



PICTURE OF THE WEEK

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Dorothy Williams

Coventry Cathedral Tapestry Christ in Majesty

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, attention has not infrequently been drawn to other examples of disasters affecting the population – fires, floods, plagues and pestilence - over the centuries they have all been part of the human condition. In particular, World War II has stirred memories for many of those who lived through it.

As a small child at the time, my recollections are necessarily selective, but I do remember that we had evacuees from Coventry staying with us. I also remember their distress on learning of the bombardment of their city and particularly of their cathedral.

When a new cathedral was built and consecrated, I felt drawn to visit it. I could not fail to be impressed by the enormous tapestry, designed by Graham Sutherland for the new building, which had been constructed alongside the ruins of the previous cathedral. Not everyone liked the tapestry, but I was deeply moved by its majesty and symbolism and by the central figure of Christ whose eyes seem to meet those of the spectator. Since then I have visited many churches in different countries and have noted how the Coventry figure evokes the representation of Christ Pantocrater (Christ Ruler of All), which decorates many early Christian churches, especially those of the orthodox faith. This, combined with the production of the tapestry, designed by an Englishman, woven by French weavers on a 500 year-old loom and using Australian wool, make this a work of art that bridges time and space.



As we are still in Eastertide, the message of the tapestry seems particularly relevant and poignant. It makes us remember other examples of human disaster and destruction and how they have been overcome. One thinks of the Great Plague of London and the Great

Fire in the seventeenth century and of the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral. In the rubble of the old cathedral Sir Christopher Wren found masonry inscribed with the message "Resurgam", Latin for "I shall rise again". He incorporated that stone into the new building, just as the builders of the new Coventry Cathedral retained the skeleton of its predecessor alongside it and chose, as its focal point, the image of the risen Christ

Coventry's cathedral is to me an example of humanity's resilience in the face of disaster and its tapestry is a tribute to the coming together of the human and the divine.