

## Transcript

### Sacred and secular

*Silvio Ferrari*

#### **Silvio Ferrari:**

My name is Silvio Ferrari, and I teach law and religion at the University of Milan in Italy. And my main research area are the relations between state and religion, and the problems connected to freedom of religion.

#### **Interviewer:**

So we have historic places of worship and active places of worship, if you like, can you just explain the approach of international organization to sacred places of worship?

#### **Silvio Ferrari:**

Yeah, the approach of international organization to the issue of sacred places for a long time has the privileged the cultural dimension of these places. These places have been regarded as important expressions of the past that deserved to be trans preserved safeguarded and transmitted to future generations.

This approach has unfortunately, a little bit underplayed, the religious nature of these places, which are living entities. I mean, there is a difference between, for example, the Karnak Temple in Egypt, which have very relevant cultural and historical value, and that are visited by millions of tourists. And let's say the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which is that place which is sacred to a living community and that is visited by pilgrims more than tourists.

Applying the same protection system to the two, neglecting this difference, one is mainly a cultural site, the other one is a mainly religious site, in a way living, and transforming, performing much more than the first. Neglecting this difference results in an unbalanced type of protection. Because you do not exploit fully the potentiality of a religious site. If there's something living, you don't focus-- speaking of Karnak, you don't need to focus on the relation between the Karnak Temple and religious community, because no religious communities are there.

If you are speaking of, I don't know, the Dome of the Rock, just to take an example from the Islamic area, you need to focus on the relation between that place and the community, which as a matter of fact, use that place for religious ceremonies for praying, for meeting. And so a different type of legal protection is required. A protection of that is more focused on this link between a community, could be also a cultural community, not necessarily a religious community, but a link between a community and a place which is important for that community. For the day to day life for them let's say, what happens every day.

#### **Interviewer:**

And so would you see the need to create a new legal instrument to provide that protection?

**Silvio Ferrari:**

I don't think we need to build a new legal instrument from scratch, from the bottom. I think that we need to adjust the legal instrument that we already have to this situation, underlying some dimensions that have been overlooked, for example, religious freedom. Sacred places should be considered also, from the angle of religious freedom of the community, which is making use of the same order from the angle of the potential that these places could have in fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue between people within different world views, with different faiths, etc. And we needed to put these elements at the centre of the protection system.