



*GEMCA : Papers in progress*

2013  
Tome 2 - numéro 1

[http://gemca.fltr.ucl.ac.be/docs/pp/GEMCA\\_PP\\_2\\_2013\\_1.pdf](http://gemca.fltr.ucl.ac.be/docs/pp/GEMCA_PP_2_2013_1.pdf)



**Varia**



# The Contested “Space” of the Æsthetic Realm in the Seventeenth Century Church of England

Anne-Françoise MOREL (FWO, UGent)

The aim of this article is to analyse the performativity of church buildings in the Stuart period. I understand performativity as the role of the architectural environment in the edification of the believer. As the article will make clear, the architectural environment acted as an agent for spiritual stimulation. Three hypotheses are formulated to demonstrate that religious architecture took up an active part in devotional exercises. The first hypothesis is that sensory impressions were deemed important for the act of devotion either in a positive or in a negative way, thus being stimulating or deceptive. Secondly, it is proposed that this importance stems from the close relation between sensory and moral qualities or values. The third hypothesis is that this close relationship explains the role of architecture in the performativity of devotion, since architecture is a sensory fact whose impact can be understood in moral terms: the building of a beautiful church becomes an act of piety and charity.

Since Elizabeth I, the “visible” Church of England was defined as “a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same<sup>1</sup>”. Outward expressions of devotion were nevertheless not banished completely and ceremonial improvements commonly found their way in, for example, Laudian, or High Church circles. However the æsthetic realm of the Church of England unquestionably remained an issue of great importance.

---

<sup>1</sup> CCJ. BUTLIN, *The Thirty-nine articles of religion of the church of England, a simple handbook of their history and meaning, together with Scriptural proofs, quotations from authorities and list of books for further reading*, Sheffield, 1986, article 19.

Sermons preached at consecrations of churches reveal in surprising detail how ideas about sense perception interact with devotion. These sermons address the role and the position of the beholder as well as the interaction with the building's architecture. The majority of the consecration sermons examine how the degree of architectural splendour affects the worshippers in their devotional exercises. The church building becomes a sensory fact with an acknowledged impact on the beholder. This impact is explained in categories in which ethics and aesthetics are entwined, such as simplicity, decency, comeliness and magnificence. Clearly, architectural and moral qualities are explicitly linked through the bias of the viewer's perception of their built environment.

In order to map the aesthetic realm of the Early Modern Church of England, it is necessary to understand how religion and devotion interacted with the worshipper's sensory experiences. Early modern philosophy was the body of theory that explains assumptions about sensations, and how they mediated between the physical and the metaphysical world. In this contribution, I will compare relevant passages on religion and the senses as well as on aesthetics with contemporary theories on epistemology, perception theory, morality, judgment, taste and early aesthetics. I will argue that these theories explain how architecture could act as an agent to stimulate devotional exercise, as they examine how an object such as the church building was perceived. In other terms, these theories help us to understand how the architectural space could be used for religious edification, and how it could play a role in devotion other than purely as the liturgical setting.

### **The devotee's sensory impressions**

The sermons rarely describe church buildings – if at all – by giving an extensive architectural description. They rather focus on the nature and degree of the decoration and its impact on the worshipper by means of generic aesthetic references and common religious metaphors. This degree of decoration is described by a limited set of aesthetic notions. These include simplicity or sobriety, comeliness, gloriousness, magnificence, loftiness, sumptuousness and stateliness.

Simplicity and sobriety refer to the *most serious*<sup>2</sup>, the essential. A simple and sober church has an architecture which is great and pure without superfluous ornamentation. Simplicity, also refers to honesty. In the glossary accompanying his anthology on English Renaissance literary texts, Brian Vickers terms *superstitious* as a synonym for excessive and superfluous<sup>3</sup>. Comeliness refers to the *appropriate decorum*<sup>4</sup> according to God's special presence and service. The glorious is the *haughty*, which also includes magnificence and loftiness or *the exalted and the sublime*. All these notions refer to God's glory and require appropriate architecture which should exalt devote experiences. Finally, sumptuousness and stateliness reflect God's omnipotence and omnipresence by scale and dignity as princely palaces do for earthly kings.

It is clear that all these terms and categories are generic. Even if they describe architectural ornamentation, they do not imply artistic or stylistic requirements. Rather, they point to an effect or affect that has to be achieved. Consequently, they are well suited for the entwinement of aesthetic and ethic categories.

Besides this limited set of aesthetic notions, the consecration sermons also use traditional religious metaphors to address the problem of perceiving religious architecture and the ornament. They commonly refer to biblical sacred places such as the Tabernacle or Solomon's Temple, Eschatological models such as the Apocalyptic Whore or Antichrist and the Church as the Living Temple of God. Except for the more extreme Puritan factions in the Church of England and Protestantism in general, all confessions, whether Protestant or Catholic, describe churches in very similar terms. For instance, these churches are referred to as re-foundations of the Temple of Solomon, the second Temple erected as a permanent shrine to the Ark of the Covenant, or as pre-figurations of the Heavenly Jerusalem, alternatively depicted as the bride clothed in fine linen, bright and pure or the perfect city built of gems and gold at the end of time<sup>5</sup>. This body of metaphors is, of course, shared by

---

<sup>2</sup> B. VICKERS, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003, p. 642.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 643.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 631.

<sup>5</sup> For a topology of this imagery, see for instance Y. HIRN, *The sacred shrine: A study of the poetry and art of the Catholic Church*, London, Macmillan, 1958 ; A.-F. MOREL and M. DELBEKE, "Metaphors in Action: early modern church buildings as spaces of knowledge", *Architectural History*, 53, 2010.

all Christians, since it is embedded in the Bible and early Christian literature<sup>6</sup>.

### *The Temple of Jerusalem*

The Temple of Jerusalem is a popular example in the consecration sermons<sup>7</sup>. From the beginnings of Christian history, a fourfold interpretation of the Temple is adopted in religious texts, namely the historical, the allegorical, the tropological and the anagogical. The historical reading gives us an account of the events according to the Letter of Scripture. The allegory refers to the spiritual meaning while the tropological reading aims to advance moral instruction. The anagogical approach ultimately leads the mind to heavenly experiences through mystical expressions<sup>8</sup>. The consecration sermons also discuss the Temple's architecture and its moral implications. These components are necessary to create mechanisms of meaning and perception of church architecture.

Using the Temple as a referent, however, creates not only opportunities, but also complexities. A continuous tension dominates the divergent stances within the Church of England. Ceremonialist and High Church partisans believe that the building and its sumptuous architecture, as described in Scripture, can offer sufficient proof that stately and even magnificently built churches are needed. Indeed, this building is a built prototype, dedicated by God himself. Many sermons draw a parallel between the Temple and their own parish church, proposing the Temple's history and architecture as a Scriptural fiat for constructing stately churches:

Solomon had no such mean and derogating Thought, as to imagine the Temple proportionable to God's Immensity and Greatness [...]

---

<sup>6</sup> D. IOGNA-PRAT, *La maison Dieu. Une histoire monumentale de l'Église au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Seuil, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> On Early Modern Temple Studies and Reconstructions in England see: P. DE LA RUFFINIÈRE DU PREY, *Hawksmoor's London Churches: architecture and theology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 125-132.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelmus DURANDUS, John MASON NEALE and Benjamin WEBB (eds.), *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments, a translation of the first book of the Rationale Divinorum written by William Durandus with an introductory essay and notes by Rev. John Mason Neale B.A. and the Rev. Benjamin Webb B.A.*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893, re-edn of 1286, p. 7-8: "In like manner, Jeruzalem is understood historically of that earthly city whither pilgrims journey; allegorically, of the Church Militant; tropologically, of every faithful soul; anagogically, of the celestial Jerusalem, which is our country".

All that Solomon designed by rearing up such a noble Fabrick upon Mount Zion, was only that he and the People of Israel might have a Place for Solemn and Divine Worship, suitable to the Honour of God's Majesty and to which they might have recourse [...]<sup>9</sup>.

Opponents, however, argue that the Temple is a Jewish place of worship, originated under the Law. The Temple acted as a shrine which contained the Old Testament's Ordinances, and as a type of Christ. The sacrifices made at the Temple would atone for the sins of Israel. Christ had sacrificed himself in order to save mankind, thus fulfilling the type. From this point of view, it could no longer assume the role of church building, as the type had been fulfilled in the coming of Christ under the Gospel. The magnificent architecture ordained by God was part of a ceremonial Jewish worship which had ultimately ended in sin and the final destruction of the Temple itself. Furthermore, God himself had proclaimed the "latter Temple" or Herod's Temple more glorious than Solomon's, not referring to the sumptuous architecture but to the presence of Christ himself<sup>10</sup>. Alternatively, Solomon's Temple is put forward in defense of rich and stately church architecture, while the Temple under Herod underlines the deceptive qualities of richly decorated buildings. The early sermons in particular, which oppose Calvinist and Laudian opinions towards church architecture, make good use of the dichotomy of the Temple-architecture. The richness of the architecture was approved of as a way to honour God, though dismissed as the instigator of superfluous materialism. This point is made, for instance, at the consecration of the parish church in Flixton (1630), when the Calvinist Brinsley condemned the richness of Herod's temple as a work of Satan, diverting the thoughts of the worshippers through external beauty:

---

<sup>9</sup> Richard BURD, *Two Sermons preached on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After the Opening of the New Chappell of St. James Westminster. The First on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of October. The Second on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of November 1702*, London, Printed for Sam. Keble at the Turks Head, 1702, p. 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> Sampson PRICE, *The Beauty of Holines: or the consecration of a House of Prayer by the example of our saviour. A Sermon Preached in the Chappell at the Free-Schoole in Shrewsbury. The 10<sup>th</sup> Day of September, Anno Dom. 1617. At the Consecration of the Chappell by the Right Reverend Father in God, the Lord Bishop of Coventry Lichfield*, London, Imprinted by B.A. for Richard Meighen, 1618; John BRINSLEY, *The "Glorie of the Latter Temple Greater than of the Former" opened in a Sermon Preached at the Consecration or Restitution of the Parish Church of Flixton*, London, Robert Bird, 1631.

That the eyes of the Lewes be dazzled with this outward pompe and glory they might looke no further, but that their thoughts might hereby be wholly taken off from looking for or longing after the promised Messias. And if so, then was this cost bestowed upon this last Temple, rather a profanation then an adorning of it<sup>11</sup>.

At this occasion, Brinsley also refers to Solomon's Temple, urging the community to repair and adorn the places of worship. Moreover, he stresses that beauty, glory and decency on the outside (the building) requires the same on the inside (the worshipper's disposition) in order to be lawful and acceptable.

*The Attractiveness of the "Roman Catholic Whore"*

Contemporary Roman Catholic church buildings often appear in the sermons as well. Their magnificent and sumptuous architecture is seen as a powerful means to persuade people of the Roman Catholic confession. Preaching at the opening of the new parish church of Isleworth, Williams links the lack of gravity and decorum in church architecture with indecent behaviour of some members of the congregation at service. Decency, order, appropriate behaviour and laudable decorum make divine service and religion attractive as they become outward signs of God's majesty and solemnity.

But ought it not to be confessed, (amongst friends at least) that if we look into the generality of the congregation, there is not that Decency and Order, that gravity and laudable decorum, that outward Beauty of Holiness, that is to be observed amongst those whose Doctrine is yet so scandalously corrupted with the Traditions of Men, and their Worship defil'd and over-run with the insufferable Weeds of Superstitious and Idolatrous Innovations. There is not that Uniformity and Exactness of behaviour in our Churches which becomes the Majesty and Solemnity of God's Worship, as we should wish for: Insomuch that if an infidel-spy shou'd drop into one of our Congregations, and see with what Indecency and Indevotion some behave [...] he were to choose his Religion, he would hardly make ours his choice [...].<sup>12</sup>

Of course, according to the same preacher, all this is based on trickery as "popish Roman Catholic worship" is a mere sensual reli-

<sup>11</sup> John BRINSLEY, *The "Glorie of the Latter Temple Greater than of the Former"*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> C. WILLIAMS, *A Sermon Preach'd at the Opening of the New Church in Isleworth, in the County of Middlesex*, London, William Hawes, 1707, p. 22.

gion based on sheer outward glory. The Puritan preacher Dyke, who preached at Epping in 1622, even compares Rome and the Church of Rome with a whore who distracts and deceives through the senses:

She is deckt with gold and precious stones: so are her churches, her images, her idols, all gloriously adorned to set forth an outward maiesty to sense... full of abomination and the filthinesse of her fornication. All is but the whores garish habite to catch carnall eyes.<sup>13</sup>

The metaphorical comparison of Roman Catholic Church architecture with the whore of Babylon is not gratuitous. St. John the Divine describes her in Revelation 17-19 as great, mysterious and decked in gold but even so the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth<sup>14</sup>. John wrote in a time of persecution to give courage to his fellow Christians. He clearly wrote from a deeply anti-Roman point of view. According to Christian exegetes, the Babylonian whore was Rome under Christian persecution: the big powerful city at the river built on seven hills where Domitian (90-95 AD) had persecuted Christian martyrs. She was thus commonly associated with evil, Satan and the Anti-Christ<sup>15</sup>. From the earliest interpretations onwards, the Apocalypse should therefore be engaged in attacks on contemporary aberrations, heresies and schisms. During the Reformation, Luther and Calvin had explicitly denounced the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church as Anti-Christ and the harlot of

---

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah DYKE, *Sermon Dedicatory. Preached at the Consecration of the Chappell of Epping in Essex*, London, I.D. for Nathanael Newbery, 1623, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, *Revelation 17, 1-6*: "Come hither: I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitheth upon many waters / with whom the kings of the earths have committed fornication. / So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. / And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of / her fornication: / and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. / And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs / of Jesus / And when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration".

<sup>15</sup> U. SALS, *Die Biographie der "Hure Babylon"*, *Studien zur Intertextualität der Babylon-Texte in der Bibel*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2004, p. 76-77; B. MCGINN, "Early Apocalypticism: the ongoing debate", in C.A. PATRIDES, J. WITTEICH (eds.), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, Ithaca / New York, Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 23.

Babylon<sup>16</sup>. Also in England, the Apocalypse became important in explaining the Reformation<sup>17</sup>. According to the Millenarian theory, for example, the Anti-Christ would be denounced. The high Middle Ages corresponded with the high-days of superstitious practices, idolatry, popish usurpation and the reign of Anti-Christ while the True Church hid in wilderness. The Beast received its wound at Protestant Reformation and would be destroyed in the near future<sup>18</sup>. Once the Beast and the whore of Babylon would be destroyed, the way would be paved for the second coming of Christ<sup>19</sup>.

### *Artificial and Spiritual Beauty*

Careful not to be caught in the trap of “the Roman Catholic whore”, most preachers also became well aware that only very few

- 
- <sup>16</sup> J. PELIKAN, “Some Use of Apocalypse in the Magistral Reformers”, in C.A. PATRIDES and J. WITTEICH (eds.), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance*, op. cit., p. 82-86.
- <sup>17</sup> John BALE, *The image of both churches after the most wonderfull and heavenly Revelation of saint Iohn the Evangelist*, London, by Thomas East, 1570, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; John FOXE, *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous dayes touching upon matters of the Church, wherein ar comprehended and described the great persecutions (and) horrible troubles, that have bene wrought and practised by the Romishe prelates...*, London, by Iohn Day, 1563 ; Arthur DENT, *The Ruine of Rome. Or an exposition upon the whole Revelation Werein is plainly shewed and proved, that the popish religion, together with all the power and authority of Rome, shall ebbe and decay still more and more throughout all the churches of Europe, and come to an utter overthrow even in this life, before the end of the world. Written especially for the comfort of Protestants and the daunting of papists, seminary priests , Iesuites and all that cursed rabble*, London, Printed by William Iaggard for Simon Walterson and Richard Banckworth, 1607; John MILTON, *Of Reformation touching church-discipline in England and the causes that hitherto have hindred it. Two books, written to a friend*, London, Printed for Thomas Underhill, 1641.
- <sup>18</sup> M. MURRIN, “Revelation and Two Seventeenth Century Commentators” in C.A. PATRIDES and J. WITTEICH (eds.), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance*, op. cit., p. 132.
- <sup>19</sup> See for instance: Joseph MEDE, *Clavis Apocalyptica ex innatis et insitis visionum charateribus eruta et demonstrate...*, Cambridge, Printed by T. and J. Buck, 1627; Isaac NEWTON, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John*, Dublin, Printed by S. Powell, 1733 – The manuscript was written in the 1690’s; Henry MORE, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos; or the Revelation of St. Iohn the Divine Unveiled containing a brief but perspicuous and continued exposition from chapter to chapter and from verse to verse of the whole book of the Apocalypse*, London, Printed by J.M. for J. Martyn and W. Kettlby, 1680. A much more moderate view of the Millenium, explaining that the events prophesied in the Book of Revelation had already taken place during “the late Reformation”.

were capable of reaching spiritual beauty without some sensory assistance. Help from the senses and the passions, even in religious exercise, was assumed to be inherent to the mortal state of human beings. As humans are instructed by both the senses and the soul, they also remain subject to material impulses and means of devotion. For Thomas Mangle, preaching at the consecration of the Holy Trinity Church in Sunderland (1719), this was one of the reasons why decent and adorned churches were still required: "The senses and the imagination must go along with the Spirit and Understanding in true Devotion, nor are we thoroughly spiritual in our religious Affections as not to find some Benefit from sensible Objects and Representations<sup>20</sup>".

The High Church clergyman Gaskarth, who preached at All Hallows in London in 1705, stated that the experience of a decent church building encouraged spiritual exercise: "We receive from our senses the idea's and notices of most things and most of our passions derive thence, [...] and next to its actings or impressions upon us<sup>21</sup>".

The question remained of course whether the outward impressions should be *sober and comely* or *sumptuous and magnificent*. Newton addressed this issue when preaching at the consecration of the new college chapel of Hart Hall in Oxford in 1716. He reminded his audience that it was not the beautifully designed and decorated architecture that made the chapel acceptable to God, but the humility and sincerity of its worshippers:

The Noblest consecrated Fabrick is not, in its own intrinsic worth, more acceptable than the Obscure Unconsecrated Closet. That which God chiefly regards is the Humility, Meekness, and Sincerity of the Votary: "For thus" saith the Lord, "the Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth my Footstool; where is the House that ye build unto me? And where is the Place of my Rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been", saith the Lord:

---

<sup>20</sup> Thomas MANGEY, *The Holiness of the Christian Churches, set forth in a Sermon Preach'd at the Consecration of the New Church at Sunderland*, London, W. and J. Innys, 1719, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> John GASKARTH, *The Beautiful Sanctuary, and The Holy Offering. A Sermon Preach'd in the Parish-Church of All Saints Barking, London, At the First Opening of the Said Church, After its having been Re-paired without, and new Pewed, and in several Respects Improved, as well as Beautified within*, London, Walter Kettlby, 1705, p. 14.

“but to This Man will I look, even to Him that is Poor, and of a Contrite Spirit, and trembleth at my word<sup>22</sup>”.

## Confessional Background

The consecration sermons indicate that the Church of England attached a great deal of importance to the sensory realm, which touched upon devotion as well as aesthetics. The confessional background certainly influenced the importance accorded to sensory impressions in spiritual exercise and their architectural environment. This concern can be explained by the concerns about Roman Catholicism as well as by internal tensions within the Church of England herself. The sermons illustrate the fear of latent dangers for ceremonialism and idolatry. They also refer to the strive for a more spiritualised worship present among the more “Puritan” preachers, versus the urge for a more ceremonial and sensual worship as advocated by ceremonialists and High Church partisans.

This ambiguity towards the sensory realm of religion had existed since the earliest years of the Church of England and was based on different interpretations of biblical texts. Several passages inspired the most zealous early reformers under Edward VI to consider the performative aspects of public prayer as hypocritical, visible and earthly contaminations of invisible and divine qualities. This view is for instance reflected in the following biblical quote (Matt. 6, 5-6): “And when thou prayest thou shalt not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues; and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men [...] Thou therefore, when thou prayest, go into thy chamber, and shut thy door and pray to thy Father which is in secret”. The moderate William Tyndale, on the other hand, offered a metaphorical reading of this same passage in his *Exposition of Matthew* (1533). In this reading he juxtaposes the visible and invisible manifestations of the soul and the visible body. He concludes that not only the soul and the heart but also the body experiences and shows the effects of sincere devotion. Some decades later, referring to Solomon’s prayer at the Temple, Lancelot Andrewes claimed that words were insufficient to worship God. Sensible signs of the body not only reflect but also incite men’s inclination and reverence towards God. Consequently, by the

---

<sup>22</sup> Richard NEWTON, *A Sermon Preach’d at the Consecration of Hart-Hall Chapell in Oxford*, Oxford, Stephan Fletcher, 1716, p. 17.

seventeenth century, praying in the Church of England had become a synonym of acting<sup>23</sup>.

The ambiguity between spiritual and bodily worship certainly resided in the fact that the Common Prayer was a liturgy based on comprehension and participation but also conceived in opposition to Roman Catholic superstitious ritualism. According to Richard Hooker, author of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie*, commonly seen as the founder of via media of the Church of England, the value of the Common Prayer was that it could compensate for the natural deficiencies of spontaneous and private devotion. Human inwardness was considered as weak and in need of external aids<sup>24</sup>.

The conception of the worshipper's mind and body clearly evolved. While the early reformers were anxious about a potential disjunction, by the 1630s elaborate accounts on the involuntary correspondence between external and internal states of devotion had gained popularity<sup>25</sup>. Renowned puritans accepted that a sensitive component was needed and High Church men warned against the possibility of error due to the beholder's fault in being distracted by worldly magnificence. In order to fully understand the role accorded to the senses in the performance of worship, it is necessary to discuss and analyse broader discussions of the senses and the passions.

### Senses, passions and magnificence in the Seventeenth century

What is common to all preachers, regardless of their confessional stance, is the belief in the close correlation between the aesthetic and ethic effect. Moreover, from the sermons, it becomes clear that there is an evolution across the confessional spectrum with regard to this particular link. The consecration sermons make clear that not every aspect can be explained solely in confessional terms. In other words, sermons draw different relations between aesthetics and ethics as a result of their confessional background and historical evolution. However, they all share common assumptions with regard to aesthetic qualities and their possible role in the edification of the worshipper. By examining the nature of these relationships, it

---

<sup>23</sup> R. TARGOFF, *Common Prayer: the language of public devotion in early modern England*, Chicago / London, 2001, p. 7-9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

becomes possible to understand how architecture was used to obtain devotional affects.

The following paragraphs will deal with this issue from the point of view of early modern English theories on sense perception. These theories conceptualize the interaction between sensory perception and devotion, ethics and aesthetics and finally architecture and worship, as they all address the topics and relations between sense, ethics, passions, will and reason. These topics are also present in the consecration sermons, which question the role of the church building and its architecture in devotion.

### *Senses*

In the seventeenth century, changing and opposing attitudes emerged towards the reliability of senses and the role of perception versus reason, in the process of gaining universal knowledge in all aspects of God's Creation. Rationalists claimed independence from the senses, while sceptics raised challenges. A recurrent sceptical argument was that the senses perceive only the outward appearances of objects, and that the nature of these objects could therefore not be grasped by the senses. However, most theories also claimed that it is possible to correct sense perception and man's dependency on sensory perception.

Philosophy can thus serve as an explanatory model for the sermons. Both preachers and philosophers shared common terminology, concepts, and ideas as well as historical and conceptual backgrounds. Both groups were confronted with the same religious and political issues of the Church. The ideas developed by the preachers thus only acquire their full meaning with the contemporary philosophy of sensory perception in mind. The sermons of the first half of the century accept the necessity of sensory perception with some reluctance, while the late sermons are more confident. As such they show an analogy with the development of English Empiricism. Throughout this period, the relationship between mind and body and that between senses and reason occupied philosophers, scientists and preachers alike.

For instance in the sermons, the resonance of theorists as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke is conspicuous. The vocabulary used in the sermons when discussing sense perceptions is borrowed from their writings and vice versa. As we will see, Francis Bacon for example described the fallacies of human understanding

as *idols*<sup>26</sup>. The same Bacon was also influential in theological and religious circles because he regularly referred to apocalyptic themes included in his writings.

This cross-fertilization engendered a re-evaluation of sense-experience in spiritual exercise. It gradually became accepted that as a consequence of man's mind-body analogy, sensory experience could be of help in spiritual exercise, especially to the less devote.

Even the wisest and best of us have senses, as well as reason and religion; flesh as well as spirit, bodies as well as souls, and consequently, that sensible images and representations may be of great use to us, even in the most refin'd and spiritual of our performances<sup>27</sup>.

Most preachers did recognise the fact that worshippers were necessarily liable to sensory experience:

We receive from our senses the idea's and notices of most things and most of our passions derive thence, as we are affected with some objects or occurrences that first touch them, and cause such motions in our animal spirits and so pass to our minds thro' them<sup>28</sup>.

In this reference, Gaskarth refers to the motions caused in our animal spirits. This strongly reminds us of corpuscularian theories espoused by Hobbes, which were widely developed in the seventeenth century to explain the considerable influence of sensory experience. According to Hobbes, sense impressions are caused by pressure and counter-pressure and the subsequent mediation thereof in body and mind:

The Originall of them all, is that which we call Sense (For there is no conception in mans mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, bee begotten by the organs of Sense.) The rest are derived from that originall [...] The cause of Sense, is the Externall Body, or Object, which presseth the organ proper to each Sense, either immediatly, as in the Taste which pressure, by the mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the Brain and Heart, causeth their a resistance, or

---

<sup>26</sup> Francis BACON, *Novum Organum*, Book I, in J. DEVEY (ed.), *The Physical and Metaphysical Works of Lord Bacon*, London, 1904, p. 390.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph TRAPP, *A Sermon Preached at Shipburn in Kent, Upon the Opening of the New Church There*, London, 1723, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> John GASKARTH, *The Beautiful Sanctuary, and The Holy Offering*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver it self: which endeavour because outward, seemeth to be some matter without<sup>29</sup>.

Hobbes was a sense-oriented philosopher, and as a corpuscularian by definition committed to real qualities and sensible species. His theory consisted of two main parts, namely the elaboration of a new theory of the senses and the relation of sense to understanding. Its key assumption was that the senses operate by motion. All ideas arise from the senses, which can only be affected by bodies in motion. The object causes (immediate or mediated) pressure on the sense organ, which leads to a motion in the beholder all the way to the "brain and the heart". The sensations remain after the act of sensing; this is how we form ideas based on imagination or memory, namely the fading sensations. For Hobbes the human mind consists of sense, imagination and the working of language. There is no further rational or cognitive faculty. He thus concluded that all human cognition could be achieved through the senses and imagination alone, without the help of an incorporeal agent<sup>30</sup>. However, Hobbes was also aware of deception of sense and fallacy of reason, which should be corrected under the precept *Nosce teipsum* (know yourself<sup>31</sup>).

Although preachers and philosophers agree that sensory impressions are an important part of our information, they are also aware of their restrictions. Contrary to reason, these impressions may dazzle and mislead us. For Francis Bacon, the senses are "the idols of tribe... falsely asserted to be the standard of things<sup>32</sup>". They become tricks of Satan to keep the community away from God in religious terms. Bacon characterized the unguided senses as dull, incompetent and deceitful. However, he most harshly criticised the idea of "understanding", which was prone to hasty generalisations, mistaken impositions, and infection by affections and desires<sup>33</sup>. Combined with false philosophy, such fallacies could even induce

---

<sup>29</sup> Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan or the Matter, Form and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, London, Printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> G. HATFIELD, "The Cognitive Faculties", in D. GARBER and M. AYERS (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 976.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas HOBBS, *Human Nature or the Fundamentals Elements of Policy of Being, A Discovery of the Faculties Acts and Passions of the Soul of Man, From their Original causes; According to such Philosophical Principles as are not commonly known or asserted*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, London, Printed for Matthew Gilliflowe, 1684, p. 10, 30, 66.

<sup>32</sup> Francis BACON, *Novum Organum*, Book I, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

<sup>33</sup> G. HATFIELD, "The Cognitive Faculties", *op. cit.*, p. 966.

superstition. Inspired by superstition some seek to derive knowledge from false religions driven by spirits and *genii*<sup>34</sup>. Contrary to those he designated as *sceptics*, he would nevertheless not destroy the authority of the senses and the understanding but rather supply them with assistance<sup>35</sup>.

Of major importance in the development of sense perception theories was John Locke's magnum opus *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). In this work Locke ignored the claims of Bacon and Hobbes. In this this essay, he aims to explain in detail what one can legitimately claim to know and what not. According to Locke, human beings have no innate knowledge. All knowledge comes from ideas, and all ideas from experience. There are two kinds of experience, namely sensation and reflection. Sensation relates to the processes and objects of the external world, whereas reflection refers to the operations of the mind. Nothing in the intellect was not previously in the senses, which are broadened to include reflection<sup>36</sup>.

Perception then being the first step and degree towards Knowledge and the inlet of all Materialls of it, the fewer Senses any Man, as well as any other Creature hath; and the fewer and duller the impressions are, that are made by them; and the duller the Faculties are, that are employed about them, the more remote are they from that Knowledge, which is to be found in some Men. But this being in great variety of Degrees (as may be perceived amongst Men) cannot certainly be discovered in the several species of Animals, much less in their particular individuals. It suffices me only to have remarked here, that Perception is the first Operation of all Our intellectual Faculties, and the inlet of all Knowledge into our Mind<sup>37</sup>.

This power of the senses did not go unnoticed in religious circles. Sensory experience could be used as a means to excite devotion and religious architecture was part thereof. The perception of the beauty and the comeliness of the church building recalled the sacred majesty of God. The sensible perception was thus a first, though inferior, step to the greater and higher purpose, namely the knowledge and worship of God. According to the ceremonial High-

---

<sup>34</sup> Francis BACON, *Novum Organum*, aphorism LXII, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, aphorism XXXVII, p. 389.

<sup>36</sup> John LOCKE, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford, 2008 [1690], p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Church preachers, the decorum and richness of the architecture were a compensation for what it could not be in extent, as even the heavens of heavens could not contain God's Majesty. More generally accepted was that the glory of the architecture reflected the glory God, following a precept taken from Vitruvian architectural theory. According to this precept, quoted in Henry Wotton's *Elements of Architecture*, ornament should be appropriate for the building and its inhabitant or function<sup>38</sup>. James Lacy, preaching at the consecration of the new parish church in Castleton, built by Lord Digby, refers to both theories of sense perception and Vitruvian architecture:

The consideration whose House we are in, minds us of the Business of the Place, and strikes a kind of Awe into our Thoughts, when we reflect upon that Sacred Majesty we usually converse with there. And the Beauty and Comeliness of it, not only takes our Eye and pleases it, but carrieth also its Profit along with it, enlivens our devotion, rouses it when it slumbers, and recalls it when it wonders. For so the Grace of God is pleased to move us by Ways suitable to our Nature, and to Sanctify these sensible and Inferior helps to greater and higher Purposes, that as the Soul receives Impressions through the Senses, so the Devotion of it may be heighten'd by the Loftiness, the Beauty and Ornaments of the Temple<sup>39</sup>.

Even if sensory impressions were still considered as inferior to spiritual ones, they were accepted as an integral part of human nature. They were thus provided to us by God himself within the Creation in order to facilitate our life, including spiritual exercise and devotion.

### *Passions*

The ambivalence towards sense perceptions also resulted from the close association of the senses with the passions. It was generally agreed that man is most affected by the responses to sensory experiences as our passions drive us to respond to the external world. On the other hand, passions were believed to exert dubious influence on sensory knowledge. Passions were commonly seen as a source of error and opposed to human reason and will, as they were

---

<sup>38</sup> Henry WOTTON, *The Elements of Architecture*, Charlottesville, The University Press of Virginia, 1968 [1643], p. 95.

<sup>39</sup> James LACY, *A Sermon Preach'd at the Consecration of a Church in the Parish of Castle-Ton, near Sherborne, Dorset*, London, W. Taylor, 1715, p. 9.

supposed to be irrational and deceptive. Furthermore, passions were considered as an irrational faculty or confused perception because they involved bodily sensation. It is because the mind depended on the body to perceive the external world that it was liable to the confusion that renders certain thoughts passions. As a consequence, passions were considered to be extremely difficult to control both morally and metaphysically<sup>40</sup>.

Most philosophers however – following the Aristotelian tradition – believed that reason and will were strong enough to control or manipulate the passions<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, the opposition between passion and reason began to be gradually re-examined during the seventeenth century and the notion of the passion was progressively reconfigured<sup>42</sup>. As a result, by the early eighteenth century, Hume for instance distinguished between affections and passions. Affections are a kind of passions but they are calm desires and produce little emotion. Therefore, these affections are confounded with reason by all those who judge something at first sight and appearance. Hume concludes: "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passion"<sup>43</sup>.

While passions were still regarded with suspicion and ambivalence by Neo-stoics, most seventeenth-century authors gradually regarded them as part of the good life. These authors shared the commonly held assumption that passions were functional in a broad sense. Passions were commonly portrayed as affects that make us act in ways intended to protect us from harm or to improve our fate as they both sustain bodily welfare and involve the soul on the body's behalf as a reinforcement for actions<sup>44</sup>. They became bodily phenomena which were an ineradicable and morally necessary part of human life, since man is made up of body and mind.

The seventeenth century thus witnessed an exploration of the ethical dimensions of the passions. Central were the questions

---

<sup>40</sup> J. BARNOUW, "Passion as confused perception or thought in Descartes, Malebranche, and Hutcheson", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53, 3, 1992, p. 399; S. JAMES, "Passions and the good life", in D. GARBER and M. AYERS (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 918.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>43</sup> David HUME as quoted by: J. BARNOUW, "Passion as confused perception", *op. cit.*, p. 420.

<sup>44</sup> S. JAMES, *The Passions in the Metaphysics and the Theory of Action*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 913.

<sup>44</sup> J. BARNOUW, "Passion as confused perception", *op. cit.*, p. 413.

whether the passions were morally good or bad and to what extent virtuous people need to control or transcend them in the end. Treatises were published examining the *faculties, acts and passions of the soul*. Important English publications were Thomas Hobbes' *Human Nature or The Fundamental Elements of Policy being A Discovery of the Faculties Acts and Passions of the Soul of Man* (1650); Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man* (1650) and Walter Charleton *Natural History of the Passions* (1674). Bacon only accorded minor importance to the passions and defined them as *perturbations or diseases of the mind*. All the later authors, however, weighed up the good and bad qualities of the passions against each other<sup>45</sup>. Passions were a consequence of man's twofold nature consisting of the mind and body. Reynolds referred to Christ's affections as a case in point. He argued that not the passions themselves were to be withdrawn. Following Christ's example, it was their violence and lawlessness that had to be restrained. This could be achieved by reason or contrasting passions:

So there is more honour, in having the Affection subdued than in having none at all; the business of a wise man, is not to be without them but to be above them. And therefore our Saviour himself sometimes loved, sometimes rejoiced, sometimes wept [...] but these were not passions that violently and immoderately troubled him [...] His Reason excited, directed, moderated, repressed them according to the rule of perfect cleare and undisturbed judgement<sup>46</sup>.

However, if reason was, unable to uphold her principles and resolutions, Reynolds warned that the human heart was weak and would give leave to false delights and pleasures. More specifically, man was seduced by profit, luxury and attractiveness of worldly and sensual objects. This argumentation is reminiscent of the words of the Puritan preacher Dyke, who was quoted at the beginning of this contribution. Both Reynolds and Dyke referred to the deceptive tricks of the Roman Catholic worship: "How weak is thy heart seeing thou doest all these things the works of an impious whorish woman<sup>47</sup>?"

---

<sup>45</sup> Francis BACON, *Advancement of Learning*, in J. DEVEY (ed.), *The Physical and Metaphysical Works of Lord Bacon, op. cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>46</sup> Edward REYNOLDS, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soul of Man*, London, F.N. for Robert Bostock, 1650, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71, 495.

Walter Charleton also subscribed to the erratic mood of the passions. Nevertheless, man remained responsible for his actions as he had an independent will and the capacity to make moral judgements.

For it is not only impious but highly absurd to imagine that God can be the Author of our Errors, because he hath not given us an understanding omniscious [...] But that Man should have a Will [...] that he can and doth act by his own will, and that is freely; and so is, by a peculiar prerogative the defect lieth in our own act, or in the use of our liberty, not in our nature [...]<sup>48</sup>.

Charleton still considered the human passions as a consequence of the Fall, but he explicitly made man responsible for his own acts.

### Passionate Sermons

Similar arguments also appear in the consecration sermons. The preachers wanted to formulate an argument for or against the use of externals including bodily reverence and stately architecture in religious worship. Therefore, they addressed the problem of the human passions and their possible interaction with devote life. The topic was certainly of interest in sermons dating from the second half of the seventeenth century. Analogous to the authors of the treatises quoted above, the preachers accepted the bi-medial human composition of body and mind. The body and mind analogy was commonly proposed as a motive for using external expressions of devotion in worship. Even a Whig preacher like Waugh concluded in 1713 that "it is a dictate of a natural religion, that we express the inward Sense of our Mind by the Outward Acts and Carriage of our Bodies<sup>49</sup>". According to the mind-body analogy, holy exercise required both inward affections and outward respectful behaviour, mental or internal reverence and outward expressions of adorations.

The late seventeenth-century preachers also accepted the passions as a natural constituent of the human condition. They commonly addressed the passions as a means to incite devotion as they considered these passions as powerful affects to bodily sensations. These included visual impressions as well as the acts of rising and

---

<sup>48</sup> Walter CHARLETON, *Natural History of the Passions*, Savoy, Printed by T.N. for James Magnes, 1674, p. 171.

<sup>49</sup> John WAUGH, *Publick Worship Set forth and Recommended in a Sermon Preached at St. Peter's Cornhill, at the Opening of the Said Parish Church after Repairing*, London, George Straham, 1713, p. 24.

kneeling during the service. The same preachers were, however, also aware of the dangers of a too passionate state of the mind, which could either lead to popish superstition and idolatry or superfluous worldly matters. Instead of reason, they called in the assistance of religion – namely the established Anglican worship – to subdue the passions in order to make them durable blessings:

Religion sets before us things suitable to our reasonable faculties, Correspondant to our Souls in their primitive State, and Places our Affections upon the most sincere and durable Blessings: Whilst worldly minded Men are miserably tossed to and fro and carried about with vain and perishing delights<sup>50</sup>.

If worshippers were still distracted by worldly matters or by the magnificent church architecture surrounding them, Sykes, preaching at Trinity College in 1691, asserted that the fault was in the worshipper's attitude and not in the decorum of the place of worship:

[...] and if any man is offended with the greatness and magnificence of these, or other sacred places designed for the honour and glory of God and employs his thoughts in the contemplation of the riches and beauty of them, when they should be lifted up to Heaven, the fault is in the Votar, not in the place of Worship<sup>51</sup>.

Nonetheless, the magnificence of the place of worship had been – and remained – a heavily contested subject. Pretenders saw the magnificent church building as way of honouring God, while opponents continued to emphasise the deceptive qualities.

### **Moral Taste and the Aesthetically Good: Shaftesbury**

When discussing sense perception and passions with regard to the architecture of church buildings, the preachers regularly associate the object of perception with moral values. As we have seen, the simplicity of the church building refers to the simplicity and honesty of early Christianity; more specifically, the beauty and purity of the church reminds the worshipper of the Church as God's

---

<sup>50</sup> Richard BURD, *Two Sermons Preached after the Opening of the New Chapel Of St. James Westminster*, London, Printed for Sam. Keble at the Turks-Head, 1702, p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas SYKES, *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of Trinity-College Chappel in Oxford*, Oxford, Printed at the Theater, 1694, p. 20.

bride. Alternatively, the magnificence of the building could represent the magnificence of God himself. From the very start, the Church of England entwined ethical and æsthetical categories, which continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Simplicity, purity and comeliness were characteristics of Christ and the early reformed Church. Magnificence, stateliness and loftiness represented the ideals of the triumphant Church as it had to be shaped under the late Stuarts, especially Queen Anne. All concepts, however, were also applied to express opinions regarding church architecture and more specifically the degree to which the building should be ornamented. Even the notion of *Beauty Holiness* expresses this double concern: the æsthetic is expressed in the word *beauty* while the sacred is reflected in the term *holiness*. However, it was only from the late seventeenth century onwards and particularly in the early eighteenth century that the consecration sermons mentioned the act of building a decent, beautiful or even magnificent church as an act of piety and charity. For example, James Lacy praised the stately churches of the Early Christians during Constantine's reign, when he was preaching at Castleton (1715):

They spared no Cost and thought nothing to dear, not only to Build, but to Beautify and Adorn those Sacred Edifices. Expenses of that Nature went under the Name of Piety and Devotion and none counted that Waste, which was expended about so Religious a Work<sup>52</sup>.

According to the late seventeenth-century preachers, also in contemporary times, beautiful church buildings still function as monuments of charity and piety, embodying the Christian duties: "For, by leaving him a lasting monument of his Piety, he leaves also a standing motive to all the Duties, and promotes all the ends of Religion, as long as it shall endure<sup>53</sup>". God is pleased with such stately places of worship as they show the honour of religion and give man the full sense of his religious duty. They represent God's magnificence and glory, as well as man's gratitude and zeal. As such they become an instrument and facility for devotion, recalling Christian ideals as piety and charity.

---

<sup>52</sup> James LACY, *A Sermon Preach'd at the Consecration of a Church in the Parish of Castle-Ton*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas SYKES, *A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of Trinity-College*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

This continual shifting between moral and aesthetic qualities reminds of the late seventeenth-century moralist and aesthete, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713). Anthony Shaftesbury played a fundamental role in the re-conception of the relationship between sensory experience, passions and art in the second half of the seventeenth century in England. Shaftesbury was the first in early modern England to explicitly link the morally good with the aesthetically attractive. Key to his association of ethics with aesthetics are his *Characteristics of Men [...]* and especially *The Moralists*, drafted in the early 1700s and published in a much revised form in 1709. The *Moralists* are dialogues on diverse topics that pay special attention to the inseparability of ethical truth and aesthetic beauty. According to Shaftesbury, man was gifted with the ability to discern beauty in works of art, nature and moral actions. In this work he invariably links virtue to beauty through the association of “the beautiful, the proportioned and the becoming” with “the virtuous, the benevolent and the good”. Shaftesbury’s *Second Characters* (1712) is a practical transition from his moral aesthetic theory of his *Characteristics* applied to art. He discusses not only beautifying components, but also artists and the corruptions of taste<sup>54</sup>. This means that Shaftesbury was both an ethical and religious thinker as well as a philosopher of the arts.

Shaftesbury’s writings should be situated in a programme of self-fashioning; a contemporary penchant for moral and cultural refinement which was inextricably linked to the development of moral and aesthetic sensibility. In an essay on *the morality of art appreciation*, Preben Mortensen, has demonstrated that it was Shaftesbury’s aim to place the contemplation of beauty within the realm of acceptable morality. According to Mortensen, Shaftesbury wanted to defend a moral approach to admiring objects, not identified with luxury, covetousness, avarice, ostentation and other immoral qualities<sup>55</sup>. The theory of Shaftesbury allows us to provide a better understanding of the historical shift in the views on ethics and aesthetics in early modern England. In this respect, three points of interest arise from Shaftesbury’s work: the association of beauty and

---

<sup>54</sup> B. RAND, “Introduction”, in B. RAND (ed.), *Second Characters or Language of Forms by the right honourable Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury author of Characteristics*, New York, 1969 re-edn., p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> P. MORTENSEN, “Shaftesbury and the Morality of Art Appreciation”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 55, 4, 1994, p. 631-650.

morality, his theory of the affects and his theory of the world of forms.

Firstly, Shaftesbury has placed the contemplation of beauty within the realm of morality<sup>56</sup>. He started from the premise that due to divine creation all things are united in the world and the human mind and soul are therefore strongly imprinted by the idea of order and proportion<sup>57</sup>. "Will it not be found in this respect, above all, that what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable, what is harmonious and proportionable is true, and what is at once both beautiful and true is of consequence agreeable and good<sup>58</sup>?" For Shaftesbury beauty was truth, virtue and compliance; it was a moral goal while moral sense became a faculty of man. Consequently, this moral sense is an inner perceptive faculty which transcends the immediate physical perceptions of the delightful and the pleasurable. The moral sense, on the other hand, perceives the metaphysical notions of the virtuous and the good. As such, moral sense perception is an innate quality contrary to physical sense perception<sup>59</sup>. Secondly, the distinction between the good of the inferior world (world of things) and that of the superior world (world of affections) suggests an ultimate order to which both are answerable. Shaftesbury has taken up Hobbes's claim that our affects lead us, but he rejects the dominance of aggressive desires at the expense of the affects of love and benevolence<sup>60</sup>. Similarly to Hobbes, moral behaviour is completely motivated by affections, but contrary to Hobbes, man is not fundamentally selfish<sup>61</sup>. For Shaftesbury, all men possess latent affections for the good of mankind, as moral self-consciousness and deliberate moral judgment distinguishes men from beasts. The good joins the beautiful when the moral judgment approves its own beauty. There is no virtue where there is no beauty, such as for instance in a fundamentally aggressive and selfish human philosophy as Hobbes's, which is based on principles of power, dominance and fear.

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 631-650.

<sup>57</sup> A. SHAFTESBURY, *The Moralists*, in L. KLEIN (ed.), *Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Cambridge, 2003 re-edn, p. 273-274.

<sup>58</sup> A. SHAFTESBURY, *Miscellany III*, in L. KLEIN (ed.), *Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>59</sup> L. SHIQIAO, *Power and Virtue, Architecture and Intellectual Change in England 1660-1730*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 103.

<sup>60</sup> S. JAMES, "Passions and the good life", op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>61</sup> R. VOILTE, "Shaftesbury's Moral Sense", *Studies in Philology*, 52, 1, 1955, p. 27.

Hence Hobbes, Locke etc. still the same man, genus at the bottom – “Beauty is nothing” – “Virtue is nothing” – “So perspective is nothing – “Music is nothing” – But these are the greatest realities of things, especially the beauty and order of affections. These philosophers together with the anti-virtuosi may be called by one common name viz. Barbar [...]<sup>62</sup>.

Shaftesbury’s concept of disinterestedness can thus not to be understood in the modern æsthetic sense as “when perceiving anything in this manner any other concerns, such as practical, moral, political, or religious are suspended<sup>63</sup>”. Disinterestedness for Shaftesbury should be understood as free from self-interest, a strife for freedom of passions and freedom of reason. This notion of disinterestedness was of particular importance for Shaftesbury as it included the claim that one should strive to love God and virtue for God or virtue’s sake and not for the view of future reward or punishment<sup>64</sup>. In æsthetic contemplation, it offered the possibility of spectatorial detachment from all evil desires represented by a surrender of any narrow form of individualistic satisfaction in favour of admiration of the general harmony. It is based on the fundamental concept that “reality as a whole, the world of nature as created by God, exhibited a beauty which is moral as well as gratifying to the sense of form, and that the discernment of this character of reality conduces directly to moral action<sup>65</sup>”.

This brings us to his third point of interest, namely that Shaftesbury also often asserted that a man’s inner disposition is affected by his intercourse with the world of forms, be they natural or artificial. The world of forms is closely related to human affections and temper.

This too is certain, that the admiration and love of order and harmony and proportion, in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the temper, advantageous to social affection, and highly assistant to virtue, which is itself no other than the love of order and beauty in society. [...] For it is impossible that such a divine order should be contemplated without ecstasy and rapture since, in the common

---

<sup>62</sup> A. Shaftesbury, *Second Characters*, in L. KLEIN (ed.), *Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>63</sup> P. Mortensen, “Shaftesbury and the Morality of Art Appreciation”, *op. cit.*, p. 632.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 634; A. SHAFTESBURY, *The Moralists, op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>65</sup> J. BERNSTEIN, “Shaftesbury’s Identification of the Good with the Beautiful”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 10, 3, 1977, p. 309.

subjects of science and the liberal arts, whatever is according to just harmony and proportion is so transposing to those who have any knowledge in the kind<sup>66</sup>.

As a consequence of Shaftesbury's premise of unity of creation, the admiration of order and proportion in nature or art enhances virtue as it stimulates order and harmony in society and human affections. However, the effect of contemplation on human affections can be both positive and negative. When dealing with painting, Shaftesbury emphasises that moral paintings are to be understood as those of judicious representations of the human passions<sup>67</sup>. These do certainly not include scenes of martyrdom, which are represented in "popish" art. Such barbarous scenes can only lead to barbarous affections. In his third maxim on *moral and theological citations and maxims* Shaftesbury summarizes this view:

3. Maxim. Viz. Ruinous in religious and moral sense to wonder or admire wrong. Hence superstition. So barbarity (that of — tyrants) from delight in blood, pain, torture. First a horror removed delight remains, etc. επιχαιρεκακία

According to the judgment of taste and politeness, no art which is savage, monstrous or cruel should be shown; while divine forms render a more perfect idea of humanity<sup>68</sup>. With regard to architecture he rejected all that was "Gothic" on the same grounds. Gothic in Shaftesbury's terms should be understood as non-Classical, thus also including the licentious Baroque of Bernini, or even the architecture of Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor<sup>69</sup>. Shaftesbury thus connected the good to the beautiful and saw them as inherent qualities of the object of thought or perception. He also regarded moral and aesthetic judgment as equally compliant to objective standards. When a beholder discerned these moral and aesthetic qualities of an object and made a conscious judgment of it, this act of perception became an act of

---

<sup>66</sup> A. SHAFTESBURY, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, in L. KLEIN (ed.), *Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>67</sup> A. SHAFTESBURY, "Hercules", in B. RAND (ed.), *Second Characters or The Language of Forms by the Right Honourable Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, New York, 1969 re-edn, p. 53.

<sup>68</sup> A. SHAFTESBURY, "Plastic Art", in B. RAND (ed.), *Second Characters or The Language of Forms by the Right Honourable Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>69</sup> E. CHANEY, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour, Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance*, London, Frank Cass, 1998, p. 318.

reflection. The passions evoked through association of the good and the beautiful became a moral action; aesthetic judgment became moral judgment<sup>70</sup>. Contrary to the ideas of other philosophers, Shaftesbury's theories were applied to contemporary architecture quite directly<sup>71</sup>.

Even if Shaftesbury explicitly expressed his disdain for the churches built by Wren in London and even if he preferred temperance to luxury and sumptuousness, his theory certainly reflects and influenced contemporary thinking. As we have seen, the entwining of ethics and aesthetics culminated at the end of seventeenth and early eighteenth century. This culmination resulted in the perception of the building of a magnificent church as an act of piety and charity. Gaskarth preaching at All Hallows in London in 1705 has a strikingly similar flow of ideas when contemplating the beauty of the church building. We see Shaftesbury's ideas in action:

[...] beauty is a higher Charity, as it more directly conveys its Benefits to the souls of our Brethren, affording them the opportunity of maintaining and strengthening the Sense of Religion, the just Apprehension of God in their Minds, which without publick Worship would be mainly lost, and of their partaking of the freer Graces that attend this<sup>72</sup>.

## Conclusion

The multiple references to the realm of the senses and the passions in the consecration sermons are not gratuitous. Since the beginning of the Church of England, the "sensory realm" had been highly debated in opposition to the "sensual worship" of the "superstitious" Roman Catholic Church. This discussion had a tremendous impact on liturgy, ritual and decoration.

The seventeenth-century debate on the senses and the passions was not only a concern in religious discourse, but even more so in contemporary philosophy. The consecration sermons show a cross-fertilization between religious and philosophical debate. Models and referents from the biblical and Christian history, including Solomon and Herod's Temple, Babylon and Early Christianity are re-activated within the context of the contemporary discussions on human sensory perceptions and passions.

<sup>70</sup> A. SHAFTESBURY, *Miscelanny III*, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

<sup>71</sup> L. SHIQIAO, *Power and Virtue*, *op. cit.*, p. 119-122, 154-155.

<sup>72</sup> John GASKARTH, *The Beautiful Sanctuary, and The Holy Offering*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

This cross-fertilisation certainly produced a more positive attitude towards sensory experience in devotional exercise and sustained the development of performative and rhetorical qualities in the architecture of the Church of England in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, it became gradually accepted that man was made up of mind and body and that both should equally participate in the worship and service of God. Sensory impressions could even function as a stimulus to devotional exercise. It was commonly accepted that our senses were a powerful instrument, through their direct relationship with the passions. By the second half of the century, it was also generally accepted that if an individual was distracted by worldly magnificence rather than inspired by spirituality, the fault lay with the devotee.

The negative connotations of magnificence (idolatry) were gradually tempered as æsthetic qualities became entwined with the ethical realm. This progressively introduced the concept of the beautiful church building as an act of charity or piety.

To summarise, I refer to Richard Roderick's words, preaching at Longleat:

And since it is hard for the earthly-minded Men to be taken off their sensual delights and to fix their scattered Thoughts upon religious Duties, the best expedient to dismiss the World for a time, the Concerns and Love of it, is to have recourse to Holy Places; which being dedicated to the Almighty's Honour will in some measure display his Majesty, stamp in Men lasting impressions of Reverence and heighten Devotion<sup>73</sup>.

**Pour citer cet article :**

Anne-Françoise MOREL, « The Contested "Space" of the Æsthetic Realm in the Seventeenth Century Church of England », *GEMCA : papers in progress*, t. 2, n° 1, 2013, p. 109-135, [En ligne].

URL : [http://gemca.fltr.ucl.ac.be/docs/pp/GEMCA\\_PP\\_2\\_2013\\_1\\_011.pdf](http://gemca.fltr.ucl.ac.be/docs/pp/GEMCA_PP_2_2013_1_011.pdf)

---

<sup>73</sup> Richard RODERICK, *Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Lord Weymouth's Chapel in Long-Leat*, London, Miles Flesher, 1684, p. 5.