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Vacant churches: Rent, sell, demolish?



I'm an American; both my parents were Swiss, my father was an architect. I hope the decision of which churches to save and which to demolish is made mostly on aesthetics; if they're of artistic interest because of their design, they should be saved and renovated for other purposes. Beyond that, I don't mind saying I find it delightful that there are decreasing numbers of religious people in Switzerland, and I wish that were the case everywhere, especially here in the US.

CHRISTOPHER EGLI, DEVON, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

There's an acute housing shortage in Geneva. Why not turn them into emergency or community accommodation for the destitute and homeless?

JOELLE OSMAN, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Please do not demolish any churches, even though fewer people go to church these days. We must consider that we might be heading for harder times – and suddenly the churches might become more popular again. I visited Switzerland several times and was always fascinated by the beautiful churches, especially in the many villages, but also in larger towns. It would be a pity if they would disappear.

NIKLAUS DURRER, PERTH, AUSTRALIA

To save them from closing down, quite a few churches have made efforts to widen their appeal. One example is the Swiss Church in London which dates from the 18th century. Following a dwindling congregation and rising costs, it was decided to expand its use, for example, allowing access for the holding of cultural events such as music recitals, talks and exhibitions, whilst still remaining a Protestant place of worship where Sunday services, christenings and marriage ceremonies take place. After a major refurbishment project in 2011, the church is now a vibrant multifunctional centre, welcoming people of different religions and backgrounds including the homeless that live in the neighbourhood.

SUSANNE SINGH, AMERSHAM, ENGLAND

The printed book lives on

Thank you for the information about printed books in Switzerland. Here in Australia it is similar. While large companies have pushed the little book stores out of business in the past, we see innovative action by the new younger generation. The local libraries offer special readings, invite authors and have special events for adults or children. Often the schools do things together with libraries. Book enthusiasts open book stores where I can sit down, read books, have a coffee and enjoy the company of fellow book readers. I tried the electronic book. I lost interest soon.



Also, I think the electronic books are overpriced. I prefer the feel of the printed book. I can easily go back to reread a passage, I can pass the book on in the family or give it to charity. My dad in Switzerland was a great book collector and the books found their way to Australia. This collection is part of my youth and an electronic book collection could never have the same meaning to me.

GEORGE FARMER, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Switzerland-EU: What exactly are they talking about?

Thank you for the excellent article. It is indeed important to know that the idea of the framework agreement comes from Switzerland. The framework agreement would solve many problems without reducing the sovereignty of the people, since it is always possible to call a referendum. Furthermore, I don't see a problem with an arbitration tribunal based on equal representation. On the contrary, it would create legal certainty. It is also clear and understandable that the EU will not tolerate Switzerland's 'cherry picking' forever. Let us hope for the sake of everyone concerned that a sensible solution will be found, since it is ultimately a question of Switzerland's economic prosperity and its status as a business location.

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