

REFLECTIONS

A Tale of Two Cities

Continued from C1

“As you can imagine, these original stones are incredibly meaningful to us,” a Frauenkirche docent tells me as we tour the church. It’s a beautiful building, with an airy, light-blessed interior and a Baroque exterior whose graceful, lightly decorated elegance represents its 18th-century Lutheran provenance. The name itself—Church of Our Lady—bears a supple simplicity.

The tale of the two churches and their cities, which are official brethren in peace, make them marvelously compelling destinations in a world that, four generations on, remains wracked by war. As the descendant of World War II survivors, my pilgrimage to these two places remains one of the most meaningful journeys of my life.

“These are the pieces of the original altar we were able to rescue from the ruins,” my grandfatherly, white-haired Dresden interlocutor continues, smiling when I peer closely at a charred stone. “You can see them throughout. As much as possible we laid them back in their original spots.

“And there,” he points behind the altar, “is the cross of nails Coventry sent us. It’s from the ruins of their cathedral roof.” This artifact is an angular, unadorned crucifix like none other I’ve ever seen. “And up above, on the steeple outside, is a star that was given to us by Coventry.”

The effect of being in historic locations is hard to explain in definitive 21st-century terms; the laws of physics do not apply, at least as we know them now. But many of Earth’s Native peoples believe everything on this planet has a spirit, so when you’re in the presence of history, there’s a profound spiritual effect. I’ve felt this treading the stone steps of a Crusader castle in Malta, at the gates of Auschwitz, on the grassy slopes of Gallipoli, at Cemetery Ridge in Gettysburg, where the tide of American history turned. In Vienna, one can sit in a pew in the small church where Mozart’s Requiem was first performed. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Native American artisans leaning back against the walls of the Palace of the Governors are continuing a 110-year-old tradition beside a 400-year-old building.

In all these places, and thousands more, the air of history isn’t a dead atmosphere. Faulkner put it like this: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

Dresden today is a proud city whose long history draws many visitors, and not just to remember World War II. Two hours south of Berlin by train, its city center is a World Heritage Site as a result of the magnificence lavished on his capital by Augustus II the Strong, the 18th-century



ILIA BRONSKIY/PEXELS

◀ The rebuilt Frauenkirche reopened in 2005, after over two decades of reconstruction efforts.

Saxon monarch whose wealth and power briefly shone as bright as any in Europe.

Among many other wonders, Dresden’s Green Vault holds the largest treasure trove in all of Europe, a multitude of rooms with so many jewels that there’s an entire room devoted to emeralds, one to sapphires, one to diamonds, one to ivory, and so on. It’s almost incomprehensible that so much treasure could rest in one place—compared to this the famous British crown jewels are just a box of baubles. Augustus himself created the museum in 1723 in one wing of the Saxon Royal Castle, thereby opening what’s generally thought to be the first such public museum on Earth.

Though he was Catholic, the Protestant Frauenkirche was built a few years later under Augustus II, becoming a famous venue for music as well as religious observance. Among its many performers was Johann Sebastian Bach, whose 1736 recital here drew 2,000 listeners. That event will be commemorated this year on April 18 with a performance of what many consider his quintessential work, the St. John Passion. The famous

Mass in B minor and Christmas Oratorio are slated this fall and winter, and I can think of no better venue for these sacred expressions of divine providence. Coventry holds no such regal opulence, though its most famous citizen, Lady Godiva, has a statue or two about. An hour north of London by train, her hometown is a charming small city in the British Midlands where, among other things, a visitor may happen upon a farmer’s



ANDREW WALKER/CC BY-SA 3.0

◀ Coventry Cathedral in England uses the ruins of St Michael’s Cathedral for its reconciliation ministry today.



▲ A casting of Josefin de Vasconcellos’s “Reconciliation” statue was unveiled in the Coventry Cathedral ruins in 1995. Other castings have been placed in Hiroshima, Berlin, and Belfast.

JIM LINWOOD/CC BY 2.0

market featuring locally made tart apple cider and Cheddar cheese. I mean real, authentic Cheddar, not the shrink-wrapped, yellow-stained block found in American supermarkets. Imbued with the Coventry-Dresden spirit of community, I smuggled both back to the United States to share with family and friends.

The whole odyssey began a week earlier in Dresden, where my visit left just one last question to ask my volunteer tour guide in Frauenkirche.

“Were you here?” He nods, but it becomes clear he misunderstood the question.

“Yes, I went to Coventry!” “No, I mean here, in Dresden, in 1945?” He takes a moment to compose his answer.

“I was just a small boy, but I remember.” Further comment is clearly impossible for him. Quiet suffices the church and our conversation. Then he beckons me to a side wall of the sanctuary. Here there’s a placard in English that explains the whole incredible story, Dresden and Coventry and the brotherhood built between the two, and he holds out his hand

toward it so I’ll read. And I do, every word.

The once-a-week English language service here includes a benediction written by a post-war clerical figure in Coventry. It’s called “Father Forgive” and it begins:

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

Father forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

Father, forgive.

Inside the ruined cathedral walls at Coventry, or in Frauenkirche listening to prayers for peace, one comes away with not just a memorable experience but a tiny, glistening idea. If these two places can become brethren, perhaps there is still hope.

Eric Lucas is a retired associate editor at Alaska Beyond Magazine and lives on a small farm on a remote island north of Seattle, where he grows organic hay, beans, apples, and squash.

The Epoch Times Interviews Shen Yun Audiences

The Joy of Shen Yun Shared With All

New York-based Shen Yun Performing Arts, established in 2006, is the world’s premier classical Chinese dance and music company. Each production is an artistic revival and celebration of China’s rich cultural heritage through classical Chinese dance, ethnic and folk dance, and story-based dance, accompanied by orchestral and solo performers.

Shen Yun’s Upcoming Performances

Madison	Wis.	Feb. 19
Washington	D.C.	Feb. 20–March 2
Milwaukee	Wis.	Feb. 22–23
Oklahoma City	Okla.	Feb. 22–23
Corpus Christi	Texas	Feb. 25
Las Vegas	Nev.	Feb. 27–March 2
McAllen	Texas	March 1–2
Boise	Idaho	March 5–6
Phoenix	Ariz.	March 6–9
Stamford	Conn.	March 7–9

For additional performance dates, please visit ShenYun.com/tickets



“A very beautiful event where the values, the principles, and the history are presented in a very beautiful way that everyone can understand.

EDDIE CHARBONIER CHINEA,
member, House of Representatives of Puerto Rico, San Juan, P.R.



“[Shen Yun] is very inspirational because they’re just wanting to deliver that positive message that there is this culture that still exists and it’s not gonna be crushed because of it [persecution].

TAMMY SIMRAK,
general manager, Detroit, Mich.



“I waited four years to see this production, and as a professional photographer, I really, really enjoyed watching the show.

VANCE THOMPSON,
photographer, Tucson, Ariz.



“This was a rare opportunity to witness the finest expression of Chinese culture and art. For us, it was an exceptionally beautiful and profoundly meaningful event.

CLAUDIO CARSERA,
CEO of the Italian state-owned group EUR S.p.A., Rome, Italy

The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts. We have covered audience reactions since Shen Yun’s inception in 2006.

