VI. PRAGMATISM: INSTRUCTION

1. THE DIDACTIC FUNCTION OF ART

An Athenian Courtesan, we are told, forsook at once the habitual vices of her profession on seeing the decent dignities of a Philosopher, as represented in a portrait; and the terrors of the day of judgment operated so forcibly, by means of a picture, on the imagination of a King of Bulgaria, that he instantly embraced the religion, which held out such punishments, and invited with rewards equally transcendant. (Viscount Sidmouth, "On the Affinity between Painting and Writing, in Point of Composition")

The pragmatic theory of art is so named because it regards art as a means to an end, as having the practical function of creating certain responses in the audience. Further, since the audience represents, as it were, the goal of art, it becomes more important than the individual artist, the universe he portays, or the art object itself. One end of pragmatic art is pleasure and the other is instruction, but ordinarily the two have been regarded throughout history as inseparable twins. For instance, Horace wrote in On the Art of Poetry that "poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life." Sir Philip Sidney stated in An Apologie for Poetrie that poetry was "a speaking picture" whose aim is "to teach and delight"; and Samuel Johnson declared in the "Preface to Shakespeare" that "the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing." It is, then, perhaps artificial and misleading to treat pleasure and instruction separately, but at the same time one might justifiably do so by recalling that although pleasure is probably an inevitable adjunct to instruction in art (though not necessarily in other types of communication), instruction is not required of pleasure, or so at least thought those in the Art for Art's Sake group, who sought to banish pleasure's ugly, didactic sister. Also, whether pleasure and instruction are inseparable or not, it is true that different ages have chosen to emphasize one or the other, and there is implicit in this fact a distinction of degree that allows for individual analysis.

We see, for example, a shift in emphasis from instruction to pleasure occurring during the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Joseph Warton complained that the art of his time was too much given over to instruction, and he expressed the hope in his preface to *Odes on Various Subjects* (1746) that his poems might return poetry to its proper middle course:

> The public has been so much accustomed of late to didactic poetry alone, and essays on moral subjects, that any work where the imagination is much indulged will perhaps not be relished or regarded. . . . But as he [the author] is convinced that the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far, and as he looks upon invention and imagination to be the chief faculties of a poet, so he will be happy if the following odes may be looked upon as an attempt to bring back poetry into its right channel.

In the hands of the Romantics, poetry did indeed return to what Warton considered its right channel; for they, too, reacted against the excessive didacticism of the preceding age, and with a unanimity that made for success. Coleridge feared that the moral of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was too explicit, and Keats unequivocally expressed his dislike of moralistic verse when he wrote his friend Reynolds, "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us . . ." (3 February 1818). In America, Poe spoke of "the heresy of *The Didactic*." The best poem, he argued, "is a poem and nothing more" and should be "written solely for the poem’s sake" ("The Poetic Principle"). In time and in sentiment, Poe is not far from Théophile Gautier’s declaration of Art for Art’s Sake in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. "Some one has said somewhere," Gautier wrote, "that literature and the arts influence morals. Whoever he was, he was undoubtedly a great fool."

From Gautier’s point of view, there would have been very many great fools during the age of Victoria; for, even though these and other writers were calling for less didacticism in art if not its total elimination, probably the large majority of audience and artists alike retained the traditional faith in art as an instructional medium. As a matter of fact, that the outcries against didacticism continued throughout the nineteenth century and culminated in the Aesthetic movement clearly reveals the existence of an immediate and formidable danger, that is to say, of moralistic art. If, however, this minority did not succeed
in expunging instruction from art altogether, it did partly win its goal by gaining for art the concept that instruction should be indirect instead of direct and that the didactic element should be subtle and subordinate. We shall investigate this change presently, but first we should consider what artists meant to achieve by means of art.

II. THE DIDACTIC SOLUTION TO THE EXPRESSIVE DILEMMA

Revivals of old styles can never be a success, unless we reproduce the tone of thought of the age that gave them birth. (A Cambridge Graduate, “As to a New Style”)

Ancient feelings and sentiments . . . alone . . . can restore pointed architecture to its former glorious state; without it all that is done will be a tame and heartless copy, true as far as the mechanism of the style goes, but utterly wanting in that sentiment and feeling that distinguishes ancient design. (A. Welby Pugin, Contrasts)

One need not rely exclusively and indirectly upon reactions against didactic art to establish its existence in Victorian times, for there is ample direct evidence of it as an artistic goal. Frequently, writers speak of art as exerting a general, civilizing influence. John Tupper, for example, declared in the Germ that the function of art was to humanize and that art should become “a more powerful engine of civilization” (“The Subject in Art, No. II,” March 1850). At other times art’s didactic purpose is somewhat more specific, as when James Fergusson writes of moral improvement: the true object of art is “to win man to virtue and goodness, and to civilise and elevate him. . . .” Or, there are religious overtones, as when Cram explains the title of his book, The Ministry of Art, to mean “that function which I think art has performed, and always can perform, as an agency working toward the redemption of human character. . . .” Sometimes the motive is specifically artistic. In reviewing the Great Exhibition, Ralph Nicholson Wornum believed the chief question to be asked was, “How far our manufacturers may improve their taste through the present Great Exhibition of Works of Industry now established in Hyde Park?” The entire purpose of the Exhibition to Wornum was to provide a lesson
in taste whereby manufacturers may learn to improve the artistic aspect of their products.

One need not look far to discover why so many Victorians were ready to follow Prince Albert's lead in placing the arts in service to the public, for the march to democracy—or in Carlyle's phrase, the Niagara leap to it—required education of those who were rapidly rising in society and acquiring wealth and power for themselves. Under the old system an ignorant majority was no disadvantage—to the contrary, it was a real advantage in forestalling insurrection and such lesser evils as leveling. But under the new system, it was an absolute necessity that this new captain of industry, this new MP, this new buyer of pictures, and all those collectively rising up from the faceless masses of Disraeli's other England be properly equipped to discharge their responsibilities in a democratic nation. To leave them ignorant would be to court disaster, or, as Arnold put it, the alternative to culture is anarchy. Nor were the leaders of this age of awakening social consciousness unmindful of the poor, as we see in the establishment of the Working Men's College, where Rossetti and others taught, and of the Kyrle Society, founded in 1877 by Miranda Hill to introduce art to the lower classes. Both of these groups were formed on a principle set forth by Charles Kingsley earlier in the century, which was that art provided a refuge for those surrounded by ugliness and a subtle education for those standing in need of moral improvement:

Picture-galleries should be the workman's paradise, and gardens of pleasure, to which he goes to refresh his eyes and heart with beautiful shapes and sweet colouring, when they are wearied with dull bricks and mortar, and the ugly colourless things which fill the workshop and the factory. For believe me, there is many a road into our hearts besides our ears and brains; many a sight, and sound, and scent, even, of which we have never thought at all, sinks into our memory, and helps to shape our characters. . . .

("The National Gallery.—No. 1," 1848)

Architecture joined with the other arts generally in being considered an instructive instrument for social change and with a greater opportunity of providing culture to the masses than the other arts because of its public nature. Kingsley might be
hard pressed to lure a single workman into the National Gallery, but thousands passed the building daily. And like the other arts, architecture's goal was broadly to elevate morally, religiously, artistically, in short, to be a civilizing influence in society. Yet, as we saw in chapter 3, the Revivalists had worked themselves into a corner by adopting the expressive theory that art reflects the society from which it springs. Now it was obvious that Victorian England with its materialism, religious doubt, and divided aims was a far different nation from the medieval England of idealism, faith, and unity. In fact, some of the leaders of the Revival, Pugin for instance, repeatedly drew contrasts between England's present, fallen state and its golden age. How, then, could the same style of architecture represent, according to the expressive theory, two vastly different societies? For one thing, contemporary England and medieval England were not, despite the contrasts so popular in the early part of the century, completely dissimilar. The nation was, after all, the same, the people were ethnically no different, and the climate was as ever. The Revivalists believed that all these things were important determinants of architectural style and that the continuance of them from the Middle Ages to the present made Gothic, which had arisen as a natural and spontaneous expression of these conditions, a far better candidate for revival than classical architecture, which was formed by foreign nations, alien people, and a happier clime. But only the blind would fail to see that changes had occurred between that age and this, and that reform was necessary for the successful revival of Gothic. Therefore, in addition to joining the other arts in an attempt to civilize society for the sake of society, neo-Gothic architecture took as its special didactic goal the reformation of society for the sake of the Gothic Revival; for only by creating a society similar in ideals to that which originally delivered Gothic could neo-Gothic, according to the principles of expressionism, flourish.

The architects of the Revival, then, took advantage of the didactic theory of art to save Gothic architecture from the predicament into which it had been led by the expressive theory;
and in bringing the two artistic approaches together, they postulated a reciprocal causal relationship between art and society in which art is both product and creator of the society in which it exists. Ralph Adams Cram best described the relationship when he wrote, "Every art is at the same time vocative and dynamic: it voices the highest and the best; it subtly urges to emulation; it is perhaps the greatest civilizing influence in the world." Charles Eastlake, in saying that for Pugin and others architecture was only a means to an end, grasped only half the relationship—the didactic part—and was only half right. He was right in saying that architecture was a means of reforming society, but wrong in failing to see that reformation was but a partial or immediate goal and that ultimately the Revivalists were attempting to restore Gothic by creating a society for which it would be the natural expression. On the other hand, Esme Wingfield-Stratford went in the other direction by emphasizing the expressive aspect and neglecting the didactic. Here is his explanation for the Revival's failure:

But after we have made every allowance, we shall find ourselves forced to the reluctant conclusion that the Gothic Revival was a failure, and not a very splendid failure at that. Its advocates founded their case on a simple fallacy of putting the cart before the horse. It was no doubt arguable that the original Gothic had expressed an ideal of civilisation saner and more spiritual than that of laissez-faire and devil-take-the-hindmost. But it did not follow that you could revive that civilisation by counterfeiting its effects, nor that such a counterfeit could be mistaken for anything else than what it was.

This is a useful example since it comes from a nonspecialist and as such probably represents a more broadly typical attitude than Eastlake's. The problems in this argument, especially the last sentence of it, are mainly semantic.

First, the word counterfeit not only prejudices the case by its pejorative connotation but seriously misrepresents the intentions of the leaders of the Revival. As we have already seen, these men were not out even to copy, much less to counterfeit; for they repeatedly insisted that the architect should imitate—that is, follow principles—and not simply and slavishly copy forms. It was all right for the apprentice to copy old buildings
in his sketchbook as a means of learning his craft, but the prac­ticing architect should delve beneath forms to uncover principles when he conceives his designs. Pugin's primary message is that now that people are familiar with forms the time has come to understand the principles behind them and that these principles, which his books elucidate, should guide the Revival. He and others consistently derided the folly of trying to duplicate exactly, or counterfeit, old buildings. A Victorian building should obviously be Victorian, not deceptively medieval; it should be a modern building constructed on medieval prin­ciples.

Second, they were not attempting to "revive" medieval civilization but to reform modern society by appealing to cer­tain medieval ideals, and there is a great difference between the two. To surrender to the spell of history and live out the past everyone recognized as delusion, and not even those who most adamantly believed in the superiority of the Middle Ages were so bemused as to think those days could be recaptured. The Eglinton Tournament was great fun, even in the mud and rain, yet no one made a habit of that sort of thing. What, in fact, the Revivalists were aiming for was compromise. On the one hand, the form—that is to say, Gothic architecture—should adapt to modern society, and could adapt if architects based their de­signs on general principles. On the other hand, through the agency of art, and architecture in particular, modern society might be reformed so that it shared more in common with medieval civilization and so that, therefore, it might not only be the better but also the more able to express itself naturally through the Gothic style.

With these two points made, I am prepared to argue that one can, theoretically at least, reform society according to an ideal by imitating the artistic manifestation of that ideal. In other words, it does follow from the notion that art expresses society that art can, in turn, change society; for if the two are as in­timately and organically related as the expressive theory re­quires, then there should be a reciprocal action corresponding to that which exists between words and concepts. Words ex-
press concepts and, in the case of onomatopoetic or echo words, take their sound—that is, their form—directly from the concept. But the causal factor operates in the other direction, too, since the forms of words partly determine their meanings, that is, the concepts that they represent. Similarly, the Gothic Revivalists believed not only that architecture was the concrete expression (the form) of a time spirit (the concept) but that it could, in turn, shape that spirit just as their artistic colleagues believed that art in general could elevate and civilize. They of course did not succeed in restoring medieval ideals, and Victorian society succumbed to materialism as surely as Tennyson's knights, who found Arthur's ideals too stringent; but if Wingfield-Stratford's explanation is correct enough practically speaking, it still ignores the theoretical soundness of the Revival's approach.

Beginning, then, with the premise that the leaders of the Revival meant to introduce through their art medieval ideals that would reform society and create thereby a congenial climate for the growth of Gothic architecture, we may now ask what, specifically, they wanted most to change. Of the various social determinants of art—climate, nationality, customs—some, as I have said, remained constant and required no or little alteration. But the one determinant that everyone, both Goth and Greek, almost universally agreed to exert the most powerful influence on art and that all acknowledged to have suffered the most considerable transformation was religion. Tennyson's parson spoke for many in lamenting “the general decay of faith/Right through the world” (“The Epic”). For those, like Newman, who carried the restoration of faith to its ultimate end, this meant “going over” to Rome. Pugin, therefore, told his students at Oscott in 1838 that the Gothic Revival was part of the return to Catholicism:

All I have to implore you is to study the subject of ecclesiastical architecture with true Catholic feeling. Do not consider the restoration of ancient art as a mere matter of taste, but remember that it is most closely connected with the revival of the faith itself, and which all important object must ever demand our most fervent prayers, and unwearied exertions.
Others, like Street, stopped short of taking the final, extreme step and settle on High Church Anglicanism, but the aim to restore faith through architecture was the same. For Street the church building has a “power to promote and foster belief,” and there should be in these buildings “such arrangements of the interior as would make it difficult, if not impossible, for people long to ignore those truths which the building is intended to teach.”

From regarding their mission as in part religious, it was but a short way for the leaders of the Revival to see themselves as divines. Cram wrote that those who promote Gothic architecture “do so less as artists than as missionaries,” and Street went further to assert the superiority of the religious artist to the preacher: “Who among preachers can hope to preach as the gifted artist does? It is not only that the sermons are in stones or on walls or canvas, but that they are read and believed by generation after generation of the faithful. The greatest orator has no thought so comforting as this.”

III. THE DIDACTIC METHOD

How rev'rend is the Face of this tall Pile,

It strikes an Awe
And Terror on my aking Sight...

William Congreve, _The Mourning Bride_

Hail countless Temples! that so well befit
Your ministry; that, as ye rise and take
Form, spirit and character from holy writ,
Give to devotion, wheresoe'er awake
Pinions of high and higher sweep, and make
The unconverted soul with awe submit.

William Wordsworth, _Ecclesiastical Sonnets_

Then gazing up 'mid the dim pillars high,
The foliaged marble forest where ye lie,
_Hush_, ye will say, _it is eternity!_
This is the glimmering verge of Heaven, and these
The columns of the heavenly palaces!

Matthew Arnold, “The Church of Brou”
For the good of the church, for the good of the people, for the good of art, architects and churchmen sought to revive in England an age of faith, but how exactly was architecture to play its part? It is obvious how writing can be put to didactic use, but it is less apparent how the visual arts, and architecture in particular, can be instruments of instruction. The answer lies, I think, in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, where Shelley explains how the poet can reform society:

I have, what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms, "a passion for reforming the world." . . . But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical composition solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of happiness.

This statement embodies in part the lesson Shelley and others of his generation had learned from the betrayal of the French Revolution. Amidst the rubble of the old institutions, new "reasoned principles of moral conduct" had arisen; but since the fundamental nature of the people had not changed, these principles were trampled by a despotic reign more dangerously tyrannical than the one it replaced. Shelley's poem shows that as soon as the basic, essential change occurs in Prometheus, as soon as he turns from hate to love, his freedom follows inevitably and automatically. But more to the point, the statement also embodies the aesthetic shift of emphasis from didacticism toward pleasure to which I referred earlier. Shelley bans simple instruction to prose and reserves for poetry the portrayal of beauty, which, by appealing to the imagination, will touch the soul of the reader and elevate his moral character. The allotment of "reasoned principles of moral conduct" to prose and of "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" to poetry is based, then, upon the Romantic distaste for too much morality and
too little art. There is also here the Romantic notion that art should appeal to the imagination and the heart rather than to the reason. One should not forget, however, that all this is from a poet who admittedly has "a passion for reforming the world" and that his intention is ultimately practical, for not only is didactic writing out of place in poetry but also it is less effective in reforming society. Its precepts will be ignored and trampled until there is a fundamental change of heart, and the beautiful idealisms of poetry are what can touch the heart and move it to follow the model of Prometheus.

The change that comes about, therefore, in Romantic poetry and is later continued in Victorian poetry is not that writers are less interested in instructing their readers and in improving society but that they believed these ends could more appropriately and more effectively be gained by the indirect method of beauty and pleasure than the direct method of didacticism. Furthermore, these writers achieve indirection not only by demonstrating rather than by preaching but also by using symbolism. Thus, Shelley shows how the world might be reformed through the example of Prometheus, who represents mankind and who, once he renounces hatred, is reunited with Asia, the symbol of love.

Although poetry may choose between direct and indirect methods, architecture by its nature must follow the indirect course; but since the Romantics had steered poetry onto the course that architecture must necessarily take, the two forms converged in their approaches to the reformation of society. We shall find, therefore, that ecclesiastical architecture used beauty and symbolism to lead people to God. Had not poetry altered its direction and so established the literary precedent, it is unlikely that architecture would have been considered so powerfully instructive.

Beauty had been exiled from religious worship in Dissenters' chapels and Anglican churches alike at least from the time of Cromwell and the Puritan revolt, if not as far back as the break with Rome and the dissolution of the monasteries. In 1774 Sir Joshua Reynolds and James Barry offered to decorate St. Paul's
free of charge, only to be refused by the bishop of London, who replied that he could never allow the cathedral to be so desecrated during his lifetime. In addition, behavior in church had degenerated so by the first decades of the nineteenth century that there are numerous accounts of sleeping, snacking, and chatting by inattentive and even boisterous members of the congregation. The restoration of beauty and decorum to Anglican churches and services came solely through the combined influence of the Gothic Revival and Ritualism.

In order for this change to come about, people had to be persuaded that instead of being inimical to religion art was, in Cram's words, "the handmaid of religion... the God-given language of religion." Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi argues against the Prior that earthly beauty is compatible with godliness, and Charles Kingsley earlier had said the same thing in prose:

Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful. Beauty is God's handwriting—a way-side sacrament; welcome it in every fair face, every fair sky, every fair flower, and thank for it Him, the fountain of all loveliness, and drink it in, simply and earnestly, with all your eyes; it is a charmed draught, a cup of blessing. ("The National Gallery.—No. 1")

There is in Kingsley's statement not simply a connection between beauty and God, but, more to the point, a view of beauty as a means of leading one to God, "the fountain of all loveliness." It is important to recognize this relationship between the two, for there has arisen what I consider to be a false distinction between the uses of ecclesiastical ritual (which very much involves church interiors and therefore includes architecture) as having either aesthetic or dogmatic motives. On the one hand, some have seen the Ritualistic movement as originating primarily from an aesthetic impulse in reaction to the bare churches and slovenly services of the preceding age. Furthermore, those who take this point of view sometimes draw parallels between the Ritualists and the Aesthetes, as J. W. Mackail, for example, does when he observes that when the movement spread into secular life it became "what was afterwards called Aestheticism." The implication of this attitude, especially be-
Fig. 25. The University Museum, Oxford. Another kind of architectural didacticism: the capitals are examples of different types of foliage, and the columns are examples of different types of stone. The building is as instructive as the exhibits it houses. Ironwork by F. A. Skidmore, of Coventry.
Fig. 26. Capital, University Museum, Oxford. Carving by James and John O'Shea, of Ballyhooey, Ireland.
cause of the link with aestheticism, is that ritual has little or no practical purpose. On the other hand, some have argued that ritual is basically dogmatic, being an attempt to set forth Tractarian doctrine (although they are careful to point out that the actual writers of the Tracts were indifferent to such matters). Thus, Vernon F. Storr was written that “the fundamental motive of the movement has been dogmatic, and is to be traced to Tractarian teaching”; and more recently James F. White has agreed that “the basic inclination of Ritualism was dogmatic and not artistic.”

I say this is a false distinction, whichever of the two points of view one takes, because the Revivalists, Ecclesiologists, and Ritualists recognized no such differences, believing as they did that beauty as beauty, with no specific symbolic or dogmatic function, had the practical purpose of creating an atmosphere of worship conducive to religious meditation. Or, to consider the matter from Kingsley’s perspective, all beauty is sacramental and therefore generally dogmatic. In this they naturally differed from the Puritans, who believed beauty distracted one’s thoughts from God since it was the creation either of man or the devil.

I am led, therefore, to disagree especially with Peter Collins, who compounds the error of perpetuating the distinction between beauty and dogma by asserting that the preoccupation with the dogmatic function of ritual resulted in ugliness. I am loath to argue with any of Collins’s statements in Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, by the far the best book we have on the subject, but it is impossible to agree with this interpretation:

The architectural programme of the Oxford Movement was put into effect by the Cambridge Camden Society, founded in 1839, and by its magazine, The Ecclesiologist, founded in 1841. Both were inspired by the ideal of what we would now call “functionalism”; that is to say, they were not primarily concerned with promoting beautiful churches, but with creating churches which would effectively serve the Anglo-Catholic requirements regarding ritual. Indeed, it can be convincingly argued that the Camden Society (or Ecclesiological Society, as it was later called) preferred a certain brutal ugliness to the more traditional notions of beauty, as may be seen in the most famous church of their most famous protégé, William Butterfield. “There is here to be observed the germ of the same dread of beauty, not to say the same deliberate preference of ugliness,
which so characterizes in fuller development the later paintings of Mr. Millais and his followers," *The Ecclesiologist* noted with satisfaction in a laudatory article published when All Saints', Margaret Street, London, was finally completed.

The fact is that, of the philosophical Trinity: the True, the Beautiful and the Good, it was only with truth and goodness that these reformers were really concerned.\(^{14}\)

Professor Collins misinterprets his evidence, for though it is true that the entire article in the *Ecclesiologist* is laudatory, the particular passage he quotes occurs in a paragraph citing faults with Butterfield's style and showing dissatisfaction rather than the contrary. The sentence in this paragraph immediately following the one Collins quotes is, "But these abatements do not in any way diminish our general admiration for the manly and austere design which is embodied in this church."\(^{15}\) Far, then, from approving the ugliness of Butterfield's church, the *Ecclesiologist* disapproved its ugliness, calling it an "abatement"; and without more convincing evidence, I should be reluctant to believe that those associated with the magazine did not think of beauty as inseparable from truth and goodness. As a matter of fact, I should go so far as to say that for them intentionally ugly ritual was a contradiction in terms. We shall find in the next chapter that functionalism did sometimes lead toward ugliness, but there the functional motive has nothing to do with ritualistic requirements.

It is wrong to distinguish between the aesthetic and dogmatic ends of ritual, but it is true that the architectural features auxiliary to ritual operated in two, indirect ways for the ultimate religious purpose: beauty and symbolism. These modes, in turn, reveal some radical differences between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes toward worship, and, beginning with beauty, there are at least three changes. First, as the church passed from the Age of Reason through the Romantic age of imagination, its services forsook the rational approach to God for the mysterious, and the church architect, correspondingly, sought through various means to reinforce this approach. For example, in the words of John Sedding, "By his divine craft the priest of form [the architect] can give to the
temple of God such an air of mystery and stillness, that you get a strange thrill of expectancy as you enter, and say, involuntarily, 'Surely the Lord is in this place.'" Second, and following from the rationalistic approach, in the eighteenth century the chief vehicle for the transmission of religion was the sermon, whose importance was signified not only by its length but, architecturally, by the dominating three-decker pulpits and the general interior design of auditory churches, which were made principally for hearing. When, however, churchmen came to see that the essence of Christianity was mysterious rather than rational, church interiors were rearranged accordingly to diminish the size of the pulpit, remove it to one side, and make the focal point the altar, whereon was enacted the chief mystery, the sacrament of Holy Communion. So diminished had the sermon become in relation to the architectural component of ritual that Robert Louis Stevenson placed the church building far above the sermon as the means of salvation and spoke of the sermon almost as if it were a profanation in so sacred a place. After describing the beauties of Noyon Cathedral, Stevenson comments.

I could never fathom how a man dares to lift up his voice to preach in a cathedral. What is he to say that will not be an anticlimax? For though I have heard a considerable variety of sermons, I never yet heard one that was so expressive as a cathedral. 'T is the best preacher itself, and preaches day and night; not only telling you of man's art and aspirations in the past, but convicting your own soul of ardent sympathies; or rather, like all good preachers, it sets you preaching to yourself,—and every man is his own doctor of divinity in the last resort. (An Inland Voyage)

This passage recalls Shelley's comments in the preface of Prometheus Unbound, for Stevenson seems to agree with Shelley that art's indirect message is more efficacious than the direct and overt instruction of prose.

Third, the Romantic concept of nature as sacramental, evident for example in the quoted remarks of Kingsley, controverted the Manichean dualism of Puritan theology. Since the body and its senses were no longer considered evil, one might piously appeal to the soul through the senses. Therefore, Isaac Williams explains that the church
Breathes life in ancient worship—from their graves
Summons the slumbering Arts to wait on her,
Music and Architecture, varied forms
Of Painting, Sculpture, and of Poetry;
These are allied to sense, but soul and sense
Must both alike find wing and rise to Heaven;
Both soul and body took the Son of man,
Both soul and body must in Him serve God.

_The Baptistery, 1842–44_

The success of the aesthetic road to salvation is illustrated by Pugin, who freely admitted that “the study of ancient ecclesiastical architecture was the primary cause of the change in my sentiments,” although he denied that his love of Gothic buildings was the sole cause for his conversion to Catholicism. In Pugin’s case architecture fulfilled its role quite properly and successfully, but what of such men as Burne-Jones and Pater who were drawn to church for the beauty of the ceremony and the building alone, with no thought of proceeding to the spiritual essence behind it? These liked ceremony for the sake of ceremony, not for the religious principles it expressed, and justified Anthony Trollope’s warning about ritualism: “Forms and ceremonies are undoubtedly good, as long as they are made the vehicles and appendages of true doings. But alas, for a man, or a people, when he or they mistake forms for things, and ceremonies for deeds” (The New Zealander). Most Victorian social critics were apprehensive about the materialistic tendencies in general of the age, and the fascination with ritual for its own sake is in a way the religious form of the overall trend. Pater attended the High Church services at St. Austin’s, London, conducted by his friend, the Reverend George Nugée. Nugée, like Trollope, was fearful lest forms be confounded with substance and once told Pater that “you quite misunderstand us. These ceremonies are but an outward expression of what is in our hearts. We don’t want mere sight-seers—or, rather, we want them only because we are in hopes that they may be led to become sincere Christians.” Pater responded to this argument by saying, “I can assure you, Mr. Nugée, I am interested in the Christian religion only from the fact of my
being Page-in-Waiting upon your Professor of Church History. The Church of England is nothing to me apart from its ornate services" (Thomas Wright, The Life of Walter Pater, vol. 2). For Pater and an increasing number of his contemporaries, the substance within the form had vanished, leaving only the shell of the chrysalis behind.

But on the whole these “sight-seers” were of a small enough number to pose no true threat. Instead, the real danger as perceived by most was that ritualism was leading the Anglican church ever more perilously in the direction of Rome, and some powerful voices were orchestrated against this movement: the queen was against it, Ruskin was against it, Disraeli was against it, Carlyle was against it, and Parliament, by passing the Public Worship Regulation Bill in 1874, sought to put an end to it. Still, all their efforts together did not prevail, and the present state of worship and of church interiors testifies to the ultimate victory of art in reestablishing its place in the church.

The second way in which architecture works for religious ends is symbolism, and here again one remarks an association with Romanticism. I have already said that symbolism is a mode of indirection, but beyond that it is also a means of expressing things that are ineffable in direct and literal discourse. When, therefore, the Romantics took as their task the description of mysterious and spiritual elements in the universe or of equally indefinable emotions within their own hearts, they were more or less compelled to have recourse to symbols. Coleridge wrote in the Biographia Literaria that “An IDEA, in the highest sense of the word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol.” When the Oxford movement followed the lead of Romantic artists and reinstated mystery to its proper place in religion after the lapse of rationalism, churchmen, like poets and painters, found that literal, direct discourse (i.e., the sermon) was inadequate for the expression of mystery, and they too turned to symbols, be they in the form of sacraments or of art. Ralph Adams Cram has explained this need for symbolical expression by saying that “the theological peculiarities of Geneva and Edinburgh can adequately be communicated by the spoken and unadorned
word: the marvelous mysteries of the Catholic Faith breathe themselves into the spiritual consciousness through the mediumship of art.\textsuperscript{18} In another comment Cram anticipates my argument in this chapter by declaring that art achieves this goal of communicating the mysteries of religion through beauty and symbolism. Each art, he writes, “is but a dialect of a normal language that reveals, in symbolical form and through the unsolvable mystery of beauty, all that men may achieve of the mystical knowledge of that Absolute Truth and Absolute Beauty that transcend material experience and intellectual expression, since they are of the essential being of God.”\textsuperscript{19}

In their introduction to William Durandus’s \textit{The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments}, John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb wrote from the same perspective Cram later adopted: “Architecture is an emblem of the invisible abstract, no less than Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”\textsuperscript{20} It is interesting that they should choose these two sacraments, for architecture was involved in both of them through the rearrangement of church interiors. Early in the Reformation the altar had been transformed into a table and moved out of the sanctuary and into the nave so that all could see. By the eighteenth century Communion was ordinarily celebrated only four times a year, and, since they were no longer used anyway, chancels were neglected or treated as storage areas. When, however, Communion was revived through frequent celebrations as the sacramental expression of the mysteries of Incarnation and Sacrifice, the table became once again an altar; it was restored to the holier environs of the sanctuary, high box pews obstructing sight of the altar were removed, and a center aisle made the altar the focal point upon entering the church. As for the baptismal font, it had been placed in the front of the church so that all could witness the sacrament; but when symbolism became so important, it was transferred to the rear of the church to show symbolically that it is by baptism that one enters the church.

In the end, perhaps it is not surprising that architecture should be involved in these two particular sacraments since
practically every architectural feature, from the smallest ornament to the general design, was thought to have religious significance. The ideal plan of neo-Gothic churches was cruciform to represent the cross, the apex of which should point eastward. The church interior was divided into the nave (the Church Militant), the chancel (the Church Expectant), and the sanctuary (the Church Triumphant). The chancel screen separated the laity from the clergy, and the crucifix atop it symbolized death as the separation between worldly life without the chancel and spiritual life within. In short, Gothic Revival architects were mindful of Neale’s and Webb’s statement “Sacramentality is that characteristic which so strikingly distinguishes ancient ecclesiastical architecture from our own,” and were attempting to recover that essential element. In doing so they were not copying mere forms but following fundamental principles, for they thought that religious motives lay behind the forms and that the forms were designed specifically to express religious truths. Pugin believed that the great argument for Gothic architecture was that “in it alone we find the faith of Christianity embodied, and its practices illustrated.” This faith, moreover, by expression through architectural forms is the very origin of the Gothic style, which he significantly was in the habit of designating as Christian: “The three great doctrines, of the redemption of man by the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross; the three equal persons united in one Godhead; and the resurrection of the dead,—are the foundation of Christian Architecture.” Pugin goes on to explain that the cross determines the general plan of the church, the Trinity determines the tripartite division of the interior and triangular shape of arches and tracery, and the resurrection determines the height and vertical lines.

This symbolical account of the origin of Gothic roused the Calvinistic ire of Ruskin, who attempted to show that the style arose from functional responses to climate. Northern roofs, Ruskin argued, have steep pitches to throw off snow, not to symbolize the resurrection. His contempt for such a preposterous theory, which he attributes to German critics, is everywhere apparent in this passage from The Stones of Venice:
We may now, with ingenious pleasure, trace such symbolic characters in the form; but we only prevent ourselves from all right understanding of history, by attributing much influence to these poetical symbolisms in the formation of a national style. The human race are, for the most part, not to be moved by such silken cords; and the chances of damp in the cellar; or of loose tiles in the roof, have, unhappily, much more to do with the fashions of a man’s house building than his ideas of celestial happiness or angelic virtue.  

In choosing a house rather than a church for his example, Ruskin misrepresents the symbolical theory, which depends upon the premise that the Gothic style is ecclesiastical in origin, but others accepted the premise and argued against the theory on its own terms. T. G. Jackson believed that Gothic features derived from structural requirements and that symbolic interpretations were imposed later. Robert Kerr satirized the symbolical theory by a fictitious dialogue between two yokels who ignorantly believe that the purpose of posts in a church is to support the roof. “Well now,” Kerr asks rhetorically, “are we seriously to suppose that the clodhoppers who fill a country church are really to see in those four piers the four evangelists?”

Pugin would not have argued with the functional use of either the posts or the pitched roofs, for everyone concerned with the Revival was committed to the functionalism of Gothic architecture and used that aspect of the style as a mainstay in attacking architectural shams. But to admit the functional purpose is not to discount the symbolical one, and Pugin showed how a pinnacle atop a flying buttress performed both roles by adding weight and therefore strength to the supporting member while at the same time symbolizing the resurrection by adding to the height. Furthermore, in believing that Gothic sprang from religious origins and that its distinctive forms were expressive of Christian principles they were right, as modern scholars have convincingly shown. Otto von Simson has explained in *The Gothic Cathedral* how the abbey church of St.-Denis, built in the twelfth century and the prototype of all subsequent Gothic churches, was designed by Abbot Suger as a symbol of heaven. He concludes that both the origin and popularity of Gothic derive from its symbolical nature:
In other words, the technical achievements that distinguish the first Gothic from Romanesque seem to have obeyed rather than preceded Suger's symbolic demands upon architecture, and it was his overriding desire to align the system of an ecclesiastical building with a transcendental vision that ultimately accounted for the transformation of Romanesque into Gothic. The instant and irresistible success of the new style in France was owing to its power as a symbol. In a language too lucid and too moving to be misunderstood, Suger's Gothic evoked an ideological message that was of passionate concern to every educated Frenchman.26

Although we are ready to agree with the findings of von Simson, in condemning the Gothic Revival for mixing morality with architecture and in disdaining the religious enthusiasm of its leaders we are perhaps too apt to forget that these men perceived first what we have only recently been able to prove and that they were as committed to the sacramentality of church architecture as their medieval forebears. Only by remembering this can we hope to understand why they believed Gothic architecture, and Gothic architecture alone, was suitable for Christian churches. For them the style was not an accident or even a sign of the religion but in the truest sense of the word a symbol of Christianity. That is, a sign arbitrarily represents something else but has no essential connection with it, which is why one could as easily choose any Greek letter as \( \pi \) to represent 3.14 if all would agree to the equation. But, as Coleridge says in *The Statesman's Manual*, a symbol "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative." Because symbols are intimately associated with what they represent, they cannot be interchanged as signs can. One cannot, for example, arbitrarily choose a color other than white to symbolize purity. Neither, since architecture is symbolical and shares with all symbols a participation in the reality that it represents, can one employ any style but Gothic to express Christianity. To attempt to employ Greek or Roman architectures, which are themselves symbolical expressions of pagan religions, to represent Christian doctrine is just as senseless as having the color green stand for purity and the color white stand for life. By extension, because architecture also expresses symbolically national character,
though not with the instructional intent of religion, secular buildings should be Gothic as well.

The leaders of the Gothic Revival, then, could not acquiesce to Carlyle's retailoring of metaphysical clothes, for the basic concept of Christianity, unlike that of nature, had remained constant, and the symbolical architectural dress which expressed that concept fit as well in the nineteenth century as it had when Abbot Suger designed it in the twelfth century. To be sure, a minor alteration here or there might be made to accommodate new building materials and techniques, but the essence of the style was still perfectly suitable, especially for the purposes of High Church Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Unless we recognize the importance these men placed upon architectural symbolism, both as a mode of instruction and as a means of expression, we can never hope to understand their single-minded and uncompromising devotion to the Gothic style.