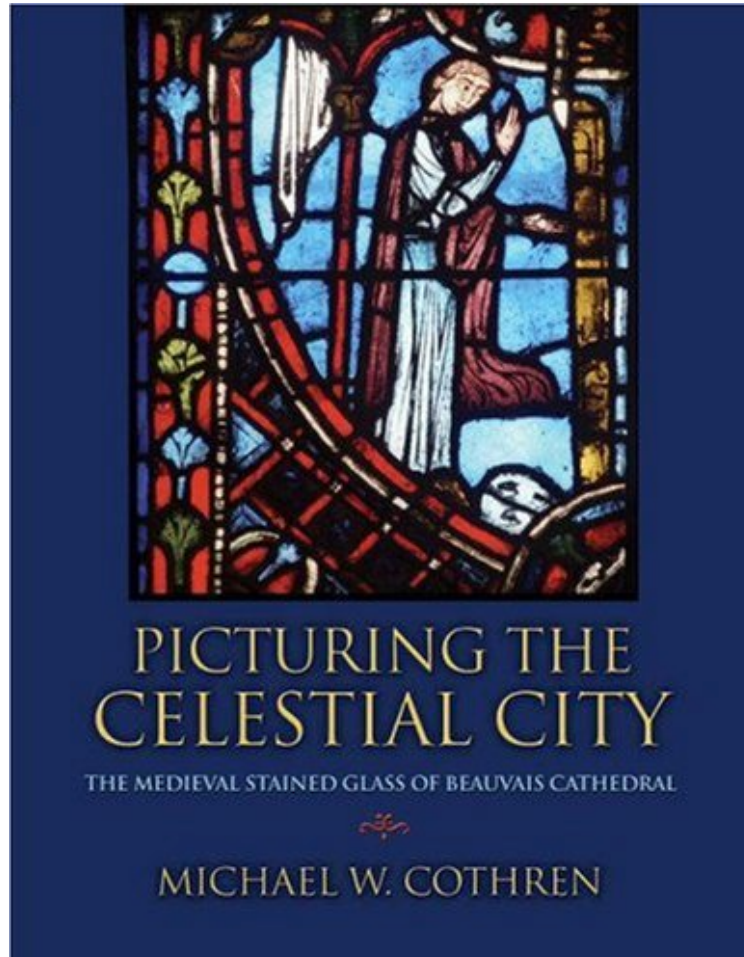


Picturing the Celestial City: The Medieval Stained Glass of Beauvais Cathedral

Michael W. Cothren

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Michael W. Cothren : Picturing the Celestial City: The Medieval Stained Glass of Beauvais Cathedral before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Picturing the Celestial City: The Medieval Stained Glass of Beauvais Cathedral:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. 10 STARS
By Eric
Despite its weight, I couldn't resist lugging it to Beauvais, and around France with me. 10 stars out of 5. I really wish similar works existed for other great places. It distinguishes (with clarity and specificity) in what century or decade the different works and details were done. For me, the details of restorations done after the 15th century are unimportant, but it's refreshing to get "too much information" rather than too little, or none.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A profound, beautiful and erudite book
By P. Hunt
PICTURING THE CELESTIAL CITY is an astonishingly beautiful book: majestic in plan, magisterial in execution. Perhaps the most profound work on stained glass anywhere in the English language, every

word choice has been carefully weighed. Attentive to detail without inundating the reader in a rain of leaden statistics, dates and archival information that can be so deadly in current art historical trends, instead this book is a revelation of the age that built Beauvais and the era and faith that rebuilt it after the collapse of the highest Gothic choir in 1284. Each stained glass window is annotated in full color with oldest to latest restorations shown precisely in place, each window's historical and thematic context presented, plus historical photos show Beauvais before and after devastating world wars. Two of my favorite crafted sections are Cothren's wry tale of the Theophilus Window cycle about this anecdotal Faustian bishop who made a pact with a devil only to later repent (pp. 71-96) and Cothren's fine sleuthing of noble 14th century cathedral window sponsor Bishop Jean de Marigny (pp. 155-159 ff) whose subtle religious symbolism survive in the sublime windows created for him. Biblical passages amply illustrate the divine Celestial City's visions of light and hope. A must for stained glass studies and clearly a labor of love that took many scribal years, this lavish book sets the highest standard, for which the publisher Princeton must be gratified.

The cathedral of Saint-Pierre in Beauvais, France, is most famous as a failure--its choir vaults came crashing down in 1284--and only secondarily for its soaring beauty. This lavishly illustrated and elegantly written book represents the first serious look at the stunning collection of Gothic stained glass windows that has always dominated the experience of those who enter Beauvais Cathedral. Chapter by chapter, Michael Cothren traces the glazing through four successive campaigns that bridged the century between the 1240s and the 1340s. The reader is transported back in history, gaining fascinating insight into what the glazing of Beauvais actually would have looked like as well as what it would have communicated to those who frequented the cathedral. Contrary to the widespread assumption that these windows are heavily restored, Cothren shows that they are in fact surprisingly well preserved, especially in light of the cathedral's infamous history of architectural disaster. More importantly, Cothren goes far to dismantle a long-held misconception about medieval painted windows, and indeed monumental medieval pictorial art in general: the notion that it was conceived and produced as a substitute text for ignorant, illiterate folks, providing for them a "Bible of the Poor." Indeed, Cothren shows us that stained glass windows, rich with shaded meanings, functioned more like sermon than scripture. As an ensemble, they created a radiant interpretive backdrop that explicated and situated the performance of the Mass in this giant liturgical theater.