



1 – Interior of University Church, Dublin

(photo Jacqueline O'Brien; courtesy J.A. Gaughan, NEWMAN'S UNIVERSITY CHURCH (Dublin 1997))

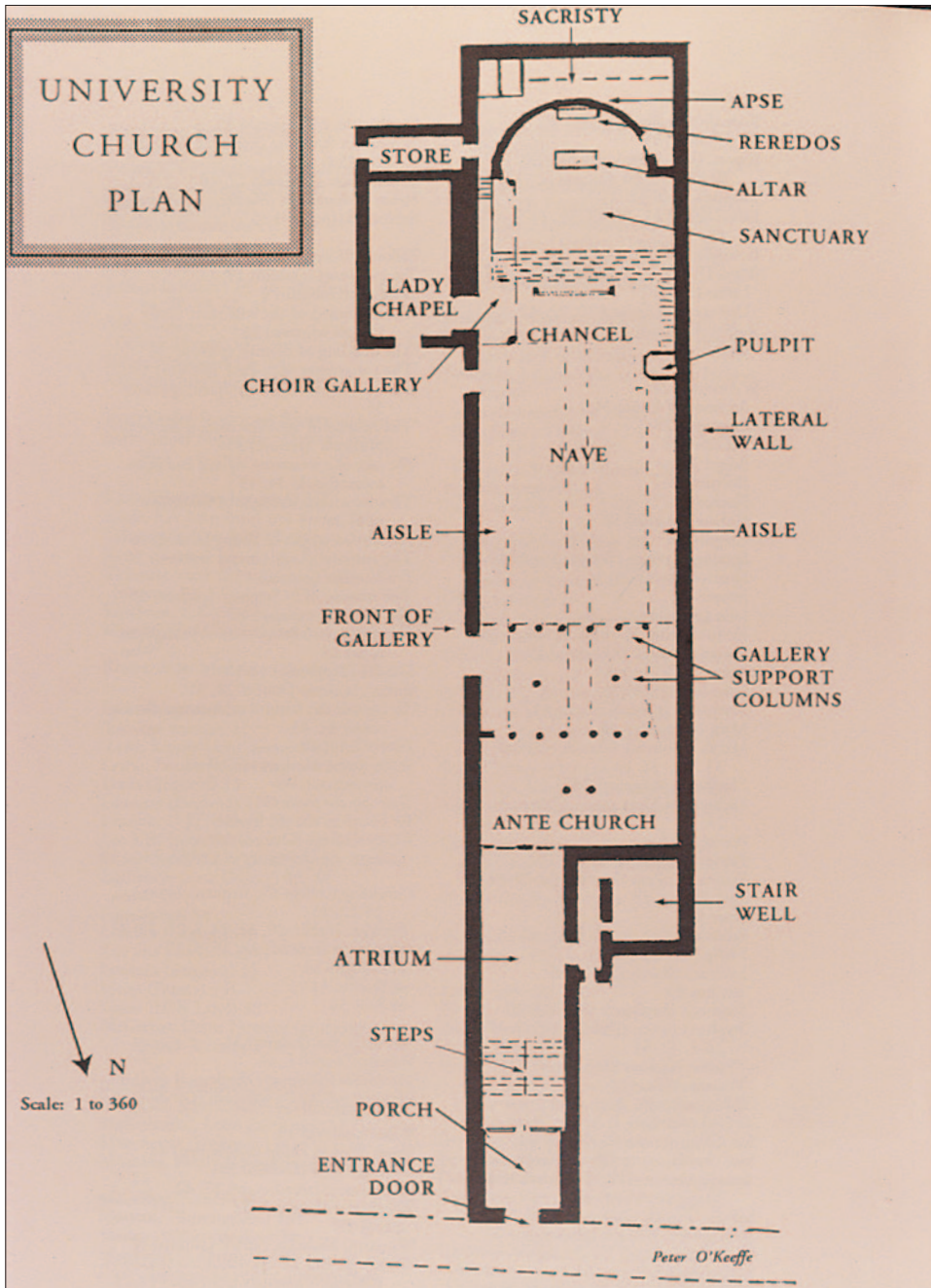
University Church: towards a stylistic context

MICHAEL McCARTHY

THE ARCHITECT OF UNIVERSITY CHURCH, JOHN HUNGERFORD POLLEN, WAS THE first writer on its architecture.¹ He doubled as Professor of Fine Arts for the new University, and his fifth lecture in that capacity, devoted to the material origins of its decoration and the sources of the iconography of its ornament, has been reprinted recently in the booklet of Fr Gaughan, as it had informed the earlier booklets of Dr Curran and Dr Kane.² It is hardly useful for me to offer further remarks in detail on the fabric and furnishings of this exquisite building – an oasis of seclusion and privacy chanced upon with surprise and delight in the public space of St Stephen’s Green, between façades of rivalling grandeur of the surrounding houses.

The entrance to the church is a later addition, the gift of Fr Anderdon (Plate 3).³ In keeping with the High Victorian brick polychromy of the firm of Sir Thomas Deane,⁴ it is a vigorous example in miniature of the Romanesque Revival, one strand of the Gothic Revival that predominated as the architecture of choice for ecclesiastical and college buildings in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ There is nothing exceptional in the architecture of the porch-entrance, therefore, except that it looks out of place. It would look much better in the Kildare Street Club, which was soon to be built by Deane and Woodward, the architects of the engineering building of Trinity College, or in Dawson Street, in the neighbourhood of the façade of St Anne’s Church.⁶ Our porch – in itself an item of joy – is a sore thumb in the context of the Palladianism of its neighbours.

The covered space to which the porch gives access is an unplanned addition, necessitated by the need to prop up the wall of the neighbouring house, and it has no architectural or liturgical function (Plate 2).⁷ On entering the rectangular space concluded by a domed apse that is the church proper, the visitor is obliged to tread through a set of half-size columns supporting the gallery at the back – an introduc-



2 - Plan of University Church

(Peter O'Keeffe; courtesy J.A. Gaughan, NEWMAN'S UNIVERSITY CHURCH (Dublin 1997))



3 – Entrance to University Church

(photo Jacqueline O'Brien; courtesy J.A. Gaughan, NEWMAN'S UNIVERSITY CHURCH (Dublin 1997))



4 – Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld
LUDWIG I SUMMONS THE GERMAN ARTISTS IN ROME TO MUNICH, 1850
(from H.F. Nohbauer, *MUNICH: CITY OF ART* (Munich 1994))



5, 6 – Basilica of St Boniface, Munich, 1828-50, and a design for the wall decoration by G.F. Ziebland and H. von Hess (from H.F. Nohbauer, *MUNICH: CITY OF ART* (Munich 1994))



tion that serves to heighten by contrast the light and space of the hall of the church (Plate 1). Its dimensions and its lighting were in fact determined by the site, which was the garden area to the rear of No. 87 St Stephen's Green. The windows are above the house levels and are comparable, therefore, to the clerestory of a cathedral. Their being made of bottle-glass to give a suffused light makes them directly comparable to contemporary practice in the furnishing and fitting of the early Christian basilicas.

This was a topic of lively discussion in the period, mostly because of the decision to rebuild the basilica of S. Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome in accordance with its original design and decoration, a process that lasted from 1823 (the year of the catastrophic fire) to 1854, when the reconsecration was attended by international interest and major publications.⁸ These were eagerly studied for architectural and decorative motifs by contemporary artists visiting Rome, notably by the German group known as Nazarenes, whose closest parallel in England were the Pre-Raphaelites, most closely associated with the University of Oxford. The architects of the engineering building at Trinity College in Dublin, Thomas Deane and Benjamin Woodward, had been brought to Oxford to build its new museum, and later the Debating Room of the Oxford Union Society,⁹ all to be decorated by the Pre-Raphaelites.

John Hungerford Pollen was curate at St Peter-le-Bailey in Oxford in 1845, the date of his first recorded ecclesiastical work – the painting of the ceiling of that church. A fellow of Merton College, he was also its dean and bursar when, in 1850, he executed his more notable work, the painting of the ceiling of the college chapel. He was introduced to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood by Benjamin Woodward, whom he had probably met in Dublin in 1854, and he was to work with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood on the frescoes of the Oxford Union Debating Society in 1857/58. His friendship with Benjamin Woodward was very close, and Pollen was to provide extensive decorative schemes, unexecuted, for Woodward's buildings in Oxford and London, as well as for Kilkenny Castle Gallery, recently restored, and domestic commissions for the firm of Deane and Woodward.¹⁰

C.P. Curran has noted the closeness of the relationship between these two artist-architects in that decade, and the same author has stressed the importance of John Hungerford Pollen's visit to Munich in 1847, where three instances of the revival of the early Christian basilica for modern church architecture were rising under the guidance of the Nazarene painters, who had been summoned back from Rome to guide the construction of the northern extension to the city inaugurated by King Ludwig I of Bavaria (Plate 4). Of these, the most important to Pollen was the Basilica of St Boniface, praised by the young artist as 'altogether a most gratifying work for the present day' (Plates 5, 6).¹¹

The context in architectural theory of the basilican revival in Munich in the first half of the nineteenth century lies in the design movement *Rundbogenstil* (Round Arch style), which rose as a questioning of the appropriateness of the Greek post-and-lintel structural system as a model for contemporary architecture.¹² This found formulation principally in the writings of Heinrich Hübsch, especially the treatise of 1828, *In What Style Ought We Build?*. His reasoning was structural rather than historicist or associative, and he found many disciples throughout Germany in the following decades, perhaps as much from the historicist and associative connections of the arch with German Romanesque architecture as for its purported structural advantages. The style reached its culmination in the church-building programme of Ludwig I in Munich, when John Hungerford Pollen was there, and Curran reminds us that he was not the only enthusiast for the basilican style espoused by Ludwig's architects, quoting a fervent wish for the adoption of the style published by Cardinal Wiseman in *The Dublin Review* of 1847.¹³

At that time the unique instance of basilican revival in church planning in England, St Mary and St Nicholas in Wilton, Wiltshire, had just been completed to the designs of T.H. Wyatt and David Brandon.¹⁴ Neither architect was to build in that style again, though they each enjoyed very active careers as church architects, so the patron of the church must be credited with the choice of style.¹⁵ The enthusiasm for the style expressed by Wiseman and Pollen in 1847 was to be reflected in the taste of John Henry Newman when he commissioned a building for the Oratory in Birmingham four years later. Roderick O'Donnell has published a set of drawings – plan, elevation, a section in longitude and two transverse sections – of a proposal dated 1851 for that oratory. The drawings are signed by Louis Duc, a Parisian architect who never again designed a church. Understandably, Newman's editors had confused him with the leader of the Gothic Revival in France, the well-known Viollet le Duc, and we must be grateful to have the confusion sorted.¹⁶ These proposals are basilican throughout, and Newman kept them by him, though they were not executed.

It is possible that the basilican church at Wilton affected Cardinal Wiseman's enthusiasm for the use of the style in Munich and consequently, or coincidentally, the leanings of Pollen and Newman towards the basilican style in structural and decorative terms. Of the three Munich buildings, the All Saints Court church has been restored in structure, but without any attempt at restoration of its decoration. The same is true of St Boniface's, though it is only half the size it was before the war, and it has lost any pretension to basilican plan and scale, as well as to the rich decoration of Georg Friedrich Ziebland and Heinrich von Hess, so admired by Pollen (Plates 5, 6). Only the Ludwigskirche, built by Friedrich von Gartner from 1829 to 1845, can be seen in its original plan and with its original decoration – frescoes by





8 – *Pulpit of University Church, Dublin*

(photo K.J. Romanowski; courtesy J.A. Gaughan, *NEWMAN'S UNIVERSITY CHURCH (Dublin 1997)*)

opposite

7 – *Peter von Cornelius, THE LAST JUDGEMENT (1836-40), St Ludwig's Church, Munich*

(from H.F. Nohbauer, *MUNICH: CITY OF ART (Munich 1994)*)

Peter von Cornelius, principally *The Last Judgement*, the second largest version of that theme after Michelangelo's Sistine painting (Plate 7). The Sistine Chapel is also, of course, the source of the oil paintings executed for Newman and Pollen in Rome to be hung in the new church in Dublin.¹⁷

A larger factor that has not been brought into discussion to date is that the Ludwigskirche, besides serving as a parish church, was designed as the new church for the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. The university, consisting of eighty professors and 1,500 students, had been transferred from Landshut to Munich by King

Ludwig I in 1826, and the buildings of the Ludwigstrasse were designed to accommodate it. The overall plan had been the work of Leo von Klenze, who had also planned the museum district to the south, presided over by St Boniface's, into which the king introduced the Benedictines to demonstrate the linking of religion with the arts and the natural sciences – links which were to be cultivated at the university.¹⁸ The Catholic authorities in Dublin contemplating the establishment of a new university were bound to be heavily influenced by the example of the King of Bavaria in the preceding decades (Plate 8).

Dr O'Donnell has demonstrated that Newman was predisposed towards the style before coming to Dublin. He found a fellow-enthusiast in John Hungerford Pollen, and he was warm in his appreciation of the basilican University Church that the artist-architect provided for him. Amid the grandiosities of the classical revivals and the strident polemics of the Gothic revivals (especially that of Pugin) predominant in post-emancipation Ireland, the basilican style is a still small voice in ecclesiastical architecture. We can be grateful that it found expression in the creation of Newman and Pollen, which we enjoy as an oasis of prayer and reflection in the tumult of the city centre.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ J. Lever (ed.), *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the RIBA*, vol. O-R (London 1974) 83.
- ² J.A. Gaughan, *Newman's University Church* (Dublin 1997); E. Kane, 'John Henry Newman's Catholic University Church in Dublin', *Studies*, summer-autumn 1977, 1-19; C.P. Curran, *Newman House and University Church* (Dublin 1945).
- ³ Gaughan, *Newman's University Church*, 27, where the design of the porch-entrance is also attributed to J.H. Pollen.
- ⁴ F. O'Dwyer, *The Architecture of Deane and Woodward* (Cork 1997).
- ⁵ S. Muthesius, *The High Victorian Movement in Architecture, 1850-1870* (London 1972).
- ⁶ O'Dwyer, *Deane and Woodward*, 132-51, 328-40, 388.
- ⁷ Kane, 'University Church', 17.
- ⁸ G. Giacoletti, *La rinnovata Basilica di S. Paolo sulla via Ostiense* (Rome 1845).

- ⁹ O'Dwyer, *Deane and Woodward*, ch. 5.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, 357-9.
- ¹¹ Curran, *Newman House and University Church*, 49-50.
- ¹² N. Pevsner, *Some Architectural Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (London 1972) ch. 9.
- ¹³ Curran, *Newman House and University Church*, 50-1.
- ¹⁴ N. Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Wiltshire* (London 1963) 514-15.
- ¹⁵ B.F.L. Clarke, 'The production of a powerful and ingenious idiosyncrasy', *Church Builders of the Nineteenth Century* (London 1969) 107.
- ¹⁶ R. O'Donnell, 'Louis Joseph Duc in Birmingham, a "Style Latin" Church for Cardinal Newman, 1851', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, NS 5, xcvi, 1981, 37-44.
- ¹⁷ Remarks on the churches in Munich are from personal observation on a recent visit. For the copies from Raphael in University Church, see Kane, 'University Church', 6-8.
- ¹⁸ H.F. Nohbauer, 'Ludwig I and Munich Classicism', *Munich: City of Art* (Munich 1994) 51-8.
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