

ON PILGRIMAGE TO CHARTRES

Honouring the Centenary of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Birth

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NO ONE WHO HAS MADE THE JOURNEY south from Paris to the cathedral of Chartres is likely to forget the first sight of the soaring towers sailing above the plains of the Beauce. In late summer, especially, the waving wheat and barley and brilliant golden rape offer moments of wonder and worship beyond even the most fervent pilgrim's expectations. These were the fruitful fields whose prosperity in part made the great church possible. They are fields made solemn ever since by the presence of a human achievement and an act of homage beyond adequate description.

Few have loved the cathedral as much as Charles Péguy. After some fifteen years of staunch atheism, he told his friend Joseph Lotte in 1908 that he had 'found faith again', and poured his anxious new conviction into page after page of plain but perfect poetry. Mary as Queen of Heaven is central to the poetry, and to her Péguy immediately entrusted his son Pierre when the boy fell desperately ill in 1912. When Pierre recovered, his father set off on foot to Mary's shrine at Chartres, as he had promised. The journey is 72 kilometres each way.

It is disputed how many pilgrimages Péguy made—whether two, or three, or a good many more. Two seem certain: the one on foot in June 1912 and another, probably by rail, in July 1913—a little more than a year before he was killed by a German bullet at the river Marne. In 'La Tapisserie de Notre Dame de Chartres' (1913), we find him under way:

Morning Star, unattainable Queen,
Here we come marching towards your great court.
Here is the plate on which we spread out our poor love,
Here is the ocean of our immense pain. ...

You see us advancing along the straight road.
 All dusty, all muddy, the rain in our teeth.
 On the fanned expanse, open to all the gusts.
 The *route nationale* serves as our narrow gate.

Then, astonished as so many others have been before and since, he sees the spire in the sky:

Tower of David, here is your tower of Beauce:
 The hardest ear of corn that ever rose
 Towards a sky of mercy and serenity,
 And the most beautiful jewel flourishing in your crown.¹

'I am a man of the Beauce', he told Lotte, 'Chartres is my cathedral'.²

Hans Urs von Balthasar came to love Péguy, along with Georges Bernanos and Paul Claudel, while he was studying theology in the mid-1930s at Fourvière, near Lyon. He admired in particular Péguy's lifelong concern with Israel and its prophets, his heightened sense of the dialogue between the Old and New Covenants, and his awareness of the incarnation reverberating through time and illuminating it. 'More perhaps than any other writer of our time', comments Louis Dupré, Péguy 'perceived the earthly ramifications as well as the historical consequences of God's entering this world and transforming its entire configuration'.³ For von Balthasar, Péguy's thought provides a fitting climax to the two volumes of *Herrlichkeit* (*The Glory of the Lord*) that study 'clerical and lay styles' in theological aesthetics.⁴

Interestingly, however, von Balthasar does not discuss Péguy's devotion to Chartres except in the most general terms. He notes that Péguy's aesthetic 'is ultimately rooted entirely in the religious; he takes no account of any kind of art other than a religious one, an art of worship', and comments that 'cathedrals are for him "the prayer of fleshly people, a glory, almost an impossibility, a miracle of prayer";

¹ Translation based on Marjorie Villiers, *Charles Péguy: A Study in Integrity* (London: Collins, 1965), 320. For the original, see <http://www.florilege.free.fr/florilege/peguy/beauce.htm>.

² Louis Perche, *Charles Péguy* (Paris: Pierre Seghers, 1957), 113.

³ 'The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetic', in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, edited by David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 183-206, here 193.

⁴ Péguy is treated in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume III: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 400-517. See also von Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

they are “embodiments of adoration”.⁵ Nor does Péguy’s own rapturous devotion to Our Lady of Chartres ever dwell on any details of the great church in which she is honoured.

For that we may turn to one of his contemporaries, Henry Adams (whom I do not recall him or von Balthasar ever mentioning). The American historian and critic’s masterpiece, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, has led generations of pilgrims to follow his path across the Beauce. Scholarship may have advanced beyond Adams; he may be more technically reliable on the Mont than on Chartres. But no one has commanded more lyric language to describe the beauty or the grace of the place.

Adams retreated to the north-west of France after the shock of his wife’s sudden suicide in 1885, losing himself among the twelfth- and thirteenth-century monuments of the region. His study there resulted, twenty years later, in the private printing of a hundred copies of his book. His heroine, like Péguy’s, is the Virgin herself. At her shrine, he wrote to his niece:

... the combination of the glass and the Gothic is the highest ideal ever yet reached by men; higher than the mosaics and Byzantine of Ravenna, which was itself higher, as a religious conception, than the temples of the Greeks or Egyptians.⁶

What is it that so captured the hearts of these two men, and of so many pilgrims since? Tourists will tell you immediately about the stained glass windows and ‘the wonderful blue’, which is all of course entirely true. More than one priest I know has chosen the Teaching Christ of the South Porch as a memorial card for his ordination. Architects speak admiringly of the unusually dynamic, wheel-like flying buttresses. But what finally captures and heals the heart at Chartres is not any of these marvellous parts but rather the remarkable whole—in all its complex simplicity.⁷

⁵ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*: III, 511.

⁶ Quoted in Francis Henry Taylor, ‘Introduction’, in Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (New York: Heritage, 1957 [1913]), x.

⁷ On the pilgrimage to Chartres, see Jean Favier, *The World of Chartres* (New York: Abrams, 1990), 27-34. On the labyrinth beloved of pilgrims there, see Gernot Candolini, *Labyrinths: Walking toward the Center* (New York: Crossroad, 2003).



Chartres Cathedral, West Front

Before the Royal Portal

Start by sitting before the west front, which gradually warms through the day as the sun comes from the east (Jerusalem) and finally sets here. You are at a site where at least five cathedrals have stood. An eighth-century cathedral was destroyed by the Danes in 858 and then rebuilt. In 876, Charles the Bald, Charlemagne's grandson, gave to this second church as a relic a veil revered as having been worn by Mary at the birth of Jesus. After a fire in 962, and a worse one in 1020, Bishop Fulbert rebuilt the whole structure, adding a crypt that remains to this day. (Fulbert was the first in a line of scholars, such as the brothers Bernard and Thierry of Chartres, Gilbert de la Porrée, and John of Salisbury, who made the school of Chartres central to the twelfth-century renaissance.) On 10 July 1194 the worst fire of all destroyed much of the town and nearly all of Fulbert's cathedral. When, a few days later, it was discovered that the veil had been saved, the town quickly decided to build anew—and largely completed the enterprise within a remarkably swift thirty years.

Two unequal towers confront the viewer from the west front. The later, fifteenth-century one to the north, by Jean de Beauce, is more

striking, with its lacy intricacies. But it is the anonymous twelfth-century tower that Adams, with reason, described as ‘the most perfect piece of architecture in the world’.⁸ Between the two, at a first level, are the three simple doors of the Royal Portal, above which are three lancet windows, all from the mid-twelfth century. The Portal, the lancets and the South Tower were saved from the fire and incorporated into the new church.

Now embellished by a great thirteenth-century rose window and a gallery of kings, this façade is solemn, almost severe, yet it sings of serenity. Statues on the pillars of the three doors bid us welcome. In the bay to the right, dedicated to the Virgin and Child, Mary is enthroned like a Byzantine empress above a nativity scene; she is honoured in the vaults around her by kings, workmen and the seven liberal arts. Above the central door, in the tympanum, the four animals of the apocalypse (later symbols of the evangelists) surround Christ in glory, with kings, queens and prophets as his court. An elegant tall queen with long plaits and an intense expression is said to be the Queen of Sheba, and is often called ‘the elder sister of the Prodigal Son’. Opposite her is a marvellous king, who seems to smile gently and assure us that we will be at home here. The door to the left, the Portal of the Ascension, shows the Lord rising sublimely above ten apostles (there were only eleven at the time—an awkward number!). Here the archivolts, or decorated bands in the arches, show angels, along with fascinating, scary signs of the zodiac that delight children of all ages.

The Royal Portal sets the tone for the entire cathedral. Its timeless ideality is more about God’s serene majesty and access to it through Our Lady than about suffering or sin. And it is consoling beyond description. Try to recall its solemn dignity as you walk around to the left towards the North Porch, on which the early morning light plays beautifully. Here, where Mary so clearly reigns, the full meaning of the church is revealed. Financed by King Philip Augustus, the porch was begun around 1215, and the basic architecture was finished by 1225. This ‘Porch of France’ is devoted entirely to the Virgin. Above the central bay she is crowned Queen of Heaven. The lintel below portrays her death, with Christ bearing her soul away while angels carry her

⁸ Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 61.

body (the resurrection-assumption of Mary!). On the trumeau, or central pier in the middle of the door, is Anne with the infant Mary.

The pillar statues about the entrance include royal and biblical figures, who are far more individualised than their twelfth-century cousins: Abraham preparing Isaac for sacrifice; Moses lifting the brazen serpent; David with his crown; and an extraordinary, ascetic John the



The Coronation of the Virgin (North Porch)

Baptist. All have recently been cleaned so carefully that some of the original painting is now miraculously evident. They compete in grandeur with the delightful statuettes in the archivolt of the doorway's canopy. Here God creates light and darkness, the birds, the animals, and especially Adam (a small figure kneeling at God's lap). Just above is another depiction of the creation of Adam, with Christ as the model in the background, one of the cathedral's most famous sculptures. Opposing the contemporary heresy of the Albigensians, this sculpture, and indeed the entire porch, could scarcely be more engagingly orthodox. For a largely illiterate people these stories in stone formed both a library and a place of prayer. Today pilgrims journey to see them and to learn what people long ago knew about our faith. The sculptures ground, connect, incarnate the grace with which the mystery of life has chosen to take our human world, in all its wonder and wound, to itself.

Before entering the church, you might also walk around to the South Porch. The west front and the two porches are after all the entry ways for the people. It is the gift of another nobleman, Pierre Mauclerc, Comte de Dreux (1213-37), an avowed rival of Blanche of Castile, who eventually had him deposed.⁹ As the North Porch belongs to the Mother, the South belongs to the Son. Here the tympanum of the central bay or doorway shows Christ enthroned and, below him, the Last Judgment. The Virgin's situation is new: uncrowned, with John the Evangelist, she implores Christ to be merciful. Below, Michael weighs the souls to be judged. But as Malcolm Miller, the incomparable English tour guide of Chartres, comments, 'the blessed look no happier than the damned'.

On the trumeau is the teaching Christ: humane, serene, consoling—especially in comparison with the rather worried-looking apostles on the piers to his left and right. More human and accessible than the sublime sovereign of the Royal Portal, he is one of us, though of course with greater dignity. The statue 'gives above all the impression of a noble, harmonious, and wise human being', says Titus Burkhardt. 'And yet, because the [unknown] artist eschewed all sentimentalism, its appearance is still much more spiritual than the majority of the later statues of Christ.'¹⁰

⁹ Adams tells the story of the rivalry at 83.

¹⁰ Titus Burkhardt, *Chartres and the Birth of the Cathedral* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1996), 118.

The bays to the right and left are replete with grand early-thirteenth-century statuary as well, with martyrs to the left and confessors to the right. Two young knights, Roland and George, the outermost figures in the embrasure of the left porch, are particularly fine. And from the other side of the street you will be able to see that, for all the emphasis on judgment, the gable at the very top of the transept has a colossal statue of the Virgin standing with the Child on her left arm. An early-fourteenth-century completion of the decoration, it looks small from ground level but makes a large point: mercy. The theology of the porch is of a Church militant—but equally of a merciful Lord and of the Communion of his Saints.

Everywhere at Chartres there is wonder and worship. But it is time now, alone or with a throng, to go into the church. And it is best to enter by the Royal Portal.

The Radiant Interior

Your first impression, depending on the weather and the time of day, is likely to be of colour, the cascade of dazzling, soft colour falling from window after window onto the rough floor and soaring pillars of the elegant, uncannily unified space. These miracles in glass serve not only as glorious decoration but also as an *illumination* that *shapes* a place for prayer. One thinks of von Balthasar's distinction between the form of the beautiful and the splendour that radiates from it.

Whoever the master architect of Chartres was, he learned the lessons of Notre Dame de Paris well. Chartres has but two side aisles, needing no others to support its lofty walls, which are already strengthened by heavy buttresses outside. Above the aisles a delicate triforium of arches and slender columns runs through the entire building, tying it together horizontally and raising its centre of gravity. But the tribune has been suppressed, allowing for far more stained glass than at Notre Dame. And the shafts of the cross-ribbed vaults fall from the ceiling to the floor in unbroken fluid lines, where in Paris they terminate at the capitals of pillars receiving them. Such an impression of majestic peace arises that it scarcely seems to matter how it has been achieved.

Looking up, you can see the mid-twelfth-century lancets glowing before you. These are often called the most beautiful glass in the world. They show, on the left, the passion and resurrection of Christ from the transfiguration to the supper at Emmaus; in the centre, the life of Christ (from the annunciation to the entry into Jerusalem in Holy Week); and on the right, the tree of Jesse (with the resplendent Lord enthroned at the top). The thirteenth-century rose window above, representing the last judgment, is difficult to read at close range—Adams, in fact, describes this rose as ‘Our Lady’s promise of Paradise’. In any case, its subject matter does not disturb the majestic serenity of the whole. As for the lancets, we are indeed before the glory of the Lord, reflected in the unrivalled blue of the tree of Jesse, in the dignified rondels detailing the



Angels and Shepherds window

passion, in the mandorla with the Empress Mary holding her blue-robed child at the top of the larger central lancet (sometimes called the ‘Christmas window’). It is a place for endless wonder and worship.

Few, if any, pilgrims are likely to have contemplated all 167 windows at Chartres, though some art historians certainly have. But if you make your way slowly, dazzled, down the nave, you can admire on the north side the procession of saints,

prophets and apostles in the lancets of the clerestory, with a beautiful rose floating above each pair. Below are six lancets that tell the stories of Noah (again a beguiling joy for children), St Lubin, St Eustace, St Joseph, St Nicholas, and, my own favourite on this side, the redemption.

On the south side there is an especially grand lancet in the clerestory showing Mary as Queen (no longer an empress!) standing with her Son in her arms. Below, along with the stories of John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene, a theologically sophisticated lancet couples the parable of the Good Samaritan with the story of Adam and Eve. Next to it, a lancet celebrates the death, burial and assumption of Mary (the mystery to which the church is dedicated). It is worth

coming to Chartres to see this alone. After the unfortunate interruption of the fifteenth-century Vendôme Chapel, a neighbouring window celebrates the Miracles of Notre Dame.

Happily, Chartres has moved its main altar out of the choir and into the crossing where its great transept intersects the nave. A handsome new podium and altar were built from local stone in 1995. The crossing is also a thrilling place to sit for a recital of the grand seventeenth-century organ, especially on a summer evening as the full fiery light of the windows gradually fades to embers.

When Mass is not being celebrated, crowds gather to admire the two great thirteenth-century roses: the Rose of France to the north and the Rose of Judgment to the south. The northern window (c. 1235) centres on the Virgin enthroned with the Christ Child, surrounded by twelve medallions, some containing doves and some angels, and then twelve kings of Judah. It was the gift of Blanche of Castile and of her son St Louis. In the lancets beneath, Anne holds the child Mary and is flanked by Melchisedek, David, Solomon and Aaron. This window's gorgeously intricate stonework has recently been beautifully restored.

The glass of the southern rose (c.1230) shines even more brilliantly, since it receives more light. At its centre, choirs of angels and the 24 elders of the Apocalypse surround Christ in glory. The five lancets below, among the cathedral's most famous, show the Virgin and Child, with the Prophets Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and Jeremiah carrying on their shoulders the evangelists Matthew, Mark, John and Luke. Together they bear witness to the fulfilment of scripture in Christ, reigning above them in the rose.

Grand as this centre of the cathedral is, commanding remarkable views in every direction, it is still not the reason pilgrims come to Chartres. For you have yet to reach the choir and the apse of the cathedral, for which the whole was ultimately built—Mary's throne room and private apartments, in Henry Adams's lovely conceit.¹²

The choir, with its heavy sixteenth-century sculptured screen, is embraced by a double-aisled ambulatory with marvellously intricate vaulting. Here there is another resplendent collection of windows—and the church's great relic of the Virgin. When it is shown, it is in a

¹² Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 97.



The Choir Screen

small chapel on the north side of the ambulatory, just beyond the chapel devoted to Our Lady of the Pillar (also sixteenth-century), who herself draws crowds of visitors to prayer. In 1927 the cloth was scientifically examined and found to come possibly from the first century AD. There is even a legend that a statue of a virgin with a child, inscribed *Virgini pariturae* (To the Virgin Who Would Bear a Child), was worshipped in the crypt by pagans who were awaiting a saviour born to a virgin.¹³ Popular stories such as these were meant to establish the primacy of the church of Chartres, both as community and as cathedral.

There are almost countless variations on the theme of the enthroned Virgin Mother reigning throughout her shrine. Presiding over all, in the centre of the clerestory above the choir, a great lancet shows her with the infant Jesus in majesty. The theological refinement of the window programme is nowhere more evident than in the smaller chapel lancet directly below and behind her, which is the easily legible window of the Apostles. Not far from it, near a statue of St Joseph, is a vivid presentation of the story of Thomas, who reaches tenderly toward the side of Jesus, surrounded by the *fleurs-de-lis* of France.

¹³ On the veil and the legend of the statue, see Favier, *The World of Chartres*, 31. On the legend, see also Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Program of Chartres Cathedral* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1959), vi.



Detail from the Zodiac Window

Because Gothic Chartres was built on the foundations of its Romanesque predecessor, the chapels surrounding the choir, in what the French call the *chevet*, or apse, of the building, are less prominent than they are, say, at Notre Dame de Paris. But the grace of the ambulatory and its windows more than compensates for this. A good many grisailles are here, grey windows with minimal coloured decoration, to give contrast and extra light. You will also find Charlemagne (considered a saint by many in the Middle Ages) engaged in wonderful battle scenes and, on the south side, the stories of

Martin of Tours and Thomas à Becket, and the legendary Zodiac window, given by the vinegrowers.

Most famous of all is Notre-Dame-de-la-belle-Verrière, whose four central panels of the Virgin and Child date from the 1180s and were incorporated into a new window between 1215 and 1220. The window's lowest register shows the temptations of Jesus. Above this is the marriage feast of Cana, then the Queen of Heaven and her Son, in ravishing blue against a ruby background. She is surrounded and supported by angels with candles, censers and columns, offering her homage in which the pilgrims join. But this magnificence does not overshadow the image of Mary the lovely mother in the smaller window directly above to the right. Here she is no longer empress or queen, but perhaps simply a lady of the court, who breast-feeds her child. This too is Chartres, where grandeur and tenderness are everywhere one.



Notre-Dame-de-la-belle-Verrière, central panels

Beauty Saves

The pleasure we gain from journeys depends greatly on how we prepare for them, and the profit we draw from journeys on how we appropriate them. Both Péguy and Adams went to Chartres as pilgrims in need. They had each found the world of their time troubling. Péguy was disgusted by the Dreyfus affair in France, and considered defence of the falsely accused Jewish captain an almost sacramental duty. His *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* espoused a resolute socialism, and, as Julian Green comments, some numbers were entirely filled with his 'bold,

often indignant words in defence of the working classes and in attacks on our modern world which he hated'.¹⁴ He was revolted by the materialistic rationalism he felt around him, and regularly contrasted the mystical and the political, fearing that the insights of the former always yield to the abuses of the latter. He himself, says Green, had 'an eye for the invisible which only the most mystical among primitives had had before him'.¹⁵ And his love of the Church, like his profound patriotism, was always complex.

Henry Adams was no friend of the modern age either. One biographer ventured to summarise his fundamental convictions as these:

- a. The universe is unintelligible and inimical to man.
- b. Society is a fiction—an attempt to make the universe intelligible and bearable.
- c. There are various possible fictions on which society may rest.
- d. The fiction of the twelfth century was one of the best.
- e. It too failed—life is tragic.¹⁶

Francis Henry Taylor, introducing a new edition of *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* in 1957, called the book 'a protest against the world in which Henry Adams found himself'; Adams's medievalism was 'an escape from the inexorable disasters of the twentieth century which as a philosopher and historian he foretold'.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Adams thought that 'Chartres expressed, besides whatever else it meant, an emotion, the deepest man ever felt—the struggle of his own littleness to grasp the infinite'.¹⁸ And Péguy wrote about the journey to Chartres, only days before he died, that 'the whole problem of the human spirit stretches itself out along that road'.¹⁹ Today's pilgrim, returning to Paris after some days, or perhaps only hours, at Chartres, is likely to find the great capital suddenly noisier, more congested, even coarser than they had remembered. This is the typical reaction to 'the world' after a retreat. But you soon

¹⁴ Julian Green, 'Introduction', in Charles Péguy, *God Speaks* (New York: Pantheon, 1945), 10.

¹⁵ Green, 'Introduction', 11.

¹⁶ Emily Stevenson, cited by Taylor, 'Introduction', xi.

¹⁷ Taylor, 'Introduction', viii.

¹⁸ Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, 104.

¹⁹ Quoted in Villiers, *Charles Péguy*, 362.

adjust. For this, or some place like it, is where your ordinary life unfolds. How, then, do you let Chartres stay with you?

Pilgrimages, like all prayer, are about attending to what calls for adoration. Need may bring you to it, or gratitude. But attention to the holy presence in a place is the reason for the journey. And whether we will it or not, such attention changes us. Hans Urs von Balthasar is a master teacher in this respect. As a devoted son of Ignatius of Loyola, he knew the dynamics of contemplation in action as well as anyone of his time. He cherished the great words of Augustine: ‘Our entire task in this life ... consists in healing the eyes of the heart so they may be able to see God’.²⁰ And so, in the seven astonishing volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, the first part of his great trilogy, he explores the analogy between our experience of earthly beauty and our experience of revealed, divine beauty, patiently examining the basic structure of the experience, great writers who have exemplified it, the metaphysical tradition that dealt with it, and its biblical presentation as well.

But von Balthasar also knew well that ‘seeing God’ leads to the desire to live like God. Such talk sounds blasphemous, but we can and must speak in this way because in Christ, crucified and risen, the human race’s effort to live like God has been forever begun. And so five further volumes, forming the centre of von Balthasar’s trilogy, are devoted to studying the dramatic relationship between God and creation (what von Balthasar called the *Theodramatik*—*Theo-Drama*). ‘The divine ground actually approaches us’, von Balthasar writes in the first volume, and ‘challenges us to respond’.

Von Balthasar may have begun by speaking of beauty and glory, but as he continued, it became increasingly clear that our response must be more than a ‘merely contemplative gaze’. It cannot ‘be translated into any neutral truth or wisdom that can be “taught”’, nor is it static. ‘Reality is action, not theory’, says von Balthasar. Mere aesthetics has ‘to surrender itself and go in search of new categories’: theology needs to articulate also ‘the absolute commitment found in that drama into which the one and only God sets each of us to play our unique part’.²² Here we see the intimate interrelationship between what scholastic

²⁰ Sermon 88: 6. The then Cardinal Ratzinger quoted this text in his funeral homily for von Balthasar.

²² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Volume I: Prolegomena*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 16, 66.

philosophy called 'the transcendentals': beauty, truth and goodness. The truth of things may be revealed to us through beauty, but this truth and beauty call us forward to goodness. The God who shows us the Son's truth in beauteous splendour thereby also calls us to a life of goodness.

We continue to make Chartres our own, then, not by remembering its architectural, historical or even theological 'lessons'. We make it our own by *seeing* again the serenity of the glorified Christ, the dignity of the prophets and kings, the approachable humanity of the Teaching Jesus, the aspiration of the vaulting arches in their all but weightless elegance, the sense of proportion in stone and statuary and glass, the jewelled history of salvation in the windows (along with life's most ordinary scenes as well), and—everywhere —the Sovereign Lady who presents to us her Son. Then, if we have worshipped in the midst of it all, we recall that this beauty was part of what we surrendered within ourselves to God, with the humble hope of being made in some small way more like to the Holy One whom for centuries it has honoured. And if we are like Him, we shall begin again to love God and our neighbour with all our heart and soul. Thus perhaps, if we long truly enough for it, Dostoevsky's prophecy will be fulfilled: 'Beauty will save the world'.

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