

Amazon fulfillment center. Sadly, designers of many Christian schools and churches routinely fall for the Bauhaus zeitgeist, and unwittingly allow architects to create buildings that have nothing to do with Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome.

Famous British Parliamentarian and aesthetical theorist Edmund Burke once said that “to make us love our country, our country should be lovely.” The same applies to our architecture. To make us love our buildings, our buildings should be lovely. Reasserting the same design principles that went into building the great cities of Christendom would help achieve this. A first step is acknowledging that architecture does speak a language, a language that can inform faith and morals. When it speaks, it should speak the most enlightened forms of language in order to communicate the good, the true, the beautiful, and thereby help make mankind better, more truthful, and lovely.

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# DOES ARCHITECTURE MATTER?

BY A.D. LEWIS

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**IS IT ANY WONDER** why Paris and Rome are the most visited cities in the world? Climate and cuisine may play a small part in the decision to visit, but they are insignificant factors compared to the attraction of architecture. People flock to Paris and Rome in massive numbers because those places feature the most beautiful architecture on the face of the Earth. The tight concentration of exquisite structures, mile after mile of them, whether they are churches (which assume the first order of beauty), castles, shops, apartment blocks and private homes, testify to a long-abiding and delicate concern for beautiful design, that gave glory to God and satisfaction to the people who occupied them. Down to the door-knockers, everything is intricately conceived and skillfully executed in places like Vienna or Budapest.

In Christendom, there was the desire, as well as the deliberate capability, to make even the common features of a building uncommonly lovely. It is only natural for people, whether they live there or not, to feel at home in these places, because it is all so welcoming. The proportions are at human scale, tailored for those who would use them. Even though down the centuries, styles changed from Classical to Gothic to neo-Classical to Art Nouveau, you could discern in each of the styles a profound respect for God and Man, the beings for whom these structures were built.

## “We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us.” - **Winston Churchill**

The one constant in all of these great architectural trends, until we hit modernism, is beauty. Like Pontius Pilate, one could scoff: “Quid est pulchritudo” or “what is beauty?” This essay will not convince those who reject the notion that real objective standards of beauty exist. But they do exist, and our era is the first that would dispute this. It is worth arguing, however, with those who think design is a matter of indifference, that it doesn’t matter what a building looks like. It is axiomatic that architecture is a language, which is why, in part, we speak of architectures having a vocabulary. What do buildings say, and what ideas do those statements assume?

Once the church catholic had the freedom to build (that is, after it had emerged from the catacombs at the behest of Emperor Constantine), it had to decide what its houses of worship should look like. What those structures looked like was the Bible, the text upon which Christianity was built. According to Roland Recht, professor of art history at the University of Strasburg, in his book *Believing and Seeing: The Art of Gothic Cathedrals*, the Church sought to construct a Bible in stone. These edifices (rightly and later wrongly) both framed basic theologies while telling Bible stories.

Later, after the Reformation, churches would more intentionally become a Catechism in stone, where the Six Chief Parts were printed, as it were, in the building materials and subsequently on the hearts of worshippers (see the excellent April 2013 issue of the Lutheran Witness dedicated to this topic).

What did the traditional architecture of Western Civilization assume about man? First and foremost, it assumes that men have souls, and that we have a need for transcendence. In that way, traditional church architecture is functional or utilitarian, but in the most sublime of ways. Its churches bear witness, when done according to traditional standards, to the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We shelter beneath its wings and receive the very Bread of Life at its altars.



The gothic style architecture of Wells Cathedral, UK.  
Photo credit: [wikimedia.org/Diliff](https://www.wikimedia.org/)

This need not apply only to ecclesiastical buildings. Secular buildings can be built and have been built in a way that recognizes that the occupants have souls, dignity, and a higher purpose. Vaulted ceilings, spaces filled with natural light, elegant symmetrical geometries; a sense of permanence and stability. If those buildings have an educational function, this is even more important. Thus, our schools should be sure to reference Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome by incorporating columns, cornices, pilasters, porticos, tympana, among other devices, into their structures .

It’s important to state what buildings look like whose designers and architects discount or reject the existence of the soul. *Circumspice*. Just look about you. Due to the influence of Bauhaus-men like Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, as well as French modernist Le Corbusier (who wanted to demolish Paris and replace it with skyscrapers), featureless glass and steel boxes now abound. It can be difficult to distinguish between an office complex, a school or an