The Gothic cathedrals of Medieval and Renaissance Europe were designed to inspire awe in churchgoers and make the congregation feel closer to God. The cathedrals served an important cultural purpose in directing the way people thought about the authority behind them and encouraged a reverent attitude from all those who saw them. Constructing the cathedrals with their high ceilings, open halls, and windowed walls was a significant engineering feat. It required innovations such as the pointed arch, ribbed vault, and flying buttress to create a sturdy yet spacious structure.

In much the same way, the North Korean regime uses their military arms as a cultural display. Like the ancient cathedrals, North Korea’s weapons are meant to be a public spectacle that inspires awe in their populace and reinforces the authority of the regime behind them. In order to accomplish this, the Korean government carries out carefully-planned elaborate military parades, and uses the testing of new arms as an occasion for national celebration. The purpose of North Korea’s arms is only partially utilitarian. Their repeated celebrations of clearly unsuccessful military tests and parades of outdated missiles show that the government is much more concerned with creating the desired image, than they are concerned with the actual usefulness of their weapons.

Cities in Europe would compete to build the largest cathedral in order to establish their reputation, just as North Korea feels the need to build up and show off its weapons as a means of establishing legitimacy and respect in the international community. Additionally, the cathedrals did not all represent a new engineering innovation. Once the pointed arch, for instance, was first used in Europe, it quickly spread across the continent and became widely used in cathedrals. Likewise, North Korea’s military weapons are not innovative, but they are an importation and adaption of a current technology.