

AUGUSTUS WELBY NORTHMORE PUGIN, *CONTRASTS: OR, A PARALLEL BETWEEN THE NOBLE EDIFICES OF THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES AND SIMILAR BUILDINGS OF THE PRESENT DAY; SHEWING THE PRESENT DECAY OF TASTE* (1836), (LEICESTER: LEICESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1969).

Chapter 1: On the Feelings which Produced the Great Edifices of the Middle Ages

On comparing the Architectural Works of the last three Centuries those of the Middle Ages, the wonderful superiority of the latter must strike every attentive observer; and the mind is naturally led to reflect on the causes which have wrought this mighty change, and to endeavour to trace the fall of Architectural taste, from the period of its first decline to the present day; and this will form the subject of the following pages.

It will be readily admitted, that the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purposes for which it is intended, and that the style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected.

Acting on this principle, different nations have given birth to so many various styles of Architecture, each suited to their climate, customs, and religions; and as it is among edifices of this latter class that we look for the most splendid and lasting monuments, there can be little doubt that the religious ideas and ceremonies these different people had by far the greatest influence in the formation of their various styles of Architecture. . . . [*description of the religious architecture of Egyptians, Druids, and others follows*]

And is it to be supposed that Christianity alone, with its sublime truths, with its stupendous mysteries, should be deficient in this respect, and not possess a symbolical architecture of her temples which would embody her doctrines and instruct her children? Surely not, – nor is it so: from Christianity has arisen an architecture so glorious, so sublime, so perfect, that all the productions of ancient paganism sink, when compared before it, to a level with the false and corrupt systems from which they originated.

Pointed or Christian Architecture has far higher claims on our admiration than mere beauty or antiquity; the former may be regarded as a matter of opinion, – the latter, in the abstract, is no proof of excellence, but in it alone we find *the faith of Christianity embodied, and its practices illustrated*.

The three great doctrines, of the redemption of man by the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross; the three equal persons united in one God-head; and the resurrection of the dead, – are the foundation of Christian Architecture.

The first – the cross – is not only the very plan and form of a Catholic church, but it terminates each spire and gable, and is imprinted as a seal of faith on the very furniture of the altar.

The second is fully developed in the triangular form and arrangement of arches, tracery, and even subdivisions of the buildings themselves.

The third is beautifully exemplified by great height and vertical lines, which have been considered by the Christians, from the earliest period, as the emblem of the resurrection. . . . The vertical principal being an acknowledged emblem of the resurrection, we may readily account for the adoption of the pointed arch by the Christians, for the purpose of gaining greater height with a given width. I say adoption, because the mere form of the pointed arch is of great antiquity; and Euclid himself must have been perfectly acquainted with it. But there was nothing to call it into use, till the vertical principal was established.

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The convulsion consequent on the overthrow of the Roman empire, which destroyed, for a time, all the practical resources of art, was a sufficient cause for the barbarous state of Architecture at that period: but

when Christianity had overspread the whole of western Europe, and infused her salutary and ennobling influence in the hearts of the converted nations, art arose purified and glorious; and as it had been previously devoted to the gratification of the senses, then it administered to the soul: and exalted by the grandeur of the Christian mysteries, ennobled by its sublime virtues, it reached a point of excellence far beyond any it had previously attained; and instead of being confined to what was sensual or human, it was devoted to the spiritual and divine. Christian art was the natural result of the progress of Catholic feeling and devotion; and its decay was consequent on that of the faith itself; and all revived classic buildings, whether erected in Catholic or Protestant countries, are evidences of a lamentable departure from true Catholic principles and feelings, as will be shown in the ensuing chapter.