

*Chapter Ten*

THE BAROQUE IN GERMANY

*Antecedents*

From the standpoint of the history of ideas the Baroque can be traced back to two sources: one is the Catholicism of the Counter Reformation, and the other is the absolute prince's consciousness of his power. The ecclesiastical religious source was more original; the secular and profane, however, far and away more fruitful. The Baroque was the fulfilment of a fundamental desire cherished by the princes who dominated this epoch: it bore graphic witness to their love of life, their power, and the all-inclusive nature of their rule. To substantiate their claims, both Catholicism and Absolutism appealed to man's distinguishing faculty of reason, which is capable of endowing all his other powers with meaning, purpose, and order. According to the Catholic view of things, the Council of Trent's great achievement was to lay bare the rational basis of the mysteries of the Christian religion. Although Catholicism was perfectly well aware that the Church, like many of its institutions and customs, could only be grasped in its essential nature by the believing heart, it nevertheless laid the greatest stress on the intellect as the ordering faculty, for in this way the element of irresponsibility and arbitrariness could be excluded as a danger to the Church, either as a whole or in part. In this way it achieved its monumental internal coherence without thereby losing any of the dynamism of a vigorous life of faith. In many respects Absolutism resembled Catholicism. Its goal, however, was not in the next world, but in this, not an organisation for the salvation of men's souls, but an earthly state. In the products of their cultural activity, whether church or palace, Jesuit religious drama or court poetry, the fundamental inspiration is always the same.

The artistic antecedents of the Baroque are to be sought in the Renaissance. From the latter it took the intellectual notion of symmetry, filling it with a superabundance of life. The straight line becomes the curve, the structural column gives way to its decorative counterpart,

the enclosing dome opens up heavenwards, drawing the eye ever higher. The Baroque could suffer nothing to be in repose; its very principle was to transform the work of art in the restless engagement of the senses into an experience. The visual arts and literature were as one here, and music followed their example.

#### *Religious Baroque*

The Baroque's country of origin was Italy, where its most brilliant representative was Bernini. In Germany also it owed its universal adoption to the Catholic or princely need for spectacular display. In Catholicism it was above all the Jesuits who in the magnificence of their churches desired to contrast the impressive cohesion and grandeur of their faith with its conscious appeal to both senses and intellect with the plainness and disunity of Protestantism. Wherever the old faith wanted to make a breach in victorious Protestantism, it addressed itself with marked success to the people through the medium of Baroque church architecture. The Baroque churches and monasteries scattered across western and southern Germany have remained an eloquent testimony to the aims and victory of the Catholic revival. Among the churches those of St. Cajetan (Theatinerkirche) in Munich and of St. Charles Borromeo (Karlskirche) in Vienna reach the heights of artistic inspiration. A number of well endowed orders, too, built houses that look more like palaces than monasteries, but which, nevertheless, represent outstanding monuments of Baroque church and monastic architecture (the abbey of Göttweig by Hildebrandt, and Melk and St. Florian in Austria, Ebrach in Franconia, Weingarten in Baden-Württemberg, Grüssau in Silesia, Klosterneuburg near Vienna, and Maria Einsiedeln in Switzerland).

The Catholic literature of the Baroque period was also primarily a vehicle for the Church's teaching. Drama treated especially of religious, historical, and legendary subjects. Artistic demands were generally small. The technical excellence of the stage and the spectacular nature of the works performed were far more important than artistic form. The viewer was to leave the theatre a changed man as a result of the effect the performance had on him.

A certain measure of artistic excellence was attained in hymnody and mysticism. The sensitive poetry of the Jesuit Spee's hymns vies with the more vigorous productions which gush forth from the spiritual

conflict of the Protestant hymnologist Paul Gerhardt. As mystics Jakob Böhme, a Protestant, and Angelus Silesius, a Catholic, attained the same height in power of expression and depth of feeling.

#### *Profane Baroque*

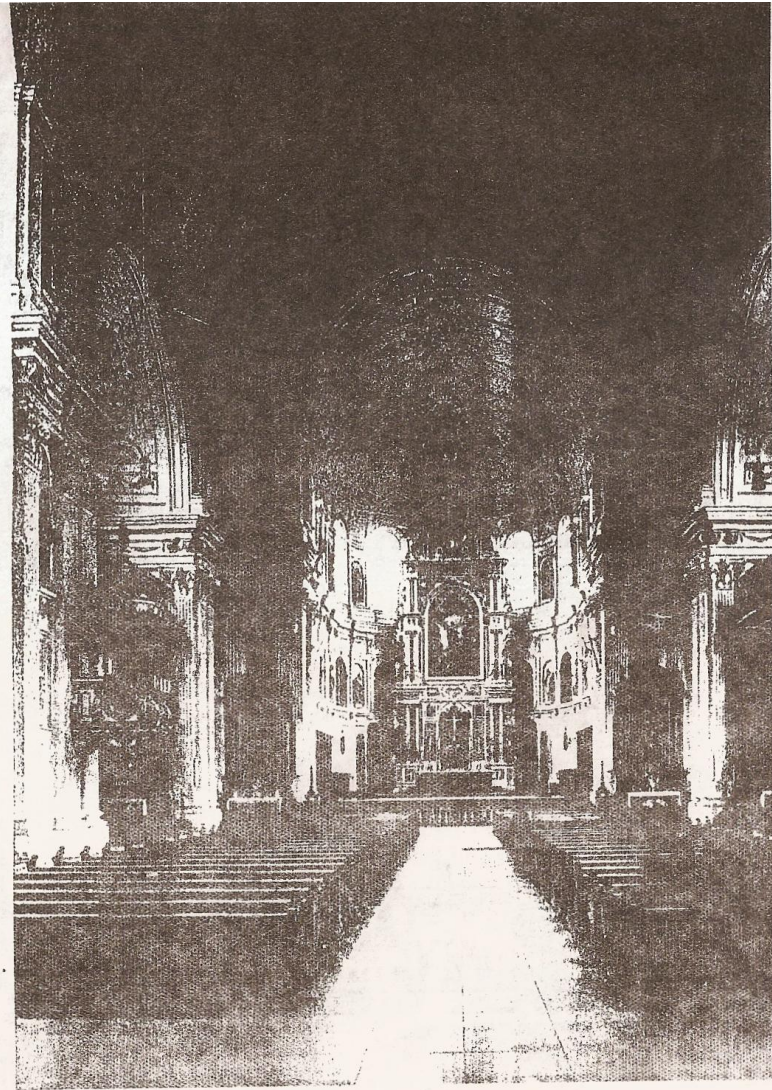
During the 18th century the secular authorities exercised much greater influence on their age than the Church or the Christian faith. It is not at all surprising therefore that the great creations of the Baroque age and culture stem from the absolute princes. The burgher class of the cities had exhausted its creative powers in the course of the great economic and political changes. The princes attempted, on the model of France, to give visible expression to their position as the focal point of their subjects' lives. But since Germany, in contrast to western Europe, was a land of innumerable princes, distinguished only in rank but otherwise absolute in their territories, its physiognomy was inevitably as different from that of western Europe as was its state organisation. The foreigner's idea of France was determined to a great extent by its capital, Paris; Germany, on the other hand, was the sum of its capitals. This factor was to ensure that the great diversity of the medieval cities would be preserved down to the present day, even if, as is only to be expected, the absolute princes have left their mark on many of them.

All the princes took Versailles as the model for their palaces. They tried to imitate it in the perfection of its conception, in its expression of royal authority. Thus "little Versailles", the splendour of whose execution was often far more than the financial resources of their small territories could bear, sprang up all over Germany. Vienna, Potsdam, Dresden, Würzburg and Salzburg owe their character to the century of Absolutism, and Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Bruchsal even their very existence. Nowhere perhaps did the princely will leave more striking monuments to the comprehensiveness of its claim than at Mannheim with its checkered, and Karlsruhe with its fan-shaped, groundplan, which centre the town on the hub of the state, the sovereign's palace. Besides these capitals, however, the princes often remodelled the countryside in the spirit of the 18th century when laying out their extensive palaces and grounds. Charlottenburg and Potsdam near Berlin, the Favorita and Schönbrunn near Vienna, Nymphenburg and Schleissheim near Munich, Herrenhausen near Hanover, Wilhelmshöhe near Kassel, Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart, Nordkirchen near Münster

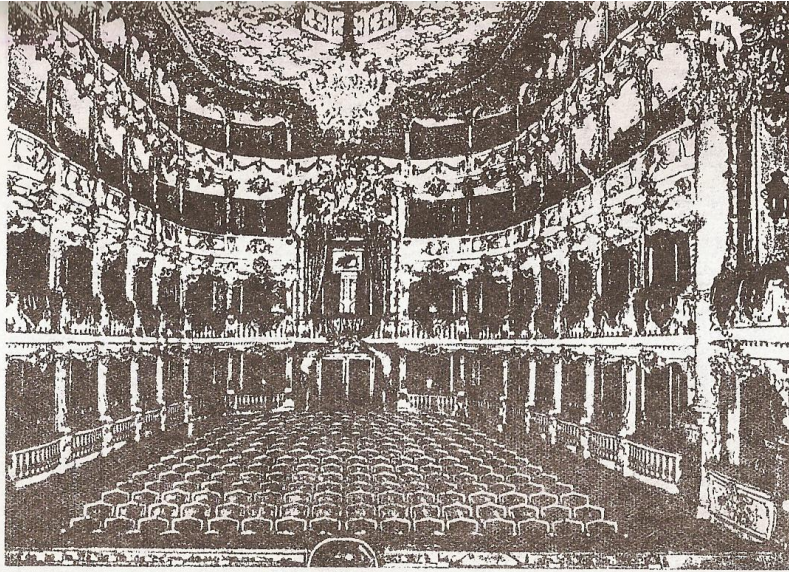
(Westphalia) are the great living witnesses to the architectural sense of the princes and the artistic genius of their creators. Though it is true that foreign influence was of decisive importance, Johann Balthasar Neumann (1687—1753) in his Würzburg creations, Lukas von Hildebrandt (1688—1745) with his Belvedere palace in Vienna, Andreas Schlüter (1664—1714) with the Arsenal, the palace, and the equestrian monument of the Great Elector in Berlin, Fischer von Erlach (1656—1723) with the Imperial Chancellery, the Court (now National) Library, the Karlskirche and Schönbrunn palace in Vienna, and especially George Bähr (1666—1738) and Daniel Pöppelmann (1662—1723) in their magnificent Dresden creations take their place alongside their contemporaries in other countries.

Within the environment of the palace and court life, courtly poetry developed into the presentation of social behaviour and manners and into the exaltation and refinement of daily life in society. It was intended to be popular and not the expression of the soaring flights of poetic inspiration; it was designed to fit smoothly and flatteringly into the rhythm which best suited life at court. In accordance with the basically rational trend of this period, the schemes which formed the framework of this poetry could be learnt. All that was then required were the sentiments, moods and superficial feelings of court society which, put into words, were woven in and around the schemes taken over as models from abroad like so many rinceaux and arabesques. In this, Opitz (1597—1639), the man of the world, was the first to achieve mastery. At the same time, however, his *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* reinstated German as the language of poetry.

The opera, which, starting from Italy, made a triumphal conquest of all the courts of Germany, was most adapted to the artistic needs and sentiments of the court. It succeeded in delighting both eye and ear. Its content surrounded life at court with a faint aura of adventure and romance. Italian music, which held the stage almost exclusively for a long time, was decidedly instrumental in facilitating the rise of German opera. Its exponents were Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714—1787) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756—1791). In this way the already extensive musical production of Germany, which was at first connected with the names of George Frederick Handel (1685—1759) and Johann Sebastian Bach (1685—1750) and later with that of Joseph Haydn (1732—1809), was made the richer by the addition of another valuable musical form. The work of Bach does not follow the trend of the age. Its ultimate root was not the desire for display, but the most profound Lutheran faith for which Bach provided

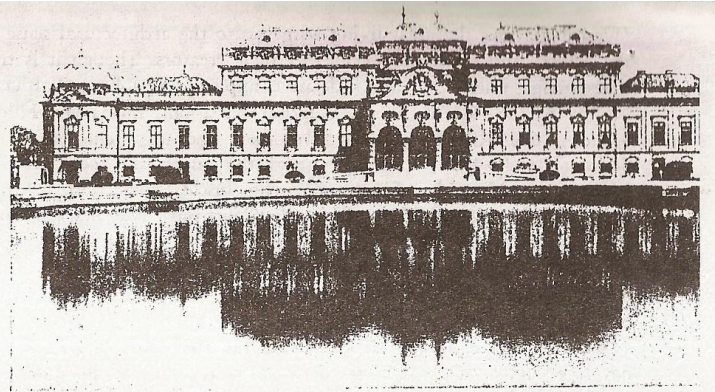
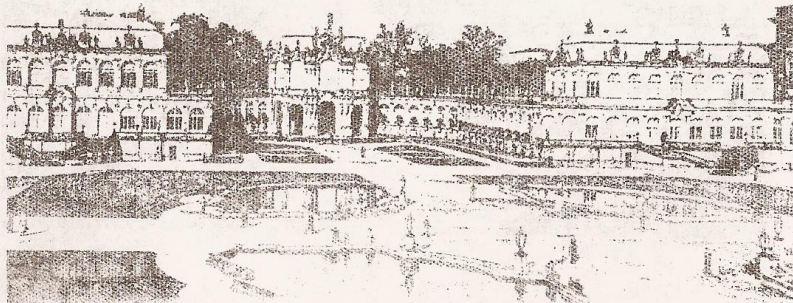


26. St. Michael's, Munich.

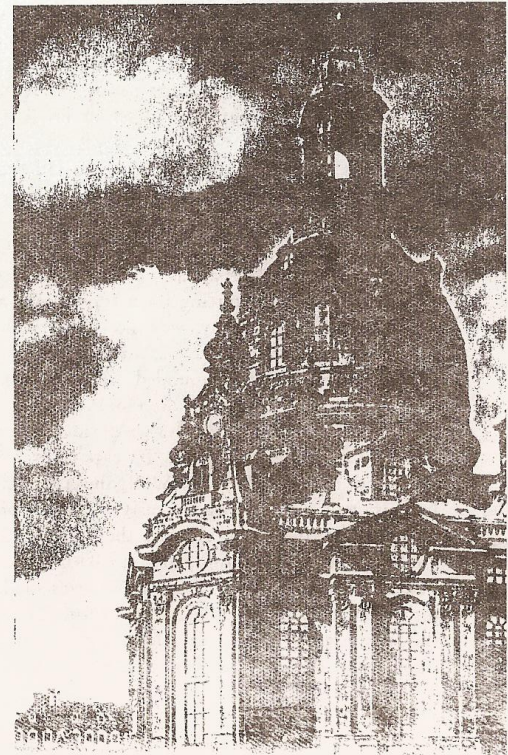


27. Residence Theatre, Munich.

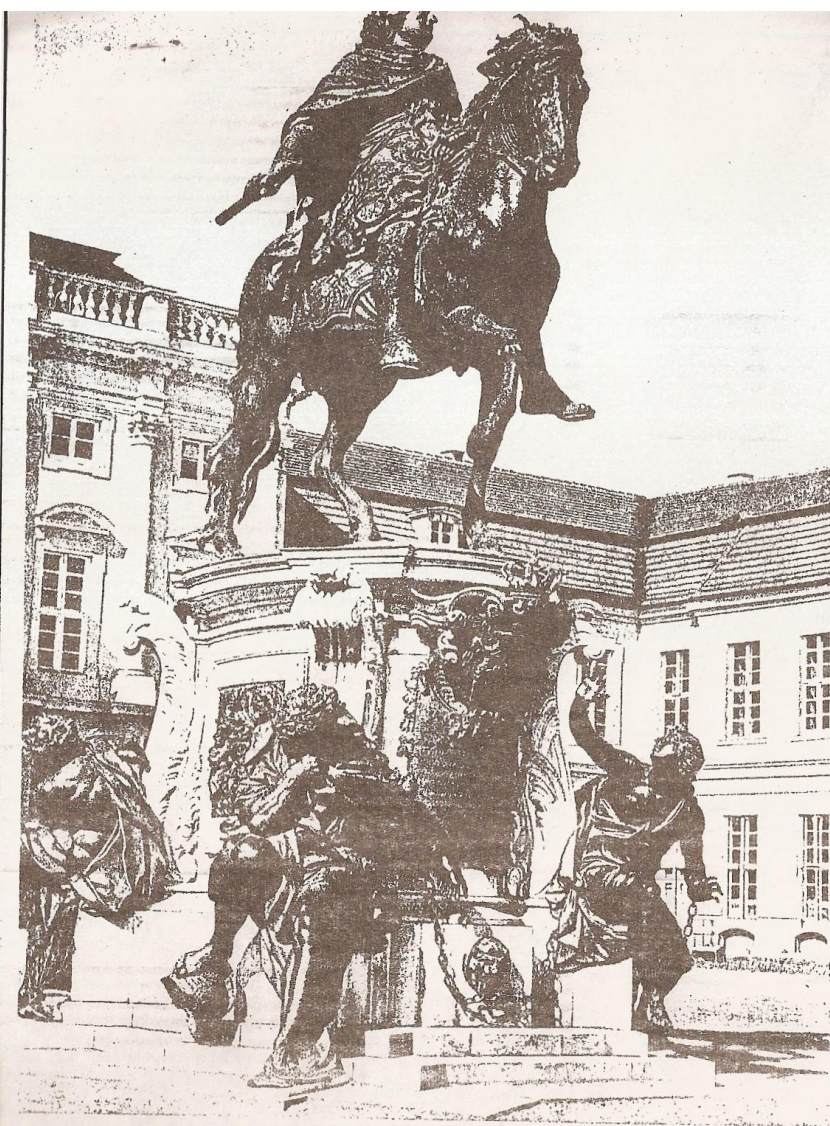
28. The Zwinger, Dresden.



29. Belvedere Palace,  
Vienna.



30. The Frauenkirche,  
Dresden.



31. Schlüter: Equestrian statue of the Great Elector.

the perfect medium of musical expression. It was not without significance either that he wrote his compositions not at the court of a prince, but as a simple cantor at the church and school of St. Thomas in Leipzig. Luther had commended the establishment and organisation of education to the princes as one of their primary duties. The absolute princes both on the Protestant and on the Catholic side were not slow in meeting these obligations, especially as they soon realised that influence over education gave them a favourable opportunity to inculcate their conception of the nature and task of the state. Primary schooling was given great encouragement at the beginning of the 18th century in a number of German states, but without being made compulsory. Duke Christian Albrecht von Holstein-Gottorp founded the university of Kiel in 1665, and Frederick I, King in Prussia, the university of Halle in 1694, which could boast an important savant and the champion of German as the language of scholarship in Christian Thomasius (1655—1728). Emperor Leopold I founded the Catholic universities of Innsbruck (1677) and Breslau (1712). The foundation of the university of Göttingen was to prove the most important, because it became the home of new sciences (e.g. history) and of numerous literary and artistic treasures of the Middle Ages.

Although the foreign influence on German intellectual life was various and strong, German scholarship was able to produce its first important representative of European rank in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646—1716). As a man of affairs, he attempted to drive home his ideas on religious toleration and understanding among princes by rational argument. As a scholar, he hoped to further cultural progress by the foundation of princely academies (Prussian Academy in 1701). As a mathematician, he discovered the differential and integral calculus independently of Newman, and, as a physicist, the formula for the determination of kinetic energy. As a philosopher, he was convinced that he could combine conflicting views in one great harmonious system, of which diversity was the distinctive feature. Important, however, as thought was in his eyes, action was even more decisive. Human life is according to him the great arena of human achievement. Reason was to be the plumb-line, a man's delight in action to provide the impetus. Man's happiness is to be sought in the steady perfecting of the world by his work and in continual progress in education.

It was in keeping with the spirit of the age that the attempt was made to give a new legal basis to the relationships between states. Following the lead of the Dutchman Hugo Grotius (1583—1645), Samuel Pufendorf (1632—1694), historiographer to the Great Elector,

studied the extent to which natural right and the natural moral law are founded in the inscrutable will of God. That they are so founded, he contended, could be proved by reason and from the nature of man. Like Grotius, he regarded the state as the instrument for the establishment of the peaceful order required by God. The state itself, however, was based on treaties. The absolute authority of the princes, too, should be restricted by treaty, and should the princes refuse such restriction, he held revolution to be justified. Such ideas as these make him the precursor of German Enlightenment.

The suggestion made by Samuel Rachel, the Schleswig-Holstein diplomat, that an international law should be created to regulate relations between states represents the first attempt to outlaw war within the European family of nations. As early as 1676 he demanded an international court of law backed by sufficient power and authority to enforce its decisions on all states.

The world of the imposing churches and palaces, of scholarship and courtly poetry had barely skimmed the surface of society leaving the lower levels almost untouched. The one poet of the age, Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen (1610—1676), although his works were closely connected with the events of the day, illustrates this point most eloquently. Basic Christian conceptions permeate his entire work. Man must win through in this utterly evil world by his own initiative and by trust in God's goodness. At the same time Grimmelshausen was not sparing with his vigorous scorn and blunt satire about every possible circumstance of his day. His novel "Simplicissimus" is the most vivid portrayal of the Thirty Years War that has come down to us.