

The Dungeon and the Cathedral

By Matt Plett

Quiet steps echoed off the stone walls as visitors walked through the cathedral. With the sun filtering through the stained glass windows, I sat in awe of the grandeur before me. The towering columns and the vast arches of St. Denis made me feel insignificant. Not only was I in Paris for my first time, I was in a cathedral that had been around in the 12th century. It felt like I was being transported to a different time and place as images from the 12th century drifted through my imagination.

What were the circumstances like 900 years ago? How did people back then view the church? Was it a place of meaningful worship or was it a place of hypocrisy and greed? Did the church look after and nurture the people, or were they just after their money? As I reviewed all that my professors and teachers tried so hard to teach me about church history, I began to get a picture of what this magnificent building might represent.

The picture that entered my mind filled me with mixed feelings. On one hand, this structure so beautifully spoke of God's beauty and splendor that I was deeply grateful for the time and money that went into its design and construction. On the other hand, I was reminded of the corruption and greed of much of the church in that era. Knowing that the money used to build this cathedral likely came from over-taxed peasants or the sale of indulgences cast a shadow over the building's beauty.

This shadow took on new meaning when a few days later I stood in the dungeon of the Trachselwald Castle in Switzerland. Thinking of all the Anabaptist prisoners held within those thick stone walls, St.

Denis in all its glory began to dim in comparison. What can be more beautiful than someone giving everything they have, even their very life, for the sake of Christ? It was convicting to stand in that dark, cold dungeon and think of what the early Anabaptists went through to ensure the future of biblical Christianity in their communities. Even though that dungeon had no beauty or splendor, it played a role in showing me that a heart fixed on God has a beauty that no cathedral can match.

Looking back at both the dungeon and the cathedral I see that God is the author of all beauty, whether it is in a building or a heart. I am grateful that I got to see a glimpse of both.

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Even after seeing that the state of the heart is what matters, I am left with many unanswered questions. Can a building really point us towards God even if it was built in pride and materialism; can a dungeon be made beautiful by what goes on inside?

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The lofty interior of St. Denis, a 12th century cathedral located in a northern suburb of Paris. St. Denis is known as the first Gothic structure in the world and the burial place of kings.

is the author of all beauty, whether it is in a building or a heart. I am grateful that I got to see a glimpse of both on my trip through Europe. This leaves me with one final question. How do I as a twenty-first century Christian create things that reflect God's beauty while having a heart like the early Anabaptist? **BB**

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