

The Inspiration of Jesus in Architecture

a lecture at Prague Christian Library

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October 11, 2005

Thank you all for coming to hear a lecture on architecture from an American, someone from the state of Tennessee, where the oldest building is a simple log cabin only two hundred years old. Here in Prague, there is a city full of beautiful architecture and fine craftsmanship and having already learned much while visiting your city, I know I will learn more from you as we share together this evening.

Introduction

It is one thing to talk about images of Jesus in visual arts like painting and drawing; it is quite another to talk about seeing images of Jesus in architecture. Architecture is by its very nature an abstract art, an art based on mathematics, on geometry and physics, an art of ratios and proportions, an art of mathematical relationships. Buildings are composed of cubes and rectangles and pyramids and spheres and conic sections. Rarely does a building resemble anything in a representational way. Near our home there is a music store built in the shape of a very large guitar, but such buildings are very rare. Because architecture is by its very nature abstract, images of Jesus in architecture will be abstract and symbolic. Looking at architecture from the vantage-point of the twenty-first century, we ought to be good at abstraction, but we are, perhaps, less familiar with the symbolic.

Architecture is also an almost inherently practical art. We can theorize about the usefulness of the arts in general and make an good argument that things like paintings and symphonies are good for human beings in complex ways that we may not be completely able to articulate, but there is no arguing about the fundamental practicality or usefulness of architecture. Architects can plan and build beautiful buildings, but an architect is no good unless these buildings can stand up and people can actually go inside. Architecture has been called “frozen music,” and I like that analogy because it emphasizes the mathematical relationships, the repetitions and variations, the patterns, inherent in both architecture and music, but no one ever actually walked in and lived in a sonata. Thus, architecture is, I think, unique in the field of the arts and our task of seeing images of Jesus in architecture will be different than the task of seeing images of Jesus in paintings or films.

Some architectural basics

In planning a building, an architect must address function, form, and structure—in other words, how the building will be used, how it looks, and how the building will stand up (Frank 207). Architecture is always concerned with supporting weight, with how to hold the whole thing up. Until the nineteenth century, there were two main systems of building, two main ways of holding things up (Frank 209, Honour 13).

(Slide two) One was post-and-lintel construction in which upright posts support horizontal beams; a variation on this is the whole wall as a supporting structure to sturdy cross beams forming the roof.¹ (Slide three) The second method is the use of the arch or arch and vault. (Slide four) This method has numerous variations including the barrel vault, a crossed vault, an arcade, a dome, and so on.

But how does one leap from talking about principles of construction to images of Jesus in architecture? Before we look specifically for images of Jesus, let's think in more general terms about the possibility of seeing meaning or meanings in the structures that put a roof over our heads and a floor under our feet. With a little reflection we will see that we do such interpreting all the time. For example, there can be meaning in the size of a building. An extremely large building implies a large number of people, a great deal of wealth, some sophisticated knowledge of building, a degree of organization of materials and labor and so on. The placement of a building on a platform, like those used for Roman and Greek temples, calls our attention to the building, sets it apart from other buildings in the area, and tells us that this building is important for some reason. The location of a building--whether in the center of the city or in a rural retreat or high on a hill overlooking a river--tells us something about that building.

The more questions we ask about a particular architectural structure, more meaning emerges. We can ask about space, for example. How much interior space is there? Why? How is that space divided? What is the relationship of space and mass? We can ask about light, where the light enters, how it is dispersed, how it is experienced by those who enter the building and to what end. In addition to identifying the system of support, we can ask how the particular system, whether post-and-lintel or arch and vault, is carried out and to what effect. We may note the relationship of the interior to the exterior and the basic unit of proportion or module on which the whole is based. I think you see what I mean about how meaning can emerge if we interrogate the structure from a number of points of view. But images of Jesus? We will have to work a little harder to see those.

The Assembly and the Place of Assembly

In the early years of Christianity, the Christian believers did not build specific buildings for worship. As described in the book of Acts, the believers in Jerusalem might meet in the Jewish temple for prayer. In other cities, they met in synagogues or by the riverside, as at Philippi. Most commonly, they met in private homes. While any large room would do, there is some indication that the room selected was often a dining room and often on an upper story (Krautheimer 2). "Until 200 A.D. . . . a Christian architecture did not and could not exist. Only the state religion erected temples" and these were erected to honor emperors and pagan gods like Jupiter. But by the mid-third century, even though Christianity was not yet an officially sanctioned religion, there were enough Christians that the borrowing of a room in a private home was no longer sufficient. Christian communities began to purchase and remodel structures for the assembly.

¹ The slides are available on the accompanying CD. Parenthetical notations tell when to change slides.

The Greek word used in the New Testament for the Christian assembly is *ecclesia*, and the term used for these meetings places was *domus ecclesia*, almost literally the house for the assembly or the meeting place for the community, the house for the church. The primary need was for space, an open, interior space for the assembly of the believers. There were other needs also—like a platform for the bishop and deacons, a vestibule for those still being taught, a baptistery, a storage room for charity work, and so on—but the main consideration was a large assembly room. Here is where I see an image of Jesus—symbolic to be sure, but a large assembly room literally constructs the symbolic language used in the New Testament, which describes the church as the body of Christ. Jesus himself said, “Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them.”

The image of Jesus is seen in the assembly itself, and architecturally speaking the construction of a large assembly space is one way of presenting the presence of Jesus, one way of “imaging” Jesus. Perhaps this point will seem a bit more convincing if we contrast these early examples of Christian architecture with the dominant religious architecture of the time, the temple.

(Slide five) This slide is a photograph of the Roman temple, the Maison Carree; Roman, but still very much influenced by the style of Greek temples. In Greek and Roman temples, only a few priests entered. People in general were outside and the temple was a backdrop to the ceremonies. The idea that the building should be structured for the purpose of accommodating the assembled people as a whole is a new idea, distinctively Christian, saying something about Christianity in general but also, I think, attempting to embody, to demonstrate in structural and symbolic terms, the body of Christ. In the city of Rome alone, in the mid-third century there were more “than forty large churches in private houses owned by the Christian community.” Though these were pulled down by order of Diocletian in A.D. 305 (van der Meer 54), some remnants of these tenement or apartment house churches exist to this day, incorporated into fifth century church buildings, under the floor of these larger, later buildings. These remains give evidence of two story apartment houses being remodeled to have a large upstairs assembly room, in one case also remodeled to incorporate an adjoining bathhouse which would have been used as the baptistery (Krautheimer 8,9). Thus, while we have no first and second century Christian architecture, we do have some suggestions from the third century of an architecture that structurally set out the idea of the body of Christ.

Following the widespread persecution of Christians by Diocletian in the very early fourth century during which Christian places of assembly were destroyed, Christianity was made a legal religion by Constantine in A. D. 313. Once Christianity had official sanction along with official funding, the building of churches began in a remarkable way. Many, many church buildings were constructed in a variety of styles throughout the Roman empire. Churches were built from Egypt and Syria to Gaul and Spain and beyond. Constantine’s mother, Helen, made it her mission to build churches on significant sites in the Holy Land, from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. While there was great variety in these buildings, the dominant style used by these fourth-century Christians was the basilica.

(Slide six) A basilica was a large public hall, often a hall of justice, often subdivided by supports. It might have side aisles, a clerestory, and an apse. It could have a flat ceiling or an open-timbered roof (Krautheimer 20-21). The basilica model was useful to Christians for a number of reasons, including the fact that it did not remind people of the pagan temple style. One commentator has put it this way: “Even the uninitiated could not avoid the impression of a worship ‘in spirit and in truth’ that would be worthy of an invisible Ruler and King of the World” (van der Meer 63).

The basilica negated the idea of the pagan temple and, more positively, provided a large interior space suitable for the coming together of the whole congregation. This new Christian meeting place would be called *basilica id est dominicum*, “assembly hall that is the house of the Lord.” In its function as a place of assembly, we can see that the basilica continues the symbolism of the church building as the meeting place for the body of Christ, but it is in the fourth century that we begin to see additional images of Jesus in the buildings constructed by Christians.

The Central-Type Plan

From the early days of Christianity, Christians were noted for their attention to burying the remains of the dead. Christians, unlike their pagan neighbors, did not practice cremation, but like the Jews practiced the burial of bodies. In some places, like Rome, there were extensive underground burial grounds, the famous catacombs. These were begun in the late second century and continued until the late fifth century with most of the catacombs actually dug out and extended during the fourth and fifth centuries after Christianity became legal (Krautheimer 9-10; van der Meer 19). But underground tunneling was not possible or desirable in many locations, and Christians used primarily open air cemeteries. After the legalization of Christianity with the Edict of Milan by Constantine in A.D. 313, many large memorials, called *martyria* or *memoriae*, were built for martyrs (van der Meer 38; Krautheimer 10-11). One influence on these buildings came from the *mausolea* or *heroa*, buildings built to honor great rulers. These buildings were often circular or octagonal structures, and they were consistently associated with kings and rulers. What does this have to do with images of Jesus, you might ask.

(Slide seven) Well, this round or octagonal shape was strongly associated with the idea of a ruler, and the very shape of the building would have spoken to the congregants the idea that Jesus is a mighty King, a great ruler (Krautheimer 42), an idea that could be explored only when the ruler was supporting rather than persecuting Christians. The tomb of Constantine's daughter Constantia was of this circular type, supported by pairs of columns arranged in a circle (built about A.D. 350) (Honour 303-4). This particular building is interesting to us for a number of reasons. The fact that it was built for the emperor's daughter shows the connection of the circular plan with royalty and rulers; also, it was associated with a church and soon became a church itself; also has been well enough preserved that it gives us a definite visual connection with fourth century church architecture.

(Slide eight) This next plan, the Church of the Theotokos (or God-bearer) on Mount Gerazim, is from the fifth century (484) (Krautheimer 116). This building was intended as a church, never a *martyrium* or tomb, but again there is a connection with a ruler because it was built by an emperor, the Emperor Zeno, to commemorate and give thanks for a military victory (Krautheimer 116).

(Slide nine) The central type church plan remained important for over thousand years, particularly in Byzantine architecture and often with a mosaic or fresco of Christ the King. (Slide ten) One of the most impressive church buildings of all time, the Hagia Sophia, was built in this style. Because it is a mosque today and has been a mosque for over 500 years, it is hard to experience this building as the architects intended, but we can try. We have to imagine it without minarets and with images of Jesus instead of medallions with Arabic script. It was built by the emperor Justinian in the early sixth century.

(Slide eleven) The vast central dome almost seems to float high above the rest of the building because it is supported by a circle of arched windows so that light flows in right below the dome. This church building speaks of Christ as the Lord of the Universe. Even in Roman times--for example, in the Pantheon--the hemisphere of the dome represented the heavens, the cosmos, and in these domed Christian churches the building became a “microcosm of the celestial and terrestrial worlds” as well as a setting for re-telling and re-enacting Christ’s life on earth. A Russian visitor to the Hagia Sophia, coming from Kiev, wrote: “When we were there, we thought we were in Paradise, and we forgot everything that had gone before” (quoted in van der Meer 45).

Even when the Western Roman empire fell in the face of barbarian invasions, the empire in the East continued for a thousand years with Constantinople as its capital. Today we call this the Byzantine empire and the architecture it produced Byzantine architecture. In Byzantine churches, the central dome became the dominant architectural style. I understand that it was Cyril and Methodius, two missionaries from Thessalonica, in the Byzantine empire, who brought Christianity to the Czechs and Moravians and others. At times it is difficult if not impossible to separate architectural structure from architectural decorations, and one of those times is in the Byzantine church.

(Slide twelve) Particular images of Jesus are usually assigned to particular areas of architecture, with an image of Jesus as Pantocrator in the central dome. This one is from Daphni, near Athens. (Slide thirteen) And there is often an image of the child Jesus on Mary’s lap, the Theotokos, in the apse. (Honour 328).

The Cross-Shaped Church

I want to move back to the fourth century and another modification made to the basically rectangular basilica that also influenced church architecture for centuries, even millennia. (Slide fourteen) One place that this change can be seen is in the basilica built by Constantine on Vatican Hill in Rome to honor St. Peter. This basilica no longer exists and is often called Old St. Peter’s to distinguish it from the current St. Peter’s which was built

in the sixteenth century. Old St. Peter's was probably begun about A.D. 333, after Constantine moved his capital to the East (Krautheimer 32). The building was intended as a shrine to Peter and was built over an earlier *martyrium*, a simple structure that was built in about A.D. 160; archeologists have found a hemispherical niche with pair of columns holding up a lintel and small flat roof which was also topped by a pair of columns with a pediment (Krautheimer 11).

In contrast to this small late second century shrine, the basilica built by Constantine was huge, and it took decades to build. The nave and aisles were lined with graves, making it a covered cemetery. The nave itself was 84 meters (276 ft.) long (Krautheimer 35). In addition to the large nave with two aisles on each side, and a clerestory lighting the nave, there was a transept between the nave and the apse and extending beyond the nave in both directions. It was a large, continuous, undivided transept. As we look at the diagram of this building, we see the shape of a cross built into the architecture. This basilica was cruciform, proclaiming in its very structure the crucifixion of Christ. (Slide fifteen) The building is completely gone, but drawings give us a likely idea of what the interior would have looked like.

Writers living in the fourth century have left us records of some of the earliest cross-shaped church buildings. In Constantinople, the Church of the Holy Apostles was built with four equal arms around a central drum with a conical roof. There are no archeological remains of this church, but it was described by the historian Eusebius, and he specifically called it "cross-shaped" (Krautheimer 46-47). Also from the fourth century is the Church of the Apostles in Milan, built in 382 and planned by Ambrose. It was a huge cross, 200 Roman feet long and 50 Roman feet wide. The arms of the cross were lower than the nave, and the altar was placed in the very center of the cross, visible to those who entered from the transepts or from the nave. At the dedication of the building, Ambrose spoke about the importance of the cruciform shape, and this shape became very influential. I think we can understand why. Even while it is a very practical, functional shape, well-suited to the assembly of Christians coming together as the body of Christ, it also by its very shape symbolized the body of Christ, particularly his crucifixion.

(Slide sixteen) Eventually this structure took on the symbolic meaning of the building itself representing the body of Christ, with the nave as the trunk, the transept his arms, and the apse as his head, and the crossing as his heart (Schwarz 3; Schloeder 6). In symbolic terms one could say that the church building made Jesus visible even as Jesus made God visible.

Such a symbolic interpretation has strong roots in the scripture where Jesus is metaphorically described in architectural terms. Speaking of himself, Jesus quoted from Psalm 118: "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (NRSV). Peter, preaching in the Jerusalem temple used this same verse to describe Jesus. Paul also used the language of architecture in I Corinthians: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11; NRSV). In the New Testament, terms from architecture were used metaphorically to

describe the work and mission of Jesus. In the fourth and fifth centuries—and throughout the Middle Ages—Christians talked about buildings in a metaphorical way to evoke the image of Jesus.

Even in the twentieth-century, church architect Rudolf Schwarz meditated extensively on the idea of the building as a body and invited his readers to consider the many connections of the whole body to a building. For example, a building is a labor not only of the hand but also of the whole body. Further, we experience a building not only with our eyes or our ears but also with our whole bodies. In addition, a building itself is, in a sense, a body with a face to present to the outside world as well as an inner space. A building, like a body, can have a skeleton covered with a skin. A church building, in particular, according to Schwarz should be a “revelation of eternal structure,” a “whole cosmos.” While Schwarz believes the day of the cruciform church is past, he believes that shape symbolizes Jesus on a very deep and profound level (3, 7, 26, 27).

From the point of view of the twenty-first century, with hundreds of cruciform churches all around us, we might be tempted to ask why it took until the fourth century for Christians to come up with such a plan. Part of the answer we have already mentioned: until the fourth century, Christianity was not a legally protected religion and thus could not and did not build monumental buildings that stood out visibly to the general public. Yes, in the third century they were remodeling multi-story apartment houses to include large assembly rooms, but only with official, imperial recognition would Christians have the resources to build on a large scale. It is also true that the cross was not an early or immediately popular symbol for Christians. In the first century the cross was all too clearly an instrument of official torture. By the fourth century, with Christianity legal and martyrdom seemingly a thing of the past, Christians turned more and more frequently to the symbol of the cross, particularly a symbolic and beautified cross as a symbol of the triumph over death and sin.

Thus architecture, inherently abstracted and symbolic, is a good place to look for the shape of the cross. In architectural terms, form, function, and support were all well-served by the cruciform shape and it was used in many variations. Precisely because this cruciform plan is so familiar to us, it has become almost difficult for us to see and appreciate it, so we are going to take some time and look at a number of versions of this idea from the fifth century.

A woman named Galla Placidia ruled as Empress of the Western Roman Empire from A.D. 425 until her death in 450. (Slide seventeen) During her rule the Western capital was in Ravenna, not the city of Rome, and it was in Ravenna that she built a large church and a smaller building thought to be her mausoleum. Both were cross-shaped, influenced by the great cross-shaped churches of Milan (Krautheimer 137; Honour 311). (Slide eighteen) The entire interior of the mausoleum is covered with shimmering mosaics which remain intensely and vividly colorful to this day. (Slide nineteen) Jesus is seen here as the Good Shepherd, a depiction at once realistic and symbolic. While the mosaic presents a realistic man with realistic sheep, we soon remember that Jesus was not a literal shepherd but a symbolic one. And the staff that this shepherd holds is a highly

stylized golden cross—like the shape of the building reminding us of the cross primarily to testify to his triumph over death with no hint of suffering.

Far from Ravenna and Milan, in Hermopolis—today's Cairo, Egypt--another type of cruciform church was built. (Slide twenty) Notice that the three apses connected to the nave make the whole into the shape of a cross. This building, the Hermopolis cathedral, dates from the mid fifth century (Krautheimer 87). (Slide twenty-one) At about the same time in a monastery far to the south in Egypt, the cross shape was incorporated entirely into the interior with the exterior being a very solid, heavy rectangular wall. This plan is for a monastery church called the White Monastery, and it was build about A.D. 440 (Krautheimer 88).

(Slide twenty-two) This church in Salonica, Greece, is a highly complex basilica with two crosses, one inside the other. It also comes from the fifth century. Italy, Egypt, Greece, and also Syria saw the cruciform church. (Slide twenty-three) Here is a complex cruciform plan from Syria, this one combining a central octagonal area with each arm of the cross a basilica in itself. This church was both for a monastery and for many pilgrims. (Krautheimer 96, 111-112).

(Slide twenty-four) One type of cruciform plan is sometimes called “cross in a box” or “cross in a square” and I think the architectural drawing makes its name clear. This plan combines a central type plan with the four equal arms and also a transept. This particular building is from the fifth century in the area we today call Jordan (Gerash) (Krautheimer 117).

While not nearly all church buildings since the fourth century were built in the shape of a cross, the cruciform shape has definitely dominated church architecture whether with the Latin cross in the West or the Greek cross in the East. We talked about Byzantine architecture primarily in terms of the central dome, but I need to point out that often the dome is the center of a cross, which means that Byzantine churches are also cruciform. (Slide twenty-five) Look with me at the church of San Marco in Venice. Here we have a central dome in a cross of smaller domes. (Slide twenty-six) Here also is the meeting place of East and West. (Slide twenty-seven) And look at the glittering interior—almost entirely covered mosaics. Rarely in the history of architecture, it seems to me, have form, function, structure, and symbolism come together so effectively as in the cruciform church—and maybe that is why its influence has been so pervasive.

A great wave of church building took place in Europe shortly after the year 1000. (Slide twenty-eight) A man living at that time, the monk Raoul Glaber, described it like this: “it befell almost throughout the world, but especially in Italy and Gaul, that the fabrics of churches were rebuilt, although many were still seemly and needed no such care; but every nation in Christendom rivaled with the other, which should worship in the seemliest buildings. So it was as though the very world had shaken itself and cast off her old age, and was clothing herself everywhere in a white garment of churches” (quoted in Honour 370, also by Clark in the *Civilisation* films).

Here we are looking at a magnificent Romanesque church; clearly it has a cruciform plan. Like Roman architecture it relied on the arch for support. (Slide twenty-nine) Unlike the earlier basilicas, Romanesque churches did not have a flat wooden ceiling, but rather favored stone vaulting and the barrel vault. (Slide thirty) To support this vaulting, the churches needed huge supporting piers and thick walls. (Slide thirty-one) In Prague, St. George's is an excellent example of Romanesque vaulting, arches, and thick supporting walls. (Slide thirty-two) Often Romanesque churches were often built to accommodate pilgrims, so they tended to be quite large and they were built with numerous side chapels, the apsidal chapels, to hold particular relics. In considering Romanesque architecture, one is again confronted with the question of what is "decoration" added on and what is inherent to the architecture. The sculpted tympanum and capitals, for example, are inherently part of the architecture. (Slide thirty-three) At the Autun Cathedral, over the doorway to confront each person entering the building, is Jesus, enthroned in glory, and judging all souls. Yes, it is a work of sculpture, and we even know the sculptor's name, Gislebertus, but it is definitely a part of the building and it definitely gives us an image of Jesus, not as the youthful Good Shepherd of Ravenna, but as the ultimate, powerful judge.

The line between Romanesque and Gothic is fuzzy rather than sharp, a gradual transition of one style into another rather than two styles widely separated in time and place. In fact, as you know from your church buildings in Prague, one building can combine Romanesque and Gothic characteristics. (Slide thirty-four) As architects strove for greater height, for more light, for a more unified interior space, a number of innovations came together producing the Gothic style that so swept over Europe that it was called the International Style. It has so dominated the minds of Christians that Gothic style churches are built to this day. The National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., for example, was built in the twentieth century in the Gothic style. Contemporary Christian artist He Qi criticizes modern Chinese Christians in the Three Self church for building in the Gothic style instead of a more uniquely Chinese style. I certainly appreciate his point, but I must confess that I do love the Gothic style.

What characterizes the Gothic style? (Slide thirty-five) It is still cruciform. But the arches are pointed, allowing for great, seemingly infinite height. (Slide thirty-six) Also, the vaulting is ribbed, groin vaulting, making the vaults lighter and putting the weight in the ribs. (Slide thirty-seven) The intricate net vaulting of St. Vitus' Cathedral in Prague is exceptionally beautiful, and the architect Peter Parler is rightly renowned for his innovations in the Gothic style. (Slide thirty-eight) In addition to the pointed arches and ribbed vaulting, much of the weight of the vaults is thrust outside the building through flying buttresses, so that the weight does not have to be supported entirely on heavy walls and huge interior piers. (Slide thirty-nine) Instead the walls can be opened up for windows, allowing room for the stained glass windows which are rightly regarded as the glory of the Gothic. Further, because so much of the weight is supported externally, the interior spaces of the building can flow together with much less sense of division, and—in some cases—a sense of complete openness. (Slide forty) The huge piers have been replaced by clusters of slender columns, further creating a sense of verticality and lightness.

There is much symbolism built into the great Gothic churches, and I think that most of us sense that the verticality is a way of lifting our minds and thoughts and hearts to God. The pointed arches also seem to point upward, perhaps almost as praying hands. The interiors are full of light, and because that light is streaming in through stained glass windows, it seems like a spiritual light, a transformed light, an image of what the worshippers hope will happen to their own lives in the light of God's love. The light itself almost seems like visible evidence of the presence of God. The golden light of the cathedral here in Prague feels like heavenly light to me. The interiors are light in another way, too; that is, they do not seem to bear down, to weigh down. And I think that sense of physical uplifting also speaks to the assembled worshippers. In writing his history of religious architecture, Ernest Short focuses on the architect's fundamental responsibility to hold things up, to provide support. He describes a definite contrast between Greek architecture and Gothic architecture in this regard:

Whereas the Greeks accepted the fundamental conflict between the column and its burden, the Gothic masons and builders strove to make the burden seem an illusion. The Greek was right: the force of gravity is an actuality not an illusion. . . Nevertheless, the inventions of the Gothic builder were so ingenious and their methods of creating illusion so perfect that they gave to their columns and arches the mysterious beauty of a dream world in which the forces of gravity appear to lose their power to oppress weak humanity" (167).

Maybe one of the reasons that Gothic architecture retains such an appeal to this day is that it does seem to lift burdens and draw one up into another world. (Slide forty-one) Abbot Suger, builder of St. Denis, regarded as the prototype of Gothic churches, described the experience of entering the cathedral as entering an anagogical world, joining "the material and immaterial, the corporeal with the spiritual, the human with the Divine" (quoted in Honour 384 and Fleming 204-205).

As with the sculpture of the Romanesque churches, it is difficult if not impossible to separate the decoration from the structure of the Gothic churches. (Slide forty-two) In the case of the Gothic, the sculpture is primarily on the outside of the building, filling the observer with images of Jesus even before entrance. Then, once inside, the images emerge in the stained glass. It would be impossible for us to list all the images of Jesus presented in the stained glass and sculpture of the Gothic cathedrals, for here the images proliferate. From his infancy to the final judgment, Jesus is presented. In fact, the history of the world from creation to judgment is presented, and—it should be noted—most of the Gothic churches were especially devoted to the Virgin Mary, as in the Notre Dames de Paris and Notre Dames de Chartres and so on. So they are full of images of Mary. (Slide forty-three) But since our focus is on images of Jesus, we will look at this tympanum over the middle set of three doors (three to suggest the Trinity and Jesus as part of the Trinity) on the west portal of Chartres. Here he sits enthroned, in power, surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists, reminding us that while he reigns as the king who brings us gospel, good news.

I don't want to conclude with the Gothic style, suggesting as some have done, that it is the ultimate statement in Christian architecture. Also, I don't want to go century by century looking at every style. So I am going to leap boldly into the twentieth century and look for images of Jesus in twentieth century architecture. In addition, I want to shift our focus of questioning from the shape of the building to the function.

What I mean is that part of the way to see images of Jesus in church architecture is to ask what is done in the space, how is the space used. (Slide forty-four) And for this example, I want to look at a modern cathedral, one from the twentieth century.

In 1940, during the German bombings of England in WWII, Coventry Cathedral was completely destroyed and left a charred, skeletal ruin. After the war, the English church and the English people were ready to rebuild, and a competition was announced to decide the plan and the architect. (Slide forty-five) The conditions of the competition began with this declaration:

The Cathedral is to speak to us and to generations to come of the Majesty, the Eternity and the Glory of God. God, therefore, direct you.

It is a Cathedral of the Church of England. In terms of function, what should such a Cathedral express? . . .

The doctrine and the worship of the Church of England is liturgically centered in the Eucharist. The Cathedral should be built to enshrine the altar. This should be the ideal of the architect, not to conceive a building and to place in it an altar, but to conceive an altar and to create a building.

In the Anglican liturgy it is the people's altar; the altar should gather the people, it should offer access for worship and invitation to Communion.

With the altar—in the unity of worship—there is the preaching of the Gospel among our people of Coventry and the interpretation of the Word. (Spence 4)

While the name "Jesus" does not appear in this declaration, there are two images of Jesus that are prominent, and these two images form the basis of the design for the new cathedral. The first is the image of Jesus in the Eucharist, Jesus breaking the bread at the Last Supper and Jesus as the body and blood sacrificed for all. The Eucharist is to be the center of the worship space and the altar the gathering place for the people. The other image of Jesus is more abstract and symbolic, but it goes right back to the Gospel of John "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1). We could go back through the basilicas and the domed churches and the Romanesque and the Gothic and we would see the same thing: the buildings are planned to keep the Eucharist and the Word as the central focus, thus the buildings inherently build images of Jesus into the architectural functioning of the space.

The architect who ultimately won the commission and built the new Coventry Cathedral also had an image of Jesus in mind for the cathedral as a whole. (Slide forty-six) While visiting the site of the old, burned out cathedral, he had a profound religious experience and—though it was not required by the competition—determined to "preserve as much of the old Cathedral as [he] could" (Spence 6). In his words, "I saw the old Cathedral as

standing clearly for the Sacrifice, one side of the Christian faith, and I knew my task was to design a new one which should stand for the Triumph of the Resurrection” (6). As we have noted before, decoration is often very strongly connected to and with the architecture, and the actual architectural plan submitted by Basil Spence included his plans for stained glass windows and for a large tapestry to go behind the altar. In the case of the tapestry, he even had the artist in mind as he submitted his plans (Spence 14-15)(Slide forty-seven) In the tapestry, Jesus is enthroned in glory and surrounded by images of the four gospel writers in a design similar to the sculpted tympanum of Chartres and also to the mosaic over the south porch of St. Vitus’ cathedral. Traditional images are used in a stunningly contemporary way at the Coventry Cathedral. I also wanted to show you a little of my home and our campus and the chapel on our campus. (Slide forty-eight) It was built in the late 1960’s and uses a traditional Georgian style along with some modern touches. Because I have seen many of the documents related to the building of this chapel, I know that it was deliberately planned to present many images of Jesus. For one thing, it has a cruciform shape. For another, the baptistery and table for the Lord’s Supper and pulpit for the presenting of the Word are prominent, asserting the centrality of Christ as bread of life, as living water, and as living word. (Slide forty-nine) There are also a number of stained glass windows presenting key images of Jesus. This one, for example, shows Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and who triumphs over death in resurrection. (Slide fifty) Another uses the cup and bread as well as stylized grapes to express the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. (Slide fifty-one) Further, the whole building is topped by a tall Celtic cross, clearly visible to all who approach the campus. The chapel is located at the geographical center of the campus, suggesting that Jesus is at the center of all we do.

Conclusion

We began this lecture with the observation that images of Jesus in architecture would necessarily be abstract and symbolic. The earliest church buildings were primarily designed as places of assembly, suggesting by the structure the idea of the church as the body of Christ. Byzantine churches were characteristically built around a central dome, emphasizing Jesus as King of the Universe. The cross-shaped church embodied Jesus’ death on the cross and his triumph over death. The new Coventry Cathedral, like many other church buildings, is constructed to emphasize the presence of Jesus as and in the Word and at the Eucharistic table. It is always hard to predict the future, but based on the churches being built in the U. S. today which are sometimes described as multi-purpose rooms or even warehouses, it seems to me that church architecture may be returning to its earliest roots, emphasizing the assembly and thus the image of the church as the body of Christ. At the same time, the tradition of the cruciform church building, and to a much lesser extent, the domed church building, still has a strong hold on our thoughts and imaginations.

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