

**Summary**  
**Gothic without god?**  
**The symbolic meanings of 19<sup>th</sup> century**  
**religious architecture**

Until recently 19th century religious art has been considered of lower importance, lacking in artistic value and deep meaning. The book aims to show that religious architecture in the era of historicism had as much serious symbolic meaning as in earlier times. This was mentioned by numerous contemporary authors writing about the rebirth of the study of 19<sup>th</sup> century symbolism (L. Cloquet, ks. Auber, Józef Łepkowski).

The second chapter gives a short review of the concepts of symbols in religious architecture from the Middle Ages to Baroque. The author claims that the symbolic thinking had always been present in Christian architecture. In both, in Medieval and modern times three basic ideological layers are to be found. Firstly, symbolic representations may be rooted in archetypes. In the case the experience of *sacrum*, the idea of *axis mundi* and the cosmological order of the world, a magical meaning of numbers and geometric figures was referred to. Secondly, religious architecture had a theological meaning resulting from the exegesis of biblical texts and a general conviction of a multilevel meaningfulness of all the creation (*sensus litteralis* and *sensus spiritualis*). Thirdly, the symbolic meanings could grow from the interception of ancient heritage and recognizing it as a timeless ideal of culture. The first layer organized thinking in all the eras discussed, influenced on the level of primal associations. The second layer was blooming particularly in the Middle Ages but it was also explored in the times of Counterreformation, Baroque, and sometimes in Renaissance. Finally, the third layer, which started to be important in the Neoclassicism, was characteristic for the whole modern era legitimizing the use of the ancient language of architecture in the religious building.

The period of Neoclassicism that is discussed in the third chapter observed the end of the predominant concept of architecture since the times of Renaissance, based on the views of Vitruvius. Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand wrote in his book *Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique* (1802) that the aim of architecture is 'utility' and being 'economic' as the only universal rule necessary for the art of building. Architecture is not

the skill of creating 'ornamental' buildings, using the classical column orders and the symbolism necessary. Durand's theory was fully reductionist, thus, a symbolic meaning was rather lacking there. However, Neoclassicism worked out a new concept of the symbolic meanings based on the emotional perception of building. On its basis the rules of *architecture parlante* were formed. According to them a building should speak about its destiny with its appearance; so, a church should look like a church.

The decline of Vitruvian ideas resulted in a need to elaborate new theoretical bases of architecture, which is discussed in the fourth chapter. Many authors have discussed the rules of geometry, which was treated many times symbolically and the relationship between particular geometric figures with the rules controlling the world and religious symbolism was discovered (August Reichensperger, Friedrich Hoffstadt, Joseph Görres).

The bases of Christian architecture demanded more precision, and this is discussed in the fifth chapter. Geometrical rules were universal because they were patterns according to which God had created the world. Christian identity forced crossing schemes comprehensible for everyone. Christian architecture should display not only universal rules but also Christian spirituality, which can be achieved through the forms which symbolise Christian identity. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a concept of Christian art and style was born – *architecture parlante*, which through adequate forms would symbolise the Christian character of churches.

The significance of religious buildings resulting from the historical style applied with Christian provenance and the emotions aroused was still of a general nature. It allowed for relating to the idea of the Christian spirit, which was religious, desired heaven, and wanted to rise 'mystically' towards it (Gothic) or humbled itself before God's wrath (Romanesque Art); however, it did not give any basis to describe the character of the building as 'confessionary'. Thus, in Catholicism, Medieval theological and liturgical treatises were used to find bases for the symbolic interpretation for the whole church, its parts, and decorations in them.

The sixth chapter analyses texts of the treatises from France, Germany, Poland, and partially from the UK, all of which have been forgotten and not used since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, on the theme of the symbolical meaning of Catholic churches. It also attempts to interpret materials in the context of such fundamental terms as style, *sacrum*, and a representation.

*Trans. by Beata and Rob Trapnell*