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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Ethics and Aesthetics of Architecture: The Anglican Reception of Roman Baroque Churches

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For Anglican travellers in Italy, Rome had an ambiguous status. It was the seat both of high culture and of 'superstitious' Roman Catholic practices, including art and architecture. These extremes culminated in church buildings. This article studies the perception and reaction of English travellers in Rome towards architecture of the Roman Catholic Church and its influence on English church architecture. It will reveal the church building as an aesthetic object, in addition to possessing religious qualities, through the analysis of printed travelogues and engravings that circulated amongst the English Grand Tour travellers. By analyzing the travelogue discourse — with particular attention to descriptions of specific church buildings and any intentional omissions in these descriptions — and examining the relationship between these discourses and contemporary English aesthetic theories, I will demonstrate how a certain appreciation for Roman Baroque church architecture was made acceptable and could even inspire the design of English church architecture. As will become clear, the process of travel included the separation of moral and artistic values in aesthetic appreciation. This separation made the cultural transfer between Italy and England possible in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

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## Introduction

For English travellers in the 17th and early 18th centuries, the status of Rome, the Eternal City, was ambiguous. It was the seat both of high culture and of 'popery' and superstition.<sup>1</sup> The existing fabric of Rome — the monuments of antiquity and the formidable constructions of the 15th and 16th centuries — were precious examples of artistic and architectural craftsmanship. These monuments captured the attention of the foreign visitors but remained glorious symbols of paganism and papacy (Delbeke and Morel 2013). Church buildings most exemplified this tension. As sacred places that also displayed the aesthetic taste of the local culture, churches in Rome could re-cast idolatry and superstition as elements of Roman culture and antiquity (Sweet 2010: 146). Visitors had to negotiate between their religious beliefs and their aesthetic preferences, and between the risk of idolatry and the admiration for religious art and architecture. Concerns in England about the dangers of foreign travel, especially regarding the young traveller's exposure to 'popish' culture, remained great, even as continental travel became increasingly common in the 17th and 18th centuries, with the growing popularity of the Grand Tour.

Since English aesthetic theory inseparably linked the human tempers with morality and the arts, the potential

dangers of exposing young, morally 'pure' Anglicans to papal culture were well acknowledged (Haynes 2001; Shiqiao 2007: 94–133). According to English moralists and aesthetes, Roman Baroque architecture was a primary example of the papacy's contamination of cultural advances. Early English aesthetic theoreticians, in particular Anthony Cooper Shaftesbury and Colen Campbell, rejected on moral grounds the 'lasciviousness' of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Francesco Borromini, and Domenico Fontana. The exuberance of Baroque architecture equalled the moral decadence of Roman Catholicism, and its capricious forms were thought to be categorically antithetical to the pure rules of Classicism. Yet, as demonstrated in this article, the moral depreciation of the Baroque within English aesthetic theory did not impede travellers' and architects' admiration of these constructions. On the contrary, travel books and souvenir etchings testify to the importance of Italian churches in the Grand Tour. While anti-Catholicism was a constant feature of Grand Tour literature, the popularity of the Italian journey gradually helped to reframe discussions of Roman Catholic art in primarily aesthetic terms. Published travel diaries and guides mirror the changing sensibility towards Roman Catholic culture in England, and also help us understand the evolving ethical and aesthetic attitudes towards Roman Baroque architecture. Although the travellers' 'ignorance' of the moral and ethical connotations of church architecture in Rome was of ongoing concern to the moralists, it also facilitated the transfer of Italian architectural models to England.

Indeed, some of the great Baroque churches of Rome came to serve as models for English Reformed churches and the works of Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor, Thomas Archer and James Gibbs. By the end of the 17th century, High Church Anglican clergymen no longer considered the 'magnificence' of Roman Catholic church architecture as an expression of the 'Babylonian whore'; rather, the magnificent buildings came to be seen as powerful means to attract worshippers and a model that could be used by the Church of England (Morel 2011: 188).

### Shaftesbury: Traveller and England's First Aesthete

The uncertain attitude the English had toward papal Rome was reflected in the writings and ideas of English aesthetes who travelled to Italy in the 17th and 18th centuries. These included Anthony Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, and Colen Campbell. Although Shaftesbury and Campbell composed works of entirely different genres – Shaftesbury wrote a treatise on the philosophy of art, whereas Campbell promoted the development of English architecture – both theorists illustrate the complex ways in which English travellers perceived Catholic Baroque churches and how the observations of these travellers were shaped by English religious discourses and art theory. They also demonstrate how English religious and moral discourses were used to forge an aesthetic opinion and came to play an important role in the English Neo-Palladian revival, which fostered a passionate rejection of everything Baroque.

In 1687, Shaftesbury began a tour of continental Europe. In Italy he devoted himself to the study of the 'polite arts' – that is, to the acquisition of good knowledge and taste in art. But during this period, he also developed a strong suspicion towards Roman Catholicism, clerics and royal courts (Klein 2004). When he returned to England in 1689, Shaftesbury began writing several philosophical essays on taste, aesthetics and ethics. By early 1700 he had drafted his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Time* and *The Moralists*. These works, considered the first treatises of English aesthetic theory, were published in a much revised form in 1709. In the dialogues of *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury argues that aesthetic beauty cannot be separated from ethical truth. Man is gifted with the ability to discern beauty not only in works of art but also in nature and moral actions. In this work he links beauty to virtue, 'the beautiful, the proportioned and the becoming' with 'the virtuous, the benevolent and the good' (Shiqiao 2007: 97). In 1711 Shaftesbury took his second and final voyage to Italy. He devoted the last months of his life to writing *Second Characters or the Language of Forms* (published in 1712), which applies the moral aesthetic theory of his *Characteristics* to the field of art. Beautifying elements as well as the corruptions of taste are equally discussed and analysed as aesthetic components (Shaftesbury 1969: 25). According to Shaftesbury's judgment of taste and politeness, no art which is 'savage', 'monstrous' or 'cruel' should be displayed. 'Divine forms', moreover, are said to 'perfect the idea of humanity' (Shaftesbury 1969: 105). Following the

art theorist Fréart de Chambray,<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury develops his theory even further, directly associating the moral life of the artist with his oeuvre. An artist who leads a dubious life, such as Bernini, could not deliver morally acceptable and thus good artworks. In *Second Characters*, Shaftesbury notices 'how the works and the characters of the masters correspond to their own proper and personal characters, legible from their artificial second characters, i.e. their works' (Shaftesbury 1969: 15). Without making explicit moral judgments, Shaftesbury similarly rejected the church architecture of Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor, which he deemed as being 'Gothick.' Following Giovanni Pietro Bellori's condemnation of Borromini as a 'gothic ignoramus' in his *Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* – a text known to Shaftesbury through the translation of John Evelyn – Shaftesbury's use of the term 'Gothic' was likewise rooted in European moral aesthetics. The term 'Gothick,' as used by Shaftesbury, referred to any style that he considered rule breaking and offensive. This included what we presently call Mannerism and Baroque, as well as Gothic, that is, all styles not purely classical (Chaney 1998: 316, 317).

### The 'Moral Licentiousness' of the Baroque

Shaftesbury was certainly not the first to attack the licentiousness and excesses of Baroque churches on moral terms. Indeed, the idea that Roman Catholic art and architecture, which in 17th-century England was commonly associated with the Baroque, was connected with moral licentiousness was grounded in religious debates between the Roman Church and the Church of England that preceded early-modern aesthetic theories. In 1622, for instance, the Puritan preacher Jeremiah Dyke referred to the Roman Catholic Church as the apocalyptic whore and to the churches of Rome as the slut's adornment, distracting and deceiving 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 majesty to sense . . . full of abomination and the filthinesse of her fornication. All is but the whores garish habite to catch carnall eyes. (Dyke 1623: 9)

Both Shaftesbury and Dyke preferred a simple and pure architecture. For Dyke such an architecture reflected the simplicity and purity of the early Church, before it was corrupted by popery and superstition. By the 18th century Shaftesbury's quest for the pure forms of classical architecture was framed within the context of the neo-Palladian movement. The way in which the proponents of this movement echoed religious theories on the morality of art and architecture is exemplified in the two-volume *Vitruvius Britannicus*. This book was originally conceived as an anonymous printseller's book displaying the most beautiful examples of 17th-century English architecture, including a number of Baroque constructions. But due to its long edition history, paradoxically, it came to be instrumental in the demise of the English Baroque, which began to lose popularity under the Whig government and the



**Figure 1:** Francesco Borromini, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome, 1634–1677. Engraving by Rossi. From Falda (1665). Photo by Pierre Putman.

Low Church movement in the early 18th century. This abrupt reversal in the book's scope is evident not so much in the addition of engravings of (unbuilt) Neo-Palladian architecture, as in the introduction written for that purpose by Colen Campbell in 1714–1715.

In his introduction, Campbell – who most likely travelled to Italy and studied architecture there – deplored the degeneration of Italian architecture after the age of Palladio, and lamented the disappearance of antique simplicity and the rise of capricious Baroque ornamentation (Colvin 1995: 213):

With him [Palladio] the great Manner and exquisite Taste of Building is lost; for the Italians can no more now relish the Antique simplicity, but are entirely employed in capricious Ornaments, which must at last end in the Gothick.

For Proof of this Assertion, I appeal to the Productions of the last Century. How affected and licentious are the Works of Bernini and Fontana? How wildly extravagant are the Designs of Borromini, who has endeavoured to debauch Mankind with his odd and chimerical Beauties . . . ? (Campbell 1715: 1) (**Fig. 1**)

Just a few paragraphs later, however, Campbell praises Wren, Archer and Hawksmoor as learned and ingenious gentlemen architects, who greatly contributed to the embellishment and adornment of England with their architectural prowess (Campbell 1715: 2) (**Fig. 2**). When considering English architecture – including the city

churches by Wren, the Queen Anne churches by Hawksmoor, John James and John Vanbrugh and the churches by Archer – Campbell, contrary to Shaftesbury and Dyke, favours the 'Gothick' or the English Baroque.

Furthermore, when one takes a closer look at the churches depicted in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, it appears that Campbell is not so fiercely opposed towards Baroque magnificence and ornamentation, and that the engravings support Campbell's second statement in favour of English Baroque architects, rather than his first one rejecting the Baroque as a licentious style. The illustrations of church architecture in *Vitruvius Britannicus* include St. Paul's cathedral in London, with its dome reminiscent of St. Peter's in Rome, the Baroque steeple of Bow church, and Thomas Archer's St. Philips church (**Fig. 3**). Archer was one of England's most well-known Baroque architects. He had travelled throughout Europe and his designs show the influence of Bernini and Borromini. Archer's work has more in common with continental Baroque than that of any other English architect of this period (Colvin 1995: 71). Finally, and most surprisingly, the first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, dedicated to the most exquisite examples of English architecture, opens with a decidedly un-English building: St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (**Fig. 4**). All the churches in this volume, including St. Peter's, are described as 'noble, majestic, beautiful' and belonging to 'the best in the Kingdom'.

As Eileen Harris demonstrates in her critical edition of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Campbell was not responsible for the original selection of buildings engraved in Volume I and therefore his perception of the Italian Baroque





**Figure 2:** Nicholas Hawksmoor, St. Mary Woolnoth, London, 1716. Drawing by Frederick Mackenzie, engraving by J. Le Keux, 1838. Image from Collage, The London Picture Archive, with permission of the London Metropolitan Archives (City of London).

cannot be inferred from these images. Only in 1714 was Campbell's authorship of the book advertised, after he had provided an additional selection of plates along with eighteen unexecuted designs by his own hand. These later images were all in a Palladian style. They accorded with the agenda he laid out in his introduction, but contrasted with the initial selection of plates (Harris 1986).

While the complex edition history of *Vitruvius Britannicus* helps to explain the conflict between the introduction criticizing the Italian Baroque and the engravings promoting Baroque architecture, it does not, however, clarify why St. Peter's in Rome is included in a book on English architecture, nor why Campbell's introductory text appears to contradict itself. The obvious tension between the aesthetic valuation of Roman Baroque architecture in 18th-century England, and the ethical connotations these buildings carried, merits further attention.

If the common attitude was still attuned to the danger of idolatry in a society dictated by good taste and a sense of decorum, from the end of the 17th century onwards, the magnificence of Roman Baroque church architecture was increasingly appreciated as one of the strengths of Roman Catholicism. Preaching at the consecration of St. Mary's in Southampton in 1711, Thomas Bisse explicitly stated that the magnificence of church architecture was one of the strengths of Roman Catholicism:

It must be acknowledged to their glory, that the beauty of their temples, though no real defence, is too real an advantage to their idolatrous Wor-

ship: . . . For as in the affairs of state, likewise of the church, the opinions and passions of men will be sway'd by shew and magnificence. With the advantages of these, the popish communion thus gain'd many a proselyte from the Reformed, whilst they have beheld the stateliness of its churches, and the majesty of its worship. (Bisse 1711: 11)

Bisse recognized the persuasive power emanating from the Baroque magnificence, and saw it as the strength of this architecture, but also its danger. That Bisse recognised the advantages of the buildings of the Roman Catholic Church proves that authors such as Campbell were not alone in attempting to negotiate the tension between English ethics and aesthetic taste. Following contemporary theories on sense perception, such as those by Reynolds and Walter Charleton, grandeur and magnificence became the primary movers of admiration (Morel 2011; James 1998: 168–177, 920, 921). It is thus not surprising that magnificent architecture was increasingly accepted as a powerful instrument of religious persuasion. Yet this does not entirely explain why the splendour of Baroque architecture was successfully integrated within a post-Reformation England that clearly associated Roman Baroque magnificence with papal excess and immorality. Moreover, it is questionable how English travellers in Rome negotiated the tension between suspicion of idolatrous worship and aesthetic admiration for the Baroque. As such, how could one praise Wren, Hawksmoor and Archer and dismiss Bernini, Fontana and Bor-



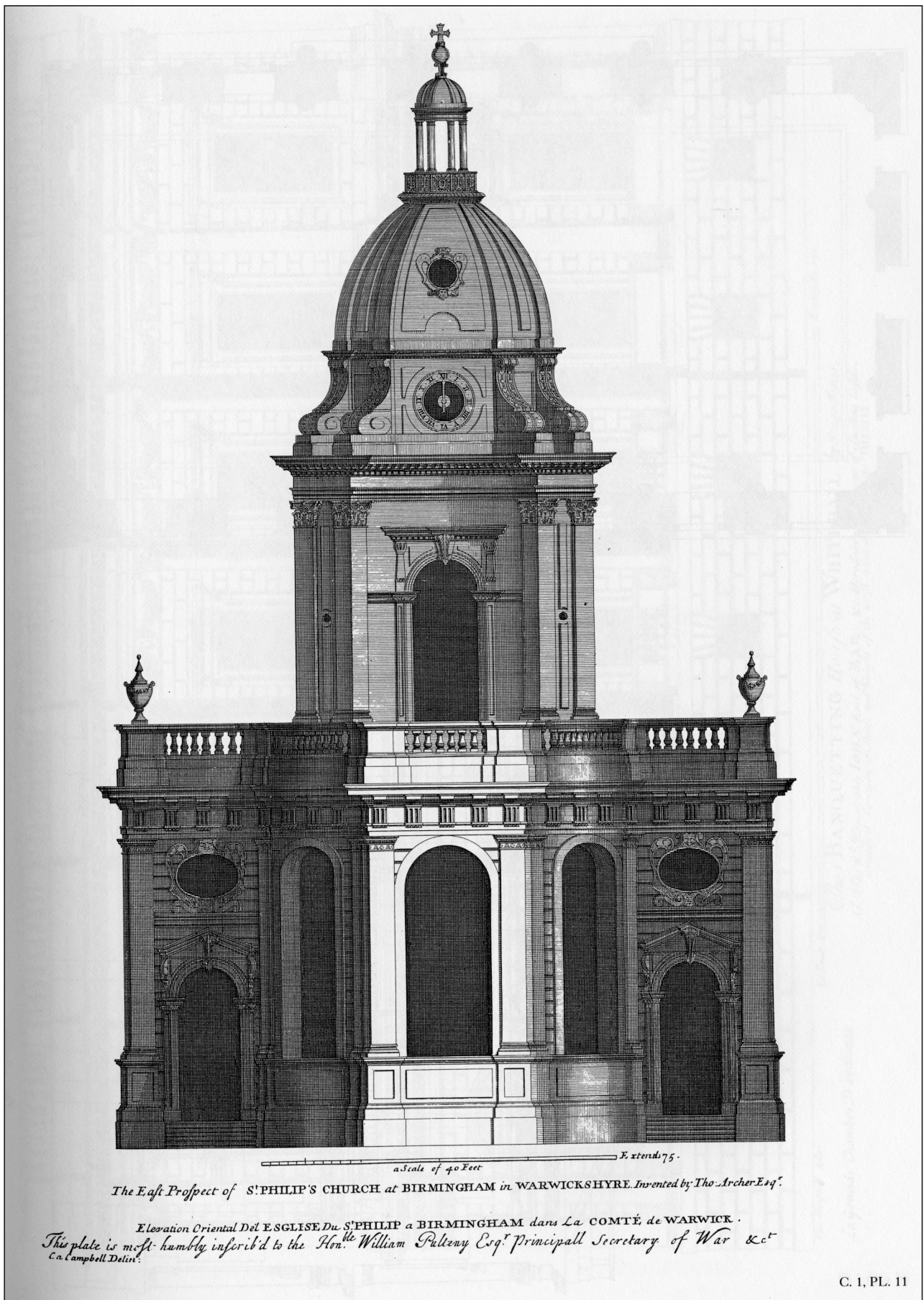


Figure 3: Thomas Archer, St. Philips Church at Birmingham in Warwickshire, 1715. From Campbell (1715: plate 11). Photo by Pierre Putman.





**Figure 4:** Donato Bramante, Antonio da Sangallo, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Carlo Maderno, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, St. Peter's, Rome, 1506–1626. From Campbell (1715: plate 6). Photo by Pierre Putman.

romini? What was the status of St. Peter's in a book on English architecture?

A clue to the answer to these questions might actually be given by Campbell himself, in his introduction to *Vitruvius Britannicus*. According to Campbell, it was necessary to distinguish between the ethical and the aesthetic value of a building. This required that the viewer develop an exceptionally critical attitude to the structures he studied, not falling sway to the marvel of the foreign and instead judging architecture in England and abroad according to the same standards. According to Campbell, such a capacity of judgement was especially rare amongst the young Grand Tour travellers:

The general Esteem that Travellers have for Things that are foreign, is in nothing more conspicuous than with Regard to Building. We travel, for the most part at an Age more apt to be imposed upon by Ignorance or Partiality of others, than to judge truly of the Merit of Things by the Strength of Reason. It is owing to this Mistake in Education, that so many in the British Quality have so mean an Opinion of what is performed in our own Country; though perhaps, in most we equal, and in some Things we surpass our Neighbours. (Campbell 1715: 1)

Campbell's critique on the lack of travellers' taste and judgement reflected the concerns of some English moralists, and it was also underpinned by a strong nationalistic agenda. In cautioning others about Giacomo Leoni's forthcoming English translation of Palladio – and speculating on the unduly high esteem it would receive – Campbell may have had his rival James Gibbs in mind, who had trained for many years with Fontana in Rome. In the field of architectural publishing, Gibbs and Leoni were Campbell's immediate competitors, who posed a great threat to his already insecure position. However, as argued in the following section, opponents of the Grand Tour also saw the ignorance of English travellers as the means by which the vices of Roman Catholicism, papal excess, superstition and other debaucheries might contaminate cultural and artistic exchanges. According to this view, the ignorant traveller was in danger of not being able to distinguish the artistic qualities of a Baroque church from the superstitious religiosity it represented.

### English Travellers in Rome: An Encounter with Roman Catholic Architecture

Travel to Italy for Englishmen became increasingly common over the course of the 17th century, when young noblemen undertook the Grand Tour<sup>3</sup> after having received their degree in England (Watkin 2000: 55). The tour consisted of a year or more of travelling within Europe, with Italy serving as the final destination. Since the English Reformation, travelling to Italy had been problematic (Watkin 2000: 51). In Elizabethan England permission to travel to Roman Catholic countries was severely restricted, as these countries were considered

enemies of the state. Protestants would have to be careful not to be caught or unmasked in the Roman Catholic countries of their destination.<sup>4</sup> Once back in England, the moral and religious condition of some travellers might come under suspicion. Religious authors, moralists and philosophers repeatedly expressed these concerns over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. Bishop Joseph Hall's *Quo Vadis?* (1617) and John Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) are examples of texts written by educated Englishmen that question the danger and value of European travel, especially that made in Italy and France, as part of a young man's education. Though separated by almost a century, both Hall and Locke feared the tricks of Roman Catholicism and especially of the Jesuits, who were known to adopt a cloak of culture and politeness as instruments of religious persuasion.

Although Locke favored travel as part of education, he objected to the young age (sixteen to twenty years) at which young Englishmen commonly went on a Grand Tour. Too old to show obedience to their tutor and too young to critically judge the society they visited, the youngsters were prone to absorb vicissitudes and immoralities instead of gaining intellectual enrichment:

If they do bring Home with them any Knowledge of the Place and people they have seen, it is often an Admiration of the worst and vainest Practices they met with abroad, retaining a Relish and Memory of those Things wherein their liberties took its first Swing, rather than of what should make them better and wiser after their Return . . . Their Thoughts run after Play and Pleasure wherein they take it as a Lessening to be controll'd; but seldom trouble themselves to examine the Designs, observe the Address and consider the Arts, Tempers and Inclinations of Men they meet with, that so they may know how to comport themselves towards them. (Locke 1732: 213–14)

As demonstrated by Bishop Hurd's 1764 reuse of the previously cited passage in a series of imaginary dialogues between Locke and Shaftesbury, opinions about travel remained heavily debated well into the 18th century (Hurd 1764: 15).<sup>5</sup> During this period middle-class visitors were most likely to openly express their distaste for Roman Catholic ritual and alleged superstition, whereas upper-class tourists were less concerned about morality than the pursuit of works of art (Gash 2010: 142). Considering this doubtful attitude towards foreign travel and cultural appreciation, as well as the lingering anti-Roman sentiments, it comes as no surprise that 17th- and 18th-century English travel guides contain minimal appreciation for Roman Catholic church buildings. Robert Samber, for instance, notes his deliberate omission of a description of the Holy Trinity, a masterpiece by Guido Reni, in the Trinity Church on the Piazza di Spagna, explaining that he did not want to offend 'Protestant ears' (Samber 1721: Preface). Instead, travel writers preferred to give (endless)



listings of the churches of Rome, with brief factual reports of what was noteworthy in each.

Within the guidebooks and travel diaries, the seven early Christian basilicas of Rome were treated as a separate, special group (Moryson 1617: 129; Raymond 1648: 81; Cogan 1654: 265; Bromley 1692: 155; Adisson 1705: 354). As the basilicas were recognized as churches of early Christianity, they carried a special status, as both Reformers and Roman Catholics claimed to be the sole heirs of early Christianity. Moreover, within the Church of England, early Christianity also bore connotations of an uncorrupted state of religion, and basilicas were therefore deemed legitimate architectural models for contemporary church architecture, even if they had undergone thorough Baroque transformations. The accounts given of basilicas in English guidebooks are consequently far more exhaustive than those devoted to other churches, and tend to include a brief architectural description.

As the world's most magnificent church, St. Peter's Basilica received the most extensive architectural commentary (Cogan 1654: 206, 265; Lassels 1670: 28–48; Bromley 1692: 163; Samber 1721: 131; Bray 1907: 118–124). Within the guides and diaries, all of the architects who had participated in the building of this 'eighth wonder of the world' are named with their particular contribution. Here one also finds accurate descriptions of the basilica portico, the interior and exterior dome, as well as the lantern with the ball on top. Descriptions of the interior focus on the structure's plan, its scale and proportions. These aspects seem to have particularly struck Joseph Adisson, who compared the perfection of St. Peter's to the 'defectiveness' of many English Gothic cathedrals (Adisson 1705: 175). All the authors also take great pains to describe Bernini's canopy above the altar in its full glory. According to Richard Lassels, St. Peter's emulates some of the greatest temples of antiquity, including Solomon's Temple, while Bargrave expressed his admiration for St. Peter's in aesthetic terms:

In a word, tis the most perfect modell of decent Magnificence in the World, there being an answerable Uniformity both within and without. . . . In the Center of the Church stands the great Altar, the most singular piece both for the material and art that ever humane hand produc't, tis all of solid Brasse, taken from the covering of the Rotunda, and afterwards melted into so stupenduous Pillars, each one whereof weighes five and twenty thousand pounds, besides other diversity of Overages, the whole so unpareld a worke that tis fit to stand in no Cathedrall, unlesse S. Peters. (Raymond: 1648: 86–87)

The descriptions of churches provided in the guides – basilicas or otherwise – routinely include short foundation histories, information about their patrons and the most important paintings, relics and liturgical objects they contain. In certain instances, the authors completed historical research on the provenance of the relics and devotional practices, unmasking them as false bearers

of superstitious practices. That travellers were aware of how their religion might affect their perception of Roman churches is illustrated by William Bromley's introduction to his *Remarks in the Grande Tour of France and Italy* (1692). Here, Bromley notes the correspondence between the travel-author's religious background and the account he gives. While a Roman Catholic like Richard Lassels will aim to conceal or deny 'the grosser superstitions of the Church of Rome,' a Protestant like Bromley 'shall conclude it his [moral duty] to expose them' (Bromley 1692: 155).

Still, most texts are less reflective, and provide only list-like accounts of what is to be seen and visited. If wonder and horror played an important role in the overall experience of the early-modern traveller, the controversial connotations of Roman art, architecture and devotion appear to have induced most travellers to remain careful and factual in their accounts (Chard and Langdon 1996: 14).<sup>6</sup> By approaching Rome and its architecture as a 'cabinet of curiosities', visitors were able to 'read' sacred spaces in terms of antiquity, magnificence and decoration, rather than as displays of papal excess (Sweet 2010: 151). With the exception of St. Peter's, architectural descriptions given in the guidebooks rarely if ever include value judgments – positive or negative – on the building. At the very most, buildings are described as 'noble' or 'magnificent' (Bromley 1692: 175, 183).<sup>7</sup> Bargrave describes Sta. Maria Maggiore as one of the seven basilicas, 'but for beauty the second church of Rome thanks to the two emulous chapels of Paulus Quintus, and Sixtus V' (Raymond 1648: 82). Sometimes the guides provide the name of the church's architect, when it is a work by a 'great master' or an 'ingenious' architect. In these cases, Fontana, Maderno, Bernini and Borromini are often cited.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Borromini appears several times in Cogan's account of Rome as the praiseworthy architect of several beautiful and well-designed churches, including San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane and the Oratorio of San Filippo Neri.<sup>9</sup> Even John Evelyn, a reputed 'connoisseur' in architecture, remains fairly restrained in his descriptions. The exception to this are his entries for St. Peter's, Sta. Maria Maggiore and St. John in Lateran, the three most important early Christian basilicas, which he describes at great length (Bray 1907: 113, 127). With regard to other churches, Evelyn is far more selective in his comments. For example, his diary entry on Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane includes only the following brief note: 'The church of St. Carlo is a singular fabric for neatness, of an oval design, built of a new white stone; the columns are worth notice. Under it is another church of a structure nothing less admirable' (Bray 1907: 113).

Such concise descriptions are a characteristic of early modern travel literature. Yet even though the ratio between factual information and personal reflections varies greatly between accounts, it is clear that factual observations were essential in travel books, whereas poetic reflections were not. In trying to collect as much geographical information as possible, travel books produced encyclopaedic accounts. This resulted in volumes restricted to a minimal narrative and a selection



of content based on the structure of pilgrimage guides: gates, streets, parish churches, convents, bridges, cathedrals, houses, inhabitants (Batten 1978: 82–88; Chard and Langdon 1996: 138). The omission of personal reflections in architectural descriptions, therefore, accords with the genre. When brief reflections about a particular building or architect are included, they are considered as part of the greater, encyclopaedic knowledge about the structure; they are not an attempt at interpretation. Henry Cogan reflects on the concision expected in travel literature in the conclusion of his *Direction for Such as Shall Travell unto Rome*, apologising for what he has not discussed and implicitly encouraging the reader to discover these buildings for himself: 'Now for a conclusion you are to note, that I have spoken of these Churches, but cursorily, and as it were by the way, without mentioning the many Chapdells [*sic*], shrines, reliques, indulgences, altars' (Cogan 1654: 275).

Quite distinct from the cautionary words of Hall and Locke regarding travel, therefore, the published guidebooks and diaries reflect a more logical approach to Roman Catholic architecture that is largely devoid of religious connotations.<sup>10</sup> The authors are satisfied to list notable religious buildings and church architects. For the traveller or architect who wanted to learn more, complementary information had to be sought in other resources, such as architectural treatises or engravings. The treatises were intended for a more specialist audience, while the

engravings were popular among the more generally curious travellers.

### Engravings of Churches of Rome in England: Lafreri, Falda and De Rossi

In the 17th century, several important sets of engravings by Italians of church buildings in Rome circulated among Englishmen, including the *Speculum romanae magnificentiae*, originally compiled by Antonio Lafreri in the mid 16th century, Giovanni Battista Falda's *Views of the Palaces, Churches, and Public Buildings of Rome* [1665–1669], and Domenico de Rossi's *Studio d'architettura civile sopra gli ornamenti di porte e finestre tratti da alcune fabbriche insigni di Roma* (1702) and *Disegni di vari altari e capelle nelle chiese di Roma* (1713) (Fig. 5). Tourists and collectors readily bought these prints and volumes and together with the travel guides they formed richly illustrated companions to the architecture of Rome. They reveal, moreover, the important role tourists had as agents in popularizing Roman Baroque architecture in England.

Originally compiled in the mid 16th century by Lafreri, the *Speculum romanae*, or the *Mirror of Roman Magnificence*, features series of maps and views of the major monuments and antiquities of Rome. Tourists and collectors readily bought prints from Lafreri, often customizing their selections and then binding them. Well after the publisher's death, the prints remained widely popular. In the 1660s, Falda, a Roman architect and



**Figure 5:** Giovanni Battista Falda, *Le Chiese di Roma*. Engraving by Rossi. From Falda (1665: frontispiece). Photo by Pierre Putman.





**Figure 6:** William Taylor, Church of the Holy Trinity, Minsterley, Shrewsbury, for Thomas Thynne Viscount of Weymouth, 1689. Image from National Heritage, Images of England: 258985. Photo by M I Joachim, 2001.



engraver, picked up on this trend, publishing a series of prints of contemporary Roman Baroque church buildings, which were collectively known as *Churches of Rome*. This collection was also included in *Il nuovo teatro delle fabbriche, et edificii, in prospettiva di Roma moderna* (1665). Falda, the house etcher for Giovanni Giacomo Rossi, was trained specifically in making etchings of Roman topography with a particular emphasis on the new buildings of Rome. Rossi dominated the Roman print trade, and well into the 18th century, any tourist in Rome would inevitably have gone to his shop. A search of 18th-century English collections, libraries and sales catalogues reveals that the engravings of Falda were widely distributed and well known in England. In his *Biographical Dictionary of Engravers* (1758), Joseph Strutt entry on Falda describes him as ‘an excellent artist . . . the works of this artist are deservedly held in very high estimation. Among these are the following: Several sets of views of churches, palaces, gardens, and fountains at Rome’ (Strutt 1758: 86).

De Rossi’s *Studio d’architettura civile* of 1702, came to England with Charles Talbot, 1st Duke of Shrewsbury, upon his return from Italy; he also wrote the text for the publication. Together with De Rossi’s publications of ornaments, churches, chapels and palaces, this volume would become one of the most influential pattern books on architecture in England. The architects Thomas Archer and William and Francis Smith found inspiration in De Rossi’s Italian Baroque patterns, and integrated variegated motifs in their English Baroque creations. Archer’s St. John’s Church in Westminster is a prime example of this. Similarly, Gibbs and Hawksmoor were fascinated by the hybridism of Borromini’s buildings – also included in the De Rossi volumes – which freely drew upon an assemblage of medieval, classical and Baroque features. For York’s Minster, a medieval structure, Hawksmoor, who owned copies of De Rossi’s books, designed a spectacular Baroque high altar incorporating features from De Rossi’s book on churches and ornaments (Friedman 2013: 213, 227).

Notably, some of the more affluent travellers, such as Thomas Thynne, John and William Digby and Christopher Vane, who acquired the volumes of Lafreri, Falda and De Rossi, came to act as patrons of Anglo-Italian architectural exchange, commissioning Italian Baroque-inspired churches and chapels in England (Fig. 6). Vane, for example, the first Baron Barnard, commissioned a church to be built in Shipbourne by James Gibbs (Morel 2011: 208). John Blathway furthered the Baroque transfer to England by learning the practice of architecture first-hand in Rome. The son of William Blathway, secretary of war to William III, John Blathway undertook the Grand Tour in 1705, and during his stay in Rome, was taught architecture by James Gibbs, who was then working with Domenico Fontana (Watkin 2000: 57).

## Conclusion

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the spate of new aesthetic theories, linking moral value and aesthetic appreciation, led to a growing awareness of the impact an object or building could have on its beholder. By linking ethical and aesthetic qualities, Thomas Bisse, Colen Campbell and

Anthony Cooper Shaftesbury also recognized a capacity for moral persuasion in devotional art and architecture. This was especially the case in Baroque art and architecture. Commonly associated with Roman Catholicism, the Baroque style was considered as both a defining characteristic of Catholic religious art and architecture as well as one of the Catholic Church’s great vices. According to some English moralists, art had the power to ‘contaminate’ Anglicans with Roman Catholic excess and superstition. English travellers in Italy were considered to be especially vulnerable, as their enthusiasm to discover the great monuments of Rome would disable them from objectively distinguishing between the artistic and religious qualities of Roman Catholic art and architecture.

A close reading of travel guides and personal accounts of Grand Tour tourists, however, shows that contrary to the moralists’ fears, English visitors did not blindly surrender to the enchantment of Roman Catholic churches (Chard and Langdon 1996: 14). The entwining of ethical judgment and aesthetic appreciation that seemed inevitable to Shaftesbury is absent from the traveller’s architectural descriptions. The majority of travel guides and diaries provide factual information about notable structures, and in those accounts that do offer additional commentary, the focus is how a building might inspire new creations within the English context (Hornsby 2000: 2).

Within Reformation England, therefore, it was believed that Roman Catholic architectural models could be adopted and translated by ‘Anglican’ architects, but that the moral values of the Roman architects’ themselves were to be dismissed. The association between moral value and aesthetic form, so integral to Roman Catholic architecture, thus led to internal tensions within English architectural culture. But it also prompted English architects to reflect on the origins of their sources. Wren based his design for the cupola of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London on Bernini’s drawings for St. Peter’s in Rome. However, Wren understood St. Peter’s Basilica not only as the seat of the Roman Catholic Church, but also as one of the most important early Christian basilicas. The Church of England, if it was heir to the early Christian church, was thus in some respect also a Catholic church, but unlike the Roman Catholic Church, it had not fallen corrupt or succumbed to ‘popish’ superstition and idolatry.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Yale Center for British Art Studies, Yale University, for funding the research fellowship that allowed me to conduct the research upon which this article is based at their institution. I also thank Edoardo Piccoli for his useful comments on the first draft of this article.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term ‘popery’, a hostile coinage from the Reformation, refers to the Roman Catholic Church and its alleged superstitious and treacherous practices.

- <sup>2</sup> Roland Fréart de Chambray (1606–76) was an important French theorist of architecture and the arts. In 1650 he published his translation of Palladio's treatise on architecture, which had a great influence on French Classicism. That same year he published an anthology of ancient and modern writers on the classical orders, *Parallèle de l'architecture antique avec la moderne*, which was translated into English by John Evelyn. His treatise on painting, *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, followed in 1662.
- <sup>3</sup> Richard Lassels is the first to use the term 'grand tour' in his *Voyage of Italy*, published in 1670. See Watkin (2000: 55).
- <sup>4</sup> This concern is most explicit in the early 17th-century travel guides. See, for instance, Moryson (1617: 102, 103).
- <sup>5</sup> This passage was quoted by Bishop Richard Hurd in his *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel Considered as a Part of an English Gentleman's Education: Between Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Locke*, published in 1764: 'I [meaning Locke, as staged by Hurd] Know what is to be said for the voyagers in Elizabeth's time. We were just then emerging from ignorance and barbarity . . . Yet methinks, they had done better to stay at home, and at least import the arts of Italy, if they were necessary to them in sager heads than their own. I say this, because it is no secret that the civility, we thus acquired, was dearly paid for; and that Irreligion and even Atheism, were, by mistake, packed up with their other curiosities' (Hurd 1764: 15). This is also mentioned in Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education*, (1693: 213–214).
- <sup>6</sup> Chard notes a certain demand for 'shock' also in relation to the horror at the bloodthirstiness of Italian Baroque (Chard and Langdon 1996: 14).
- <sup>7</sup> Bromley (1692: 183): 'Chiesa Nuova, belonging to the Fathers of the Oratory of Filippo Neri wants for Nothing that may make it appear splendid and glorious'. And Bromley (1692: 175): 'The Church belonging to the Jesuits of the Roman College is large and handsome'.
- <sup>8</sup> Lassels (1670: 216, 231), for instance, mentions Bernini, Fontana and Maderno and praises both the Propaganda Fide and the Sapienza. Bromley (1692: 190, 209) mentions Bernini, the Cornaro Chapel and the 'college de propaganda Fide fronting the Piazza di Spagna and is a great Ornament to it'. Evelyn (Bray 1907: 107) writes, '8th november. We visited the Jesuit's Church, the front whereof is esteemed a noble piece of architecture, the design of Jacomo della Porta and the famous Vignola'.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Santa Maria della Valicella de Padri dell Oratorio . . . rarely built with the designe of Signor Francesco Borromini [sic] . . . The College called Sapienza . . . wherein is this day a goodly church built, the designe of Signor Francesco Borromini . . . St. Carlo I Reformati Spagnoli del Riscatto, built with the ingenious and excellent design of Signor Francesco Borromini' (Cogan 1654: 216, 235, 258). See also Bromley (1692: 194) on S. Andrew delgi Frati: 'it is a very handsome and large, with a fair Cupola designed by Borromino'.
- <sup>10</sup> An exception is Lassels, who, being a Roman Catholic, praises the Roman Catholic art and religion; see for instance, on the Baldachino: 'all of them together make this Altar, The Altar automatically, as this Church is the Church of the World. So that if the Climax be true (as true it is) that Churches are for Altars, Altars for Priests, Priests for God, I know no Religion which prayeth such honourable Tributs of Worship to God, as the Roman Catholic religion doth, which hath the noblest Priests, the noblest Sacrifice, and all this to the noblest God' (1670, vol. 2: 36).

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**How to cite this article:** Morel, A-F 2016 The Ethics and Aesthetics of Architecture: The Anglican Reception of Roman Baroque Churches. *Architectural Histories*, 4(1): 17, pp. 1–13, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ah.75>

**Published:** 16 November 2016

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