

Resurrection dance at Chartres

by Tim Moore

Last summer while I was visiting the labyrinth at Chartres in France the cathedral announced newly discovered liturgical information. The announcement, provided on an eight-foot-tall banner, stated that several authenticated texts provided the new information, though it did not provide any citations or source material. (If you have walked a canvass labyrinth, finger walked a pottery labyrinth, or seen pictures of one, there's a 50 percent chance it's been a rendering of the Chartres labyrinth.)

On Easter morning the dean of the cathedral began walking the labyrinth, carrying in his arms a yellow ball of wool, while the Gregorian chant, *Victimae Paschali Laudes*, proclaimed Christ's resurrection. As the priest meandered through the pathway the congregation began encircling the outer rim of the labyrinth.

In Greek mythology, Theseus entered a labyrinth (actually a maze, where he could get lost) to kill the monstrous Minotaur. As a precaution he took thread with him to find his way back out. A golden frieze of Theseus was originally inlaid at the center of the Chartres labyrinth, though it became a casualty of the French Revolution—ripped out and melted down and poorly replaced with stone.

The priest, with a ball of thread in hand, mimics Theseus as he wanders through the labyrinth, yet he represents Christ Jesus descending into death. Unlike Theseus he does not unwind the thread, because he is not trying to find his own way out. Instead, he holds it until he reaches the center of the labyrinth. Upon arriving at the center, representing Christ's confrontation with death, the priest throws the ball to the outer edge of the rim while holding onto a single thread. The parishioner then throws it back, and the priest tosses it in another direction. As the ball of thread is playfully tossed around the circle through the center, the Chartres announcement stated that a "festive, rhythmic dance" began. I'm imagining this large circle moving three, four, five steps left and then back and forth while the ball is being passed until a massive woolen web covers the labyrinth.

The latest issue of *The Christian Century* featured a cover story about the Eastern Orthodox Church's communal vision of resurrection by John Dominic Crossan. The article and his new book, *Resurrecting Easter: How the West Lost and the East Kept the Original Easter Vision*, argues that Western Christianity with its focus on sin turned the cross and resurrection into an individual hope, whereas the East kept the focus of Good Friday and Easter on Jesus' collective victory over death for humanity.

Anselm's 11th century sacrificial atonement theory replaced the idea of Christus Victor in Western Christianity. Gone was the idea of Jesus defeating death for all humanity, replaced with the idea that Jesus died in place of sinful humans who owed a debt they could never repay. While in time this sin-soaked idea about Good Friday and Easter Sunday saturated Catholic and Protestant Christianity, the playful image of the Chartres cathedral still celebrating Christus Victor in resistance to Anselm for a century or two offers a renewal for the Church today.

Perhaps if your Lenten, or Passion Week, practice provides a canvass labyrinth walk, you might want to keep it through sunrise service on Easter morn. Carry the ball of thread to the center and create your own web across the labyrinth. Then, when all are connected, part the circle just enough so that the

Christ representer can proceed straight from the circle with the tangled web following behind (while singing a great Easter hymn) as a tangible reminder that Christ walks from death to resurrection with all humanity in tow.

Happy planning for Lent and Easter. Christus Victor!