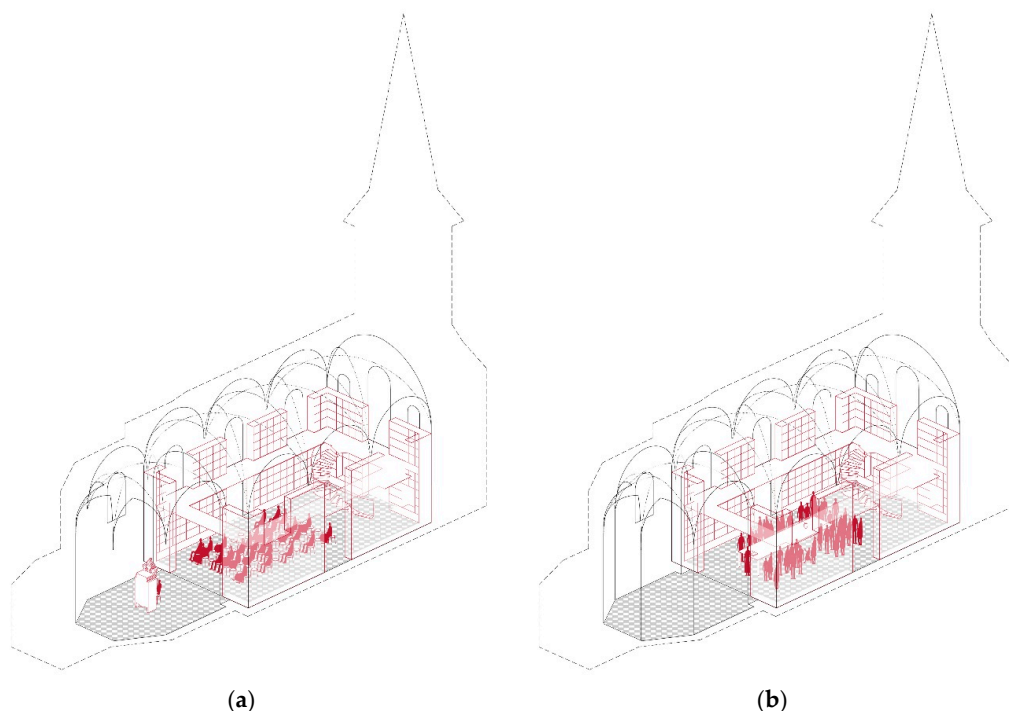


Figure 5. Columbarium church of St. Odulphus, axonometric view of the interior of the nave and apse and the its use: (a) Traditional set-up, allowing for different activities: memorial gatherings, small concerts, etc.; (b) Set-up defined by the central presence of a table, confirming the intimate setting and symbolizing (Christian) gathering.

⁹ Compare also to the development of the concept of the “house church”, typical in Flanders and the region (Bekaert 1967).



Figure 6. Student chapel, Abbey of Melk (AT) 1966, design by Ottokar Uhl: intimate gathering for the Eucharist around a large table as part of a spatial choreography for the liturgy (photograph by Gert Schlegel, the authors of the article have made any possible attempt to locate and contact the owner of the copyright of this figure).

As in early Christian gathering spaces, the focal point of the celebration is situated in the midst of the community, central in the nave rather than in the choir or apse. This centrality is emphasised and confirmed by the layer of wooden urn cases surrounding the table and defining the edges of the new interior. As such, it also reinforces the meaning of the gathering beyond the singular event of a funeral and symbolizes the presence of a larger assembly or community beyond death. The concept of enveloping continues in a soft way outside of the church, surpassing its interior in the rural landscape around.

4.2. *An Island of Passage*

As in many religions, the idea of the Christian funeral is that of the “passage” or transition, in which Jesus Christ preceded man and through whom access to new and everlasting life with God was opened. Vatican II marked the transition from a more static funeral rite with an emphasis on prayer for mercy, penance, liberation from sins and salvation towards a “new” rite with rituals and prayers focusing on the guidance of the deceased in the passage from death to new life on the one hand, and being close to and consoling the relatives on the other.

The adaptations to the small “island” aim to spatialize the concept of passage in several ways (Figure 7). Re-introducing the small moat and hedge separates the ensemble of the church, rectory and guild hall from the rural environment, confirming the idea of a secluded and sacred place in an informal way. Bridges or crossings formalize the “passage” towards and from the island. Relatives accompany the deceased and take part of the transition: from a life with, to a life without the physical presence of the departed. The experience of separation is to be strengthened by “freeing up” the island grounds through the creation of an accessible garden (by removing the lower vegetation and cultivating the higher) and concentrating the new graveyard interventions outside of the island (the old graveyard around the church remains but is no longer actively in use). This connects with Christian images of the biblical garden, adding to the site a character of peace and eternity. In addition, the open garden creates the space for outdoor gatherings and memorial services, for instance on the occasion of the feast of All-Souls, still very popular in Flanders and as such also appropriated beyond its religious meaning and transferred to more secular or cultural environments.

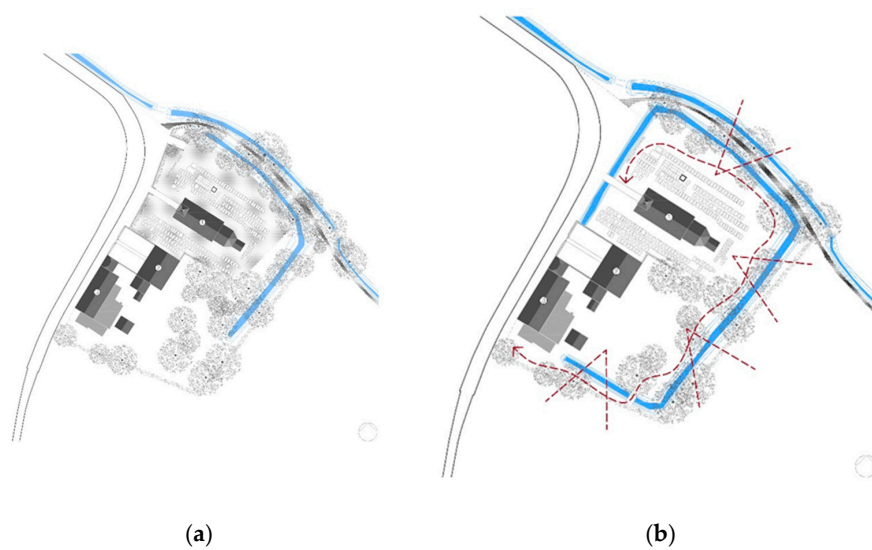


Figure 7. “Island” plan with 1. St. Odulphus church, 2. former rectory and 3. guild hall: (a) Existing situation with part of the historical moat surrounding the site; (b) Proposed situation with a reintroduction of the moat and the removal of lower vegetation to create an open view to the rural environment.

The same spiritual charge can also be experienced at the Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof in Langemark, Belgium (Figure 8). Designed by Robert Tischler and built between 1930 and 1932, the cemetery has similar features. Besides the subtle use of Christian iconography, the site remains visually open and blends into the surrounding agricultural landscape, relying on the same interventions to distinguish it. The spatial contrast between the graveyard grid with horizontal tombstones and the high stem trees renders the appropriate atmosphere for memory and loss.

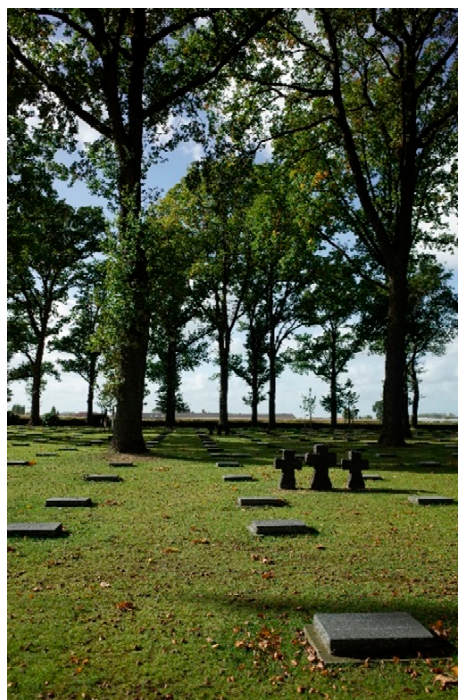


Figure 8. Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof in Langemark Belgium: an open and accessible graveyard with a spiritual character defined by a grid of horizontal tombstones and the vertical presence of full grown trees.

4.3. A Spiritual Landscape

The presence of the well spring of St. Odulphus hints at a history before the construction of the church, or even the settlement of the village afterwards destroyed. Typical for the Flemish rural area, a small devotional chapel south-east of the island marks the larger site. In an informal way, and together with some benches and trees, the chapel seals the character of a simple and common spirituality radiating from the landscape. Located at the source of the well, it translates the symbolism of water as a representation of the origin of the site. Referring to baptism, the waters of creation, and to the Red Sea that the people of Israel cross on their way to the promised land, the element of water plays an important role in the Christian funeral rite. In the context of the biblical flood-story and the water shedding out of Christ's wounds on the cross, a combination of the dreadful and even deadly powers of water with its life-giving qualities come to the fore. However, the element of water and its many symbolic meanings is also universal and bears different meanings from an anthropological point of view, open to other religions and cultures.

The dual symbolism of water, having both the possibility of giving life and destroying it, can be translated in the double use of the surrounding fields, combining its natural or agricultural properties with the gentle layout for urn burial in a sustainable way. Edging the island, the fields allow for a continuation of the mentioned passage, e.g., a procession from the church building to the particular grave, carrying the ashes over the water, accompanied by a blessing, a prayer or another form of goodbye and last tribute. The figures illustrate some landscape transformations in a schematic way. Rather than a *tabula rasa*, the proposals introduce transformations that take the existing (natural) properties and their broad symbolic potential (be it ecological–environmental or spiritual) as a basis for a new and open interpretation. Figure 9a shows the “cloister”-like arrangement of graves following the existing trees edging the field. Figure 9b transforms the terrain into an urn forest, providing the space for natural burial while planting various tree types in an irregular way¹⁰. The existing low-stem orchard in Figure 9c can be adapted to the less dense but ecologically sounder high-stem orchard. Beyond a common and traditional form of agriculture in the region, the orchard is an archetypical and age old example of cultivation. The cyclic and seasonal expression of trees blossoming, bearing fruit, being harvested and losing leaves carries a strong connotation to life and death. As such, it can also be associated with the popular and contemporary custom of the so-called “birth forest” (Figure 10). Introduced by many municipalities in Flanders, it allows families to celebrate the birth of a new-born baby with the planting of a tree, thus in addition to the burial site closing the circle of life.

¹⁰ This is a rather recent evolution in view of burials and only legally possible in Belgium since 2016. The request for natural burials is increasing and for the moment (2020) there are only five places in Belgium where this is possible.

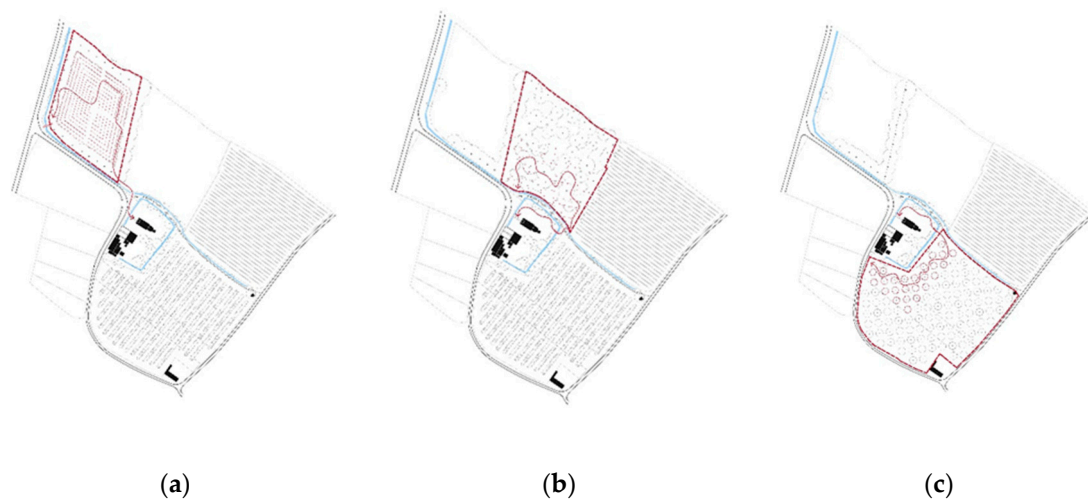


Figure 9. Situation plan of the St. Odulphus site and the surrounding fields: (a) Urn “cloister”: the graves are positioned parallel with the edges of the field and surrounded by a line of trees; (b) Urn forest: natural burial among irregular plantation of trees; (c) Urn orchard: the low stem orchard is replaced by a less dense high stem orchard with the graves positioned in circles around them.



Figure 10. Birth forest Gentbrugse Meersen Ghent Belgium: celebration of the birth of a new-born babies with the planting of young trees (photograph by Patrick Henry, © Stad Gent).

5. Genius Loci or the Spirit of Place—Conclusions

Rather than considering the reuse of the St. Odulphus church a spiritual loss, we believe that it can offer the opportunity to reinforce and open up the traditional symbolic and ritual meaning of the Christian liturgy to the larger community. The inherent flexibility of the Christian funeral rite did not only inspire the reuse design, but the rituals performed here will be reinforced and become inspired themselves by the space. As such, this case fits very well within the contemporary pluriform Flemish religious context. Connecting ritual and space in this way, the symbolism of the Christian funeral ritual can at the same time be strengthened and experienced by all users on different levels and without imposing it. By organically adding rather than reducing layers of meaning, the design tries to adhere to the memory of the site and remain faithful to its religious origins.

In this paper, we presented a re-localization of the religious experience of this place, from the church towards an involvement of the wider environment of the landscape. In times of declining and disappearing institutional religion, abandoned churches like the St. Odulphus can gain a renewed religious meaning to the community today, through the repeated and double perspective of space and ritual. Re-activating the spiritual character of the place recalls the notion of *genius loci* or spirit

of place. Known in Roman antiquity and introduced in architecture and landscape design since the 18th century, it has been defined in broad phenomenological terms by architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz in 1979 as a “meaningful place for man to dwell”.¹¹ As such, it is the true calling of architecture to express this spiritual identity of a certain *locus* in ever new and changing cultures. The Belgian Monk Frédéric Debuyst refers to “interiority” as an essential property for a Christian *genius loci* (Debuyst 1997), more recently followed by Bert Daelemans S.J. using the neologism “theotopy” in an attempt to translate theology into architecture (Daelemans 2015). Both apply the concept to church buildings as sacred places that resonate with the intimate connection between man and space. With this proposal of adaptive reuse for the St. Odulphus church and site as a columbarium and urn cemetery, we hope to express the *genius loci* of this particular place, to preserve and even reinforce its particular identity in a time where too many of them are abandoned and no longer used.

“Although what I call Genius Loci can never be personified, we may yet feel him nearer and more potent, in some individual monument or feature of the landscape. He is immanent very often, and subduing our hearts most deeply, at a given turn of a road; or a path cut in terraces in a hillside, with view of great distant mountains; or, again, in a church like Classe, near Ravenna; most of all, perhaps, in the meeting-place of streams, or the mouth of a river, both of which draw our feet and thoughts time after time, we know not why or wherefore. The genius of places lurks there; or, more strictly, *he is it.*” (Lee 1907, p. 6)

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¹¹ For an extensive analysis of the term and its potential role in the emerging discipline of adaptive reuse we refer to (Plevoets and Cleempoel 2019, pp. 79–95).

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