Thresholds for 'Byzantinism' in Architecture

Newman University Church, Dublin, and Early English Architectural Histories

In June 1854, John Henry Newman (1801–1890) – prominent leader of the Oxford Movement, which sought to reincorporate ancient traditions into the Anglican Church, and then famous convert to Roman Catholicism – was officially installed as the inaugural rector of the first Catholic university in the British Isles, established in Dublin.[1] University Church (1855–6) was Newman's first aspiration when he accepted the rectorship, and it can be considered a physical expression of the concept behind the unprecedented Catholic university – the establishment of an erudite Catholic alternative to post-Enlightenment secularism and Protestant hegemony – through a style-based analogy to the Early Church (Fig. 1).[2] For Newman, the church was built out of "zeal" for the university and it gave it "a sort of bodily presence in Dublin".[3] The Early Christian style of the aisleless basilica – which drew on features of Roman and 'Byzantine' churches – declared a new future for Catholics. Its style responded to secularism in a manner comparable to wider European utopian uses of Early Christian and Byzantine styles at mid-century, which advocated materially for the Christian faith in the face of social, political and religious flux, and it raises interesting questions concerning how we understand and define 'Byzantinisms' in architecture.

The church constitutes one of the earliest iterations of Byzantine revival architecture in the British Isles, emerging as a socially utopian expression that foreshadowed later work aligned to the Arts and Crafts movement. It originated from the desire of Newman and his architect John Hungerford Pollen (1820–1902) – also a convert to Roman Catholicism, whom Newman had appointed to the Chair of Fine Arts at the University in 1855 – to express their vision for a brighter Catholic future as they attempted through the University to "smash modern Heathenism under the Communion and in the name of Peter".[4] It is rarely discussed in relation Byzantine revival architecture. This stems in some measure perhaps to its location in a subjugated, Catholic-majority region of what was then the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, but also, I argue, from a failure to acknowledge the diversity of Byzantine architectural expressions, as they developed from Roman architecture, and particularly as they were understood in the earliest English architectural histories.[5] Reluctance to consider the defining features of Byzantine architecture as they were understood in the mid nineteenth century, beyond preoccupation with direct emulations of centralised structures planned around the Greek cross and surmounted by a dome, has

---

[1] Niamh Bhalla, *Newman University Church Dublin: Architectural Revivalism and the Authority of Form*, London 2024. Bibliographic material on Newman is vast. For a summary and further bibliography, see Frederick D. Aquino and Benjamin J. King eds. *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry* Newman, Oxford 2018.

[2] For Newman, every aspect of the political and social system in Britain was dominated by Protestantism. He discussed the persecution of Catholics at length in his controversial *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics Addressed to the Brothers of the Oratory in the Summer of 1851*. London, 1908. which he delivered during the Papal Aggression crisis of 1850–1, which led to him being brought to court for libel. See sp. pp. 363–73.

[3] John Henry Newman, 'Report for the year 1855–6', *My Campaign in Ireland*, 2 vols. Paul Shrimpton ed., Leominster 2021, I: pp. 69–71.

[4] Letter [to John Henry Newman] from John Pollen, Worcester, 29 September 1855. MS. 17906/5, fols. 18–19. *Pollen Archive*, Oxford.

[5] Varied prototypes are assuming more interest in some recent publications, for example, Mary Greensted, "Sidney Barnsley, Byzantium, and Furniture-Making", in *Byzantium and British Heritage: Byzantine influences on the Arts and Crafts movement*, Amalia Kakissis, ed. London and New York, 2023, pp. 220–39.

resulted in the marginalisation of early iterations of 'Byzantinism' as they emerged in western Europe, or at least confusion concerning the threshold at which we determine that a building should be included within the purview of Byzantine revivalism.[6]

Early expressions were aligned to the understood development from Roman architecture of what was, by the time of the earliest histories in the mid-nineteenth century, termed 'Byzantine' architecture. Byzantine as a more or less empty signifier facilitated the distancing of the eastern half of Roman empire – which continued for over a thousand years after the fall of its western half in the fifth century – from its self-understood Roman identity. The appellation "the Empire of the Greeks" had been used in the medieval west and early modernity for the same reason so that western Europe could situate itself as the heir of Rome, but this title became increasingly problematic in the wake of Greek irredentism following the Greek War of Independence from the Ottomans (1821–32) and increasing tensions around the Crimean War (1853–6).[7] At the time that the Dublin church was created, the term 'Byzantine' was being used to describe the eastern empire and its architecture, but the early architectural histories written in English that Pollen was influenced by still understood the eastern Romans ethnically as the 'Greeks of Constantinople'. While there is a lot to say about the university, the church and its Irish context, my focus here is what this significant church can tell us about how we should understand the thresholds for what might be considered 'Byzantinism' in nineteenth-century architecture.

Although imprecise ethnolinguistic understandings of the Eastern Roman Empire as 'Greek' persisted, becoming subsumed into the foundations of retro/exonym Byzantium despite its apparent neutrality, a notably positive account of continuity between Roman architecture and the built tradition initiated by Emperor Constantine (d. 337 CE) in the East emerged in early English architectural histories which belied the narrative concerning the degenerative 'empire of the Greeks' more generally. The account of Byzantine architecture in writings that influenced Pollen was somewhat Romanticised, based on the perceived freedoms from pagan Rome made possible in the East, but the authors believed that this allowed for the creation of the first truly Christian architectural expression which influenced later European architecture and that of Islamic regions.[8] This positioned Byzantine architecture perfectly for employment within utopian Christian movements. Pollen precociously developed upon these histories, articulating in his own writings a celebrated continuity between Roman and Byzantine architecture with regards the basilica, broadly conceived, a continuity that he physically expressed in his 'Romano-Byzantine' church.

The church evidences a meaningful use of what were widely understood as the distinguishing features of the Byzantine style in a basilica that its architect understood as the

---

[6] Relatively little has been written on Byzantine response in the British Isles. See Robin Cormack and Elizabeth Jeffreys, eds. *Through the Looking Glass: Byzantium through British Eyes*. London, 2000. The recent volume on the Arts and Crafts movement, *Byzantium and British Heritage*, is a welcome addition but there is more to be said from an earlier date. The landmark publication by J.B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered*, London 2003, which focused on the art and architecture of western Europe and North America, was the first to provide insight into British design but the focus was not on early iterations.

[7] Anthony Kaldellis, "From 'Empire of the Greeks' to 'Byzantium': The Politics of a Modern Paradigm Shift", in *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe*, Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff eds., Washington D.C. 2021, pp. 349–369.

[8] See, in particular, Thomas Hope, *An Historical Essay on Architecture by the late Thomas Hope. Illustrated from drawings by him made in Italy and Germany*, 2 vols. London, 1835, I, sp. p. 121; Edward Freeman, *A History of Architecture*, London, 1849, p. 165.

form that provided continuity between Roman and Byzantine design. This self-conscious use of Byzantine features in ecclesiastical architecture came years before its promotion in the 1880s by the Arts and Crafts movement.[9] The Romano-Byzantine church formed a defence of Catholicity and a statement of intent for a new social placement for Catholics in the British Isles who were making new gains following post-Reformation persecution. To do this, features understood as determinative in relation to Byzantine architectural design were used to emphasise continuity from the Early Church. The church and the architectural histories it responded to provide interesting insights into a more positive intellectual engagement with Byzantine architecture in the mid nineteenth century British Isles, one that did not support an overly spiritualising, Orientalist agenda, but which pertained to the Roman and early Christian identity of 'Byzantium', more than is currently acknowledged. My focus here is on placing Pollen's design, which interpreted Newman's desire to create a basilica that connected the contemporary Catholic Church to the Early Church, within the context of early English writings on the history of architecture.[10]

The historical context of the church

Pope Pius IX (1846–78) expressed the need for a Catholic university in Ireland in the late 1840s following the British Government's decision in 1845 to establish secular, non-denominational Queen's Colleges in Galway, Cork and Belfast, which opened their doors in October 1849. These divisive secular or 'godless' colleges were intended to solve the difficult 'university question' for Irish Catholics which persisted following the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 because of Protestant hegemony in higher education.[11] This attempt to provide professional education for the emergent Irish middle classes was deemed insufficient by Rome and the Catholic University of Ireland was formally established on 18 May 1854 with a faculty of letters, or liberal arts, opening its doors at number 86 St Stephen's Green on 3 November 1854.[12]

Newman was identified as the right choice for principal by Paul Cullen (1803–78), former rector of the Irish College in Rome who was appointed to the See of Dublin in May 1852. Cullen hoped procuring a renowned convert would ensure the University's success in the difficult context. Newman remained in post until resigning in November 1858, having returned to the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Birmingham, which he remained head of during his time in Ireland. In a letter to fellow Oratorian Richard Stanton on 12 March 1854, he discussed his plan to begin with a university church that would be both a tangible

---

[9] Nikolaos Karydis has also recently drawn attention to an increasing interest in the potential use of Byzantine forms in English ecclesiastical architecture at an earlier date. Nikolaos Karydis, "Discovering the Byzantine art of building: Lectures at the RIBA, the Royal Academy and the London Architectural Society, 1843–58". *Architectural History* 63 (2020), pp. 171–90. Interest in the potential of Byzantine design for English churches is seen in the extended archaeological treatment, detailed plans and informed discussion of the Byzantine architectural tradition in James Fergusson's *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture,* 2 vols. London 1855.

[10] I have written extensively elsewhere on Newman's vision for the church based on this understanding of the development of the Church and on the complex development of that idea by Pollen. See Bhalla, *Newman University Church* as a whole.

[11] Scholar of the Catholic University of Ireland, *The Queen's Colleges and the Royal University of Ireland.* Dublin 1883.

[12] Newman intended his university to eventually have five faculties – the four medieval faculties, plus science. The most thorough study is still Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect: A study of Newman's educational ideal.* New Haven 1955.

representation of the university to the public and a means of achieving its objectives, saying "it will maintain and symbolise that great principle in which we glory as our characteristic, the union of Science and Religion".[13] His words resonated with the fundamental impetus for the Catholic university itself, outlined by the Irish bishops in their 'Address to the people of Ireland' issued in support of the university, which decried secularism, describing "the separation of religion from science" as "one of the greatest calamities of modern times".[14] Newman's church, built with his own funds, embodied his mission in Dublin.

Newman acquired 87 Stephen's Green beside the University House for the church in June 1855. University Church was built in the garden to the rear of 87, accessed by means of a narrow atrium between the two houses (Fig. 2). Pollen was charged with drawing up plans for a basilican church and it opened in May 1856. Newman decided on the overall design of an early Christian basilica. An 'Architectural Description of the University Church' in the *Catholic University Gazette* (April 1856) described the design as determined by the rector and inspired by "those deeply impressive and historical structures, the early Italian basilicas".[15] Newman entrusted Pollen with executing his vision, and Pollen designed the church in a style that self-consciously drew upon both Roman and Byzantine churches, which he understood as belonging to the continuous Early Christian basilican tradition.[16]

A simple aisleless basilica was erected (36.5 ×10.7 × 12.5 m), its narrow rectangular plan determined by the garden in which it was built. It terminated in a semicircular apse surmounted by a half-dome containing a pseudo-mosaic of the seated Virgin painted by Pollen, which clearly responded to the twelfth-century mosaic in the apse of the upper basilica of San Clemente in Rome, understood as a 'Byzantine' work of art in the nineteenth century. A gallery at the back of the church and another choir gallery to the left of the sanctuary were supported by beautiful monolithic columns of variously coloured Irish 'marbles', or polished limestones, with alabaster capitals, carved mostly with vegetal forms native to Ireland or generic Byzantinising designs (Fig. 3). These columns were surmounted by high, round-arched arcades in both cases. The remainder of the church was sheathed in sumptuous polychromatic 'marble' inlay; archaising paintings based on the work of Raphael and connected to the Nazarene movement; and pseudo-mosaics of the saints. The sanctuary of the church was also punctuated by gilded woodwork, much of which was executed according to a perceived Byzantinising aesthetic (Fig. 4).

What Byzantinism is this in Ireland?

Ireland never formed part of the Roman empire, at any stage of its existence, and Pollen's engagement with the Byzantine style raises a persistent theme in Byzantine reception studies – degrees of proximity and separation and how that determines the shape of the response. The response to Byzantium has been seen as more pertinent in regions that once formed part of the Eastern Roman Empire or developed dialectically with it in relation to Orthodoxy, particularly in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In these areas, there has been a greater emphasis on ontological continuity—approached more or less critically.[17] Studies

---

[13] Newman, *My Campaign* I, p. 24.

[14] Fergal McGrath. *Newman's University: Idea and reality*. London, 1951, p. 101.

[15] 'Architectural description of the University Church', the *Catholic University Gazette* 51/3 (1856), p. 57.

[16] Newman, *My Campaign* I, p. 294.

[17] Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance: Continuation de l'Histoire de la vie byzantine*, Paris 1935; Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe*, London 1982; Lowell Clucas, ed. *The Byzantine*

have often been divided between regions where the history and idea of Byzantium has been leveraged in the development of the modern nation state, particularly through the connection of Orthodoxy, versus western Europe and north America where the response is treated as a flexible aesthetic and/or ideological trope that can be manipulated – both positively and negatively – for aesthetic, religious, cultural and sociopolitical ends. For Western Europe, Byzantium has formed a complex and flexible repository – a '*véritable magasin d'accessoires à la disposition des Européens à partir de 1453*' – [18] used from an early date as the foil against which to construct the identity of Western Europe as the rightful heir of Roman civilisation, Greek literature and true Christianity. More recent volumes have sought to address Byzantine reception more holistically across such divides and to challenge the relationship that it holds to western Europe in particular.[19]

Early iterations of architectural Byzantinism in western Europe may have something more to tell us about the complex construction of Byzantium as a concept. Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) influentially defined Byzantium in *Byzance après Byzance* (1935) as a complex synthesis of elements – political system, intellectual Hellenic inheritance, Orthodox religion and Roman law – so that everything that defined Byzantium and thus Byzantinism did not fall with Constantinople. Byzantium as it was fashioned as a retronym had inherent malleability and the latent possibility of emphasising one of these strands over others in essentialising responses, leading to contested 'ownership' of, or indeed disregard for, the Byzantine legacy. Its 'Romanness', however, has been the most contested/ignored strand in relation to 'Byzantinisms', despite the fact that the 'Byzantines' understood themselves as Romans (*Romaioi*). The argument that Byzantium was a continuation of Roman civilisation has been raised intermittently by figures such as prominent Irish historian J.B. Bury (1861-1927) who adroitly argued against the idea of separation of Byzantium from Rome, but this continuity has been consistently supressed.[20] Anthony Kaldellis charts this denial of the Romanness of Byzantium from 800 CE as necessary for the *translatio imperii* with regards the Roman legacy in western Europe.[21] What we find in the Dublin church is a clear charting of continuity from Roman to Byzantine architecture as an expression of early Christianity. The church troubles the neat chronological categories and homogenisation assumed in relation to Byzantine reception which has tended to make nineteenth-century responses in western Europe more aesthetic, mystical and, ultimately, Orientalising – as opposed to the more serious theological engagement with Gothic architecture by figures such as Augustus Pugin (1812-1852).[22] The story of the Dublin church is one that does not fit neatly with canonical narratives of reception, but one which forms part of a more informed engagement

Legacy in Eastern Europe, Colorado 1988; Dimitri Angelov, "Byzantinism: The Imaginary and Real Heritage of Byzantium in Southeastern Europe", in *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*, Dimitris Keridis, ed. 2003, pp. 3-23; Alena Alshanskaya et al. eds. *Imagining Byzantium: Perceptions, Patterns, Problems*, Heidelberg 2018.

[18] Marie-France Auzépy, ed. *Byzance en Europe*, Paris 2003. p. 251.

[19] See, for example, Ingela Nilsson and Paul Stephenson, eds. *Wanted Byzantium: The Desire for a Lost Empire*, Uppsala 2014.

[20] John Bagnell Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire: From the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565)*, London 1923. Leonora Neville succinctly charts the purposes that 'Byzantium' has served as a separate entity in Leonora Neville, *Sailing Away from Byzantium Toward East Roman History*, Cambridge 2025.

[21] Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, Cambridge, MA, 2019; Idem, *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium*, Oxford 2024.

[22] For a full consideration of how this style related to Gothic revival architecture, see Bhalla, *Newman University Church*, chapter 4.

on the part of architectural historians in the British Isles with the strands of Byzantine identity. Its exploration through the lens of these writers and the writings of the church's architect troubles sweeping histories of engagement that homogenise past attitudes and a move towards nuanced and unique entanglements with Byzantium in the West, which could be partial and imperfectly informed but still significant.

The Dublin church is a reminder that Byzantinism is not about faithful architectural emulations but about contemporary politics, culture and religion. Where elements were understood in their context as Byzantine and exploited for what they could bring to the present, then this must constitute the threshold at which we identify Byzantinism. An informed response to Byzantine architectural forms developed slowly in the nineteenth century, particularly after 1850, as travel to the former regions of the empire and academic publications increased.[23] For Pollen, the basilica was as an inherently Romano-Byzantine form and he employed elements understood in the period as 'Byzantine' – particularly the convex leaf-cut capital, the stilted arch, polychrome marble cladding, gilded woodwork and pseudo-mosaic – to create an architecture that could provide for the needs of the present.

Byzantium and the Basilica

Continuity from Rome was difficult to avoid in architecture and we are confronted with a nascent narrative in the mid nineteenth century that was ostensibly more positive concerning Byzantine achievement. Newman perceived the Byzantines like most other nineteenth-century intellectuals under the influence of Enlightenment authors as "a fanatical people, who had for ages set themselves against the Holy See and the Latin world, and who had for centuries been, under a sentence of excommunication", a people of "a cowardly, crafty, insincere, and fickle character of mind, for which they had been notorious from time immemorial".[24] However, there emerged in early architectural writings a more affirmative engagement with Byzantine architecture up to 1200 as a keystone of the Early Christian tradition, premised on its continuation and development of Roman architecture which bequeathed an architectural inheritance to Europe (which was still the focus of these teleological, most often racialised, narratives, although Byzantium's influence on Islamic and Russian architecture was also acknowledged). Beyond this, however, these architectural writers were precocious in calling out other aspects of Byzantine achievement, namely the preservation of Greek texts and learning. In looking at the arts and architecture of Byzantium, these writings acknowledged Byzantium as being born of Rome, steeped in Greek language and learning and as a bastion Christian state for over a thousand years; aspects of the eastern empire that researchers today are still trying to achieve recognition for in relation to the development of modern Europe (which is still the focus).

Thomas Hope (1769–1831) in his *Historical Essay on Architecture*, published posthumously in 1835, saw that Constantinople "asserted the superiority she still maintained, during the Middle Ages, over the rest of the world … Her artists and her men of learning were sought by the old Asiatic monarchs, as by the new sovereigns of Europe".[25] Scottish art

[23] Kostis Kourelis, 'Early travellers in Greece and the invention of medieval architectural history', in *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, performance, place*, D. Medina-Lasansky and Brian McLaren, eds. Oxford, 2004, pp. 37–52.

[24] John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the History of the Turks in its Relation to Christianity*. London 1854, p. 136.

[25] Hope, *An Historical Essay*, p. 144.

historian and antiquarian Lord Alexander Lindsay (1812–1880), later 25th Earl of Crawford and 7th Earl of Balcarres, influenced by Hope, went further in challenging the assumed Oriental backwardness of Byzantium. In his *Sketches in the History of Christian Art* (1847), he pointed to Byzantium's overlooked greatness in faith and learning, arguing that "the unbroken line of Christian Fathers, men of undoubted genius, and of learning to which the contemporary West presents but a feeble parallel, amply vindicate their intellectual character". He concluded that the "influence of Christianity on Byzantium, and of Byzantium on modern Europe, has been much underrated".[26] Lindsay acknowledged Europe's debt to Byzantium for "the preservation and transmission of the Greek language and literature". But more than anything, he perceived Byzantium as the guardian of the "precious deposit" of art and architecture throughout the dark ages, making it the bridge between classical antiquity and the later Middle Ages – the focus always a teleology focused on Europe.[27]

In his 1855 Dublin lectures on the basilica's development, delivered while designing the church, and a later article of 1858 in the first volume of *Atlantis*, the Catholic University's journal, Pollen outlined a clear conception of structural continuity between Roman basilicas and the Byzantine tradition.[28] Influenced by these earlier architectural histories, but pursuing his own argument, Pollen charted the basilica as an inherently early Christian type originating in Rome but reaching perfection in Byzantine buildings, saying, "The same spirit seems to have reigned over the architecture of these first eight or nine centuries of our era, and basilicas, whether Byzantine or Roman were of a common origin – the monuments of the old Empire".[29] He articulates the development of the basilica as starting in Rome but meeting an impasse at the end of the Empire when "artistic design was undoubtedly at its lowest" before reaching new heights in sixth-century Byzantine basilicas in Ravenna, like San Vitale.[30] Pollen, who had travelled to Constantinople, did not stop at the Adriatic like John Ruskin (1819–1900) – the most famous English advocate of Byzantine architecture in the nineteenth century. In the East, according to Pollen, "the emperor achieved greater wonders even than in Ravenna".[31] The type reached its most sumptuous at Hagia Sophia, and its most polished at San Marco in Venice. For Pollen, Byzantine basilicas excelled in colour and ornament, and it is in these aspects of University Church that the Byzantinism of the style is most observed, rather than in a Greek cross plan with dome.

This extended chronological and geographical sweep contrasted with the assessment of architectural historian James Fergusson (1808–1886). In his *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*, published around the time of the Dublin church, Fergusson attributed "considerable elegance" only to early Byzantine architecture, which he argued deteriorated after Justinian (r. 527–65 CE). This perpetuated a Gibbonian sense of atrophy and decline, as Fergusson saw the Byzantine Empire after this point as "too deficient in unity or science to attempt anything great or good".[32] Far from a feeble attempt to maintain the achievements of

---

[26] Lindsay, Alexander William Crawford. *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*. London 1847, vol. 1, p. 59.
[27] Ibid. 60–1.
[28] Pollen, "Structural characteristics of the basilicas", *Atlantis: A Register of Literature and Science* 1 (1858), pp. 129–144.
[29] Ibid. 131.
[30] Ibid. 141.
[31] Ibid. 137.
[32] Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook* II, p. 962.

Justinian within the inheritance of western Europe by beginning the Byzantine period proper in the seventh century, Pollen's evolutionary trajectory continued beyond Hagia Sophia and he included his own Dublin church in this basilican lineage.

Fergusson's positive and informed archaeological treatment of the Byzantine tradition up to Justinian's time marked a change from the disparaging, also Gibbonian, evaluation epitomised in Robert Curzon's (1810–1873) best-selling travelogue *Visits to the Monasteries in the Levant* (1849). Curzon's work, with its appendix on Byzantine art, characterised Byzantine architecture as a degraded effort to produce Roman architecture as the empire atrophied.[33] Two years before Curzon's text, however, the seeds of change had come with the framing of the Byzantine tradition in Lindsay's *Sketches* as the highest expression of 'early Christian' architecture, sculpture and painting prior to 1200, positioned as the foundation for western medieval art. Lindsay was aware that he was writing against the Enlightenment disparagement of Byzantium, made a proxy for criticism of the deficiencies of European leaders in their own era, saying "I can hardly doubt that the respect with which I have spoken of the arts of Byzantium, in the preceding pages, must have appeared rather strange to you. We are apt to think of the Byzantines as a race of dastards, effete and worn out in body and mind, bondmen to tradition, form and circumstance, little if at all superior to the slaves of an Oriental despotism".[34] The Dublin church was one of the first material outworkings of this more positive 'Early Christian' usage as it developed out of Rome.

Hope's earlier essay is often overlooked in terms of the reception of Byzantium in the British Isles, but it was seminal for later histories. Like Lindsay, Hope was comfortable with the position that Byzantine architecture occupied, straddling the eastern and western worlds, claiming that "the Greeks of Constantinople were the *arbitri elegantiarum* to the rest of the world, as those of Athens had been before. Hence also their new style of architecture was copied on every side", charting in the remainder of his text the formative influence that Byzantine architecture played in the development of the architecture of medieval Europe, Russia and Islamic regions. For architectural writers influenced by Hope and Lindsay, like Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820–1877) and John Burley Waring (1823–1875) – who wrote on the Byzantine style in relation to the Byzantine and Romanesque court at the Crystal Palace in 1854 – the Byzantine became an intermediary Early Christian architecture between Greco-Roman classicism and medieval Gothic as well as the architecture of Islamic lands. Byzantium was written somewhat positively into a teleological schema which ultimately serviced western Europe.

The three volumes of John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, published between 1851–3, were crucial in promoting the Byzantine in Britain under the influence of Lindsay's new appraisal. For Ruskin, Byzantium represented the antithesis to aesthetic ideals based on order – evolved from Enlightenment values – and a new (perhaps more spiritualising/Orientalising) model for an architecture of religious feeling and awe instead, providing further seeds for

---

[33] Robert Curzon, *Visits to the Monasteries in the Levant*. London 1849, pp. 25–33.
[34] Lindsay, *Sketches* I, p. 239.

those who would seek to use the Byzantine to signal the need for a revived Christianity.[35] Pollen's trajectory of continuity connected to strands in Ruskin's thought:

> Christian art of the declining empire is divided into two great
> branches, western and eastern; one centred at Rome, the other at
> Byzantium, of which the one is the early Christian Romanesque,
> properly so called, and the other, carried to a higher imaginative
> perfection by Greek workmen, is distinguished from it as Byzantine … both of them a
> true continuance and sequence of the art of old Rome itself, flowing uninterruptedly
> down from the foundation head … elevated by Christianity to
> higher aims, and by the fancy of the Greek workmen endowed with
> brighter forms.[36]

Pollen does not credit his sources or locate his inspiration concerning his understanding of Roman and Byzantine 'basilicas'. Indeed, he was criticised for not doing so in a scathing review of his article on the structural characteristics of the basilica, published in *The Ecclesiologist* in 1858. Despite this, it is clear he drew on the thought of Lindsay and Ruskin, in both his relational model for Roman and Byzantine architecture, and the esteem in which he held architectural polychromy, but his thought was also innovative and precocious based on direct experience of Byzantine buildings. Pollen was aware of the potential criticisms of his inclusion of both the 'basilica proper' (the oblong building divided into three or more naves) and more centralised domed churches under one category. Indeed, his reviewer refuted Pollen's evolutionary trajectory, claiming his thoughts lacked both "originality and accuracy", criticising his decision to include both basilican and circular domed buildings as arbitrary and unreasonable.[37]

In fact, many writers distinguished between the basilican and Byzantine traditions – the latter differentiated chiefly by means of the dome – but attributed a generative role for both traditions in the development of later medieval styles of European architecture. Edward Freeman in his influential first history of architecture published in English perceived the basilican and Byzantine traditions as two important starting points from which "almost all subsequent forms may be derived; their influence runs in two streams, sometimes remaining parallel and distinct, sometimes converging and commingling", with their profitable intersection resulting in some of the most significant medieval buildings of Italy and Germany.[38] There were many cases in which the two converged, however, as Freeman observes, particularly in the basilicas of Byzantine Ravenna. Despite the distinction between the two building traditions found in such histories, which increased with greater exposure to buildings in Greece, the basilican and Byzantine were not easily disentangled. Fergusson

---

[35] See Robert Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice: Paradise of cities*. New Haven 2010. For good overview and previous bibliography on the role of feeling in Ruskin's aesthetics, see Timothy Chandler, "Feeling Gothic: Affect and aesthetics in Ruskin's architectural theory", in *Ruskin's Ecologies: Figures of relation from modern painters to the storm-cloud*, Kelly Freeman and Thomas Hughes, eds. Courtauld Books Online, 2021.
[36] John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin (edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn)*, 39 vols. London 1903–12, vol. 9, p. 3.
[37] The Ecclesiologist, "The "Atlantis" on the structural characteristics of the Basilicas", *The Ecclesiologist* 19 (1858), pp. 103–5.
[38] Freeman, *A History*, p. 154.

emphatically differentiated between basilicas and the Byzantine tradition, but he included the churches of Ravenna and Venice within the former category and ran into further issues separating the basilican and Byzantine traditions when confronted with buildings like the seventh-century basilica of Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki, Greece. He ultimately had to admit that "the limits between the two styles are so imperfectly defined that we must wait for further information between attempting to make a classification".[39]

Pollen was clear on his stance, predicting criticisms of his decision to include "a class of buildings not always so named" under the category of basilica. He asserted that the principles and spirit shared by the buildings merited his decision to trace this connection between the Roman and Byzantine iterations of what he considered the most serious and imposing tradition of architecture, which defined the first eight or nine centuries of Christianity.[40] Pollen's vision, deemed unacceptable at the time, was precocious, moving against the prevailing Orientalist impetus which sought to separate Byzantium from Europe. His church operated according to a model of continuity rather than decline, disrupting the usual Enlightenment narrative.

Pollen explained the practical reasons for choosing the basilican type over the popular Gothic alternative in his 'Apologia' – the final instalment of his undergraduate lecture series on the development of the basilica, delivered in Dublin in 1855:

> The Basilicas exhibit a system of internal architecture; now this decoration is less costly, and far easier, than that of exteriors; and if the one only can be effected, more consonant to the Christian spirit; for there was this striking point of contrast between temples of the old worship and the houses of the new; here the worshippers themselves entered, and heard and saw the mysteries within.[41]

Despite practical considerations, the building had ideological import. For Pollen and Newman, the "serious and imposing style of architecture" perfected in the basilican tradition spoke to the history of Christianity's triumph as a newly imperial religion, when the Church transitioned from being a persecuted minority worshipping in private houses to large public buildings.[42] Newman's friend Fr William Neville described the Dublin church as the outcome of Newman's suggestions, with "the ancient Churches of Rome serving him as his model, both from his liking them, and from their historical associations".[43] Writing later, Pollen confirmed the analogy with the Early Church that sat at the heart of Newman's church:

---

[39] Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook* II, p. 958.

[40] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", pp. 129–31. There was an Ultramontanist strain within Catholic aesthetic thought in Europe, embodied in Alexis Ferdinand Rio's *The Poetry of Christian Art* of 1836 which rejected 'Eastern' Byzantine art which exerted a negative influence on western art, even in Ravenna, but which celebrated the Roman basilicas and their mosaics as an expression of papal authority. For discussion, see J.B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered*, London 2003, 65. A more positive connection between Catholicism and Byzantine architecture developed later in the century France but it had emerged earlier in Bavaria, discussed further below.

[41] John Hungerford Pollen, "Lecture VI: "Apologia" of the Basilica, Stephen's Green, Dublin, 1855", in *John Hungerford Pollen: 1829–1902*, Anne Pollen, ed. London 1912, pp. 378–82, sp. p. 378–9.

[42] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", pp. 129, 131.

[43] Newman, *My Campaign* I, note 9. An increasing interest in the early Christian basilicas of Rome in the nineteenth century was spurred on by the devastating fire of 1823 that destroyed the important early Christian papal basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura: its rebuilding over a sustained period of time and the attendant

he felt a strong attachment to those ancient churches with rude exteriors but solemn and impressive within, *recalling the early history of the Church, as it gradually felt its way in the converted Empire, and took possession.*[44]

Staff and students at the nascent Catholic university existed within both a hegemonic Protestant socio-political hierarchy and a post-Enlightenment intellectual climate grappling with secularism.[45] In Newman's memorandum for the synod of 1854, he stated that one of the university's central objectives was to "provide a series of sound and philosophical defences of Catholicity and Revelation, in answer to the infidel tenets and arguments, which threaten us at this time".[46] The church spoke to both Protestantism and secularism through an appeal to the Early Church which surmounted an analogous pagan majority context and continued into the Middle Ages. University Church channelled the Early Church to express Newman's vision for the university, which would devote itself holistically to the formation of its students, producing learned Catholic men to take up societal roles hitherto denied to them.

Analogies between the Church of the present and the past pepper Newman's substantial corpus of writings. In his famous sermon, 'The Second Spring', preached in celebration of the reestablishment of the Catholic diocesan structure in 1850 following its dissolution at the Reformation – Newman specifically compared Catholics and their survival in post-Reformation England to the early persecuted Church, saying they had survived "in corners, and alleys, and cellars and the housetops, or in the recesses of the country; cut off from the populous world around them, and dimly seen, as if through a mist or in twilight, as ghosts flitting to and fro, by the high Protestants, the lords of the earth".[47] Newman's motivation in requesting a building that resonated with early Christian basilicas reflected the meaning attributed to them in the first English architectural histories of the nineteenth century as a type embodying the rise and triumph of Christianity. Freeman develops this concept most fully, saying the appropriation of this imperial building type for Christian use embodied the fundamental shift which wasn't merely the displacement of one religion by another, but the triumph of religion over all spheres of life. The basilica had an immediacy of message: "The mention of these buildings at once brings before us the first triumphs of our religion, the days when the powers of the world first bowed before the Cross".[48]

Newman and Pollen's basilica had clear symbolic resonance, but Pollen's *execution* of the basilica incorporated specific features understood as Byzantine as part of this Early Christian vision. Pollen situated the splendour and prestige of Byzantine churches in continuity with Rome through the Dublin church, in a homage to the Early Christian basilican tradition which he saw as belonging to the eastern and western halves of the empire. He saw

---

discussions concerning how its original design could be preserved garnered interest from across the Christian world.

[44] Pollen, *The Month,* September 1906, p. 319. Emphasis my own.

[45] For a critique of 'the Enlightenment' as a complex and problematic term, see Michael Peters, "The enlightenment and its critics", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51:9 (2019), pp. 886–94.

[46] Newman, "Memorandum on the Objects of the University and the Means for attaining them, April 29, 1854," in *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman,* 32 vols. Oxford 1961–2008, vol. 16, p. 557.

[47] Newman, *Sermons Preached*, 172–3.

[48] Freeman, *A History*, p. 152.

the Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena as bringing the Roman basilica to Constantinople and Palestine, transforming it by means of the dome, along with "the elaboration of colour and detail".[49] And it is to colour and detail that we must turn our attention.

Byzantine features

> The Christian Roman and Byzantine work is round-arched, with
>
> single and well-proportioned shafts; capitals imitated from classical
>
> Roman; mouldings more or less so; and large surfaces of walls
>
> entirely covered with imagery, mosaic and paintings, which of
>
> scripture history or sacred symbols.[50]

Although Early Christian and Byzantine forms were perceived to share many of their characteristic traits, articulated succinctly here by Ruskin, there were differences of emphasis perceived by Victorian writers. Aside from the eventual development of the centralised plan based on the Greek cross, surmounted by a dome, there were smaller features that distinguished the two styles or in which the Byzantines excelled, most of which are evident at University Church. The capital was perceived as one of the main differentiating features, alongside stilted arches, colourful stone cladding and the use of mosaic, perceived always as the work of 'Greek' artisans.

Marble incrustation

The aisleless basilica demanded an 'interior' architecture that privileged colour, texture and pictorial representation. It is in these aspects that the Byzantinism of the Dublin church is observed, through the extensive sheathing of the interior with polychromy and golden pseudo-mosaics.[51] Pollen claimed that basilicas "contemplated art in their interior only" and that "this was by a system of decorative incrustation", referencing Ruskin's primary characteristic with which he defined Byzantine architecture: its "confessed incrustation" – sheathing inexpensive structural mediums such as brick with precious marbles and mosaics. Ruskin famously celebrated colour in Byzantine design, connecting "the bright hues of the early architecture of Venice" to "the solemnity of her early and earnest religion".[52] Detractors decrying his disregard for the classical tradition, saw that it was precisely Ruskin's "singular delight in colour … which he sees as somehow connected to the religious sentiment" that lay behind his "love of the Byzantine style, and admiration of the principle of incrustation", which admittedly was, even for this critic, "the only legitimate means of giving to a building perfect and permanent chromatic decoration".[53] Generally, a

---

[49] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", pp. 133, 141.
[50] Ruskin, *The Works* vol. 9, p. 39.
[51] Excellent, extensive use of colour was perceived as a signature trait of the Byzantine style. See "Letters to a lady, embodying a popular sketch of the history of architecture, and the characteristics of the various styles which have prevailed, no. XI", *The Builder* 10 (1852), p. 437.
[52] Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 10, p. 177.
[53] "Classical columnar architecture", *The Builder* 11 (1853), p. 723.

contentious connection between colour and Byzantine design was widely held, defined by means of the application of marbles and mosaics, but also polychromatic brickwork. Pollen saw colour as one of the defining principles of the basilica, achieved primarily through incrustation, with the eastern tradition excelling far beyond the West.[54]

Colourful and varied 'marble' inlay covers the walls of the nave up to a height of 4.5m (Fig. 5). Pollen said "the side walls are all crusted over with marbles in the peculiar mode called by the ancients *opus musivum*; no raised panellings as in the Gothic or modern Italian methods, only flat *intarsiature* without relief. This inlaid marble is bordered and incorporated into the wall by a string or running mould in the Byzantine manner, of Caen stone, roughed over with flat lines and covered with gold".[55] Pollen observed this method in the buildings of Ravenna and in San Marco, Venice. That the design of these marbles was intended to appeal to such churches to channel the spirit of the Early Church is clear in the description of University Church in the *Catholic University Gazette* (1856), probably by Newman, which said: "To Irish productions we shall be indebted for a variety of colour and vein which might almost vie with St Mark's at Venice, that mine of the most precious relics of antiquity". Style technique and apostolic lineage were inseparable.

Stilted arcades

The darker antechapel, dramatically framing the bright, colourful space of the nave, is filled with monolithic columns of light and dark 'marbles', or polished limestones, from counties Armagh, Offaly and Kilkenny (Fig. 1). These supports carry the large gallery above which extends 14 m into the church. A row of eight thin columns of alternating black and brown shafts surmounted by carved alabaster capitals, featuring Irish flora such as oak leaves and clover, support seven tall, elliptical arches that frame the view towards the apse; the outermost columns are engaged to the church's lateral walls, with the inner six freestanding.[56] Roman columns springing into a round-arched arcade were considered a defining characteristic of both Early Christian and Byzantine architecture by Victorian writers, but arcades with stilted or elliptical arches were considered Byzantine.[57] For Freeman, it was the stilted arch that differentiated the Byzantine from the basilican.[58] For Hope, the arch underwent even greater changes than the capital – in Roman architecture it had "universally been round-headed, and had always rested the termination of its semicircle on the capitals of the supporting columns", but "the abutments were now elongated downwards, below the semicircle, to an indefinite length".[59]

Convex left-cut capitals

[54] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", p. 141. On the material enhancement of Byzantine forms through colour, see Wyatt and Waring, *The Byzantine and Romanesque*, p. 29.
[55] Pollen, "Lecture VI", p. 381.
[56] On the 'elliptical' shape of the arches, see Pollen, "Lecture VI", p. 379.
[57] See, for example, Wyatt and Waring, *The Byzantine and Romanesque*, p. 20; Freeman, *A History*, p. 158.
[58] Freeman, *A History*, p. 172; Hope, *An Historical Essay* vol. I, p. 131, speaks on the stilted arch arcade as specifically Byzantine.
[59] Hope, *An Historical Essay* vol. I, p. 131.

Four thicker freestanding columns precede this arcade, three black and one brown. Their alabaster capitals constitute crisply stylised foliage in the Byzantine manner (Fig. 6).[60] They resemble Ruskin's diagrams of various Byzantine "convex" capitals in *The Stones*, which had greatly influenced Pollen.[61] The Byzantine capital was considered a differentiating feature of the style by Victorian writers such as Hope who, although less appreciative of the it than others such as Ruskin and Pollen, saw the Byzantine capital as still placed on a round shaft but now "little more than square blocks tapered downwards to the dimensions of their stalks, and adorned either with foliage in low relief, or with a sort of basket work".[62] Wyatt and Waring wrote at length on the characteristics of the Byzantine style in their attempt to elevate perceptions of it in 1854, describing the Byzantine cushion capital as evolving from the ancient Roman model: "The foliage of the acanthus, although imitated from the antique, quite changed its character, becoming more geometrical and conventional in its form".[63] Ruskin gave great attention in *The Stones* to the arch and supporting capitals of Byzantine architecture as chief determiners of the style, and he characterised the capital by means of its cut-leaf design and superior homage to nature compared to its classical precedents.[64]

Drawing on Ruskin's ideas as well as his own close observations and measurements made in Ravenna, Pollen describes the Byzantine cushion capital as based on the concave acanthus capital of classical antiquity, distinguished from it by "a greater desire to appreciate its natural beauty, and with a certain delight in observing the fresh joyousness of living vegetation, blown by winds and clinging round the convex mass".[65] Following the decline of the classical tradition, Pollen saw the "Easterns" as far exceeding the West in the design of the capital, and thus Byzantine churches as "the best field" for study of the capital. He celebrated the capitals of Ravenna and Constantinople in particular, as having an original character of their own which was "sharp, severely controlled but not wanting in vigour or grace".[66]

The renowned west front of San Marco, celebrated influentially by Ruskin, included an assortment of multicoloured marble columns surmounted by diverse capitals in lighter stone and they were clearly a source of inspiration for the Dublin church. White stone capitals atop monolithic shafts of different coloured marbles were a distinguishing feature of the basilican tradition according to Pollen.[67] For him, San Marco was a later and superlative exemplar of the basilican type – "a wonderful exponent of their principles", dwelling particularly on its "columns of marble in all colours, the archivolts being of sculptured white marble".[68] The darker antechapel dominated by these coloured columns and alabaster capitals

---

[60] At San Vitale a leaf pattern that is very similar to the antechapel columns appears on the sides of the double capital columns in the presbytery.

[61] Ruskin, *Works* vol. 10, p. 158, plate 7.

[62] Hope, *An Historical Essay* vol. I, p. 122.

[63] Wyatt and Waring, *The Byzantine and Romanesque*, p. 21.

[64] Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 10, p. 155 onwards.

[65] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", 134. Pollen measured and sketched the alabaster capitals in Ravenna's churches in detail in 1847. See Mary Pollen, *John Hungerford Pollen*, p. 81.

[66] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", pp. 140–1.

[67] Ibid. He was also influenced by the coloured marble columns with light stone capitals being employed at the Museum Building in Trinity College. See Bhalla, *Newman University Church*, pp. 96–104.

[68] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", pp. 142–3.

sculpted with identifiable Irish flora and Byzantine designs created an affective liminal space wherein viewers moved from the mundane world of the Dublin street into the bright marble and pseudo-mosaic of the nave which resonated further with the glories of the Early Christian milieu.

Pseudo mosaic

A pseudo-arcade was created on the lateral walls of the nave by means of green faux columns embedded in the marble cladding. These imitation columns, surmounted by low relief alabaster capitals, support 'arches' containing golden lunettes with carefully chosen saints flanked by angels, which were painted by Pollen in an archaic style similar to the Pre-Raphaelites, to whom Pollen was linked. The textured gold ground creates a play of light and the inclusion of hatched lines and fragments of coloured glass and polished marble were clearly intended to suggest mosaic. A further pseudo-mosaic, painted on lined panels by Pollen, is found in the semi-dome of the apse, forming the focus of the church (Fig. 7). Writing to Newman on the 8 August 1855, Pollen called it "mosaic work", making clear he was emulating the more expensive medium.[69] In the centre of the semi-dome, the enthroned Virgin is labelled *Sedes Sapientiae* (Seat of Wisdom). The dove of the Holy Spirit is above her and a jewelled cross. The hand of God extends from the summit of the semi-dome, emitting rays of light. An inhabited vine grows from the base of the composition, its branches swirling outwards in a series of circles occupying the remaining space of the conch. Each circle contains a saint bearing a palm frond, on a dark ground that contrasts with the gold ground of the remainder of the composition. A variety of flora and fauna occupy the tendrils of the vines. The design was a clear response to the apse mosaic in the upper church of San Clemente (completed by 1125).

In Victorian scholarship, western medieval mosaics were assumed to have been either carried out by "Greek" craftsmen or local workers trained in the Byzantine idiom. The conflation of mosaic and Byzantium was enduring.[70] Hope and Lindsay wrote on Byzantine mosaics as an inherently Christian art form, in keeping with their reverence for the holiness of the Byzantine style. Ruskin's description of San Marco generated wider interest in mosaics and their capacity to instil religious "awe" through majestic solemnity.[71] For Hope and Lindsay, mosaic merely had a Roman prelude to its most glorious Christian phase in Byzantium. Hope asserted that mosaics, even later "magnificent examples" in Rome such as San Clemente, were entirely Byzantine: they were manufactured in Constantinople "until the extirpation of the Greek empire, and thence diffused over all the countries within easy reach of Greek artists".[72] Lindsay agreed that "Greek artists were employed in every church of consequence", and that luminous vault mosaics were the preserve of Byzantine artists.[73] Ruskin cemented the characterisation of mosaic as an inherently Byzantine art form that was

[69] Letter [to John Henry Newman] from John Hungerford Pollen, 62 R[athmines] R[oad] [Dublin], 8 August [1855]. *PA*, MS. 17906/5, fols. 10–11.

[70] Articles in *The Builder* repeatedly reference mosaic as a Byzantine art form. See, for example, 'On the decoration', *The Builder* 9, 22 February 1851, 131.

[71] Ruskin, *Works* vol. 10, p. 132.

[72] Hope, *An Historical Essay* I, pp. 166–70.

[73] Lindsay, *Sketches* I, p. 246.

suited to all Christian churches in *The Stones*, wherein he asserted that the Byzantine church was differentiated from other styles by means of its pictorial mosaics covering large surface expanses.[74] Wyatt and Waring maintained this line of thought, celebrating the "truly ecclesiastical" nature of Byzantium's "gold-clad interiors" and insisting that "beautiful glass mosaic" was "peculiar" to the Byzantine style.[75] Pollen too defined it as "early Christian representation" perfected in Byzantine basilicas.[76] Later, when mosaics emerged within British churches, Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894) still defined the form as "essentially a Christian art" which was inherently connected to Byzantium as Rome's "Eastern successor".[77] The San Clemente mosaic that Pollen was responding to was perceived as a Byzantine work of art. Lindsay even went so far as to say that the first stirrings of the revival of art under the Byzantine Komnenian emperors of the eleventh century were felt in the apse mosaic of San Clemente.[78]

From the 1860s, mosaic was employed more widely through the work of Antonio Salviati who founded a company capable of manufacturing mosaic commercially.[79] Pollen's painted emulation pre-dated this more widespread availability and he was influenced by the Byzantinising murals of Nazarene artists that both he and Newman had admired in Munich, particularly those by Heinrich von Hess (1798–1863) in the Allerheiligen-Hofkirche, built for King Ludwig I between 1826–37 and Georg Friedrich Ziebland's basilica of St Boniface (1835–50). The overall design of University Church was informed by these Rundbogenstil (round-arched style) buildings and their mural paintings by the Nazarenes, whom Ludwig had brought from Rome, some of which similarly combined basilican and Byzantine traditions in various permutations.[80] The Rundbogenstil buildings of Munich were lauded in English publications and Pollen visited there in 1847, when students and antiquarians were flocking to study the architecture and revival of mural painting.[81] Pollen was particularly interested in Ziebland's St Boniface, destroyed in the Second World War, which was under construction at the time. Inspired by Sant'Apollinare in Classe and San Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, the basilica was supplied with monolithic marble columns, a brightly painted open timber roof, archaising religious history scenes above the arcade and a Byzantinising pseudo-mosaic in the apse as in Dublin (Fig. 8). The church belonged to a Benedictine Abbey established by Ludwig as part of his endeavours to reinvigorate the Catholic faith after the secularism of the early century. The community had jurisdiction over the nearby museum district to signal the

[74] Ruskin, *Works* vol. 10, p. 132.

[75] Wyatt and Waring, *The Byzantine and Romanesque*, 20, 29, 32.

[76] Pollen, "Structural characteristics", 142.

[77] Austen Henry Layard, "Mosaic Decoration. Royal Institute of British Architects", *The Builder* 26 (1868), pp. 887–9, sp. p. 888.

[78] Lindsay, *Sketches* I, pp. 276–7.

[79] Reino Liefkes, "Antonio Salviati and the nineteenth-century renaissance of Venetian glass", *The Burlington Magazine* 136 (1994): pp. 283–90.; Sheldon Barr, *Venetian Glass: Confections in glass 1855–1914*. New York 1998, pp. 19–42.

[80] The connection between Pollen's design and the Munich buildings was first made by Constantine Peter Curran, *Newman House and University Church*, Dublin 1953, p. 224, built upon in Michael McCarthy, "University Church: Towards a stylistic context", *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies: The Journal of the Irish Georgian Society* VI (2003), pp. 22–33.

[81] See for example, John Gregory Crace, "Decoration of buildings at Munich", *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal* XIV (1851), pp. 133–6.

connexion of religion and the arts and sciences as part of his resistance of secularism. Both Newman and Pollen admired St Boniface, and its arrangement, components and impetus clearly exerted an influence over the Dublin design.[82]

The paintings and continuity

The original paintings above the marble inlay continued the colourful expression of continuity from the Early Church. They were modelled on Raphael's (1483–1520) tapestries of events from the lives of Peter and Paul, and the death of the proto-martyr Stephen – commissioned in 1515 for the Sistine Chapel by Pope Leo X (1513–21). They were punctuated by copies of the twelve apostles from the nave pillars of Tre Fontane, Rome, thought at the time to be the work of Raphael's school and of a similar date to the tapestries.[83] The dilapidated paintings were replaced with acrylic paintings by Levent Tuncer in the twenty-first century. Like Nazarene murals, the originals responded to 'primitive' Christian works of art predating the High Renaissance as part of the drive to reinvigorate Christian spirituality by prominent Romantic groups such as the German Brotherhood of Saint Luke – derogatively termed the Nazarenes because of their medievalising appearance and lifestyle. The paintings at University Church responded to both the Nazarene movement and the Rundbogenstil buildings that contained their paintings.

Newman was interested in the Nazarenes even before conversion, and on his way back from Rome in 1847 he travelled with the Nazarene painter Hess to Munich, where he admired "the celebrated frescoes", commenting that those of Hess in the Allerheiligen-Hofkirche and St Boniface there, were "the most beautiful".[84] Newman commissioned the Dublin paintings while in Rome in 1856, writing to Pollen on 1 February that he had an arrangement with 'M. Platner' – a disciple of the Nazarenes, who were still influential in Rome despite its protagonists having dispersed – and that they had engaged a French painter to complete the paintings.[85] The placement of narrative religious scenes painted in an archaising style above the pseudo-arcade in University Church, accompanied by a hieratical golden pseudo-mosaic in the apse, paralleled the decorative scheme of St Boniface.

Like the basilican design, marbles and mosaic, the paintings continued the visual appeal to Rome's apostolic authority. According to Pollen, they were to create an analogy between the work and context of the university and the Early Church, saying to Newman "I hope you will like the choice for a University Ch. As we mean to smash modern Heathenism under the Communion and in the name of Peter …"[86] This sentiment applies to the structure and decoration as a whole which appealed to Early Christianity at every turn, by means of its Romano-Byzantine design, intrinsically undermining ideas of rupture and atrophy through an expression of ancient Christianity adapted to present needs.

---

[82] Curran, *The Romanesque Revival*, p. 125.
[83] *Letters and Diaries* 17, p. 142.
[84] *Letters and Diaries* 12, 135, 151.
[85] *Letters and Diaries* 17, 4. See Eileen Kane, "John Henry Newman's Catholic University Church revisited", *Artefact: Journal of the Irish Association of Art Historians* 1 (2007), pp. 6–27, sp. p. 20.
[86] Letter [to John Henry Newman] from John Pollen, Worcester, 29 September 1855. MS. 17906/5, fols. 18–19. *PA*.

The church's design created an analogy with the triumph of the Early Church but also expressed the hallowed continuity of the Church over the centuries, vindicating the university's mission. This unavoidably challenged Edward Gibbon's (1737–94) scathing deprecation of the early medieval church in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* published between 1776–88, particularly as it motivated the writings of Protestant scholars whose characterisations of the corruption of the medieval Catholic church were closely informed by it. Newman discussed the foundational notion upon which the rejection of Catholicism and the persecution of Catholics rested:

> … that Christianity was very pure in its beginning, was very corrupt
>
> in the middle age, and is very pure in England now, though still
>
> corrupt everywhere else: that in the middle age, a tyrannical
>
> institution, called the Church, arose and swallowed up Christianity,
>
> and that that Church is alive still, and has not yet disgorged its
>
> prey … in the middle age there was no Christianity anywhere at all,
>
> but all was dark and horrible, as bad as paganism, or rather much worse.[87]

It was Newman's rejection of this paradigm that precipitated his conversion, articulated in his *Development of Doctrine* the year of his conversion which expounded how core beliefs evolved over time while maintaining their essence – Newman's influential accretive understanding of doctrine.[88] Sacred continuity from the Early Church to the Church of the present was key to Newman's defence of 'Catholicity and Revelation' – the main objective of his university, embodied in University Church and expressed in a style created for him by Pollen.

Newman knew he was building in the context of revivalism variously connected to issues of doctrine and nationalism, but he was unswerving: architecture should develop like doctrine, providing a "living architecture of the 19th century" suited to hosting the "living ritual" of the church.[89] Appeals to the past were only valuable for their contribution to the present. As a contemporary expression of an ancient basilica, the Dublin church embodied his accretive comprehension of Catholicism – the preservation and evolution of type. Pollen included the visual and architectural culture of the eastern Roman empire to make this point which he saw as the most excellent evolution of the Early Christian basilican type inherited from Rome.

Whilst for others, medieval revivalism was often imbricated with emergent nationalisms, Newman was only interested in Catholic identity. The church projected an erudite and time-honoured identity for disenfranchised Catholics. In his lectures delivered before the university's inauguration, Newman said: "Catholics in these islands have not been in a condition for centuries to attempt the sort of education which is necessary for the man of the

---

[87] Newman, *Present Position of Catholics*, pp. 12–13.
[88] Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*. London, 1845.
[89] Letter to Ambrose Lisle Phillipps, 15 June 1848, *Letters and Diaries* 12, p. 221.

world … Their legitimate stations, duties, employments, have been taken from them".[90] The structure and forms were used to create something that connected back to the ancient church, implicating early Byzantine architecture as part of the hallowed Early Christian tradition as it evolved from Rome in a serious, rather than whimsical or Orientalising tone. The vision was for a better Catholic future; University Church provided a physical manifestation of those aspirations.

---

[90] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, London 1907, pp. xv–xvi.