

Cross Current



Real help for real life

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The Art of Transformation

It's a unique church that puts death and destruction in a new light.

In Belgrade, Serbia, on a craggy ridge overlooking the Danube and Sava rivers, is Fortress Kalemegdan. It's name means *fortress amid battlefields*. Originally built in the first century by the Romans, the stark, stone stronghold was razed and renewed several times over the centuries by a never-ending wave of invaders, including the Turks, Hungarians and Austrians.


But tucked into one side of the fortress walls is Ruzica Church, once used by the Turks as a gunpowder storage room for more than a hundred years. In recent centuries, the church has provided a place of refuge and reflection in times of conflict and that, in turn, has given the sanctuary its most astonishing feature.



During World War One, Serbian troops fighting alongside the British and Americans took the dark trappings of war and transformed them into a symbol of spiritual life and illumination. Lighting the religious murals of Ruzica Church are two unique chandeliers made entirely of one-time weapons.

At the very top of each is a cannon wheel which gives the chandelier its circular shape. Swords hang vertically, acting as supports. Artillery cases serve as centre columns and each chandelier is dripping with countless bullet casings that reflect the light and give the room its special glow. In a moving testimony to human creativity, machinery of destruction becomes emblematic of spiritual hope, peace and guidance.

Those chandeliers are examples of *trench art*, items made from the debris of battle by soldiers, prisoners of war or civilians. In the time of Napoleon, soldiers carved animal bones, fighters in the American Civil



Sometimes you
have to be
deep in a hole
before you can grow.

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War made game pieces from bullets, and the mechanization of war took trench art to a whole new level. "The lads in the trenches while away the flat time by fashioning rings, crosses, and pendants out of bullets and the softer parts of shells," wrote a soldier during World War One. More complicated pieces, like the chandeliers, were made away from the front lines, using simple metalworking. There's another Stronghold that was established in the first century and it, too, has survived wave upon wave of attack, remaining victorious to the end. The Church is a *fortress amid battlefields*, a place of rest and protection for all of us caught up in the conflict that rages, not only around us, but within us.

As believers, we're told to "endure... as a good soldier of Christ Jesus"(2 Timothy 2:3). But we can endure only so much on our own, so God placed us in a spiritual army and gave us a citadel of the saved. When the church is the strong, caring community it was designed to be, we find the refuge we need from a world that makes war on our our worth and identity, our weakness, and every aspect of our well-being. Most of us are wounded or, at the very least, tired from the fight.

So whether it's the weapons used against us, or the ones we wield upon ourselves, we need to transform them into the means of inner illumination. After all, anyone can glorify God when all is at peace, but it takes a special grace to do so amid pain, doubt and turmoil.

That process begins by asking the Spirit of God to help us see everything from a new perspective, looking for value and beauty in even the worst of experiences. "*We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials,*" the Bible says, "*for... they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation.*" (Rom. 5:3,4)

If we're willing, attacks on our faith can lead to honest reexamination and a strengthening of our convictions. We can refashion fear, fatigue and even failure into a new and necessary dependency on God that brightens the way for others. And we can use deep awareness of our sin to shed light on our innermost desires then reshape our shame into shining chandeliers of renewed faith, love and commitment.

Spiritually, each of us can find the art in the artillery that rains down upon us. The truth is, weakness and adversity work best at bringing God's power to light.