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Heaven In Stone And Glass: Experiencing The Spirituality Of The Great Cathedrals



Synopsis

Like a mystical tome awaiting to be deciphered, a Gothic cathedral holds many secrets about the soul's yearning for God. In *Heaven in Stone and Glass*, Catholic priest and professor of theology at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago teaches us how to read these secrets, with beautiful reflections on aspects such as light and darkness, the labyrinth, the meaning of gargoyles and demons, and the imagery of vertical space. Whether you are preparing for a pilgrimage to York Cathedral or Notre Dame in Paris, or looking ahead to inspirational bedside reading, this book is the perfect guide.

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Customer Reviews

I am a seminarian where Fr. Barron teaches and have had some of his courses. He is an excellent instructor, pastor, and priest, but more importantly he is one of the best communicators around. He can convey with passion and brevity in two minutes what it would take others twenty; he is exciting and inspiring, characteristic of a good witness to the faith. I feel blessed to have him as a part of my formation. He tackles theological issues with a fresh and unique perspective. *Heaven in Stone and Glass* is no exception. Not many books may ever have been written about the distinct (and sorely overlooked) spiritual dimensions that Gothic cathedrals convey. Joseph Campbell, in *The Power of Myth*, once said that while in France, Chartres Cathedral is his sacrament; it puts him in touch with the Divine like nothing else. That is the point of Gothic; to make you awestruck, humble and kneeling before the Almighty. Travel to any cathedral in Europe or Washington National Cathedral in D.C. and you immediately understand; it is the numinous, the religious feeling, the experiential

wonder of which Schleiermacher wrote; it is the *Mysterium Tremendum* of which Otto wrote. It is to make you feel like a child before God; small and lost in praise walking in the lofty, incense-filled rarified interiors of these cathedrals. It is to put us in our place before the grandeur of God like no other. It could be argued that this is what true religious experience is, of which Gothic cathedrals afford us. Perhaps that is what, in part, Jesus meant when He said we had to become child-like unto the Lord. That is the point of Gothic. This is what Bob Barron was on to.

Fr. Barron's book was used in the course on the church and the arts at my seminary; the course strives to connect various aspects of art, architecture, music, etc. into the spiritual life of the church - this book fulfills that purpose admirably. It is an extended meditation upon humanity's link with God, using the idea and image of the Gothic cathedral as the central icon or focus upon which this meditation is based. His analysis is erudite and wide-ranging, drawing upon his own experiences and reflections, as well as references past and present in the greater corpus of Christian and intellectual traditions. For example, in the chapter on Virtues and Vices, Barron flows easily from Aquinas to Flannery O'Connor (both of whom are frequently reference throughout the text); in other places, he incorporates Bertrand Russell and Pythagoras on mathematics, Tillich's idea of the ground of being, Rahner's idea about the incomprehensibility of God, the theologies of Augustine and Teilhard, Dorothy Day and the Desert Fathers. The ideas incorporated here include those of this world and of other worlds, drawn together into harmony and unity, while still retaining aspects of particularity. Barron looks at particular aspects of the cathedral, drawing both on the physical and emotional responses one might get being in a cathedral. There are architectural and artistic features of cathedrals designed to deliberately evoke certain responses, symbolic of the status and relationship of human beings to God and the heavens. This includes the darkness upon entering, the verticality and light of the high windows, and even the very shape of the cathedral itself.

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