

PREFACE

ONE OF THE difficulties of living in a secular, post-Christian age and writing about an age which was religious and Christian, is a certain bashfulness which seems almost to paralyse many writers. They are shy when it comes to trying to understand and describe those elements in an age, which are so different from our own. The lengths they will go to provide a purely secular motive and meaning for the great churches of Europe are extraordinary. Symbolism in the Middle Ages was a part of religion, a way of expressing it, and of understanding the mysteries which it enfolded. The religious motivation behind symbolism has to be faced, and I hope it has been faced in this book.

I am a Christian, but not the one (if there are any) who would endorse everything that medieval Christians believed and all that they practised. I have to accept the fact that I judge some of their belief and practice to be wrong or mistaken; and that their emphasis on purgatory, for instance, was unhealthy, even though it helped to finance some of the greatest works of art and architecture in the world. I find it impossible to accept many of the assumptions of Neo-Platonism which had so much to do with the way in which Christians approached reality and symbol in the Middle Ages. I hope that none of my prejudices has influenced my understanding or expression of how they believed and behaved in their religious life.

When I was young and farmers still built haystacks, the rule was that if you built up the edges the middle would look after itself. I find that I have spent a lot of time on the edges of symbolism, but I hope not at the expense of symbolism itself. If medieval symbolism is to be understood, we need to have a context into which we can fit it. No subject is 'an island entire of it self,' and the symbolism of medieval churches is no exception. On one side, it merges with architecture, on another with iconography, yet on another with mysticism or with magic, with sacramental theology, theology of the Church (ecclesiology), and

philosophy, with rhetoric, devotion and education, and especially with allegory and typology.¹ It is locked into that continent which we call the medieval Church, and that continent is part of the whole medieval world.

This book is an introduction, not a complete survey of the subject. Much more could be written about some medieval writers, nor are the contributions of some recent writers to various aspects of the subject such as the New Jerusalem, or the use of buildings in moral texts examined.² I have written nothing about the anthropologists' approach to symbols: I have confined myself almost entirely to medieval categories, of which anthropology in the modern, academic sense of the word is not one. The sociologists have fared no better. The book is an introduction both to medieval ideas and also to medieval authors, which I hope will inspire readers to look further into the shadowy world of church symbolism.

Conventions

Church with an upper-case initial refers to the institution or to the people; church with a lower-case initial refers to the church as a building.

Use with an upper-case initial refers to the liturgy used in a particular province, such as Canterbury or York, or even a diocese. A Use is a sub-division of a Rite, such as the Roman or Byzantine Rite. The Sarum Use, used extensively in many English dioceses, is a variation of the Roman Rite.

All material in square brackets within quotations is editorial.

Psalms, quoted or referenced, are numbered according to the Latin use. The first eight psalms are the same in the Latin and English versions. Pss 9 and 10 (English) are combined in the Latin. So Ps 11 (English) is Ps 10 (Latin). The Latin continues one number behind the English; thus, for example, Ps 23 (English) is Ps 22 (Latin), and Ps 119 (English) is Ps 118 (Latin). The Latin Pss 146 and 147 are combined in the English as Ps 147, so the remaining three psalms have the same numbering. Some of the verse numbers are different in the two versions, but the variation is slight.

The Index has the dates (when known) and a brief note of the person or item at the head of the entry.

Notes

- 1 Lately Typology has acquired a meaning to do with classification. In this book, the meaning will always be to do with the symbolic or prophetic relationship of one event or feature to another. See p. ref pp. 57 ff for a further discussion.
- 2 A.R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 2003). Lee Bowen, 'The tropology of medieval dedication rites,' *Speculum* 16.4 (October, 1941): 469-479, and others.