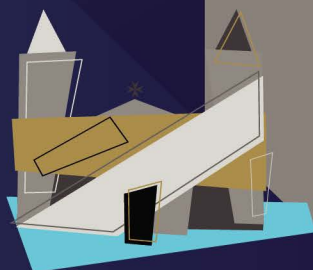


# EUROPEAN CATHEDRALS MALTA-PISA

**The Physiognomy of Cathedrals:  
Conservation Strategies**

**CATALOGUE**

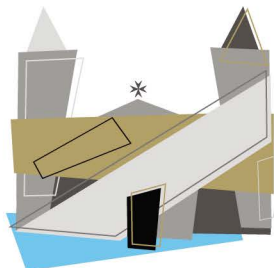


EUROPEAN  
CATHEDRALS  
**MALTA**  
CONFERENCE  
1 - 2 JULY 2021

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## St John's Co-Cathedral

• Valletta Malta •

St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation  
St John's Street  
Valletta

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OPERA  
DELLA PRIMAZIALE  
PISANA

# A Legacy of Glory Restored

**Mgr Professor Emmanuel Agius**

*President 2020 - 2021*

*The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*



It is my pleasure and honour, as President of the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation, to welcome you all to our European conference on "The Physiognomy of Cathedrals: Conservation Strategies." We are privileged to convene this gathering in co-operation with the Opera della Primaziale Pisana which is responsible for the conservation of the monuments in Piazza del Duomo in Pisa.

The title of this conference refers to Malta and Pisa because this joint initiative between the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation and the Opera della Primaziale Pisana is launched in Malta and will be followed by another conference in Pisa towards the end of October of the same year. This high-level meeting is convened to mark the twentieth anniversary of the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation.

Twenty years ago, the Catholic Church in Malta and the Government of the Republic had succeeded in hammering out a historic compromise to bypass the long-standing controversy regarding the ownership of the Co-Cathedral and establish, by a public deed of July 2001, the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation as an independent body to manage and administer this prime Baroque monument and its priceless art collections.

In fact, one of the main tasks entrusted to the Foundation has been precisely the remit of creating and administering an effective, holistic, and sustainable conservation and restoration strategy for St John's and its artefacts.

The Foundation has taken this task in great earnest, as evidenced by the impressive range of restoration and conservation projects that have been implemented over the past twenty years. The restoration and conservation projects embarked upon by the Foundation have embraced a wide range of works of art, together with many architectural features of the Church fabric.

Indeed, over this period of time, St John's Co-Cathedral has been a veritable hive of restoration and conservation activity, with multiple projects being undertaken in rapid succession, sometimes even simultaneously!

After decades of neglect and decline, St John's Co-Cathedral has now been lovingly restored and rejuvenated to its former glory, transforming it into the original resplendent jewel of the reign of the sovereign Grand Masters of the Order of St John. Restoration and conservation projects have now brought forth this outstanding temple into a celebration and overwhelming experience of Baroque art at its best. We can now truly savour what the Conventual Church of the Knights would have looked like throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

There is no better way of celebrating the success story of the state-of-the-art restoration and preservation projects carried out by the Foundation during the past twenty years than with a European conference on conservation strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change on our cultural heritage.

The European dimension of this conference aptly befits the erstwhile Conventual Church of St John the Baptist, which constitutes a tangible memorial that perpetuates the Order's legacy of glory, and which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was an epicentre of Baroque splendour and a microcosmic reflection of European artistic excellence.

Moreover, the very nature of St John's Co-Cathedral, with its nine richly decorated langue chapels on each side of the main nave, represents the European roots of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta. St John's Co-Cathedral is thus a prime landmark in European cultural history and a unique tangible expression of a united Europe!

This is a gathering of curators from European Cathedral museums, conservators, scientists and academics coming from a number of European countries to share their knowledge, research, good practices and managerial/conservation skills in the preservation of artefacts through the manipulation of the environment by microclimatic techniques.

Although the conference focuses mainly on European Cathedrals, our programme includes a couple of presentations on conservation projects which, though unrelated to Cathedrals, offer interesting insights on climate-related risks and conservation strategies.

The challenge of the preservation of art collections depends upon a knowledge of how the materials and objects in the collection behave, and how the environmental impact on them can be controlled to maximize their lifespan and guarantee their survival. Thus, the interface between scientific/technological knowledge and conservation practical skills constitutes the foundation of conservation training, research and practice.

Environmental assessment and monitoring are based on scientific knowledge. The development of new instruments, non-invasive technologies and innovative solutions for analysis, protection and conservation require nanotechnology initiatives. The application of new products and materials for conservation entails skills, science and technology.

Without constant restoration and conservation, our historical buildings and their priceless artistic treasures would be gradually left to deteriorate and decay to the detriment of future generations. The science of conservation is analogous to the art of the hermeneutics of understanding in literature. Without the methodology of interpretative tools one cannot appreciate the meaning of written texts and analyse systematically their hidden meanings within a proper understanding of their context and history.

Similarly, one cannot embark on projects for the conservation of cultural heritage without examining the world of micro-material, complex structure and fabric of the object, coupled with an understanding of its environmental context and history in order to implement the best strategy for conservation. Objectivity and subjectivity continue to be the topic of heated discussions in the cultural heritage field. In the area of modern science-based conservation, heritage professionals pride themselves on their objective and interdisciplinary approach to conservation decision-making.

However, it is argued that many conservation decisions are by nature subjective, and that taste or professional preferences play an important role. Coupled with the fear based on a strict interpretation of conservation codes of ethics, this often leads to convoluted and heated arguments for or against a particular treatment. The meaning of the key concepts of authenticity and originality is no longer clear to practitioners. I hope that open and candid discussions during this conference would shed more light on this complex issue in conservation policy and strategy.

The theme of this conference is also very timely and highly important. Climate change is now emerging as one of the most serious threats impacting the conservation of the tangible and intangible features of our cultural sites and artefacts. Despite a high-level scholarly interest in climate change impacts on natural and socio-economic systems, a comprehensive understanding of these impacts on cultural heritage is noticeably absent from the available literature.

I hope that this conference, which is the first of its kind to be held locally, will contribute to address this gap. I am confident that the sharing of your research, data analysis and good practices in conservation policy will profitably contribute to the development of more adequate, effective and robust strategies for the sustainable management of our cultural heritage. Our common interest and challenge is how to make historical buildings and the vast collections they contain more resilient to outdoor and indoor fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

As custodians of our cultural heritage, we have an ethical responsibility to review continuously our current approaches and techniques in environmental control in order to sustain our historical buildings and their priceless art collections for the benefit of current and future generations.

May I take the opportunity to thank the Hon. Dr José Herrera, Minister for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government, and the Hon. Clayton Bartolo, Minister for Tourism and Consumer Protection, for sponsoring this conference. I am indeed grateful for their assistance, and particularly to Minister Herrera for his unfailing co-operation and continuous support.

A special word of thanks goes to our CEO/Curator, Ms Cynthia De Giorgio, and her team for organizing this conference and for seeing to all its logistics in full conformity with current Covid-19 health regulations.

I would finally like to extend my gratitude to all the foreign and local speakers of this conference. Thank you so much for having accepted our invitation to share with other participants your expertise, experience, research and good practices on the applied monitoring and mitigation of climatology on our cultural heritage.

It is my sincere hope that this conference will raise the level of our consciousness and conscientiousness regarding the nature and scale of the risks arising from climate change to help us improve and refine our design of climate change adaptation plans for the benefit of generations yet to come.

My thanks and appreciation extends to all of you present, for the interest you have shown in our conference and for honouring us with your participation.

Thank you.

Mgr Professor Emmanuel Agius  
*President 2020 - 2021*  
*The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*