

ART

A Hollow Heritage?

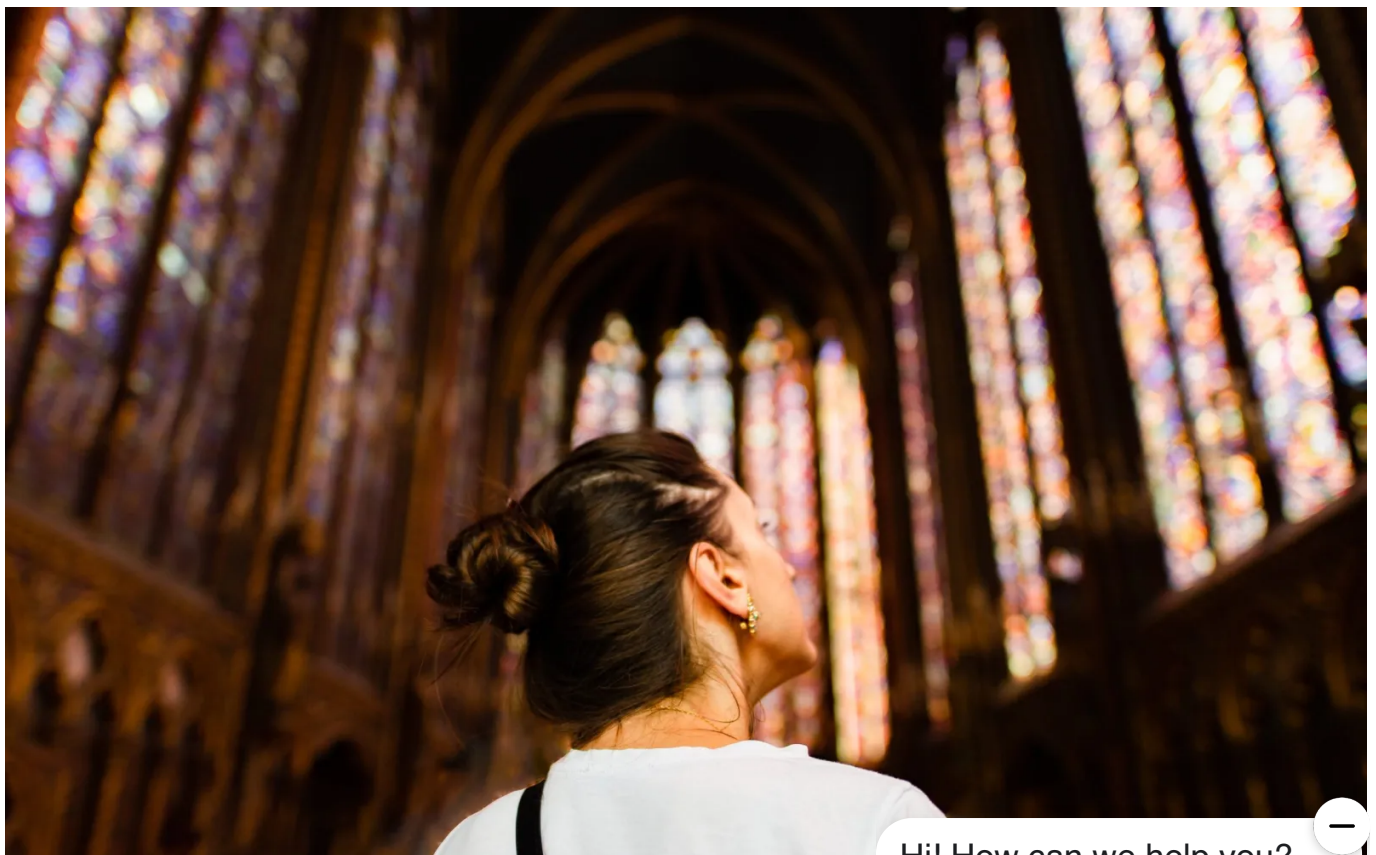
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The article explores how we relate to our Christian cultural heritage, which is intended as a pathway of faith. Such heritage may have had this core purpose hollowed out and been reduced to tourist attractions, but it can still be of relevance today if properly understood.



Thomas Muscat
01/12/2022

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contemporary [art](#) can be just as jarring. Sometimes it just feels like it's hard to reconcile our patrimony with our faith. [Malta's heritage](#) also carries a legacy of warfare and demonizing [the other](#) that sits uncomfortably with our understanding of faith and humanity. Updating a church with contemporary [art](#) can be just as jarring. Sometimes it just feels like it's hard to reconcile our patrimony with our faith. [the other](#) that sits uncomfortably with our understanding of faith and humanity. Updating a church with contemporary [art](#) can be just as jarring. Sometimes it just feels like it's hard to reconcile our patrimony with our faith.

Yet things aren't that simple either. Beneath Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, [Pope Benedict XVI](#) acclaimed,

beauty, [...] precisely because it opens up and broadens the horizons of human awareness, pointing us beyond ourselves, bringing us face to face with the abyss of Infinity, can become a path towards the transcendent, towards the ultimate Mystery, towards God.



What is our cultural heritage if not our ancestors' attempts to create this beauty?

Indeed, the great works of [Christian](#) art that help form this heritage are prayers, a gateway to the dimension of faith that shaped them. Truly understanding and experiencing art and culture is thus an adventure of [spiritual](#) communion with the artist's prayer across the centuries. This reality is beautifully embodied in Dante's dual role of poet and pilgrim of *La Divina Commedia*, and the kneeling statue of Master Mateo facing the altar of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela to present his Portico of Glory.

It is with sadness that I often see that we ourselves have carved out the beating heart of our heritage and left it a hollow vessel. Some see showcasing it as a sign of its intrinsic faith itself being antiquated. Others marvel at its beauty and history but ignore how it can still move us today. The result is the same: cutting ourselves off from our culture and consigning it to the past. We've turned churches into relics and signs of devotion into mere tourist attractions, if not sources of pique. It is indeed the paradox of our time that a growing number of people go into churches but not to church.

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The epitome of this paradox can be found in the sacred space where our Living Stones community gives its service, St. John's Co-Cathedral. To not open the magnificent space to visitors and ensure its preservation would do a disservice to its artistic and historical value. Yet to see it managed as a museum and often inaccessible to believers does a disservice to the theological richness of its art and architecture. It is often difficult to convince visitors that there is something worthwhile beyond the art-historical information of their audio guides. Yet, as Living Stones, we continue to invite them to rediscover a living space, a place of encounter with the Word of God that transcends the time it was created in.

I feel that it is a calling that we all share, to seek to understand and share our heritage and discover how it can still speak to us today. The true Word it can transmit is a living one that knows no bounds, be they past, present or future.

Tags: art, beauty, Christian, Christian Identity, heritage, music, Pope, society, the other

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