

# The Religious Fanaticism and “Odd Coincidences” of Gothic Architectural Art

Liang Yan<sup>1, a</sup>, Zhenzhen Sun<sup>2, b, \*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Architecture and Urban-Rural Planning, Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu 611830, China;

<sup>2</sup>College of Forestry, Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu 611830, China.

<sup>a</sup>51027540@qq.com, <sup>b</sup>1564052398@qq.com

**Keywords:** Gothic architecture, religious belief, architectural art, aesthetics.

**Abstract.** While satisfying the human survival concept, architecture also needs to give us the comfort of inner spirit and the appeal of sensual aesthetics. As "coagulating music", architecture is the material carrier of our spiritual world, and it also reflects its aesthetic significance. In the thousands of years of architectural history in the West, Gothic architecture is included with its own unique value, so that architectural art and religious belief can be perfectly combined. It is a form of Gothic architecture that can shock people and purify people's minds through vision. Gothic architecture originated in the middle ages of Europe. It is the most important art heritage in Europe. It is the concrete manifestation of the theological system and aesthetic thought of the times.

## 1. Introduction

In 313 A.D., Constantine, filial emperor of the East Rome, promulgated the edict of Milan. The Christian (Catholic) tagged with "pagan" was finally legalized. From then on it replaced the Greek culture and became the most important representative of the western culture. The edict has been influencing the world until today. The devout Christians, who were no longer arrested and massacred, came out of the underground tombs and from the "Church of the dwellings". They developed by dint of the "Brazil Rica" building in Rome, forming centralized churches, Byzantine churches, and Rome-style churches. The development of the Christian Church art lasted for thousands of years, and reached its peak in the art of Gothic cathedral in the "dark" middle ages. It was precisely because of the legality of Christianity that established its cultural status in the whole of Europe, which made other religious factions be severely attacked and regarded as pagan. Christianity was the most distinctive in the whole of the middle Ages, which will also affect the politics, economy, culture and ideology at that time, making the Christian ideas everywhere. As part of the culture, Gothic church embodies the religion in its form expression, art processing and ideological presentation, and combines architectural art with religious belief perfectly.

## 2. The Features of Gothic Church Art

The features of Gothic church art are the spires which represent religious fanaticism, the ribbed vaults which bring the upward visual sense, the arched buttress made by the technology bottleneck, the beam of the visual game, and the window glass of the illusion of heaven, the beam column of visual game, and the colored window glass that gives illusion of heaven. Through the influence of the external factors of the architectural technology, the visual motive of the vertical development of the Gothic architecture is reflected, which fully embodies the belief in the pursuit of eternity, breaking away from the world and transcending the life of the present world in the Christian religious context, that is, the longing and yearning for heaven. Gothic architecture is produced in a specific historical period, creating buildings that can be comparable to heaven's work, such as the Cathedral of Cologne in Germany, the Notre Dame de Paris in France, the Church of Saint Deny, the Chartres Cathedral, the Church of Cuomo in Italy, and the Cathedral of Vienna in Austria.

## **2.1 Gothic Church and Culture.**

As the two systems of western culture, there is a common feature of Greek culture and Christian culture, that is, "dialogue with God in the same world and listening to the teachings of God". In particular, Christianity believes that "the world is a sea of bitterness, and that it is infinite happiness to be addicted to God". Whether the mythical Babylon pagoda or the romantic Christian Church, architectural art is used to repose the awe of God and the yearning for the kingdom of heaven. In this time dimension for more than one thousand years, the "God" has become the incarnation of "beauty", only to construct the building according to the intention of God and obedience to the call and grace of God, can we reach the side of God. Christians no longer become the food of lions in the fights. Jesus says "the poor are blessed", "the rich will be more difficult to get into the heaven than the camels get through the eye of the needle", and "all the wealth of King Solomon does not add up to a lily of the wilderness". When the barbarians of the Goths, the Vikings, the Germans and the vandals invaded the continent, the barbarian rulers was in fear of inability to enter heaven after the bloody slaughter. Whether the people at the bottom who suffer from misery, the eroding and decadent noblemen, or the rulers with their hands full of blood, they use the desire to set up the Church straight to the sky to sacrifice them in the present world. With the improvement of the economic level of Western Europe after tenth Century and the consolidation of the feudal system, the mass missionary activities brought by the Crusades made the spread and influence of Christianity greatly enhanced. The "harmonious combination" of economic development and religious fanaticism has provided conditions for the "monument-type" churches. The tall, sharp arches of the early twelfth Century old Gothic buildings have become an important symbol of the Christian Architectural art, and the vertical vision is distinguished from the vision of the oriental architecture.

## **2.2 Gothic Churches and Materials.**

Gothic architecture originated in the middle ages which was called "Dark Age" by historians. It can be called the "cathedral" era for art historians. The amount of stone used to build churches in the whole era is far beyond the amount of stone used in the ancient Egyptian period to build Pyramid, which embodies the social psychology of people under the great religious environment. The worshipping hot pillow for the giant stone must be produced in the madness of religion, for any religion is characterized by the pursuit of the immortality of the soul and spiritual transcendence. Stone material itself has strong texture and mysterious sense of people, just to meet this requirement. Therefore, stone architecture provides the Westerners with a historical opportunity developing from worship to aesthetics, which fully embodies the western complex of "loving stone". The stones are used in Gothic architecture to write a brilliant architectural epic.

## **2.3 Gothic Church and Technology.**

When there is a contradiction between the idea of God and the reality of architecture, what happens is the collapse of church buildings. In the illusion era of belief, architectural technology could not bear the religious desires of people, which could explain the construction of a church would cost decades or hundreds of years, because people did not realize that their free will had been imposed on nature at that time, and what their longing for was that nature is created by God in order to solve the contradiction between them, the flying buttress came into being. The early flying buttress was only used to solve the structural and mechanical problems of the building. It was used to support the outward thrust of the building wall, depriving partial load-bearing pressure of the wall, so that the building could be built higher and not collapse, but it was only the "supporting role" of the building, which was hidden by the theme building. Later, people found that the flying buttress has the beauty of mechanics, which is used as part of the beauty of the building. People carve and decorate on the flying buttress, which appear towering, lofty, light and beautiful. This also fully confirms architectural technology can be perfectly combined with art.

## **3. The Aesthetic Characteristics of Gothic Church Art**

The external features of Gothic architecture are mainly pointed arch and flying buttress, while the inner characteristics of Gothic architecture give people the feeling of "high, sharp and light". When

entering Gothic cathedral, people's gaze will rise uncontrollably. The cross ribs and beam columns play a vital role here. The formation of flying buttress shares the mechanical pressure of columns and walls. On the basis of the Rome column, the beam column is divided into several finer styles, without losing the mechanical effect, it makes the sturdy and vigorous columns of the original visually more delicate and erect and the space more steep and tall. The columns are no longer the barrel shape. The combination of many thin columns emphasizes the vertical lines in the interior space of the building. During this period, the Rome style column cap also disappeared. From the visual point of view, the column was no longer only to support the vault. The beautiful lines formed by the beams grew out of the land, making the interior space more light and wide. The Gothic cathedral roofs are previously characterized by the dome structure of Byzantine and Rome style barrel arches. However, these two roof structures cannot have the upward visual sense of cross ribbed vault of Gothic cathedral. The cross rib vault is changed from the Rome barrel vault, which makes the height and span of the vault not to be limited. The four edges formed by the cross rib vault are gathered at one point, which guides people's upward view and gives people a visual hint of "upward". Therefore, it is unavoidable to appreciate Gothic architecture causing pain in the neck. Take Cologne Cathedral as an example, this Catholic Church in Cologne, Germany, is known as the most perfect example of Gothic cathedral architecture. The wide and high proportion of the hall has reached an astonishing 1:3.8. It is the narrowest proportion in all Gothic churches. In addition, the transcendental psychological effect is produced from the gallery of cross ribs, vertical and upright columns, and a strong sense of upward movement brought by a pair of octagonal towers and sculptures in the southwest and couples of pinnacles.

The colored window glass further enhances the Gothic architectural art. The Gothic architecture began in twelfth Century, which is also the dawn of the beginning of modern European civilization. In this period, the early stage of the universities was established on the basis of the monastery. The successive establishment of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge questioned the religion, and the public questioned the stories recorded in the Bible. When religion and politics are challenged, both will turn their attention to "art". Even though the sun doesn't pierce the window glass, it can make the sun shine into the church, which just answers the question in the Bible story, "why did Maria give birth to Jesus without being pregnant?" The Gothic church wall not only is the main force that supports the buildings like the Rome style church, but also provides the scientific conditions for the production of the window glass and makes the window glass have the enclosure function of the whole wall. Colored window glasses mainly red and blue. Red represents the blood of Christ and blue represents heaven, which makes the glass have symbolic significance. The Arabs invented the arches and the glass, but the Europeans developed both of them. People adjoin pieces of glass with lead and draw a biblical story on the glass to publicize the Christian doctrine to all the people who do not know the Latin word, the same as the painting sculpture. Its function is the same as paintings and sculptures. It is the colored window glass that makes the mysterious and colorful landscape inside the church, changes the lack of light and oppression in the Rome style church due to the small windows, and expresses the ideal of longing for the kingdom of heaven. Colored window glass replaces the entire wall, making the whole building space more transparent and making the space effect perfectly combined with religious ideas. The line between "present world" and "the kingdom of heaven" "appears at the moment when the organ in the church rings out in a hoarse noise, the angelic children sing the carols, and biblical story is processed by the sunshine into a colorful "petal of light", sprinkling on every corner of the church and on the face of every devotees. Is it really that important to distinguish rationality and sensibility, materialism and idealism, right and wrong, religion and art?

Gothic architecture came into being before the Renaissance. At that time, architecture, painting (mosaic), and sculpture had not developed independently. The paintings and sculptures in Gothic architecture depict the stories of the Bible. In the Christian doctrine, Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden and they had "original sin". People are baptized in the church from births, marriage to their deaths. Therefore, instead of ideal, strong, sunny, and beautiful bodies in the Greek's paintings and sculptures, the human bodies in the Gothic art are tightly wrapped by clothing. The bodies on the paintings and sculptures are deformed, dry, serious, bitter and astringent. Just as the

gilded statue of the virgin Maria is carved on the central tower in the Church of Duomo in Italy, and the number of sculptures carved by the church is more than 2000, known as Gothic architecture with the most sculptures. The exterior decoration of the Church of Duomo is so complicated that the number of the minarets is over 135, and each of the spires has a sculpture. It looks like a building forest from a distance, and the visual effect is spectacular. The Final Judgment engraved in the middle gate of Notre Dame de Paris enables people to fear and repent in the face of sculpture, and to repent their sins by repentance. The "weariness of the mind, the tendency of fantasy, the constant despair and the hunger for warmth" naturally make people believe that the world is a sea of bitterness, and that life is a test. They believe in the religion which regards worshipping God as a supreme happiness and converting to God as the primary obligation. The endless horror and infinite hope, the flaming and the endless description of the hell, the ideas of the bright kingdom of heaven and the paradise are excellent nourishment for the suffering or trembling heart. On such a basis, Christianity rules people's hearts, inspires art and makes use of artists. When people face the religious problems of heaven, earth and hell, the Gothic architecture makes a comprehensive interpretation of "beauty".

### **References**

- [1] Liu Yue. 2008. *A Comparative Outline of Chinese and Western Architectural Aesthetics*, Fudan University Press, No. 111.
- [2] (French) Danner. 1963. *Art Philosophy*, People's Literature Publishing House, No. 51-52.