

THE MANCHESTER CATHEDRAL: INFLUENCES ON IT AND ITS PLACE IN THE GENERAL DISCOURSE OF CHURCH BUILDING; A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT:

The history of any architectural object has been an intriguing subject of study, especially when it came to the architectonic skills that went into the making of it. This has been quite relevant in case of a religious place of worship like a church, which has often displayed features that has been a synergy of quite a number of strategies that may have been the features of buildings that have been different from it in shape and size. For instance, the church of St. Sophia in Istanbul has , in the long passage of time, shown features that belong both to a church (as far as its interiors are concerned), and that of a mosque as far as its minarets are concerned. We may also cite other equally exciting examples the Chartres' Cathedral in France incorporated certain features that were 'new' in the context of the then Renaissance Europe. This proposed paper would, then seek to 'locate' the Manchester cathedral in England, firstly, in the general discourse of the church building in England and on the Continent, and secondly, it would, in the manner of a 'case study', try to see certain architectural patterns that made this colossal entity, built over a period of 65 years, truly different as from the other churches in England and even on the Continent.

KEYWORDS:

Architectural, Continent, Discourse, Renaissance

INTRODUCTION

The history of an architectural object may be an intriguing matter for most of the people who may not be familiar with the provenance of a work of art, especially when it comes to objects that are architectural colossuses. This description very well fits the Manchester cathedral in the city of Manchester in the United Kingdom. Though there are many other architectural marvels, say, the Chartres' cathedral in France that may make "any self-professed atheist feel uneasy", as The National Geographic (2009) seems to report; one has to after all, understand that the Manchester Cathedral simply bemuses us because of the numerous influences that have gone into the making of it. The said cathedral was built in between the years 1421-1882 A.D., which is indeed a huge span in the history of the building of any monument; compared to it, the Great Pyramid at Giza was finished in just 22 years at the orders of the Pharaoh Khufu. The style that can be seen to have been used is that of the Gothic architecture, mainly in its use of the high spires and the use of towers that initially came to be associated with the church building during the Norman era (Figure 1) [2].



Figure 1. The Manchester Cathedral and the high spires typically associated with the gothic architecture [1].



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The style that has been used is “the perpendicular gothic”, which is the “third stage” in the architectural history in a gothic church. The name comes from the use of the perpendicular lines in which the church was built. The said cathedral was extensively refurbished in the Victorian era, but was nearly destroyed in the German Nazi bombings of the Second World War. This church has affiliated with the Church of England, and seems to have remained so all these years. James Stanley was primarily responsible for the commissioning of the late medieval wooden furnishings in a crucial point in the development of this massive stone structure. This structure is in the list of “Grade 1” buildings of the city of Manchester, and this means in Municipal parlance that it (a). Cannot be, in any way demolished (b). Deemed to have been neglected by posterity.

This cathedral also falls within the Planning Act of the 1990, which stipulates that the conservation of buildings that are “of exceptional cultural interest” is mandatory. The cathedral is dedicated to St. Mary and St. Michael, and this cathedral still remains exempted from all customary duties.

An overview of the architectural patterns of the said cathedral

Firstly, the use of the pointed arches is a conspicuous feature of the said cathedral. The use of arches is a marked feature of buildings of the Roman times. In fact, the Colosseum in Rome has been called the symphony of arches. It is noteworthy that to take the pressure of a heavy roof, a “pointed arch” may be used. The benefit of a structure like this is that the pressure from the roof would fall on the portions that tend to “point, and would be evenly distributed all along the columns. This would, in turn mean that there would not be any possibility of cracks developing all along the columns, as the entire weight would be evenly distributed.

Secondly, The Mary Chapel, a small structure within the said cathedral shows the inclination of the cathedral builders to incorporate within the main structure a small substructure where the main deity would be worshipped. This has apparent parallels with the concept of the “gopuram”, that is the main shrine of the god that was used in the medieval temples in the south of India, that was covered with ornamental roofs that stood high and often, in the present-day temples of South India, have conical shapes.

Thirdly, The West door and the St. Mary window of the said cathedral have lavishly used the stained glass window panes. As it is a well-known fact, the use of the stained glass windows goes back to the middle ages when dyes were used to lavishly decorate the interiors. The Chartres’ cathedral in France received pigments that were considered to be “fit” by the then Bishop of the cathedral to consecrate the memory and grace of Mary for whom the cathedral was erected. The figures given below, namely Fig. 2 and Fig.3 show the apparent parallels between the

interiors of the two cathedrals separated not only by considerable distances, but also by some centuries.

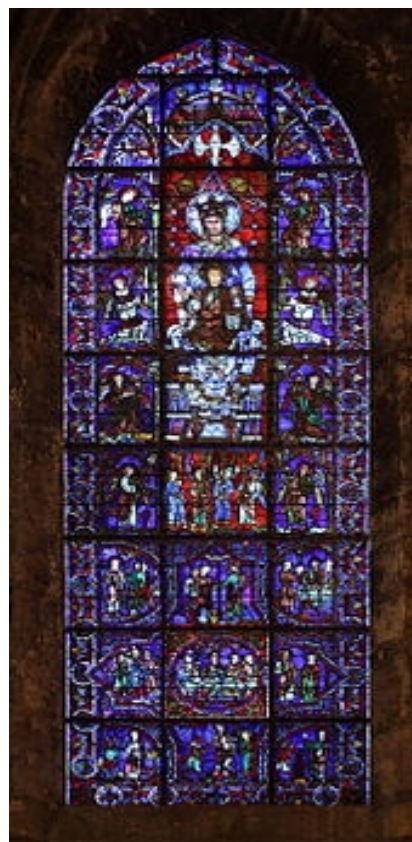


Figure 2. The elaborate use of the stained glass windows in the Chartres’ cathedral. Notice the use of blue pigment [1].

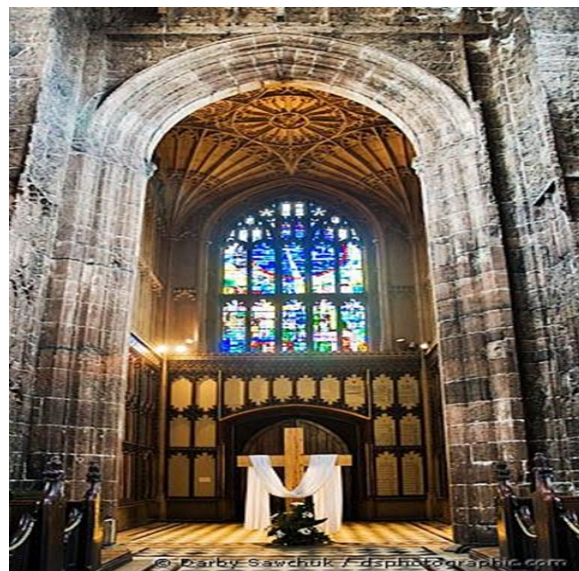


Figure 3. The elaborates use of stained glass windows in the Manchester cathedral. Notice the similar use of the blue pigment and the pointed arches, comparable with the Chartres’ cathedral [1].



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The sunrays, falling on these special glass panes would be, through the process of “illumination” be scattered into multitudinous colors. The use of blue as a color has often stood in western metaphysics as a symptom of melancholia; it has to be borne into mind that Pablo Picasso used shades of blue in his famous painting of Guernica.



Figure 4. Guernica. Oil on canvas by Pablo Picasso the left side only. Note the subtle use of the blue pigment in the painting that not only exposes the horrors of war, but also that of the melancholia associated with the same [1].

But the color blue has several other shades of meanings. According to the Riviera Presbyterian Church Group (2012), the color blue is the symbol of the Heavenly bliss, hence that of Godhead. These stained glasses often tend to make extensive use of Biblical themes, especially that of the Crucifixion of Jesus and the figure of Mary holding the savior in her hands with the Angles witnessing the scene from heaven. The conspicuous use of other colors may be noticed in Figure 5, especially that of white, that stands for purity as per the exegetical writings [3].



Figure 5. The stained glass images in this figure show the use of the white colour, that connotes purity [1].

Thirdly, there seems to be an extensive use of stone gargoyles in the Manchester Cathedral. A “gargoyle”, as it is well known, stands in the discourse of church building to be a grotesque human or animal figure (figure 6) that was often built by the architects to drain out rain water, so that it could not damage the roofs and the masonry walls with the mortar between. The Chartres’ cathedral makes extensive use of this architectural pattern and so does the Manchester cathedral.



Figure 6. A gargoyle in the Manchester cathedral. Notice the use of a grotesque human-cum- animal figure with wings that looks sinister and satanic [1].

Fourthly, the said cathedral got extensive refurbishing during the modern period, as has been mentioned before, when it was discovered that the Binney sandstone had begun to get eroded, and the ‘problem’ of coating the interiors of the cathedral and the nave with Roman cement aggravated the problem further.

Fifthly, the bells of this cathedral should be mentioned, as they stand conspicuous due to their mass the heaviest of them weighs around a ton. These bells are an integral part of the cathedral, as they are the integral part of any cathedral. The tower of this cathedral may well be seen to be incorporating clocks on all the four sides, and this links it with the “Big Ben” of the royal Buckingham palace.

Sixthly, the pointed arches of this cathedral, discussed in one the sections of this paper, on a closer introspection, seem to be composed of 3 near-concentric columns that tend to lie in a “bunch.” This means that these three concentric semi-circular pointed arches were both meant for decoration, as well as for certain precautionary measures, as this cathedral has had a long history of ongoing renovations. One cannot also miss to notice the castle-like features of this cathedral, that stand in sharp contrast to the Salisbury Cathedral, which, instead of having all these features, is known to have the tallest spire amongst all the other churches in England. Although the Salisbury cathedral does not seem to have a great extension in the form of a nave or an extensive “lobby”, the Manchester cathedral has all these features. Compared to the Salisbury cathedral, which is predominantly in the shape of a cone, the Manchester cathedral has gothic projections all over.



Thus, we have nearly discussed all the major architectural features of this cathedral.

Implication of such architectural features in the discourse of church building

The implications are as follows:

- Firstly, this cathedral has been erected in the course of many centuries, which means that there has been an ample time for additions and re-additions. This, in turn means that there has been a possibility of the changing of the choir and other such areas by extensive wood work. In fact, one of the sources of the perpetual wonder of this cathedral is that there has been a successive employment of the woodworks that seem to be not the additions of one hand at all.

- Secondly, a kind of symmetry seems to have been maintained when it comes to the design of the interiors in the area around the pulpit, the wood work is in sharp concurrence with the architecture of the walls. The whole cathedral has been supported by a series of pointed arches, and the church builders have been careful to use this architectural pattern in wood work as well.

- Thirdly, all the internal stone work and the naves were removed in the modern era, due to which the cathedral gives the overall impression of a nineteenth century building. Added to this is the undeniable fact that this cathedral was nearly destroyed in the bombings by the Nazis. This modern look is more enhanced by the conspicuous absence of the “flying buttresses” features that were used in the medieval cathedrals. The Chartres’ cathedral, to a considerable degree, uses the flying buttresses to hold the building together, so that any portion of it may not go astray, as the work proceeded. What we can easily notice is the ‘clean’ look given by the tower that is connected to the extension that further leads to the nave.

CONCLUSION

What we can infer from the above statements about the said cathedral are:

- Firstly, this cathedral stands in a somewhat sharp contrast to the other cathedrals found on the English soil, and also those found on the continent. The Chartres’ cathedral in France is characterized by the flying buttresses and the presence of stone gargoyles, which links it with the French tradition. The Manchester cathedral, however adheres to the use of stone gargoyles, but seems to rely on certain other architectonic skills than on the extensive use of the “flying buttresses.”

- Secondly, as Carr (2012) has succinctly pointed out, the “flying buttresses” was most probably invented in Northern France in the 1100 A.D., and this was done so that the heavy roof of a building would be eventually supported by a masonry structure [3].

We may conclude by saying that the Manchester cathedral witnessed many quick changes in the

passage of time - it has, in the meantime, seen the replacement of certain older forms by the relatively ‘newer’ ones. One may attribute this to the peculiar location of this place of worship, i.e., in the city of Manchester that has been a bustling metropolis. We may wonder if similar cathedrals in the countryside had somewhat the same experiences or not.

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