

Intro:

The Middle Ages has been called the Age of Faith and one of the symbols of that Age is the Gothic cathedrals. In the cathedrals we see several new developments of the high Middle Ages come together: the 12th c. renaissance and the new learning in universities and scholasticism, the growth of towns and the “commerical revolution,” the development of the Cult of the Virgin Mary and new expressions of faith.

The Age of Cathedrals

The term "Gothic", while taking its name from the Germanic Goths, has nothing to do with the Gothic tribes. When applied to architecture it was a pejorative term used as early as the 1530s by the Italian writer Vasari (Lives of the Artists) to describe culture that was considered rude and barbaric.

Characteristics of Gothic churches and cathedrals

The structure of a typical Gothic cathedral

Gothic architecture combined several existing medieval building technologies to make a new building style: pointed arch, the ribbed vault, and the flying buttress.

The Gothic style in churches emphasizes verticality and light. The *defining* characteristic of Gothic architecture is the pointed or ogival arch. The features of the pointed arch, the ribbed vault, and the flying buttress, which give the cathedrals their distinctive appearance came together as a solution to an engineering problem, how to build such a high structure with heavy stone. The cathedrals are really stone skeletons made of these parts.

The ribbed vaults allowed the builders to increase window size by channeling the weight of the walls to a supporting shaft, resulting in lighter walls and making room for the beautiful stained glass we associate with medieval cathedrals.

The flying buttresses arched externally from the springing of the vault across the roof of the aisle to a large buttress pier projecting well beyond the line of the external wall. These piers were often surmounted by a pinnacle or statue, further adding to the downward weight, and counteracting the outward thrust of the vault and buttress arch as well as stress from wind loading.

The Gothic vault differs radically in form and vision from Roman and Romanesque buildings which used a semi-circular vault. The pointed arch channels the weight onto the bearing piers or columns at a steep angle and enables the soaring feeling of the Gothic cathedral.

Most Gothic churches are in the shape of the Latin cross (or "cruciform") plan made up of a long nave, a transverse arm called the *transept* and an extension called the *choir*, chancel or presbytery.

“The Gothic **cathedral** represented the universe in microcosm and each architectural concept, including the loftiness and huge dimensions of the structure, were intended to convey a theological message: the great glory of God.” The mathematical equations and geometry in the construction of the cathedral mirrors the orderly universe created by God in which an underlying rationality and logic can be perceived. (Links to Scholastics – Quadrivium)

The images in the stained glass, sculptures and carvings were, of course intended to teach the unlettered and show very dramatically and visually the glory of God.

Medievals developed a theology of light in conjunction with cathedrals that were seen as representations of the new Jerusalem on earth. The colors of the stained glass represented precious stones which each had meaning and significance. Abbott Suger was best articulator of this and wrote in his *De administratione*, “the multicolored loveliness of the gems has called me away...transporting me from material to immaterial things...the dull mind rises to truth through that which is material and in seeing this light is resurrected from its former submersion...Thus, when out of my delight in the House of God, the loveliness of the multi-colored gems had called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has caused me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial. This philosophy of color and light drew on the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500) who allegorized God as heavenly light and Jesus as the earthly image of the light drawing on the Gospel of John 1:4-5 and 9, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...[He] was the true Light which lights every man who comes into the world”. The cathedrals then brought the light of God to man in a concrete and visible way.

The stained glass and sculpture also served as instruction for the unlettered, giving them visual instruction in the stories of the Old and New Testament: Creation, the Virgin’s Life, Christ’s death and Resurrection and the Last Judgment.

Chartres: Built – the Cult of the Virgin Mary

Old Romanesque church destroyed by fire in 1194, but the relic from the Virgin found intact in the Crypt, which was interpreted as a sign from the Virgin that a new church should be built. Construction proceeded quickly, with about 300 men on site at any one time. The south porch with all its sculpture was installed by 1206, and by 1215 the north porch had been completed and the western rose installed. The high vaults were erected in the 1220s, the canons moved into their new stalls in 1221, and the transept roses were erected over the next two decades.

2nd spire added 1563.

Dedicated to the Virgin Mary – a relic, the tunic the Virgin wore at the Annunciation is housed there presented by Charles the Bald in 876 (earliest cult of the Virgin statue dates from 1130 in St. Denis)

St. Bernard is one of the first to speak as the ideal of beauty and a mediator b/w God and man

Stained glass: “Man may rise to the contemplation of the divine through the senses.”

Rose Window

Blue Virgin Window

Labyrinth:

The Middle Ages showed a renewed interest in labyrinths and an eleven-circuit design divided into four quadrants became popular. It was often found in Gothic Cathedrals but over time many of these labyrinths were destroyed or intentionally removed.

The most famous of these remaining labyrinths is at Chartres Cathedral near Paris, France. The labyrinth at Chartres was built around 1200 and is laid into the floor in a style sometimes referred to as a pavement maze. The original center piece has been removed and other areas of the labyrinth have been restored.

This labyrinth was meant to be walked as a pilgrimage and/or for repentance. As a pilgrimage it was a questing, searching journey with the hope of becoming closer to God. When used for repentance the pilgrims would walk on their knees. Sometimes this eleven-circuit labyrinth would serve as a substitute for an actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem and as a result came to be called the "Chemin de Jerusalem" or Road of Jerusalem.

Commercial Revolution and Growth of Towns:

One economic historian says that the cathedrals are seen as the symbol of the ages of faith, but they just as easily could be seen as symbols of the age of commerce. Chartres was extremely wealthy and had a cathedral school already. 3 years income were put into the building by the Dean and the Chapter of the cathedral.

Cities were growing and becoming more important.

12th c. London was 30,000 people, crowded, violent and dirty, but with sanitation workers

Trade increased, there was a growing merchant class, which was changing the makeup of medieval society

12th c Renaissance refers to the influx of lost Greek works especially Aristotle and Muslim and Jewish works on philosophy, medicine, mathematics. Transmitted through contact with Muslim controlled Spain and Iberian Jews coming to France, England and Germany, these works were translated from Arabic or Hebrew into Latin and revolutionized medieval Europe.

The growth of universities:

Trivium: Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric

Quadrivium: Mathematics, Geometry, Astronomy, Music

Scholasticism became the dominant form of theology and philosophy in the High Middle Ages. It was both a method and a system which sought to reconcile the Christian theology of the Church Fathers with the Greek philosophy of Aristotle and his Muslim and Jewish commentators.

The main proponents of scholasticism were Peter Abelard, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Bonaventure and, above all, Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa Theologiae* synthesizes Greek, particularly Aristotelian, philosophy and Christian doctrine, especially that of Augustine. Aquinas wrote: "Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu." (Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses). Scholastics are criticized later by Renaissance humanists and the Enlightenment figures for their in depth analysis of apparent minutiae, but scholasticism was really about a boundless faith in man's reason and his ability to know God's creation. Bernard of Chartres wrote that they were dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants, but nonetheless they could see further than those who had come before.