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The Architecture of Lincoln Cathedral and the Institution of Justice

John Hendrix

The façade of Lincoln Cathedral reinforces the authority of the kings and Old and New Testament figures. The organization of the cathedral reinforces the hierarchical organization of a just society based on Christian morality, in facilitating the rituals of the worshippers and the clergy in the liturgical mass. The Dean's Eye and Bishop's Eye, the stained glass windows at the north and south ends of the great transept, reinforce the authority of the Dean and Bishop of the cathedral in the maintenance of the Christian ideal of the just, or the good. Most importantly, all of the details of the architecture of the cathedral reinforce the intellectual comprehension of the just or the good on the part of the worshipper. The details are designed to facilitate the ascension of the mind of the visitor from the physical particulars of sensual reality, the temptations of which are the source of unjust acts, to the intelligible universals of a metaphysical reality, which reinforce justice in the concept of the good, the universally just state.

In the *Republic* of Plato, a just, well-ordered state depends on the just, well-ordered soul of each individual. The cathedral institutes the well-ordered soul of each individual in order to facilitate a just state. The soul of each individual becomes well-ordered, through the experience of the architecture, as it ascends from the multiple particulars of experience to the universal laws which govern experience. This is enacted in the architecture through the transition from the compositions of the elevations and vaulting, in geometrical and mathematical relations, to the purity of the light in the stained glass windows, the spiritual light, or *lux spiritualis*, which conveys the universal concept of the just or the good. The mind of the viewer ascends from its material intellect, the *nous pathetikos* of Aristotle, which is passive and easily influenced, to an active intellect, the *nous poietikos* of Aristotle, which is a universal, divine intellect. As the active or divine intellect begins to participate in the mind of the viewer through the experience of the archi-

tecture, the viewer begins to understand the concept of justice in morality, in universal truth rather than individual need or desire.

The remains of the original Norman wall in the west front contain Norman sculpture from the time of Bishop Alexander. The figures represent incidents from Biblical history but are haphazardly arranged, suggesting that they were not original to Lincoln. The figures are three feet six inches tall, and are placed above eye level. From north to south, the figures depict the torments of the wicked, and Christ triumphant over Satan in the jaws of Hell. Jamb figures represent saints, Christ weighing souls, Lazarus taken up to Heaven, the expulsion of Adam and Eve, the call of Samuel, Samuel and Eli, and God's injunction to Noah. Other figures on the wall represent Man tilling the soil, Noah building the Ark, entering the Ark, and Daniel in the lion's den. More statues were added later in the mid-fourteenth century by Treasurer John Welbourne, of English kings from William I to Edward III.

The main source of light in the cathedral is the rose windows. At the north end of the great or west transept is the Dean's Eye, and at the south end is the Bishop's Eye. The windows are the best example of stained glass in the early thirteenth century in England, preceding the stained glass at Canterbury. Both windows in the transept are twenty-four feet in diameter. The Dean's Eye retains its original tracery, while the tracery of the Bishop's Eye is from the Decorated Period in the fourteenth century, inserted around 1320 in honor of John of Dalderby. Both windows are described in the *Metrical Life of Saint Hugh*, and they would have been completed during the bishopric of Robert Grosseteste. The Dean's Eye faces the deanery to the north, while the Bishop's Eye faces the bishop's palace to the south, next to the Galilee Porch, the ceremonial entrance to the cathedral for the bishop. As described in the *Metrical Life of Saint Hugh*, the Dean's Eye protects the cathedral from the spirit of the Devil to the north, while the Bishop's Eye invites the Holy Spirit to the south into the cathedral. The *Metrical Life* was the second biography of Bishop Hugh of Avalon, written by Henry of Avranches, a friend of Grosseteste, between 1220 and 1235, when Grosseteste became Bishop of Lincoln.

The subject of the images in the glass of the Dean's Eye is the Church on Earth, the Church Militant, paired with the Church in Heaven, the Church Triumphant, in sixteen circular openings surrounding a quatrefoil. Christ is seated in the center surrounded by the blessed in Heaven. Four compartments surrounding the central image, which are probably not in their original positions, forming the quatrefoil, show various subjects, including the relics of

Saint Hugh. Subjects in the sixteen outer circles of the window include angels with the instruments of the Passions, Saint Peter conducting people to Heaven, the Resurrection, and bishops and archbishops. Below the window, five lancet windows can be seen through an arcade of seven lancet arches. Large lancet windows on either side of the Dean's doorway, dating from the fourteenth century, contain images of angels playing musical instruments and geometrical patterns. The musical instruments of the angels are a reference to the *musica cosmica* in contrast to the *musica mundana*, that there corresponds to all music created by human beings a celestial music from above, in the same way that the geometrical patterns represent a celestial intelligence in relation to human intelligence.

In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* (I.17)[1] of Robert Grosseteste, a *lux spiritualis* floods over intelligible objects, or *res intelligibiles*, like the light through the stained glass window in the cathedral, and over the mind's eye, or *oculus mentis*, and stands to the interior eye, or *oculus interior*, and to intelligible objects as the corporeal sun stands to the bodily eye and to visible corporeal objects,[2] following Aristotle, Themistius, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. The *lumen spiritualis*, the light produced by the *lux spiritualis*, allows the mental sight, the *visus mentalis*, to apprehend the intelligibles in the *virtus intellectiva*, or *nous poietikos*, as the light of the sun, the *lumen solare*, makes vision possible. The *lumen spiritualis* is the "first visible" in interior sight, *visus interior*, as the colored body is the first thing receptive of the light of the sun (I.19). The colored glass in the stained glass window corresponds to the *lumen spiritualis* in the *oculus mentis*.

The more receptive the intelligible object, the *species apprehensibilis*, is to the *lux spiritualis*, the more visible it is to the *oculus mentis*. The object which is most similar to the light, the least material, is the most receptive of it. The power of the mind, the *acies mentis*, is a spiritual light, an *irradiatio spiritualis*, which operates in the *virtus intellectiva* to illuminate the *species apprehensibilis*, and the *virtus* is strongest when the object is the least material and conforms most easily to the immaterial *species*. The architecture of the cathedral presents a hierarchy of materiality in forms, like the hierarchy of the celestial spheres, following the "principle of divisibility" of Scholasticism, in the multiplication and division of the architectural forms, culminating in the pure *lux spiritualis* which enters through the stained glass window.

Each of the stained glass windows at Lincoln is the *oculus mentis* of the body of the cathedral. The colored glass is the *lumen spiritualis*, and the geometry of the tracery is the *species apprehensibilis*, the intelligibles of the

architecture, and the structure of the cosmos, visible to the *oculus mentis*. The sight of the mind, the *visus interior*, is turned toward darkness and idleness when deflected from the *lumen spiritualis*, and is occupied with "corruptible bodily things" (I.14), as Grosseteste describes in the *Commentary*, but when it perceives a trace or *vestigium* of the *lux spiritualis*, it seeks it out, as the visitor to the cathedral seeks out the stained glass window, and then the *visus interior* is able to perceive the *lumen spiritualis* within.

The analogy of spiritual light to corporeal light was applied by Grosseteste to elements of the operations of the Church. In *De Libero Arbitrio*, or *On Free Will*, the analogy is applied to the Trinity, as the *lux spiritualis* is the mediation between the intelligible and material in the same way that the Holy Spirit is the mediation between the Celestial Father and the Body of Christ. In *De Libero Arbitrio*, the light shining through the stained glass window of the cathedral is seen as the operation of divine grace through free will. In his *Epistolae*, Grosseteste compared his relationship as Bishop to the clergy of the cathedral, and the relationship between the Pope and his prelates, including Grosseteste, to a mirror reflecting light into dark places. The Bishop illuminates the minds of the clergy by reflecting the *species apprehensibilis* by the *lux spiritualis* into the *oculus mentis* of the clergy, so that the *species apprehensibilis* can become the *species sensibilis*, sensible or perceived form, as a tangible rule of operation, in the correct operations of the Church, and the Bishop can assert his authority. The universal law is translated into material operations.

In the *Metrical Life of Saint Hugh*, the round stained glass windows are compared to heavenly bodies, whose "circular display, facing the north and south, outshines all the rest [of the windows in the cathedral] with its twofold light."[3] While the two windows in the transept can be seen as the sun and the moon, the rest of the windows "may be likened to common stars." The two windows are not only like the sun and the moon, but "they excel: for the sun, reflected on the clouds, produces the rainbow; while these two flash without the sun…" The windows represent the Bishop and the Dean, as the Bishop, as described by Grosseteste in the *Epistolae*, illuminates the minds of the clergy by reflecting the *species apprehensibilis*, the intelligible form provided by the *lux spiritualis*, as through the stained glass window, into the *oculus mentis* of the clergy, in order to establish the rules of operation for the church. As Grosseteste explained in *De Libero Arbitrio*, the light shining through the stained glass windows is the "operation of divine grace," as a light without a corporeal source. Inscriptions above the windows describe

"dwellers in the Heavenly City and the weapons with which they overcame the Stygian Tyrant," of the River Styx, so that the windows represent the heavenly cities, as in the *De Civitate Dei* of Saint Augustine. The windows allow the architecture to play the role of reinforcing standards of Christian justice in medieval society.

The Bishop's Eye is the greater of the two windows, because it faces south to receive the Holy Spirit, while the Dean's Eye faces north to protect the church against the devil. The two windows illuminate the cathedral from the "lantern of heaven," the great transept, which "with these eyes surveys the gloom of Lethe," the oblivion of the river of forgetfulness in Hades. While the two great windows symbolize the Bishop and Dean, the clerestory windows below symbolize the canons, and in the aisles, the vicars, in a descending hierarchy from spiritual to more material affairs. The hierarchy of windows can be seen as a diagram of the order of the Church, an *imago generalis ecclesiae*, and as the reflection of light described by Grosseteste in his *Epistolae*, from the Bishop to the clergy of the cathedral.

In the *Metrical Life*, the colors of the body of the church represent the virtues of the heavenly cities. "The hewn white stone stands for the chaste and wise: whiteness is decency [and purity] and its shaping, doctrine [or justice]." In the dark marble, "smooth, shining, dark, is signified the Bride [or the virgin Mary], frank, virtuous, afflicted. Its smoothness truly exemplifies her utter candor, the polish her virtues, and the darkness her distress." The colors are the product of the *lumen spiritualis*, the spiritual light reflected in the corporeal world, in the *species sensibilis*, by the *lux spiritualis*.

The "consummation of the whole allegory" of the church is that "the insentient stones conceal the mysteries of stones that live; the fabric made with hands displays that of the spirit; the outward appearance of the church shines doubly, enriched with twofold array." The architecture of the church combines the material and the spiritual, the *virtus cogitativa* and *virtus intellectiva* in intellect. The architecture is the imprint on matter of the idea of the architect, participating in divine intelligence, discernible to someone whose intellectual ascension allows divine intellect to participate in their material intellect. As in the *Republic* of Plato, the mental faculty of the initiate described by Socrates "will not rest content with each set of particulars which opinion takes for reality, but soars with undimmed and unwearied passion till he grasps the nature of each thing as it is" (490).[4]

In the architecture of Lincoln Cathedral, the Trinity is present especially in Saint Hugh's Choir, in the grouping of three lancet windows per clerestory

bay, and in the triradial vaults in the ceiling, where three tierceron ribs emanate from each boss along the ridge pole, causing the asymmetrical syncopation. In the choir the *lux spiritualis* shines through the triune lancet windows and mediates between the spiritual and physical, as in the Trinity, and shines the *species apprehensibilis*, represented by the forms of the glass windows, onto the *oculus mentis*, the mind's eye of the observer, in the form of the *species sensibilis*, represented by the triradial ribs in the vaulting, as they take the form of corporeal geometry, in mathematical relations.

The transition from the windows in the clerestory to the vaulting of the ceiling represents the transition from the *species apprehensibilis* to the *species sensibilis*; it represents the formation of matter through light, where matter becomes denser and more substantial as the lines of the rays of light become more multiple and the *virtus* becomes stronger, in the process of condensation and rarefaction; and it represents the formation of the material world from the point to line to surface in the two-dimensional pattern of the lancet windows, and the line to surface to solid in the vaulting pattern, concave surface, and volume of the vault. Conversely, the transition facilitates the ascension of the soul, or *anima rationalis*, of the viewer, from *nous pathetikos* or *virtus cogitativa*, reason connected to material things, to *nous poietikos* or *virtus intellectiva*, reason which is disconnected from material things and composed of intelligibles, in particular the concept of the good, or what is universally just. *Virtus intellectiva* involves the participation of *intelligentia*, divine intelligence, as described by Grosseteste in his *Commentary*.

The architecture is an *edificium* of the hierarchies of intellect described by Grosseteste, and it is a talisman for the intellection of the observer; the perception of the catechism of the architecture inspires the viewer to engage the *virtus intellectiva*, to understand the relation between reason and intellection, material world and spiritual world, body and soul, and to transcend the dictates of the body in the material to the dictates of universal laws in the spiritual. Saint Hugh's Choir consists of four bays. There are two arches in each bay of the triforium, each divided into two sub-arches, with trefoils and quatrefoils in the tympanum above, corresponding to the trivium and quadrivium of Scholasticism, heaven and earth. The Trinity, which is the manifestation of the One, divine *intelligentia*, transforms the *lux spiritualis* through the windows into the *lumen spiritualis* reflected in the choir, and the *lumen spiritualis* is further materialized through the Trinity, as it presides over the corporeal world, in the form of the triune groupings in the vaulting, which describe the structure of the corporeal world.

Peter Draper[5] compared the contrapuntal arcading in the aisles of Saint Hugh's Choir to an illustration in the *De statu ecclesiae* of Gilbert, Bishop of Limerick, the first papal legate in Ireland, which can be found in Cambridge University Library. In the illustration, tiers of arches are arranged in a complex pattern of arcading to illustrate the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The arcades are offset so that the shaft of one arcade overlaps the arches of the arcade underneath, as in Saint Hugh's Choir. The arches represent the people of the Church, which is seen as a macrocosm or organism as represented by the system of arcading. The arcading represents a diagram of the order of the Church, in what the text calls an *imago generalis ecclesiae*. The arcades are organized in a series of pyramids; the smallest units are at the bottom, and work up to the largest units at the top. The basic units are the parish, run by the priest, and monastery, run by the abbot. The units are divided into ranks and categories, including *oratores*, or those who pray; *aratores*, or those who plough; and *bellatores*, or those who fight. The parishes and monasteries are governed by the diocese, which is governed by the archdiocese, the district of the archbishop, which is governed by the highest ranking bishop, *primatus*, of the Church. The Church is governed by the pope, who is governed by Christ. A secular hierarchy is established to correspond to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The arcading of the illustration is set on a continuous plinth, as in Saint Hugh's Choir, and the Gothic pointed arches are set on piers with bases and capitals. The continuous plinth represents the broad base of the Church and its open arms in embracing all people. The pointed arches in the upper level represent the more narrow and disciplined life, the *arcta via*, of religious and ordained people. The intersection of the arches as they overlap represents the close relationships between those religious or ordained. The arcading is set inside a major arch, representing the macrocosm of the Church, the *ecclesia generalis*. The arcading set inside the major arch represents the ability of the Church to subsume variation, particularities and individualities under an overarching whole. Romanesque towers appear at the top of the arcading. The Romanesque towers contrast with the delicate membrification of the arcading, which reflects the emphasis on light, transparency, structural clarity, and progressive divisibility, the principle of the *manifestatio*, associated with Gothic architecture. The illumination is an *edificium* in the same way as the cathedral; it is a catechism of a structure of knowledge, and the institution of justice, communicated in visual and structural terms.

The analogy between scripture and building as edifice is found in the *Moralia in Job* of Gregory, and the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint-Victor. The edifice of scripture has both a structure, or history, and a superstructure, or allegorical content, in the same way that architecture has both a structure and an allegorical or metaphysical content, the ideas associated with its forms. In the *Metrical Life of Saint Hugh*, Lincoln Cathedral is compared to a honeycomb, yielding sweet inner meaning, the allegory of divine communion. Hugh of Saint-Victor compared history, as the foundation and principle of sacred learning, to a honeycomb, from which the allegory is extracted as honey. The structure of the cathedral corresponds to the history of the Church, its foundation of learning and institution of justice, and the metaphysical role of the architecture in communicating ideas corresponds to the allegorical content of spiritual development. The image of the honeycomb can be compared to the tiered arcading of the illumination of Gilbert, and to the syncopated arcading of Saint Hugh's Choir. In each case the reticulation, as an instrument of the progressive divisibility of the *manifestatio* in Scholasticism, contains the synthesis of reason and faith, in the comprehension of the good and the justice of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The reticulation also occurs in the masonry of the crossing tower and the west front, in the Y-tracery of the stained glass, and in the vaulting of Saint Hugh's Choir, the nave, the Morning Chapel, the Consistory Chapel, and the chapter house at Lincoln.

In a letter written by Robert Grosseteste from Oxford, in around 1200 or 1225, to Master Adam Rufus, a former student, Grosseteste began, "To make clear how God is the form of his creatures…the meanings of this word 'form' must be explained." Here the Latin *forma* can be translated as design, form, mould, pattern, or shape.[6] "It is said that the design is the model (or *exemplar*) to which the craftsman looks to make (or *formet*) his handiwork, in imitation of it and in its likeness." Grosseteste continues, "Thus the last [a block shaped like a foot], to which the cobbler looks to form the sole accordingly, is called the pattern of the sole." The basis for the design of the architecture is the basis for the activity of any artisan, any urban professional of the era. "Thus too the lives of good men, which we regard in order to form the manners of our life in their likeness, are called our pattern of living." Grosseteste likens good design to ethical and moral behavior, on the model of the good; the basis for all artistic activity is also the basis for the ethics and morality of the era.

In the letter to Adam Rufus, Grosseteste asks the reader to "imagine, even though it be impossible, that the will [or *solertia*] of the same architect wishing to build the house were so powerful that this will alone need be applied to shape the material into the house of the design in the architect's mind, so that by this application will be fashioned into the house." The process of architectural design requires the penetrating ability and clarity of vision of the *oculus mentis* in relation to the divine *intelligentia*, as aided by the *irradiatio spiritualis*, in the intellectual ascension of the *virtus intellectiva*. If the process of architectural design is successful, then the architecture will accommodate the same intellectual ascension in the mind of the viewer, and the same vision of an ordered and just society.

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[1] Pietro Rossi, ed., *Commentarius in Posteriorum Analyticorum Libros* (Florence: Olschki, 1981).
[2] Steven P. Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste: New Ideas of Truth in the Early Thirteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 196.
[3] *Metrical Life of St. Hugh, bishop of Lincoln*, ed. J. F. Dimock (Lincoln, 1860), lines 833–965, quoted in John Harvey, *The Medieval Architect*, pp. 237–239.
[4] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1955).
[5] Peter Draper, *The Formation of English Gothic: Architecture and Identity, 1150–1250*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
[6] John Harvey, *The Medieval Architect* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), p. 23.