Rethink Church Space (Éveux, 21 Jan 27)

Couvent Sainte-Marie de la Tourette (Eveux)
Deadline: Dec 23, 2026

Benjamin Chavardès

Architectural design cultures, research and strategies.
6th International Study Day 'The spaces of the Sacred',
SACRES Chair.

Presentation

The spaces of the Sacred offers a space for reflection and debate for anyone who understands sacred spaces as laboratories for architectural, urban and landscape research. This definition includes places of worship, funerary and memorial spaces, as well as the urban spaces and landscapes that surround them. Defining sacred spaces as a laboratory means considering both their design and their potential transformation.

The ambition is to study contexts as well as project experiences, theories as well as practices, legacies, and mutations as well as orientations and prospects. In a few words, to build knowledge and culture, to learn, experiment, and develop operational tools to understand the present and enrich contemporary practices. As a complement to the historical and social studies developed around these issues, this study day places the architectural, urban, and landscape project at the heart of its concerns.

The spaces of the Sacred provides an opportunity to share ongoing or completed research projects and to bring together researchers working on these issues. The event is open to students, doctoral candidates, teachers, researchers, practitioners, and anyone interested in developing interdisciplinary exchanges across institutions and borders.

Call for papers

For this sixth edition, the study day will focus on the conversion of churches.
The transformation, conversion and adaptive reuse of existing buildings has become a major field of research and experimentation in architecture. When this process concerns sacred heritage, it raises ethical, social, spatial, structural and programmatic questions, while also interrogating the relationships between religious heritage, processes of desacralization, contemporary uses and the future of buildings. Through the diversity of projects and approaches, it provides an opportunity to examine design cultures, intervention strategies and new ways of thinking about existing architecture.
In 2016, the international conference L'avenir des églises contributed to structuring the debate on the future transformation of churches. This study day seeks to extend this line of inquiry by deep-

ening the analysis of projects, built works and research exploring their architectural futures. Particular attention will be paid to design processes, spatial and structural choices, ways of negotiating the relationship between the existing and the new, as well as research methods developed around these transformations.
The study day adopts an international comparative perspective, attentive to the diversity of cultural, heritage, religious and architectural contexts. Contributions may address research, projects or built works located in a variety of territories, both in Europe and in other parts of the world. Contributions engaging with contexts beyond Europe and North America are particularly encouraged, in order to broaden comparative perspectives and bring different architectural traditions, practices and approaches to transformation into dialogue.
The aim is to establish a critical overview of research and architectural experiences devoted to the conversion of churches, bringing to light the questions, methods and strategies that contribute to renewing this field. Contributions may also present ongoing research, experimental approaches or original projects combining theoretical analysis, investigation of built works and design-based research.

Proposed Areas of Reflection

Proposals may address, among others, the following themes:

1. Design Cultures and Doctrines of Intervention
Approaches to transformation, principles for intervening in existing buildings, heritage and architectural approaches, and the evolution of doctrines and professional practices.

2. Spatial Strategies and Architectural Devices
Spatial organisation, transformations of volumes, light, movement and circulation, thresholds, structural and technical devices, and relationships between existing structures and new interventions.

3. Dialogue between Old and New
Modes of coexistence, contrast or continuity between inherited sacred elements and contemporary secular interventions; materiality, architectural expression and the inscription of transformations over time.

4. Programmes and Architectural Potential
Relationships between programme and spatial design; the capacity of buildings to accommodate new uses, combine multiple functions or redefine their relationships with their surroundings.

5. Reuse, Reversibility and Temporalities
Strategies of incremental transformation, spatial adaptability, reversibility of interventions, economy of means and the inscription of projects within long-term temporalities.

6. Design-Based Research and Experimental Approaches
Research methods combining design and knowledge production, architectural experiments, transformation scenarios, representational tools and prospective approaches.

7. International Research and Comparative Approaches
Academic research, project corpora, studies of built works and comparative analyses that help

characterise different design cultures and approaches to the transformation of religious buildings around the world.

This list is indicative. Proposals developing an original research question related to the architectural transformation of churches are welcome beyond these themes.

Nature of contributions
The study day is open to researchers, architects, teachers, PhD candidates and professionals involved in the study or transformation of religious buildings.
Contributions may be based on a built project, a group of projects, a documentary corpus, ongoing research or a design-based experiment. They should develop a clearly formulated research question, which will guide the analysis and make it possible to identify findings, hypotheses or analytical tools that may be transferable to other situations.
Particular attention will be given to proposals that make their methods explicit, place architectural choices in perspective and contribute to renewing knowledge of transformation practices. Research combining critical analysis, case studies and design approaches is particularly welcome.
Contributions focusing on geographical, cultural and architectural contexts that remain underrepresented in the international literature are strongly encouraged, as are studies that bring together experiences from different regions of the world.

La Tourette: a place for reflection on architecture
Hosted at the Couvent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette (Eveux), designed by Le Corbusier, the study day will take place in a building where the relationships between architecture, spirituality, space and use are constitutive of the experience of the place. This setting will provide a privileged context in which to examine the transformation of religious buildings and the architectural, cultural and contemporary issues they raise.

Submission guidelines

Proposals should include:
- a title;
- an abstract of 300 to 500 words, presenting the research question, the corpus or field of study, the methodology and the main findings or hypotheses;
- a short biography of the author (maximum 100 words);
- contact details and institutional affiliation.

Proposals may be submitted in French or English.

Submission deadline: Wednesday, 23 December 2026
Notification to authors: Thursday, 31 December 2026
Study day: Thursday, 21 January 2027

The scientific committee will pay particular attention to the clarity of the research question, the relevance of the methodology and the contribution of each proposal to a renewed understanding of design cultures and architectural strategies for the conversion of churches.

Scientific direction

Benjamin Chavardès, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
Bastien Couturier, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon

Scientific committee

Benjamin Chavardès, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
Julien Correia, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
Bastien Couturier, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
Charles Desjobert, Couvent Sainte-Marie de la Tourette
Philippe Dufieux, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
Ricardo Gomez Val, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya
William Hayet, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Montpellier
Kevin Jacquot, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
Aïcha Sariane, École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon

Information

Venue: Sainte-Marie de la Tourette Convent (Eveux)
Dates: 21 January 2027
Languages accepted: French and English

Organised by
Chaire SACRES

Contacts
sacres@lyon.archi.fr

Partners

École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Lyon
EVS-LAURe
Couvent Sainte-Marie de la Tourette

Reference:
CFP: Rethink Church Space (Éveux, 21 Jan 27). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 27, 2026 (accessed Nov 28, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/58061>.