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*Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism.*

BY ERWIN PANOFSKY.

Latrobe, Penna.: The Archabbey Press, 1951. 19.5 × 14 cm. Pp. xviii + 156.  
Illustrated.

The text of this short work is that of a lecture given in 1948 at St. Vincent College, Latrobe (the 'Wimmer Lectures') and published by the Latrobe Benedictines. The order of its presentation retains the stamp of the spoken word, but it has been expanded by the inclusion of copious notes. Though known and discussed on both sides of the Atlantic since before its publication, the book does not in fact raise any fresh problem. For the last century, a large number of writers have given more or less close consideration to the question. We know Dehio's formula—*Gothik ist eine steinerne Skolastik*; Mâle's and A. Meyer's studies on the liturgy and Gothic style; and Dvorak's memorable essay (*Idealismus und Naturalismus in der*

*plastischen Gothik und Malerei*, 1918). But up till now this relationship between theology and plastic art has been treated purely from the point of view of chronological coincidence, or else it was ascribed to a direct influence of theology on art through the medium of iconography (Mâle) or symbolism (Sauer). In the first part of his book, Panofsky considers these vague, general relationships, which are concerned more with the evolutionary pattern of events than with their essential character. The first phase of the Gothic period corresponds to the initial phase of scholasticism (Gilbert de la Porée, Abélard); the age of the great cathedrals of the thirteenth century is that of St. Bonaventura, St. Thomas Aquinas, Albert

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the Great; the 'refinement' of the decorated Gothic style (its 'doctrinaire' period, as Dehio says) corresponds with the refinements of the epigones of scholasticism, Duns Scotus or Brunetto Latini.

The striking novelty and importance of this book are due to Panofsky's attempt to establish a different and profounder pattern of relations, 'formal' relations, between theological thought and art, 'a genuine cause and effect relation', deriving from a 'mental habit' common to the craftsmen and the theologians. It is likely that such a relationship could have arisen: the teaching of the schools and the intellectual milieu of the public '*disputationes de quodlibet*' must have influenced both the master-builder and the educated man, the true scholar and the 'Doctor Lathomorum' (the epitaph of Pierre de Montereau). Villard de Honnecourt uses a scholastic term to describe the plan of a church, built with Pierre de Corbic, '*inter se disputando*'.

How can this common mentality be described? Scholasticism demands of the mind a strict systematisation of reasoning. Starting from preliminary statements acceptable to reason, the truths of faith are demonstrated by means of the confrontation of positive and negative arguments and of '*similitudines*'. The composition of the *Summa* and of each proof obeys a rule of division and subdivision, hierarchically arranged according to a 'logical pattern' in *partes*, *membra*, *quaestiones*, *articuli*. This attempt to organise thought and to circumscribe it with a view to reaching final clarity

—'*manifestatio*'—can be recognised equally in the reasoning of the artist. Compared with Roman architecture, the style of the Gothic epoch exhibits a sharper clarification of themes, a stricter separation of parts, and a more logical relationship between them. Just as *manifestatio* is the final purpose of the building of the *Summa*, so does clarity of 'view', the intelligible appreciation of the edifice, seen either from outside or inside, seem above all to preoccupy the architect. The systematisation of the theological composition—'arrangement according to a system of homologous parts and parts of parts'—is quite naturally expressed, in the visual order of architecture, by the thirteenth-century promotion of the principle of the bay. The body of the building is strictly divided into distinct bays, each of which is subdivided into storeys or fractions, and certain forms—the window, the bays of the *triforium*—are made up of yet smaller component parts, of the same character, however, as the dominant pattern. Here, in spatial or surface composition, we find a system of hierarchical divisions in terms of their 'logical pattern', whereby clarity is achieved through the opposition of the component parts and confers intelligibility on the whole structure. These observations are evidently sound. Perhaps the problem of the 'rationalism' of Gothic architecture (which since Pol Abraham's thesis has given rise to so many controversies) can be completely solved in the light of these ideas. The strict structural functionalism, upheld by Viollet le Duc and his school, is doubtless a mere illusion; the function

of an architectural form is always multiple—structural, ‘logical’ (insofar as it shows the connexions and makes plain the role or the place of each element), plastic, and also, as Sauer has proved, symbolic. The very language of the Middle Ages—and Panofsky’s philological virtuosity is displayed in this thesis—expresses structural functions (*arcus singulariter voluti* for pointed arches; buttress for broken arch). The ‘logical’ functions of forms are certainly even more convincing in Gothic art; the architectonic elements are articulated, linked with one another, ‘branching out’ like an actual method of thinking.

Even the evolution of architecture between 1140 and 1270, in the original centre of both the scholastic and Gothic movements—a circle of a hundred miles round Paris—may be compared with the development of scholastic reasoning, its pursuit of final solutions, of the ultimate reconciliation of contradictory possibilities, which proceeds by way of dialectical leaps and contrasts (*videtur quod . . . sed contra . . . respondeo dicendum . . .*). Panofsky tries to show how this opposition of contradictory

tendencies, finally reconciled, is expressed in the evolution of the Gothic façade (with the difficult problem of the siting of the rose window), and in the development of the *triforium* or in that of the piers.

Some of the conclusions in this part of the book are not in accordance with the generally accepted theories (particularly in France), especially with the view that the achievement of ‘final solutions’ and of the ‘resolutions’ of contrary tendencies is to be found in the art of Pierre de Montereau at Saint-Denis, or in the Cologne Cathedral. But the theory will not be weakened by the possibility of controversy with regard to any particular problem. Its value lies essentially in its method and the competence with which it is used. Panofsky’s method is one which closely links artistic phenomena with the main currents of philosophical or scientific thought in terms of their formal or symbolic relations. As in his already established work on proportions, perspective, or the ‘iconology’ of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, this method leads to fruitful syntheses in more than one branch of the humanities.