



Lettre de Chartres, sanctuaire du Monde

Février 2015

**Dear friends,
Dear readers,
Dear donors,**

We turn to you with confidence to ask you to join us and donate to help restore the cathedral's stained-glass windows, these wondrous sources of light at Chartres!

These difficult economic times give us cause for concern: in 2015 will there continue to be the same impetus to support the preservation of the windows in the nave, these magnificent 13th-century works of art?

This question calls on the virtue of hope, the same hope that the poet Charles Péguy declared to be the very first, the "little girl hope", who "sees that which does not yet exist and that shall be [...] a force, a new beginning, as fresh as the dawn...".

This lustral freshness, in the expert hands of the restorers, is gradually being rediscovered by the cathedral, now able to let in the splendid light of its origins in the ambulatory, choir and the crossing of the transepts. It is now the great nave which, in less than 30 months' time, will be entirely free of the grime of centuries.

With the blackness of the dust gone, the brilliance of the glistening stained-glass windows in this monumental sanctuary magnify this Bible of glass laid out in the clerestory of this great stone nave.

Now is the time! Now is the time, dear donors, dear visitors of the cathedral, to respond to our 2015 appeal so that we can raise as much money as possible for the restoration of the upper bays in the nave and their protection with thermoformed glazing.

In the hope that we shall see, with you and thanks to you, this new stage in the restoration of the nave, please be assured, dear readers, of our gratitude and devotion.

Servane de Layre-Mathéus, president

The restored vault of the choir
Detail of sculptures

© Nicolas Lhoste - Rectorat de Notre-Dame de Chartres



Charles Péguy, now recognised as one of France's greatest poets and thinkers for the present day, celebrated Chartres sublimely in his work. The route of his pilgrimage from Palaiseau to Chartres is now signposted for all who wish to follow it as an act of remembrance, inspired by his pilgrim's calling and his devout prayers at Notre Dame.

The light of Chartres...restored

Until a few years ago, visitors to Our Lady of Chartres focused their attention on the stained-glass windows alone, since the monument's architecture was to a large extent hidden in the shadows of the dirt and dust, making it impenetrable to the light entering through the windows.

And as a result no-one gave any thought to the necessary dialogue between the glazed surfaces and the opaque surfaces onto which the light fell because everyone's gaze was blinkered by the glistening of the windows alone – themselves long darkened by accumulated grime before being the first to be revealed through their own restoration; one paid insufficient attention to the walls opposite, whose true nature had been largely disguised, especially since the late 19th century.

With the restoration of the great choir completed, one can now clearly see that the necessary dialogue has become re-established between the glazed surfaces and the painted surfaces, which are once again bright and splashed with the colours projected through space by the sun's journey through the sky.

Because, from the start, the colour of the walls was designed as a response to the colour from the windows.

Medieval man would never have recognised the dark, so-called medieval atmospheres that our own romanticism has persuaded us to accept as the norm in view of the general condition of our monuments, left to us in a sorry state after the depredations, abandonment and later the negligence accumulated through the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

Medieval man painted everything, and this was something that Viollet-le-Duc made clear, even if he did not manage to overcome the prejudices and fashionable ideas of his day.

If medieval man painted everything, this was due both to his technical intelligence – since paint protects, forming on timber and stone a sacrificial coat that is not only protective but also easy to renew – and for aesthetic reasons, because he also used colour to brighten up the world!

To brighten up the world, but also and above all to prefigure Christianity's view of eternity to which he aspired through a vision of Heavenly Jerusalem that the church was required to evoke through the splendour of its decorations.

So it was that light-coloured walls, walls coated with coloured plaster or paint as in Chartres, Bourges and elsewhere, created a dialogue, and now once again create a dialogue with the light from the stained-glass windows, the gems described by Abbot Suger.

This demand for luminosity was so firmly rooted in the medieval mind that barely 40 years after the cathedral was opened in 1221 its interior was completely repainted for its consecration in 1260, for which the keystones were also



The restored cathedral choir © Nicolas Lhoste - Rectorat de Notre-Dame de Chartres

painted, since at that time the building remained unfinished.

To enable the cathedral to bathe in this light heralding the joys of Heaven, the light had to be able to spread to fill all of the space. Such a result would not have been attainable by simply leaving bare the beautiful Berchères stone, even though it is a fine vaguely ochre colour when new or thoroughly cleaned, but in any case this would not have been suitable for a reason that was evident to both the clerics and the architects: the raw material was too revealing of the ponderous materiality of the construction and its structures created from successive courses of stonework that were necessarily irregular, both to avoid wasting materials, which were so costly to transport, and to ensure that the way they fitted together bore the forces creating the balance in the nave. It was important that this chaos, controlled though it was, should be subdued, to conduct the spirits of the faithful beyond the realm of the cathedral's earthly ponderousness.

As a result, the regularity of the mural decoration, of which 80% is authentic in Our Lady of Chartres, masks the 'brutality' of the building's construction, reflecting back the abundant light descending from the windows and thus transfiguring and expanding a space that has become completely freed from the weight of its construction.

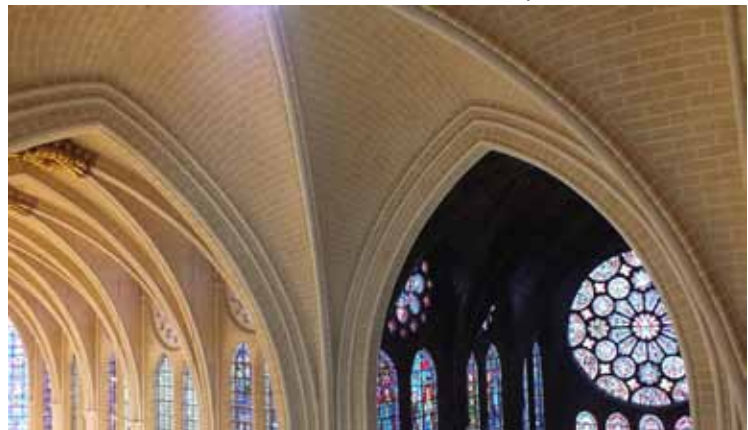
Until the 19th century, as the building accumulated dirt, people in every era attempted to lighten it again. Even Victor Louis, following his neo-classical redesign of the choir expressed the wish that the entire cathedral should receive a new coat of whitewash to enable it to become a bright showcase once again, but this had only just been started when the Revolution began.

From the 19th century onwards, too much of this decoration was mostly scraped off to expose the bare stone, following a new fashion inherited from the Modern movement which swore only by the 'truth' of the raw material, opening the way for greasy dust to coat the surfaces...

Since 2009, the great nave has regained its colours.

But also, when the stained-glass windows in the upper choir were restored, irrefutable evidence was found on the exterior indicating that the cathedral's facades were also painted. We now know this to be true of the choir, painted in the same ochre colour, with the same faux mortar joints...

Patrice Calvel, state-registered architect, honorary Chief Architect of Historical Monuments, vice-president of C.S.M.



Restoration of the St Giles and St George Bay by Claire Babet, master glass artist



In September 2014 the first series of windows from the nave was removed for studio restoration. The St Giles and St George Bay (Bay 133), whose restoration is being supported by the sponsors Caisse du Crédit Agricole Val de France and Crédit Agricole's Fondation des Pays de France, is currently in Claire Babet's studio in Chenonville, just south of Chartres. The first lancet window depicting St Giles at his martyrdom has been completed and is now at the Debitus workshop in Tours where its thermoformed covering is being made.



Claire Babet and her team removing the bay
© Crédit Agricole Val de France



Bay 133, the St Giles and St George lancet windows, before restoration
© Claire Babet

Claire Babet's team is currently cleaning the St George lancet window. The set of two lancets and the rose window will be reinstalled in the nave before summer 2015.

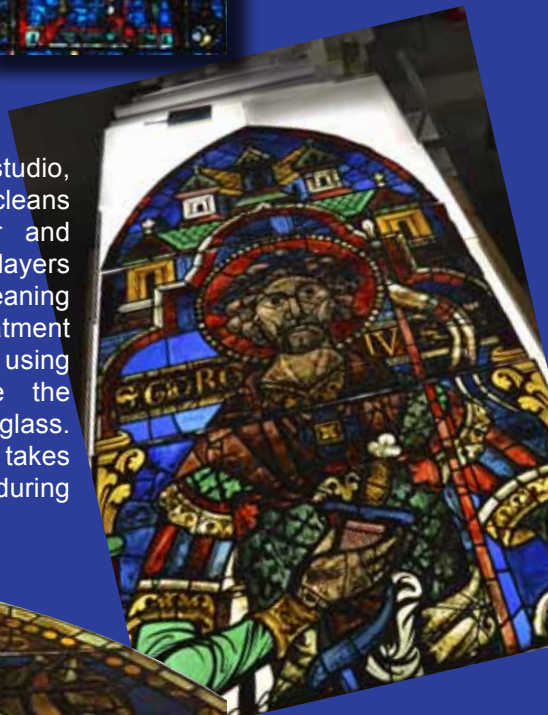
Claire Babet's studio will continue its work with the restoration of Bays 139, 140, 141 and 142.



Since 1998,
26.3 million euros' worth of work
State : 20 M€ Europe : 1,5 M€
Région : 2 M€ Sponsoship : 2,8 M€

Source: Centre Region Cultural Affairs Directorate

When it arrives at the studio, the master glass artist cleans the window with water and ethanol to remove the layers of soot and dust. This cleaning is followed by a treatment with EDTA applied using compresses to remove the limescale deposits on the glass. This cleaning phase also takes off the varnishes added during previous restorations.



Details of the St George lancet window during cleaning. The saint on horseback and the scene of his martyrdom.
© Caroline Berthod-Bonnet



Please consult our website www.chartres-csm.org regularly for details of our 2015 programme of activities (lectures, exhibitions, visits, etc.).



Polychrome artwork on a keystone in the nave under restoration; details of Bay 135 before restoration; the rose window above two lancet windows in the nave; traces of paint on a pillar in the nave
© Rodolphe Laubier - Rectorat de Notre-Dame de Chartres

Together in 2015, let us continue to raise funds for the restoration of the windows in the nave...

Every donation is a link in the chain that enables the restoration to progress and our collective impetus to continue. Thanks to your generosity, the windows in the nave will soon be resplendent once again in their original setting.

Votre déduction fiscale

Votre don	Dépense réelle	66% de votre don déductible de vos impôts
50 €	17 €	
100€	34 €	
200€	68 €	

There are also other ways to support the cathedral restoration programme with a temporary usufruct donation, a legacy or a life insurance payment through the Chartres, sanctuaire du Monde Endowment Fund. For full details of life insurance payments, please read the enclosed sheet and contact Noël Raimon on +33 (0)6 56 88 02 66

News from our sponsors...



"Through the Crédit Agricole Pays de France Foundation, Crédit Agricole Val de France helps to raise the profile of the architectural and cultural heritage in its part of France. Beyond our business as bankers and insurers, our sponsorship activities are testament to our strong desire to preserve places rich with history in order to encourage economic and tourism activity locally from day to day. Thus, alongside the association Chartres, sanctuaire du Monde, Crédit Agricole is clearly stating its commitment to the outstanding monument of Chartres Cathedral through its restoration of Bay 133." José Santucci, managing director

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Because of our commitment to our city and our heritage, of which the cathedral is the finest symbol, Le Parc Saint Charles has become a sponsor of this national treasure." Jean-François Vivier, director

On 31 January 2015, we said a sad farewell to a generous sponsor Pierre-Louis Roederer, vice president of American Friends of Chartres, and also administrator of Chartres, sanctuaire du Monde since 2005.

Date for your diary:

On Thursday 21 May 2015 at 11.45am a thanksgiving mass will be celebrated in the crypt of Notre-Dame de Sous-Terre de Chartres to honour his memory and that of all those who have worked for C.S.M. and A.F.C.

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