



## Weep for Notre Dame

“I believe that this church offers the carefully discerning such cause for admiration,” the 14th-century French philosopher Jean de Jandun wrote of Notre Dame, “that its inspection can scarcely sate the soul.”

A cultural calamity played out on live TV when the Paris cathedral that has been a focal point of Christendom for so long was apparently gutted by a raging fire, destroying a significant part of an inheritance built up over hundreds of years in a few hours.

Notre Dame stands for so many qualities that we now lack – patience and staying power, the cultivation of beauty, a deep religious faith, the cultural confidence and ambition to build a timeless monument of our civilization – that the collapse of its spire was almost too much to bear.

The great novelist Victor Hugo, author of the “Hunchback of Notre Dame,” wrote how “every surface, every stone of this venerable pile, is a page of the history not only of the country, but of science and art.”

It was the work of generations, completed across three centuries, in a triumph over considerable architectural and logistical challenges. Thousands of tons of stone had to be transported from outside Paris, one ox cart or barge at a time. To achieve its soaring height and hold up its ceiling and walls, it relied on the architectural innovations of the rib vault and flying buttress.

France built 80 cathedrals and 500 large churches across this period, but there was only one Notre Dame of Paris, a Gothic jewel whose towers, prior to the advent of the Eiffel Tower, were the tallest structure in the city.

It is – or, one hates to think, was – adorned by what are significant cultural artifacts in their own right.

The statuary meant to illustrate the story of the Bible, and to awe worshippers who couldn’t read.

The stained-glass windows that took ingenuity to embed in stone walls and are themselves artistic marvels.

The organ with more than 8,000 pipes.

The bells, with their own names, including the largest, the masterpiece Emmanuel, dating back to the 15th century and recast in 1681.

Not to mention the religious relics that mean so much to the Catholic faithful.

It has been the site of countless processions and services to petition and thank God on behalf of the French nation. It was where illustrious marriages and funerals occurred, where Napoleon crowned himself emperor, where Charles de Gaulle attended a mass to celebrate the liberation of Paris in 1944, rifle fire echoing outside.

It survived the rampages of iconoclastic Huguenots in the 16th century, the depredations of radicals during the French Revolution in the 18th century (they transformed it into a shrine to the Cult of Reason, used it as a warehouse and wanted to melt down the bells) and incidental damage during two world wars in the 20th century.

Notre Dame has been thoughtfully restored and preserved over the years, to our credit. But it’s difficult not to discern a distressing message in the wanton destruction that ravaged the iconic cathedral – what prior generations so carefully and faithfully built, we are losing.

*Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.*

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### Sudoku Answers

1	5	4	6	2	7	8	3	9
8	5	9	1	3	6	4	7	2
3	2	1	9	8	4	6	7	5
6	7	3	2	5	9	8	1	4
8	1	4	6	3	7	5	9	2
2	5	9	8	4	1	3	6	7
3	8	5	1	6	2	7	4	9
1	6	7	4	9	8	2	3	5
4	9	2	3	7	5	1	8	6

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