“If Christ has not been raised, empty too is your faith”

Saint Paul, First Epistle to the Corinthians 15, 14
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PHOTO CREDITS:
The hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Unification of Italy

by Giulio Andreotti

Rome, 15 March 2011

The anniversary of the Unification of Italy recalls the events that one hundred and fifty years ago, through the heroic deeds of the Risorgimento, led to the proclamation of the independence and the unity of the country.

In commemorating this one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, we all turn our thoughts to those who made this great event possible. And our commemoration comes out of a calm, objective evaluation, such as to set those great figures above any partisan spirit, in that the work they accomplished was aimed at one purpose only: the making of Italy.

Each of the great figures in the Unification of Italy, within their limits and their principles, strove and made prodigal efforts to achieve the same enterprise: so if Garibaldi’s deeds were legendary, no less effective and decisive was the unifying work of Victor Emanuel II, the political sagacity of Count Cavour, the patriotic fervor of Giuseppe Mazzini.

But around these great men moved a dense band of Italians of every class and age, tireless in helping, encouraging and all motivated by the desire for national unity.

The solemn celebration of Unification is a duty because through the celebrations a basis for discussion on the future of our country can be built, and only through careful thought and rigorous study of the events that followed on one another up to the achieving of Unification may our younger generation ideally feel part of the events themselves.
Above, The opening of the first Italian Parliament in Turin 18 February 1861, Théodore Tetar van Elven, National Museum of the Risorgimento, Turin

Below, the President of the Republic of Italy Giorgio Napolitano, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the Presidents of the Senate and House of Deputies at the celebration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Unification of Italy, Altare della Patria, Rome, 17 March 2011
POOR CLARES OF SANTA CLARA CONVENT
Pacet, Indonesia

Thank you for your wonderful magazine

Pacet, 25 December 2010

Dear Senator Andreotti and staff,

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas 2010 and a Happy New Year 2011.

Thank you so very much for your generosity in sending us your wonderful magazine. Thank you also for your new address which you have sent us.

God bless you!

United in love and prayer,

The Poor Clares of Pacet

CARMELITE SISTERS OF THAPELONG CONVENT
Mafikeng, South Africa

Thanks from South Africa

Mafikeng, 25 December 2010

Dear Mr Director,

Once again we thank you for your great generosity and kindness in sending us 30Days. May Our Good Lord reward you and your family abundantly for your good work.

May the coming of the Christ Child bring you and your loved ones fresh hope this Christmas, much peace and happiness and all the blessings of the coming New Year.

May God bless you always,

The Carmelite Sisters of Thapelong

DAUGHTERS OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS
Tarbes, France

Thank you for having sent us the beautiful magazine 30Jours free

Tarbes, 5 January 2011

I would like you to send me twenty copies of Qui prie sauve son âme in French and the details to make payment.

Thank you for having sent us free, for several years, the beautiful magazine 30Jours, so in depth on the Church. We are the Daughters of Our Lady of Sorrows, originating in the diocese of Tarbes and Lourdes. We run rest homes for the elderly in France and the Middle East (Lebanon, Israel and Egypt) as well as the reception of the sick who come on pilgrimage to Lourdes.

On these pages, some works by Lorenzo Lotto coming from different places on display at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome from 2 March to 12 June 2011; left, the Annunciation (around 1534-1535), Civic Museum, Recanati
We pray in particular for the Eastern Christians who are suffering but who are ready to witness their faith as far as martyrdom.

God bless you and bless all those who collaborate with the magazine! A Good and Holy Year 2011.

Sister Isabelle-Marie

Discalced Carmelite Sisters of Santa María de la Fe
Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, Mexico

"God reward you" for the magazine you give us as a gift

Ciudad del Carmen, 15 January 2011

Dear Senator Andreotti,

I am writing this in early 2011, saying “God reward you” for the magazine you give us as a gift. A beautiful, very beautiful magazine, with such important articles on the holy Fathers of the Church, such profound articles on St Augustine on St Theresa or on the German statesman Konrad Adenauer, or those on current affairs, such as the recent visit of the Pope to Great Britain. We also want to thank you for the good you do throughout the world through this medium of communication, to many religious communities, seminaries and to many people. May God bless and reward you by giving you a deeper life in friendship, love and knowledge of the Trinity. We pray for you, Senator, and your esteemed family, as well as for your work as a politician and help to beautiful Italy.

With great affection and gratitude, your

Sister María Josefina de Jesús Apango, OCD

Carmelite Sisters of Nha Trang Convent
Nha Trang, Viet Nam

From a Carmel in Viet Nam

Nha Trang, 22 January 2011

Dear Mr Director,

We haven’t written to you for a long time. Excuse us. However we do not forget to pray for you and for all... “The Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with inexpressible sighs”.

For more than five years, your magazine 30Giorni, has come to us a little irregularly, but... no problem. We knew why. Everything is grace, and our Heavenly Father always gives us the best part. After reading it, we passed it on to a Franciscan priest: he was very happy and asked us: “How can you have such a valuable and interesting magazine?” Deo gratias.

We also received Qui prie sauve son âme and we gave it to a fellow sister who is currently in a Carmel in France.

Thank you for everything you have sent us.

In union in the glorious bosom of the Father, Who, through the intercession of Our Mother and Queen of Mount Carmel, may fill you full of grace,

The Carmelite Sisters of Nha Trang

The Adoration of the Shepherds (1530), Civic Museum of Art and History, Brescia
Transfiguration of Christ
(1511-1512 circa)
Civic Museum, Recanati
30Giorni helps us greatly to know and live the present moment of the Church

Fianarantsoa, 6 March 2011

Mr Senator Giulio Andreotti,

I’m very happy to write two simple words of thanks and admiration to you for the service you do to all those who have the grace to be able to read and reread the pages of your magazine 30Giorni. I have great admiration for you, I have known you since I was a child because my parents had so much respect and trust in you and we prayed together for you, so that you could always be a true Christian-Catholic-Democrat; my parents greatly believed in your very clean politics and followed your ideas enthusiastically. Many years have passed and now it is I who admire and pray for you that the Lord will still give you much good health to do so much good through your magazine. I’m sorry that my parents are not here anymore, but from heaven, where I’m sure they are, they continue to pray for you and protect you, so that you may continue to do good to all of us.

Thank you for your magazine, from which both I and my community of formation, composed of young postulants and Madagascan novices seeking a better life by following Christ, derive much spiritual and cultural profit from all the information we find there. Above all, it helps us greatly to know and live the present moment of the Church, the word of the Magisterium and of our beloved Pope and Shepherd; really it makes us feel more closely united to the Church and the world today with all the problems in which we find ourselves; this gives us the opportunity to bring to our prayer the intentions for the world, and especially for our Holy Mother Church. Many times we do the reading at table explaining the meaning of the more topical and important subjects, especially the word of the Pope.

We pray very much for you, your team, your editorial staff, your journalists, so that the Lord will bless you, your work, and reward you for all the good you do through your magazine. I ask if you can send us some copies of the booklet Chi prega si salva both in Italian and French because we pray in three languages.

For more than a year we have had the grace to be subscribed to your magazine, thanks to the charity of our Italian sisters. I would like to take this opportunity to ask if you can send me some gift-books from your collection already published in French, to give as nourishment to our young Madagascans. I have confidence in your positive response and I thank you in advance sincerely with all my heart.

I am an Italian Capuchin missionary sister and have worked here in Madagascar for about fifteen years; I am most happy to give my life to these Madagascan brothers and sisters, and especially to train our future Madagascan sister missionaries. I ask you to pray for me and for them. I assure you of my and our prayers and again thank you deeply and thank all the benefactors who help us.

With all my affection in the Lord,

Thanks!

Sister Maria Amata, Capuchin

CARMELITE SISTERS OF LISIEUX CONVENT
Lisieux, France

From the Carmel of Little Theresa

Lisieux, 17 March 2011

Mr Director,

It is with a heart full of gratitude that I wish to thank you, on behalf of all my sisters, for your fine magazine 30Jours that you send us so faithfully and for free.

I would like to assure you of our very special prayer before the Lord and Little Theresa so that a “shower of roses” may rain on each of your collaborators.

I’d like to receive the booklet Qui prie sauve son âme in French, English, Spanish, German and Arabic. The pilgrims who come to visit us from all around the world would surely be interested in your valuable book.

Again our thanks,

Sister Dominique, OCD
In September 2006, inaugurating the column “Spiritual Reading”, we began publishing the most important documents of the Magisterium of the Church on the doctrine of grace. On “the mystery and working of grace”, as Péguy said. We began with the excerpts from the Creed of the People of God by Paul VI (September 2006-May 2007), to then continue with the canons of the Council of Carthage in 418 (June-September 2007), with the Indiculus, the small Roman Catechism of the first half of the fifth century (October 2007-January 2008), with the canons of the Council of Orange in 529 (February 2008-September 2009), leading to the texts of St. Ambrose, which express in the immediate transparency of prayer the contents of this same doctrine (October 2009-November 2010).

We continue with this issue to publish the documents of the Magisterium, proposing the decrees of the Council of Trent that reverently preserve and faithfully propose the Church’s teaching on grace in a definitive manner. We begin with the introduction and the first two canons of the Decree on Original Sin approved on 17 June 1546 (with a brief historical note explaining the genesis of the conciliar text).

The Decree of the Council of Trent has, among other things, its own “journalistic” relevance in relation to certain articles published recently in some newspapers, in which an account is presented of certain interpretations that deny the historical reality of original sin, considering it a theological invention of St. Augustine.
Always bearing in mind that the ordinary faithful realize from experience how completely reasonable it is “to remain in the teaching of Christ” (2 Jn 9), the observations that Augusto Del Noce published in his book II problema dell’ateismo [The problem of atheism] (Bologna 1964) precisely about original sin prove a comfort to the intelligence of faith. The Catholic philosopher – after saying that modern atheism is not so much explained as a “radical secularization” of Christianity, as by a “re-understanding of the Christian novelty in ancient categories”, for which “evil is placed in the finiteness itself of the existing” – writes: “The choice that conditions all the categories and the whole development of rationalism is the refusal of the vision of sin as it is found exposed in Genesis. The religious criticism that demolishes the Bible by reducing it to legendary tales is in reality consequent on this choice. The explanation of the Bible that evil was introduced by us into the world through an act of freedom, is replaced by another for which the nexus of finitude and death is considered necessary. With which, in essence, you return to the explanation of evil contained in Anaximander’s fragment”.

Either the evil that we see in the world was introduced by an act of human freedom, by “a gravesin of pride and disobedience”, as stated in the Catechism of Saint Pius X, or evil coincides with the creation itself and therefore “is of God and in God”, as Hegel says. Tertium non datur.

In the words of the beloved apostle in his second letter, we can say (cf. 2 Jn 9): Either you remain in the doctrine of Christ and thus remain in God or you go beyond and you fall into gnosticism or gnosis, or rather, as is more accurate to say, into false gnosis.

Original Sin, Palatine Chapel, Palermo
Original sin was the first dogmatic question addressed by the Council of Trent. The impetus to deal with it came on 21 May 1546 from the papal legates Del Monte, Pole and Cervini, who were exclusively entitled to propose the topics. Of course, by re-emphasizing the doctrine of original sin it was intended to blunt the errors in regard that the Protestants had borrowed from the Gnostics and Pelagians. According to the procedure of the progress of work, the issue was first discussed in the “congregation of theologians”, convened early in the morning (5am!) on 24 May. Thirty-two in number, almost all belonging to the great religious orders, the theologians ended the debate the following day. On 28 May the “general congregation” took place, that is the meeting of the Council fathers with the right to vote, in which Del Monte introduced the basic outline to the fathers. They worked on it from 31 May to 5 June, in successive general congregations. The first draft of the decree – prepared with the help of some bishops and theologians, by the legates themselves, who had pledged themselves to use only expressions already approved by the councils and Catholic doctors – appeared on 8 June. After a few adjustments were made to it, the definitive text of the decree was promulgated on 17 June 1546, in the fifth solemn session of the Council, held in Trent, in the Cathedral of San Vigilio.

That our Catholic faith, “without which it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11, 6), may, errors being purged away, continue in its own perfect and spotless integrity, and that the Christian people may not “be carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4, 14); whereas that old serpent, the perpetual enemy of mankind, amongst the very many evils with which the Church of God is in these our times troubled, has also stirred up not only new, but even old, dissensions touching original sin, and the remedy thereof; the sacred and holy, ecumenical and general Synod of Trent – lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the three same legates of the Apostolic See presiding therein – wishing now to come to the reclaiming of the erring, and the confirming of the wavering – following the testimonies of the Sacred Scriptures, of the holy Fathers, of the most approved councils, and the judgment and consent of the Church itself, ordains, confesses, and declares these things touching the said original sin:

Decretum de peccato originali

Ut fides nostra catholica, «sine qua impossi bile est placere Deo» (Eb 11, 6), purgatis erroribus in sua sinceritate integra et illibata permaneat, et ne populus christianus «omni vento doctrinae circumferatur» (Ef 4, 14), cum serpens ille antiquus, humani generis perpetuus hostis, inter plurima mala, quibus Ecclesia Dei his nostris tempori bus perturbatur, etiam de peccato originali eiusque remedio non solum nova, sed etiam vetera dissidia excitaverit: sacrosancta oecumenica et generalis Tridentina Synodus in Spiritu Sancto legitime congregata, praesidentibus in ea eisdem tribus Apostolicæ Sedis legatis, iam ad revocandos errantes et nutantes confirmandos accedere volens, sacrarum Scripturarum et sanctorum Patrum ac probatissimorum conciliorum testimonia et ipsius Ecclesiae iudicium et consensum secuta, haec de ipso peccato originali statuit, fatetur ac declarat:
God calls Adam and Eve after the sin, the Palatine Chapel, Palermo
1. Si quis non confitetur, primum hominem Adam, cum mandatum Dei in paradiso fuisset transgressus, statim sanctitatem et iustitiam, in qua constitutus fuerat, amisisse incurrisseque per offensam praevaricationis huiusmodi iram et indignationem Dei atque ideo mortem, quam antea illi comminatus fuerat Deus, et cum morte captivitatem sub eius potestate, «qui mortis» deinde «habuit imperium, hoc est diaboli» (Heb 2, 14), totumque Adam per illam praevaricationis ofensam secundum corpus et animam in deterius commutatum fuisse: anathemasit.

2. Si quis Adae praevaricationem sibi soli et non eius propagini asserit nocuisse, acceptam a Deo sanctitatem et iustitiam, quam perdidit, sibi soli et non nobis etiam eum perdidisse; aut inquinatum illum per inoboedientiae peccatum mortem et poenas corporis tantum in omne genus humanum transfudisse, non autem et peccatum, quod mors est animae: anathema sit, cum contradicat Apostolo dicenti: «Per unum hominem peccatum intra vit in mundum, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiti, in quo omnes peccaverunt» (Rm 5, 12).

1. If anyone does not confess that the first man, Adam, when he had transgressed the commandment of God in Paradise, immediately lost the holiness and justice wherein he had been constituted; and that he incurred, through the offence of that prevarication, the wrath and indignation of God, and consequently death, with which God had previously threatened him, and, together with death, captivity under his power who thenceforth “had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil” (Heb 2, 14), and that the entire Adam, through that offence of prevarication, was changed, in body and soul, for the worse; let him be anathema.

2. If anyone asserts, that the prevarication of Adam injured himself alone, and not his posterity; and that the holiness and justice, received of God, which he lost, he lost for himself alone, and not for us also; or that he, being defiled by the sin of disobedience, has only transfused death, and pains of the body, into the whole human race, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul; let him be anathema: whereas he contradicts the apostle who says; “By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men, because (in him) all have sinned” (Rm 5, 12).
Dear Brothers,

We are a group of young men of the church of St Anthony of Cárdenas in the province of Matanzas (Cuba). We belong to the lay Missionaries of Charity, and while we were in the parish library we saw some old copies of the magazine 30Días and we were enchanted by it. It appealed to all those who are part of our vocational group. We had never seen a magazine that spoke of the Church in the world in this way. We would like to receive, if possible every month, at least one copy of it to share with the sisters, but for free, given that our economic situation is not very good. If it is not too much trouble, we would also like to have a copy of the booklet Quien reza se salva that we could photocopy for our missions in the “bateyes” of the rural areas and for our mission houses. Together with Mary, our Mother, may God our Father bless all the collaborators of your editorial staff.

Your brothers in Cuba

LAY MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY
Cárdenas, Cuba

We would like to have a copy of the booklet Quien reza se salva that we could photocopy

Cárdenas, 9 February 2011
PARISH OF THE SACRED HEART
Porto-Novo, Benin

Two thousand copies of *Qui prie sauve son âme*

Porto-Novo, 9 March 2011

Thank you, Mr Director, for *Qui prie sauve son âme* that you sent for this year’s catechumens.

It’s nice to see how, in a unanimous way, they expressed their satisfaction and joy at having for themselves this valuable work tool. We gave it as a gift also to the English speaking students who are taking a linguistic “immersion” in the University situated on the territory of our parish.

This little book is so good and appropriate, that the associations and groups of children in the parish also wish to benefit from it.

It is therefore for this reason and in their name that we want to respectfully request the gift of two thousand copies of this little booklet.

Pending a favorable response to our request, we assure our pastoral availability in the field of the Lord.

Father Paul Akplogan

MISSIONARY IN JAPAN
Hyūga, Japan

I am a missionary who has been working in Japan for twenty-five years

Hyūga, 22 March 2011

Dear Director Mr Giulio Andreotti, and 30Giorni editorial staff,

I am a missionary who has been working in Japan for twenty-five years. I am an enthusiastic and assiduous reader of the magazine that I appreciate very much. Formerly I paid my subscription, but since you have kindly started sending the magazine free to my fellow-brothers, at the behest of my superior I asked to have it for free also.

Since then, I receive it free with regularity, and I thank you sincerely. Now I write also to notify my change of address. Thank you so much for everything, I will remember you in my prayers, and may the Lord bless your work.

Happy Easter.

Father Severino Mastrotto

The dead Christ supported by an angel, St Joseph of Arimathea the Madonna and Magdalene, detail from the *Altarpiece of St Dominic* (1506-1508), Civic Museum, Recanati
Dear Mr Giulio,

Please receive the cordial greetings from the instructors and seminarians of the Corazón de Cristo diocesan seminary.

I am writing from this seminary that welcomes this year, by the grace of God, 111 young people who, with great enthusiasm have left everything to follow Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd. They come from Callao and other ecclesiastical jurisdictions: the Archdioceses of Piura and Arequipa and the Dioceses of Carabaylo and Huacho; the bishops send them to our seminary, so that we can prepare the future priests.

Our seminarians come from poor families which can not participate financially in the costs of their education. We priests of the team of instructors understand that when God entrusted us with the preparation of future priests, He entrusted them to us entirely; and this mission would be impossible without the aid which the Lord gives us through generous individuals and institutions.

That is why, knowing your spirit of cooperation, I allow myself to ask you for a free subscription to your magazine which is a wonderful means of education for our seminarians who find themselves on the path to the priesthood.

With the certainty that the Lord will bless you for the work of evangelization that you carry out, I greet you and entrust you to Our Lady, the Virgin of Mount Carmel, the patron saint of Callao.

With affection in Christ,

Father Carlos Esparza Gómez, Rector

SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER SEMINARY
Lahore, Pakistan

A letter from Pakistan

Lahore, 10 March 2011

Dear Giulio Andreotti,

Best wishes from Saint Francis Xavier Seminary. With the fortune of prayers and of a boundless gratefulness, I am pleased to thank you on behalf of the students and the rector for sending copies of the magazine 30Days and for your attention and concern in our regard also.

In addition, all the students are keenly devoted to this magazine which facilitates us to be strong in our faith and makes us aware of the recent issues confronted by the Church.

Be assured that you will remain constantly in our prayers and supplications. May God bless and preserve you in His presence. And may your “network” of evangelization preserve God’s joy in the hardships of the world.

Most affectionately in Jesus and Mary,

Waqas Sadiq
30Giorni keeps us in communion with the See of Peter

Balanga, 14 March 2011

Dear Senator Andreotti,

Warm greetings of peace and respect!

Even during my term as rector of the Pontifical Filipino College I together with my priests witnessed and experienced your constant kindness and pastoral solicitude. God has gifted us with your inspiring and truly enlightening magazine. We are blessed to freely receive a copy of 30Giorni. And right now, God continues to give us His gift and graces. As Bishop of Balanga I am again a constant recipient of 30Giorni. Even miles and oceans apart 30Giorni keeps us in touch with Rome, updated with Church activities and teachings. 30Giorni is keeping us in communion with the See of Peter.

Please rest assured of everyday prayers and daily celebration of the Holy Mass for you and for all your hardworking staff. I always invoke our Lord to guide you and to shower you with His choicest graces. And may our Blessed Mother, whom I fondly implore as Our Lady of Guadalupe, keep us under the mantle of her maternal protection. Always with my profound gratitude and constant prayers, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

Ruperto Cruz Santos
Bishop of Balanga

The Madonna enthroned with the Child Jesus and Saints Joseph, Bernardino of Siena, John the Baptist, Antony abbot, and angels (or the Altarpiece of St Bernardino, 1521), church of St Bernardino in Pignolo, Bergamo
As soon as he realized what was about to happen, a fidei donum priest from Trent managed to catch the last flight for Tripoli and returned here, to be close to those who would have need of him. A Muslim family from Beida did, in their own way, even better. They traveled hundreds of miles to the border with Egypt to wait for Sister Lucia, a friend who was returning to work in the hospital. Not having the possibility of a direct flight to Benghazi, Sister Lucia had to pass through Egypt, where she was hosted by the relatives of those same Libyan friends who then met her at the border. She too is now here, now that a lot of pain is being handed out, and people can’t really understand why.

In October, for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the episcopal nomination of the Apostolic Vicar of Tripoli (the same Giovanni Innocenzo Martinelli), there was a spontaneous celebration, peaceful and joined in by Christians and Muslims, with great cordiality of all towards all. No one imagined that war would come.

After the first moments of the rebellion against the regime, life in Tripoli continued almost as usual, while the fighting took place elsewhere. There was more silence than usual, an apparent tranquility and sought after to drive off the fear and sadness. Some people, understandably, fled, hoping to return soon. The presence of the checkpoints reminded us that there were violent clashes in the country. Then came the coalition bombings, which have caused a lot of civilian casualties. I’ve heard numerous and credible witnesses and have repeated it publicly. How can you expect to hit a military target near people’s homes without thinking of the consequences? Because of the “humanitarian” bombs buildings collapsed carrying away entire families; some hospitals have also reported damages.

Now we have the police van in front of the entrance door of our Franciscan house, we have become the subject of greater protection from the government, and it’s more than obvious given the situation.

In general, however, the Catholic Church has not been touched, in fact, it has been protected. The life of our community has been diminished... but it continues. In this “normality”, with the few Catholics remaining we can still celebrate Mass on the mornings of Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Most of the Christian community are foreigners. It’s a known fact that our Catholic identity is Afro-Asiatic, represented mostly by Filipino workers employed in the hospitals, and by French and English speaking African immigrants. The Westerners, working in the foreign companies winners of the contracts, left when the...
shutters went down, at the first sound of fighting.

Islam has nothing to do with this war and we have never had problems with our Muslim friends. On the contrary, Libyan Islam has never been a preoccupation for us.

With the war going on, at the end of March, we also maintained our regular meetings with the Dawa al Islamiya, known as the World Islamic Call Society, the famous government body for religious dialogue. I first of all had a personal interview with the Secretary-General Mohamed Ahmed Sheriff, and a few days later a meeting was held with the group of Christian and Catholic religious in Tripoli. In so far as I was able, I promoted this initiative. These encounters, experienced with a fraternal spirit, are useful and now also serve to foster mediation, wherever that is possible, in this war.

The Dawa in fact, in accord with the Holy See, is asking that a solution to the war be immediately sought.

As I speak there is still hope for a political and diplomatic solution. That is, that there may be a genuine dialogue between the factions that can realistically offer an honorable outcome for all. The African Union and the Arab League need to be involved.

These are days when I think I see some signs of reconciliation, both within the country and outside. There are attempts underway.

The African Union (AU) has not been seriously called on, not to the extent that it can effectively carry out negotiations. Perhaps someone has a superiority complex. The Africans, for their part, do not expose themselves, but we know that there are those within the AU who have requested that action be taken for Libya.

For decades we have been saying “Africa for the Africans”. Why shouldn’t this apply now?

On the other hand, there are coalition countries that want to give weapons to the rebels. Weapons do not bring peace, whoever is using them. What would be the purpose, for the Libyans to continue killing each other? Here people are united by nature – I have not met anyone who has told me that he wants the country to be divided in two – and dispensing weapons is against the people. It’s almost as if there is a desire to eliminate them. We must do everything to encourage talks between the parties, in a serene atmosphere, with the appropriate persons; we must reach agreement through compromise.

I want to thank all the bishops who have called me, and above all to thank Pope Benedict, who comforted us greatly and has taken a simple and clear position.

From Saint Peter’s Square he requested that “a horizon of peace and concord arise as soon as possible over Libya and the entire North African region”. No to weapons; yes immediately to talks and peace. We have translated his comments into English and Arabic and circulated them as widely as possible. We have read the text in all our masses and I went in person to deliver it to a few Libyan friends.

Every day looking at the witness of the Christians here sustains me, people like the Filipino nurses and the women-religious who work in the hospitals in Tripolitania, and the countless others in Cyrenaica, in the cities in the hands of the insurgents. All of them take care of all the victims, on both sides of the barricade.

(Sub-Saharan African migrant workers in the church of St Francis, in Tripoli)
What has happened has surprised even him. Maroun Lahham, a Palestinian from Jordan, Archbishop of Tunis since October 2005, really did not expect that out of Tunisia would come the great upheaval that has been shaking the Arab countries for two months. Those days in February were full of uncertainty and worry, with the curfew confining him to the walls of his residence, the demonstrations, the tear gas and tanks positioned in front of the cathedral, in the Place de l’Independence. But now the situation is calm. Difficulties, uncertainties and the din of the ongoing war in neighboring Libya have muted the tone of what the so-called “Arab spring”. And maybe it’s the moment to attempt a first interim judgment on what has happened so far.

In Tunisia the spark that ignited the revolt had a social character: rising prices, unemployment and poverty.

MAROUN ELIAS LAHHAM: Yes, but after two days the protest had already widened to include political issues, starting with exaspera-
tion with corruption. The speed with which the uprising spread from one country to another is a sign that the tension was evidently building up underneath the apparent calm imposed by the regimes. There was a spark, but the piles of wood and dry leaves had already been there in the whole region for some time.

But are the uprisings in the Arab world really so similar?

The situations are obviously different in many ways. But there is at least one feature in common: there is a generation of young Arabs who can no longer bear to live in a state of silent subjection under oppressive regimes, with corrupt functionaries blocking the way to economic, political and social development. Many of them have studied and are well aware of the global dynamics of today’s world. This generational element is a historical fact that one must take account of, without overdoing it.

According to the Italian and the other European governments the Tunisians who arrive in boats are not refugees but illegal immigrants who must be kept out or returned to their own country.

I can’t speak on the political and legal aspects. But as I see it the human aspect must also be taken into account. The people trying to get to Europe are not terrorists, they are largely young people who have studied, many have college degrees. They’re people who have lost their jobs. Tourism provided jobs for 450,000 young people who are now all unemployed. Many of them have always dreamed of going to Europe, and now they’re doing so because the borders are less guarded. If they are sent back, they will try to do it again. We’ll also see from this whether Europe is a political and cultural entity truly capable of tackling problems. Meanwhile, Tunisia has taken in 170,000 refugees fleeing from Libya: earlier came Filipinos, Pakistanis, Eritreans, Egyptians, and then began this Libyan wave... The Tunisians have given formidable evidence of being receptive. People prepared food at home and took it to the refugees. Our nuns also went to the refugee camps to prepare food every day for ten thousand people.

How do you see the future? Is there a class of leaders that can really replace the regime of Ben Ali?

After Ben Ali three governments have followed on one another, and the current one is lasting because there are no members of the old regime in its ranks. In July there will be elections for the Constituent Assembly. You can see how much people want to participate from the explosion of parties and political symbols, already more than fifty have sprung up.

Isn’t there a risk in that of sectarian fragmentation, as happened in Iraq?

Now everything is possible. I expect and hope that over time many of these small groupings come together around a clear and more

What is the current situation in Tunisia?

Now the situation is calm, but the economy is at point zero and the tourist industry, a mainstay of the country, is virtually stationary. This explains the mass exodus of young people.

Interview with Maroun Lahham, Archbishop of Tunis

Above, Mohamed Ghannouchi, Prime Minister at that time, with Archbishop Maroun Lahham in Tunis, 20 February 2011, after the murder of Father Marek Rybinski; left, a demonstration against the provisional government outside the headquarters of the prime minister in Tunis, 21 January 2011

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they have no money. However it would be an honor for Tunisia to become the first Arab country with a truly secular and democratic constitution.

Such an uncertain and fragmented scenario may favor the local Islamist party.

The Islamic party Ennahdha in fact appears to be well organized, even if it’s been officially allowed only since 3 March this year. It had been banned since 1991, but apparently continued its activities underground. Currently it’s using a pluralist and democratic language, claiming new spaces and new forms to express publicly its religious vision. One may credit them, but keeping one’s eyes open. So far, there had never been moderate Islamic parties, all Islam political groupings aimed in fact at the creation of an Islamist regime. The novelty is that there’s now a different historical model on the scene, that of Erdogan’s party in Turkey which is achieving a coming together of Islam and democracy. Let’s hope that this example will be followed by others. The evolution of the political landscape in the Middle East can only happen if Islam moves through democracy, that is, through the evolution of political Islam. In partial analogy with what happened in the West, in the encounter between Christianity and modern democracy.

You Catholic bishops of the Maghreb have nevertheless made a common appeal expressing your concern about the western-led military intervention in Libya. “We know that war solves nothing, and when it breaks out, it is just as uncontrollable as the explosion of a nuclear reactor... The first victims are always the poorest and most disadvantaged”.

That intervention may rekindle anti-Western sentiments of which the Arab uprisings have so far remained free. Whether we like it or not, it will look like a new crusade. And it may stir the call for holy war against the “invaders” which has always been a strong argument of the fundamentalist forces.

**How have the Catholics experienced this moment in Tunisia?** A few days after the uprising, there was the barbaric murder of the Salesian Father Marek...

That really upset us [cf. box on page 24]. And in the early days of

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**Father Marek, who loved Tunisia**

The Polish Salesian Marek Rybinski was killed in Manouba on 18 February last. At that moment the outcome of the so-called “jasmine revolution” was still uncertain and Tunisia continued to be rocked by protests and clashes between police and protesters. In that climate the barbaric murder of the Polish priest fueled concerns about the fate of Christians in an Arab world where uprisings were wrecking the old equilibrium and uncertainty was filling the future.

Then the investigations ruled out any “religious” impulse behind the murder. And Bishop Maroun Lahham wrote a letter to the faithful expressing in a simple and straightforward way his grateful and moving reaction to an ordinary Christian lot, usque ad sanguinem.

Here are a few passages.

My dearly beloved, we do not cease to experience events (I leave the word without an adjective). Now it is Father Marek, a thirty-four year old Salesian, in Tunisia since 2007, slain in a storeroom of the Salesian school in Manouba.

The Ministry of the Interior has issued a statement to the effect that the murderer was the school carpenter. The Salesian Fathers say that the murderer borrowed, last Eid (three months ago), two thousand Tunisian dinars to buy work material. He seems to have spent the money on other things, the supplier refused to deliver the unpaid material and Father Marek insisted on having the school’s money back. In a panic, and fearing to be discovered, the statement from the Ministry of the Interior declares, “the murderer surprised the priest, violently and repeatedly striking him with a blunt instrument on the nape and neck, causing death”...

**Why was Father Marek killed?** For two thousand dinars! One hardly dares credit it. There are certainly details that I don’t know. Whereas, there are things I do know:

- I know that Father Marek had written two weeks before his assassination, about the Tunisian people: “They are a young nation, intelligent, incapable of violence [sic!], deeply good and not capable of hate”.
- I know he had just written a first book on Tunisia, which says among other things: “During my stay in Tunisia, my attitude toward my Muslim brothers has changed a lot. This fear of terrorism and extremism has completely disappeared. The Tunisians are so welcoming, friendly and cordial. They teach me this attitude”.
- I know that he volunteered to come to Tunisia four years ago, when he had shortly been ordained priest.
the uprising there was some concern. The Catholic Church in Tunisia consists almost entirely of foreigners, so none of them were personally involved in the protests.  

But in general, what may be the consequences for Christians of the changes taking place in the Arab countries? May they end up saying that it was better before?

I don’t know how it will end. But I think that if processes of democratic enlargement are really set in motion, there’s no point and it is not right that Christians be on the other side, or nourish anachronistic wishful thinking. Not even the search for protection in the West seems desirable or appropriate to the situation.  

So what then?

Christians can simply stay where they are, sharing the hopes and fears of all. As was the case in other circumstances, such as in the period of Arab nationalism. By participating in historical processes, they can also collaborate with our Muslim brothers in an attempt to make the mechanisms of a democratic system adapted to local conditions take root in the Arab world.

Some commentators fancy that the Christian minorities in Arab countries can teach the secular nature of politics and democracy. Isn’t there a danger of nourishing pretensions to social influence?  

I don’t see that risk. In Tunisia, and more generally in Arab countries, we Christians are humble by nature...
created cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in the Consistory of 20 November 2010, Kurt Koch was Bishop of Basel from 1995 and for three years, from 2007 to 2010, the President of the Swiss Bishops’ Conference. On 1 July the Pope appointed him president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. And in that office Cardinal Koch has already visited the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, and Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and of All Russia. Even so, as he tells us, his interest in the Churches born out of the Reformation remains undimmed.

KURT KOCH: There’s no lack of things that need doing, and one has to balance between the eastern and western sections of our Pontifical Council.

I’d begin with the first, recalling the meeting with all the Orthodox Churches, in Vienna in September 2010 as part of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, at which we took an important step: we decided on the need for the Church to have a protos, i.e. a summit at the local, regional and universal levels, and also on deepening the historical research into how the primacy of the Bishop of Rome existed in the first millennium of the undivided Church. They are the same themes of our preceding meeting in Cyprus in 2009. The Orthodox, however, subsequently decided not to continue with the historical research, considering it objectively complicated and not in keeping with the Commission. Whereas systematic theological
study of the relationship between primacy and collegiality which will be discussed at next year’s meeting has begun.

You held a meeting in January with the Eastern Orthodox during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

We focused primarily on the Christological issues, given that some Eastern Orthodox Churches did not accept the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and it was necessary to start again from there. We emerged from that meeting with the recognition that the differences between us do not relate to the faith, but to certain modes of expression. In 1984 the Pope and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch signed a common profession of faith about the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the mutual hospitality in the sacraments of reconciliation, of the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick, where there are urgent cases. Today we want to go into the ecclesiological issues and the Petrine primacy.

The western section?

We can see that in the Churches of the Reformed tradition a lot of fragmentation is taking place. So the first necessity is to discuss with the Reformed the nature of the Church, because the Dominus Iesus declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states that there are no Churches in the proper sense in the Protestant world but ecclesial communities. And in the interview-book Light of the world, Pope Benedict says that what we see here is another type of Church. Indeed that’s how it is, and it’s not for us to define the ecclesial concept of the Churches of the Reformation, but it’s up to them. That’s why we need to discuss the nature of the Church: in fact each denomination has its own conception of what unity is internally. Among the aims of the ecumenical movement is that of rediscovering that multiplicity, given that there are various and competing denominational ideas on the theme of unity. A second aspect is the great change that is taking root in the thinking of the Reformed communities: they no longer see visible unity in faith, sacraments and ministry as the goal of the ecumenical movement, but want the permanent presence of a plurality of Churches which recognize each other, all of which together would finally result in the Church of Christ. A little like households, from which every so often comes an invitation to the neighbors to join in some celebration. The Catholics and the Orthodox do not like that position. This is not the single and undivided body of Christ, that is it does not correspond to the prayer of Jesus that the disciples be united, as are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What is the appropriate response?

No common path can be found outside of ecumenical spirituality, that is, without prayer.

The ecumenical movement was born with the proposal for the January Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The idea came from an Anglican convert to Catholicism, Paul Wattson, and from an American Episcopalian, Spencer Jones, and it gradually won papal support in recent times, and was further gone into by Paul Couturier, a leading figure in ecumenical spirituality. It is a reminder that we humans can’t achieve this unity, we can maybe arrange some transitional historical situation, which the Holy Spirit then makes use of.

That is the basis of ecumenism, and I would like to further it during my term of office.

Earlier you said that in the discussion among Christians, there is no shared meaning for unity. What do you propose?

Unity in the same faith, in the celebration of the sacraments and in recognition of the ministries in the Church does not mean leveling, because the differences be-
between the Churches exist and it isn’t necessary to remove them. We only need to be rid of the ones that led to the rupture amongst us and require healing. The others... let them remain. Pope Benedict has reiterated to the Anglicans who want to enter the Catholic Church: you can keep your traditions. There, that is unity in diversity and diversity in unity: otherwise there is only a leveling unification, foreign to the very essence of Catholicism. The set of religious orders and forms of ecclesial life make a garden with many flowers in the history of the Church and we don’t want to replace them with a single crop, the Church is not so. The same applies in the field of ecumenism.

Let’s go back to the different conceptions of unity.

There are, we were saying, two styles of ecumenism. The one seeks for visible unity, works and prays for that. The other leaves intact the plurality of today, codifies it, and asks for ultimate recognition of all the Churches as shareholders in the Church of Christ. The Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran bishops who support the first way are happy that the Holy See proposes unity and plurality, the others are less so. In his homily at Vespers for the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope Benedict said that we cannot renounce the goal of ecumenism, that is visible unity in faith, in the sacraments and in the ministry.

There is more than one passage in the text of the Ecumenical Directory pointing out that there are means of salvation outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ is not an abstract idea, which does not yet exist, but is in the Catholic Church, understood as historical subject. And that does not mean that Catholics are better Christians than others, but only that the means of salvation exist in the Catholic Church. It is an objective fact. So when I hear that there are Protestant believers who wish to become Catholics I say to them: “You need not give anything up, you get something more”, that is, the means of salvation in the Catholic Church. These are not a merit of the Church, but a gift from the Lord.

By that it’s already understood that in other ecclesial communities the means of salvation exist.

What is the nub of the dialogue with the Churches of the Reformation?

With them we certainly can’t start from the primacy. With the Reformation another Church came into being, and that was not what Luther was looking for, he called for the renewal of the Catholic Church. The Protestant ecumenist Wolfhart Pannenberg has said that the existence of new Churches is not the success but the failure of the Reformation. That opinion helps me a lot with a view to the year 2017, the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, because I ask myself how the Protestants themselves see the Reformations today: a commitment to the renewal of the Church or a break? I personally am very interested that the Reformed should speak not only of the five hundred years after the break, but also and above all of the two thousand years of the life of the Church, of which fifteen hundred were spent together. I am very happy that the president of the Evangelical community in Switzerland, Pastor Gottfried
Locher, has described himself not as a Protestant but as a reformed Catholic. That is as a Catholic with the experience of the Reformation, maintaining also the foundation of the same apostolic faith, shared up to 1517. It’s my hope that things be looked at in this way.

**Do you think that work can also be done for the unity of the Church in China?**

So far we have not had the chance. It is primarily the responsibility of the Secretary of State. We know the delicacy of that situation and the delicacy of the letter, full of compassion, which Pope Benedict wrote to the Chinese faithful in 2007. If our Council can help in the future, well and good...

**In what way?**

That will depend on what the competent bodies of the Curia may ask. But for China, in my personal prayer, I already do everything I can.

**In dialogue with Jews cues for the talking-points are there. Let’s begin with an indication from the book-interview of the Pope, following what St Paul declared about the relationship between Christians and Jews.**

I’m sure of the worth of what St Paul passed on to us, he still helps us today. I’m also certain that the Pope has followed St Paul in drafting the new version of the Good Friday prayer. Pope Benedict is very sensitive to the Jewish theme, starting with the fact that he no longer calls the Jews our “elder brothers”, knowing full well how problematic the definition of “elder brother” is in the Old Testament. I’d like to go deeper into theological discussion.

**On what issues?**

Christians believe in the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ, on the other hand people say that a mission to the Jews is absolutely impossible. How can these two statements not be incompatible? That’s another reason why the new Good Friday prayer has stirred so much debate.

I’d like to get a better understanding of what the Christian faith and the relationship between Jews and Christians mean to a Jew. Pope Benedict’s dialogue with Rabbi Neusner, in the first part of the book, Jesus of Nazareth, is important for me, it’s precisely the theological dialogue that I imagine. And about a systematic mission to the Jews... the Church is not seeking it. But we Christians confess our faith in Jesus, and we lay it freely before the freedom of others.

**Is there a Leitmotiv in your work since you’ve been in Rome?**

Some people claim that Benedict XVI is not interested in ecumenism with the Churches born out of the Reformation, since the Orthodox Churches are closer to us, and this claim is not true. When the Pope asked me to take this assignment, he said that it was necessary to have a person who knew of the ecclesial communities born out of Reformation not only through study but out of experience. The Pope has great hope in the ecumenical movement. In fact, we have this text, the Ecumenical Directory, which reminds us that every bishop in his diocese is the main person responsible for ecumenism. This document will always be useful to everybody to read and use. In every diocese there are particular ecumenical situations and the local bishop has the main responsibility for them. Our Pontifical Council also wants to be at the service of the local church when this is asked and desired.
POPE/1
St Alphonsus: “Who prays is saved”

Benedict XVI dedicated his catechesis of Wednesday 30 March to St Alphonsus Maria de’ Liguori, the Neapolitan saint-author, as the Pope recalled, of the popular Christmas song Tu scendi dalle stelle (You come down from the stars). “In his day, there was a very strict and widespread interpretation of moral life because of the Jansenist mentality which, instead of fostering trust and hope in God’s mercy, fomented fear and presented a grim and severe face of God, very remote from the face revealed to us by Jesus. Especially in his main work entitled Moral Theology, St Alphonsus proposed a balanced and convincing synthesis of the requirements of God’s law, engrained on our hearts, fully revealed by Christ and interpreted authoritatively by the Church, and of the dynamics of the conscience and of human freedom, which precisely in adherence to truth and goodness permit the person’s development and fulfilment. Alphonsus recommended to pastors of souls and confessors that they be faithful to the Catholic moral doctrine, assuming at the same time a charitable, understanding and gentle attitude so that penitents might feel accompanied, supported and encouraged on their journey of faith and of Christian life. St Alphonsus never tired of repeating that priests are a visible sign of the infinite mercy of God who forgives and enlightens the mind and heart of the sinner so that he may convert and change his life. In our epoch, in which there are clear signs of the loss of the moral conscience and – it must be recognized – of a certain lack of esteem for the sacrament of Confession, St Alphonsus’ teaching is still very relevant...”.

In his speech, the Pope then recalled the insistence of the saint on prayer, explaining: “With regard to prayer he writes: ‘God does not deny anyone the grace of prayer, with which one obtains help to overcome every form of concupiscence and every temptation. And I say, and I will always repeat as long as I live, that the whole of our salvation lies in prayer’. Hence his famous axiom: ‘Who prays is saved’ (Del gran mezzo della preghiera e opuscoli affini. Opere ascetiche II, Rome 1962, p. 171). In this regard, an exhortation of my Predecessor, the Venerable Servant of God John Paul II comes to mind: ‘our Christian communities must become genuine ‘schools of prayer’... Among the forms of prayer fervently recommended by St Alphonsus stands out the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or as we would call it today, “adoration”, brief or extended, personal or as a community, before the Eucharist. ‘Certainly’, St Alphonsus writes, ‘amongst all devotions, after that of receiving the sacraments, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament takes the first place, is the most pleasing to God, and the most useful to ourselves... Oh, what a beautiful delight to be before an altar with faith... to represent our needs to Him, as a friend does to a friend in whom he places all his trust!’ (Visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary for each day of the month, Introduction).”

POPE/2
St Lawrence of Brindisi and the “sweet yoke” of Jesus

In the catechesis of Wednesday 23 March dedicated to St Lawrence of Brindisi, Pope Benedict XVI said: “In speaking to priests and seminarians in the Cathedral of Brindisi, St Lawrence’s birthplace, I recalled that ‘the time he spends in
prayer is the most important time in a priest’s life, in which divine grace acts with greater effectiveness, making his ministry fruitful. The first service to render to the community is prayer. And, therefore, time for prayer must be given true priority in our life …”.

In concluding his catechesis, Benedict XVI recalled the great devotion of St Lawrence to the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit sweetens the yoke of the divine law and lightens its weight, so that we may observe God’s commandments with the greatest of ease and even with pleasure”.

In March, the Vatican Press Office released the news that the texts of the meditations for the Stations of the Via Crucis on Good Friday this year were composed, at the request of the Pope, by Mother Maria Rita Piccione, superior of the Federation of Augustinian nuns, who live in the monastery of the Santi Quattro Coronati, in Rome. The images that illustrated the different stations were drawings by Sister Elena Manganelli, she too an Augustinian nun from the convent of Lecce (Siena).

Cañizares and the Virgin Mary, now also Our Lady of Arabia

“I proclaim Our Lady of Arabia, patron of the two Apostolic Vicariates of the Gulf”. With this solemn declaration, Cardinal Antonio Cañizares Llovera, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, on 16 January 2011, proclaimed in the Cathedral of Kuwait, the Blessed Virgin Mary Our Lady of Arabia, the patroness of all the Gulf countries, namely Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Oman. This “new” title of the Virgin Mary has touched the hearts of the people. Now next to the glorious titles such as “Our Lady of Lourdes”, “Our Lady of Fatima”, and many others, we may humbly add, “Our Lady of Arabia”. Here in Kuwait, the Madonna did not make appearances as at Lourdes and Fatima and elsewhere, but she has always been present here and managed to bring Jesus even before the arrival of Islam. In fact, on the island of Failaka, which belongs to Kuwait, there are the remains of a church, probably Nestorian, of the fifth century. As well as other important archaeological remains of churches of that time that are also found in other Gulf countries. To her, with great veneration, we have decided to dedicate the entire Gulf so that she may both precede and accompany our ministry”. This is the beginning of an article in l’Osservatore Romano on 11 March signed by the Apostolic Vicar of Kuwait, the Combonian Camillo Ballin. The article concluded with a quote from the homily of Cardinal Cañizares last January: “May the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Arabia, help us to follow Jesus, to remain faithful and steadfast in the faith and always look to Jesus, source of our faith”.

Tettamanzi, St John Chrysostom and the Gospel of the good Christian

“We could say it this way: belief in some way involves the seizure of an ideal, or a God, who ends up being put at one’s own service. Those who are motivated by faith, however, surrender themselves to others, abandon the idea of control over reality.” The words are those of Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi in an interview published in La Repubblica on 14 March. Responding afterwards to a question about what it means to believe in God, the prelate said: “It means not so much making reference to an absolute and transcendent being, but to a being…”. 
that has a name, a face and a heart. It means believing in someone who listens to me, accompanies me, provokes me, consoles me. It constrains me to behave differently. Faith, in short, more than a concept is a meeting, a communion. And this applies not only to the Catholic or Christian. Finally, to explain what constitutes Christian witness, he recalled the teaching of St John Chrysostom, "who sustains that there is no need to proclaim the Gospel. If faith is alive in the most humble and simple gestures of the good Christian, he himself becomes the Gospel: a living Gospel".

Malabarese since 1999, died. On that day the Sacred College was composed of 200 cardinals, of which 116 are voters. On 1 March meanwhile, the Pope accepted the resignation from the pastoral governance of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (USA), presented by Cardinal Roger Michael Mahony, who had turned 75 two days before. He is succeeded by 59 year-old Archbishop José Horacio Gómez, of the Opus Dei clergy, who had been coadjutor of the same archdiocese since April 2010.

NORTH AFRICA/1
Egypt and the sowers of discord between Christians and Muslims

In la Repubblica on 8 March an article appeared which details how during the recent uprising in Egypt, the revolutionaries got into the corridors of power, collected files with confidential information, then placed on the net, documenting various crimes perpetrated by the past regime. This is the conclusion of the article: "Particularly serious are the accusations about the tensions created deliberately between Christians and Muslims, followed by raids among the Islamists... And the leaking of the documents also makes the investigation against Mubarak’s minister, the all powerful Habib al-Adly, more credible. On 7 February the Public Prosecutor of Cairo included him in the register of those suspected of having organized the attack at Christmas against the Coptic Church of Alexandria”.

NORTH AFRICA/2
The Nazis, smart bombs and preventive wars

In an article in the Corriere della Sera on 21 March Armando Torno, taking his cue from the ongoing Libyan war, questioned the blurred boundaries between just and unjust conflicts. “In the first Gulf conflict,” he wrote, “the concept of ‘smart bombs’ was spread and in 2002 President George W. Bush spoke of ‘preventive war’, but these terms were not new: Joseph Goebbels used them in 1940 and 1941 for the...
bombed, the attack on Russia, launched to prevent Stalin’s offensive.” Further down one reads, among the subtle arguments for or against war: “Titus Livius glimpsed its nature: ‘Bellum se ipse alet’ or ‘War feeds on itself’ (Ab urbe condita XXXIV, 9); perhaps this is why right and wrong are sometimes confused”.

EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES
Rai new Maronite Patriarch and Shevchuk new major Archbishop of Kiev

On 25 March the Pope granted the Ecclesiastica Communio requested of him by Béchara Boutros Rai, canonically elected Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites on 15 March at the Synod of the Bishops of the Maronite Church, which met in Bkerké in Lebanon. Rai, 71 years old, of the Maronite Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patriarchal Vicar since 1986, was transferred in 1990 to the eparchy of Jbeil (Byblos). Also on 25 March the Pope granted the confirmation requested of him by Sviatoslav Shevchuk, who on 23 March had been canonically elected Major Archbishop of Kyiv-Haly in the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, which met in Lviv. Shevchuk, 41 years old, was auxiliary of the Eparchy of Santa María del Patrocinio in Buenos Aires, Argentina, of which he was apostolic administrator of the sede vacante from 2010.

The Lebanese Patriarch Béchara Rai

Controversy was stirred in the Jewish world by the conciliatory gesture of Amos Oz, who gave a gift of a copy of one of his latest literary works, A Tale of Love and Darkness, to the Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti, imprisoned in an Israeli jail. Called to give an account of his action, in an interview with Elena Loewenthal in La Stampa on 30 March, the Israeli writer stated: “I wanted Marwan Barghouti to read A Tale of Love and Darkness because I know that this book has helped many Arabs to understand Israel. And because I’m certain that some day we will speak with him. By ‘we’ I mean the State of Israel. Some day Israel will find itself talking to Barghouti even if he was the instigator of the second Intifada and has on his conscience a large number of suicide attacks and many more victims than of those terrorist attacks. My novel is a deeply personal and familial story, but also and perhaps especially it is the epic story of Zionism from the inside, with its reasons and its roots…” Then, at the end of the interview, he referred to his motives for the act: “I did it in full consciousness. Armed with a certainty which is good to remember: one makes peace with enemies. With friends one doesn’t make peace, with enemies yes. Is that perhaps not true?”.

The Italian translation of Amos Oz’s book, Feltrinelli, Torino 2005, 627 pp., € 13.00

Marwan Barghouti
The second part of the book *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Ratzinger [Benedict XVI] is certainly an important work. Because of its complexity it is not an easy read. The author develops a close and detailed dialogue with the ambience of the exegetes, though he is not himself an exegete. This aspect already has its importance, because sometimes, in the theological world, a certain distance between exegetes and dogmatic theologians seems to perpetuate itself. But there is no reason to dwell too much on this if one wants to go beyond pure erudition. The author explains in the opening pages that this was not his intention. He simply wanted to write something “helpful to all readers who seek to encounter Jesus and to believe in Him” (p. xvii).

At the core of the book is the acknowledged fact that the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith are the same person. A bold statement, since the rationalist tendency that opposed what one can know of Jesus Christ in scholarly fashion and what the Church teaches has penetrated, with disastrous effects, even among believers. According to this line of thought, the Church’s teaching on Christ is a later addition, a mythical construction created by the Christian community regardless of the facts.

The book by Benedict XVI, with the constant reference to the historicity of Christ, also rebuts the opposite temptation of gnosticism that transpires today in the writings of various theologians. When we read the Gospel – the author points out on many pages – we are dealing with facts, which remain so even when they are as mysterious as the redemptive efficacy of the Passion and Resurrection. “Many details”, writes Joseph Ratzinger on page 105, “may remain open. Yet the ‘factum est’ of John’s Prologue (1,14) is a basic Christian category, and it applies not only to the Incarnation as such; it must also be invoked for the Last Supper, the Cross and the Resurrection”. God has entered history. The Bible...
The book by Benedict XVI, with the constant reference to the historicity of Christ, also rebuts the opposite temptation of gnosticism. When we read the Gospel we are dealing with facts, which remain so even when they are as mysterious as the redemptive efficacy of the Passion and Resurrection.
The Bible speaks of God’s history with humanity. But not in the Hegelian sense of a gnosticism that absorbs the historical fact into a theologico-logic construction. Speaking of the Resurrection, the author stresses that “The third day is not a ‘theological’ date, but the day when an event took place that became the decisive turning point for the disciples after the calamity of the Cross” (p. 258).

In this historical perspective, Joseph Ratzinger takes the same attitude as the early Church, which looked at the facts of Christ in the light of the Old Testament. The unity of the two Testaments seems to me one of the fundamental lines of argument along which the book develops.

The early Christians had the Old Testament as Sacred Scripture. For them it was a surprise and a confirmation of faith when they realized that the mysterious texts of the ancient Scriptures were unveiled in full by the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. The author often efficaciously sets the Christian reading of the Old Testament alongside the rabbinical one, without obscuring the differences.

Deeper down, the intimate union between the Old and New Testaments is captured in the person of Jesus Himself. Jesus prayed with the Psalms. Even the most intimate relationship of the Son with the Father comes about through the prayers of the poor of Israel. The author writes: “In the Passion too – on the Mount of Olives and on the Cross – Jesus uses passages from the Psalms to speak of Himself and to address the Father. Yet these quotations have become fully personal; they have become the intimate words of Jesus himself in his agony. It is he who truly prays these Psalms; he is their real subject. Jesus’ utterly personal prayer and his praying in the words of faithful, suffering Israel are here seamlessly united” (p. 153).

Jesus lived in the Holy Scripture of Israel. While the book excludes all reduction of the facts to symbols in gnostic fashion, it brings out the foreshadowing link that exists between the facts of the Old and New Testament. This relation, interior to the history of salvation, is not an immanent and progressive development of a pre-arranged saving principle, in the manner of Hegel. It is God Himself who intervenes and, in the continuity of the history of salvation, prepares and carries through to completion with, so to speak, gratuitous “qualitative leaps”, that is through acts that are always new. This intertwining of the Old Law and the New Law of the Gospel patterned by the gratuitous acts of God is a weave that runs throughout the book. For example, in the chapter on the priestly prayer of Jesus, Pope Benedict XVI quotes from the exegete André Feuillet to emphasize that such prayer “can be understood only against the background of the liturgy of the Jewish Feast of Atonement (Yom ha-Kippurim). The ritual of the feast with its rich theological content, is realized in Jesus’ prayer – ‘realized’ in the literal sense: the rite is translated into the reality that it signifies. What had been represented in ritual acts now takes place in reality and it takes place definitively” (p. 77).

Finally, the “methodological issue”, that had already been addressed in the first volume, with the criticism – which is not a rejection – of the historical-critical method, also emerges in this volume. Again, Benedict XVI highlights that the exaggeration of the question of method can easily lead to a form of methodological superstition. In the natural sciences, if the method is applied well, it works almost by itself. But not so in the humanities, where the method, if it meets the requirements of rigor, has its own criteria. In fact the object has its own uniqueness and the interpreter, historian or exegete, commits himself in person. In the case of the Word of God, the interpreter, assisted by the Spirit, beyond the scholar, is the Church as living subject.
Jesus praying in the Garden of Olives, detail, Barna of Siena, Collegiate of San Gimignano, Siena
Much has been said these days about the Pope’s new book, and that is normal and due. But the strange thing, though not unusual, is that the chapter which discusses the Jewish responsibility in the death of Jesus was talked about almost exclusively. This is not unusual, because often the media give prominence to a fact that could be marginal compared to others which deserve more attention; it happens in information in general and even more so in that which deals with this pope, whose major doctrinal positions are ignored whereas details that arouse curiosity are dwelt on. But the matter is in any case strange, because of all this fuss created around an issue that should by now be settled and taken for granted. The revolution in Christian-Jewish relations has its symbolic reference in an official text, promulgated by the Second Vatican Council: the declaration Nostra Aetate, in which it is explained, or rather it is solemnly declared, that the responsibility for the death of Jesus can not be attributed to all the Jews of his time, and much less to those of later generations. Thus the terrible charge of deicide which was prolonged for centuries, constituting one of the foundations and justifications of hatred and persecution of Christians against Jews, collapsed. After more than forty-five years since that statement, a book about the history of the Passion of Jesus, bearing the most influential signature of the Catholic world, cannot but endorse those ideas, and at most can explain them by authoritative doctrine. This is precisely what has happened with the Pope’s book. We would have been surprised if things had gone another way, with other views and other arguments. Or if a Pope had written them before the Council. So why all the fuss? The possible answers are dissimilar, and not mutually exclusive; I will suggest two. First, the launching of a publicity campaign always requires an attractive bait, and when the news does not exist, it must be invented. The second response demonstrates that what should be simple and obvious is not at all so; in the sense that despite the past decades, the widespread educational commitment and the real change in the climate of Christian-Jewish relations, the question of deicide still seems to remain always and in any case an unre-
solved knot at least in the deepest part of the consciousness. And that therefore the problem needs to be tackled daily with new tools. The fuss does not depend on whether the Pope proposed a certain explanation, but on the fact that there is a need of this explanation. And if things are really like this there is need to be worried about it.

One of the problems at the origin of the matter, difficult to resolve, is the harshness of the Gospel texts, each of which in its own way, sends the message that together make up the traditional framework of the hostile Jews shouting “crucify” and assuming responsibility for themselves and future generations. Much is due to the climate in which these texts were created, reflecting what was initially only a controversy within the Jewish world. But a simplified reading of the Gospel texts without commentary risks presenting them as anti-Jewish texts and endorsing a negative image of Jews, which could lead to hostility and hatred. One of the tasks of dialogue is precisely to combat the teaching of contempt. In parallel, Catholic biblical scholars are trying to deny or re-dimension the apparent anti-Jewishness of the Gospels. An important official document to that effect, produced ten years ago, in 2001, by the Pontifical Biblical Commission bears the significant title Il popolo ebraico e le sue Sacre Scritture nella Bibbia cristiana [The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible] and the preface is signed by the then Cardinal Ratzinger. Again, this demonstrates the non-novelty of the present contribution and the continuation of a consistent line. However, this does not diminish its importance. To avoid the dramas of the past it is necessary to remove the old conclusions and hostile approaches, to comment, distinguish, explain every phrase and every detail inserting them in the appropriate context. An operation that Professor Ratzinger knows how to execute masterfully. An attentive observer such as Professor Ugo Volli suggested that this work of exegesis, before being a defense of the Jews is a defense of the Gospels from the accusation of being anti-Jewish. However it may be, it is significant. As it is significant that certain techniques of commentary that overturn apparently obvious meanings of the texts, and which are characteristic of the rabbinic tradition, should enter and become part of the research methods and expression of the Catholic tradition.

Those who frequent the blogs and the traditionalist sites can easily see how these pages of the Pope are unheard, challenged, rejected, in favor of the classical view of Jewish deicide. It remains to be seen, with a little curiosity, if not anxiety, which ideas, in this regard, are truly more rooted in the Catholic world.
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The new book by the Pope is not a gift only for believers. It is a gift to all seekers of truth. Pope Benedict is the Christian voice most heeded around the world. This book does not discuss just any topic, but the center of the Christian faith. It is a matter of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. And specifically of two moments in His life when it is decided whether Jesus Christ has an un-renounceable significance for the twenty-first century also. At the heart of this second volume by Pope Benedict on the figure of Jesus are the cross and resurrection.

It is not possible in such a short talk to bring out adequately the richness of the deep thinking found in this volume also. I can only highlight some features which I consider important in our postmodern, and partly post-Christian, situation.

The Last Supper and the historical-critical exegesis

The Pope's book on Jesus is not, as he himself points out, a magisterium publication. This book was not prepared with committees of theologians, the Pope here presents his personal image of Jesus. In this way he has undoubtedly embarked on a risky undertaking. Presenting the first volume, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna coined a comparison. Like the Apostle Paul in Athens, the Pope has dared to go into the Agora, the marketplace of contrasting opinions.

In this marketplace today there are not only philosophers, but also historical-critical exegesists. As in Paul's time there were various opposing philosophical currents, namely the Stoics and the Epicureans (Acts 17, 18), so also the historical-critical exegesis is absolutely not a unitary discipline. If today there are irreconcilable opposing views in the exegesis of the New Testament, they do not arise out of denominational differences. The dividing line now lies rather between the exegesists who approach the New Testament with substantial confidence or basic historical skepticism. The Pope knows this and so does not refer to Catholic scholars only. The fact that in 2008 this Pope invited to Castel

Rainer Riesner, Professor of New Testament at the Protestant Institute of Theology of the Faculty of the Humane and Theological Sciences at the TU Dortmund University, at the launch of the book Gesù di Nazaret. Dall’ingresso in Gerusalemme fino alla risurrezione by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), in the theater of the Faculty of Theology of the Triveneto, Padua, 16 March 2011

by Rainer Riesner

"If today there are irreconcilable opposing views in the exegesis of the New Testament, they do not arise out of denominational differences. The dividing line now lies rather between the exegesists who approach the New Testament with substantial confidence or basic historical skepticism.” The review of a Lutheran theologian
Gandolfo the Evangelical New Testament scholars Martin Hengel and Peter Stuhlmacher to discuss the second volume of his book on Jesus with them is an undeniable proof of his exceptional humility. Both of these professors, who were my teachers, were colleagues of the young Professor Joseph Ratzinger at the University of Tübingen. With his invitation Benedict XVI launched an ecumenical sign of great import, that Christians of different denominations come close to each other in paying serious heed to Holy Scripture.

His discussion of the Last Supper shows clearly how seriously the Pope takes historico-critical exegesis, while at the same time indicating the ideological limits of certain scholars belonging to this school of thought. Thus, Benedict XVI admits that there are in the Gospels historical problems to which several scholarly answers are possible. That is why he leaves open the question of the relationship that exists between the farewell dinner of Jesus and the Jewish Passover meal. There is however another matter that the Pope absolutely does not leave hanging. Many exegetes today doubt that Jesus uttered the words attributed to Him at the Last Supper. They justify their skepticism on the grounds that the announcement of the Kingdom of God by Jesus would be difficult to reconcile with the thought of atonement. As example the parable of the prodigal son is often quoted, in which he gets forgiveness from his father without any atonement being made (Lk 15, 11-24). But the words of the Last Supper are already reported by Paul as a firmly established tradition that he himself borrowed from the first community of Jerusalem through the community of Damascus (1Cor 11, 23-24). Hence the Pope is absolutely right when he writes: “From the point of view of historical evidence, nothing could be more authentic than this Last Supper tradition. But the idea of expiation is incomprehensible to the modern mind. Jesus with his proclamation of the kingdom of God must surely be diametrically opposed to such a notion. At issue here is our image of God and our image of man. To this extent the whole discussion only appears to be concerned with history” (p.119).
Jesus lived in the Holy Scripture of Israel, as indeed the Pope also. Not all his discoveries about references to the Old Testament could be dug out of the exegetical literature. Some things clearly derive from his meditation on Sacred Scripture throughout his life.

Good Friday as great day of Atonement

Another objection to the historicity of the words of the Last Supper is that it would be unthinkable in a Jewish context. One of the strengths of the Pope’s book is the demonstration that the statements of the New Testament on Jesus’ death as atonement for human sin become comprehensible only with the help of the Old Testament and its explanation in ancient Hebrew. Here, too, great respect for Judaism is expressed by the Pope, which rightly found a very positive echo in the international press. The fact that certain exegetes highlight in particular fashion Jesus’ Jewish religiosity, but at the same time want to rid Him of almost all the references to the Sacred Scripture of Israel, belongs among those phenomena difficult to understand. The references are not limited to direct quotations. The words of Jesus are woven through with allusions to the Old Testament. If one wanted to delete them all, not much would remain. Jesus lived in the Holy Scripture of Israel, as indeed the Pope also. Not all his discoveries about references to the Old Testament could be dug out of the exegetical literature.

Some things clearly derive from his meditation on Sacred Scripture throughout his life.

This approach enables the Pope to show, in the presentation he makes of Jesus, that there is an inner link in the unfolding of the events that occur between the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem up to His crucifixion on Golgotha. This link is both plausible from the point of view of history and highly significant in terms of theology. The so-called purification of the temple is not simply an act of social criticism of the class of high priests, who enriched themselves in the trade of offerings. With a simple prophetic symbolical gesture, Jesus instead announced that the end had come for the sacrificial cult in the temple of Jerusalem (Jn 2, 14-22). This is confirmed by the synoptic discourse on the last days and the prediction of the destruction of the temple (Mark 13, 14-17). However, the basic assumption is not represented by the opinion that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were always worthless. But that they referred, with the support of the affirmations of a prophet such as Jeremiah, to something that went beyond the sacri-
fices themselves, heralding the stipulation of a new covenant (Jer 31, 31).

The mysterious figure of the “Servant of God” suffering and dying in the Book of Isaiah makes it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that atonement is possible only through the vicarious function of a special envoy of God (Is 53). Jesus referred to Himself the prophecy of the Servant of God even in the formulation of the words of the Last Supper (Mk 14, 24). Also the high priesthood is in no way challenged by Jesus, but finds its full realization in Him. The so-called priestly prayer in John’s Gospel (Chapter 17) can be understood only in the light of the liturgy of the Jewish celebration of Yom Kippur. Here the Pope follows the interpretation of the illustrious Catholic exegete André Feuillet, whose works are often widely and wrongly ignored even by contemporary Catholic exegesis. On the occasion of the “great day of Atonement” the high priest crossed, for the only time in the year, the threshold of the Holy of Holies in the temple and cleansed the people of Israel from their sins by sprinkling the Ark of the Covenant with blood (Lev 16). In His reply to the high priest Caiaphas, who questions Him asking whether He be the Messiah (Mk 14, 62), Jesus proclaims Himself “a priest in the order of Melchizedek” referring to Psalm 110.

The veil of the temple that rends in two at the moment of Jesus’ death refers symbolically to the fact that the great last day of Atonement has found fulfillment in the cross on Golgotha (Mk 15, 38). The interpretation of Jesus’ death as atonement thus goes back to Jesus Himself. The Coptic and Syrian Churches have not accepted this doctrine, known as that of the two natures. They attribute to Jesus only a divine nature. Alongside this ancient Monophysism there is also a widespread modern variant, according to which Jesus had only a purely human nature. Through the Gospel story of the tempted prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane Pope Benedict clarifies why both of the two visions of Jesus are not right. Gethsemane shows Jesus, especially in the reading of the Gospel of Luke (22, 44) and the Epistle to the Hebrews (5, 7-8), in all His vulnerable and frightened humanity. However, the Heavenly Father expects Him to drink “the chalice” (Mk 14, 36), that in the language of the Old Testament here means the destructive wrath of God (Is 51, 17). This indicates that Jesus must be more than just a man. Absolutely relevantly the evangelist Mark transmits here the intimate cry “Abba, Father” in its Semitic form, as it was heard from the mouth of Jesus. On this point the Pope draws on the research of the Evangelical scholar of the New Testament Joachim Jeremias who in the middle of the last century was one of the most prominent critics of the skeptical concept of Rudolf Bultmann. The evangelist Mark knew that prior to Jesus no pious Jew, nor any prophet, had addressed God so. Therefore, only He who was truly the Son of God could talk in that way. Pope Benedict comments as follows: “Because he is the Son, he experiences deeply all the horror, filth and baseness that he must drink from the ‘chalice’ prepared for him: the vast power of sin and death. All this he must take into himself, so that it can be disarmed and defeated in him” (p. 155). Gethsemane, however, also poses the following question: is there something that goes beyond the divine judgment of God on man’s guilt? It is the same question that arises when one questions the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus.

The reality of the Resurrection

Also in dealing with this issue, the Pope shows that he is very aware of the historical and exegetical problems posed by the texts of the New Testament. He does, especially in the reading of the Gospel of Luke (22, 44) and the Epistle to the Hebrews (5, 7-8), in all His vulnerable and frightened humanity. However, the Heavenly Father expects Him to drink “the chalice” (Mk 14, 36), that in the language of the Old Testament here means the destructive wrath of God (Is 51, 17). This indicates that Jesus must be more than just a man. Absolutely relevantly the evangelist Mark transmits here the intimate cry “Abba, Father” in its Semitic form, as it was heard from the mouth of Jesus. On this point the Pope draws on the research of the Evangelical scholar of the New Testament Joachim Jeremias who in the middle of the last century was one of the most prominent critics of the skeptical concept of Rudolf Bultmann. The evangelist Mark knew that prior to Jesus no pious Jew, nor any prophet, had addressed God so. Therefore, only He who was truly the Son of God could talk in that way. Pope Benedict comments as follows: “Because he is the Son, he experiences deeply all the horror, filth and baseness that he must drink from the ‘chalice’ prepared for him: the vast power of sin and death. All this he must take into himself, so that it can be disarmed and defeated in him” (p. 155). Gethsemane, however, also poses the following question: is there something that goes beyond the divine judgment of God on man’s guilt? It is the same question that arises when one questions the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus.

“To this extent, in our quest for the figure of Jesus, the Resurrection is the crucial point. Whether Jesus merely was or whether he also is - this depends on the Resurrection. In answering yes or no to this question, we are taking a stand not simply on one event among others, but on the figure of Jesus as such”
“Only a real event of a radically new quality could possibly have given rise to the apostolic teaching, which cannot be explained on the basis of speculation or inner, mystical experiences. In all its boldness and originality, it draws life from the impact of an event that no one had invented, an event that surpassed all that could be imagined”

however, make a distinction between minor matters of detail and the main issue on which everything depends. Here Benedict writes with great clarity: “Only if Jesus is risen, has anything really new occurred that changes the world and the situation of mankind. Then he becomes the criterion on which we can rely. For then God has truly revealed himself. To this extent, in our quest for the figure of Jesus, the Resurrection is the crucial point. Whether Jesus merely was or whether he also is - this depends on the Resurrection. In answering yes or no to this question, we are taking a stand not simply on one event among others, but on the figure of Jesus as such” (p. 242).

In this inevitable either/or, the Pope has on his side the apostle Paul who, in his first epistle to the Christian community of Corinth, wrote: “And if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ” (1Cor 15, 14-15).

But how credible is the apostolic witness of the Resurrection? The Pope raises both the historical and philosophical question. He rightly criticizes the fact that the wording “Jesus rose on the third day” (1Cor 15, 4) is a pure and simple derivation from the Old Testament. The “third” day is an indication of a historical date. On the third day after Jesus’ crucifixion, His tomb was found empty. The Pope notes in this regard that “the empty tomb as such, while it cannot prove the Resurrection, is nevertheless a necessary condition for Resurrection faith, which was specifically concerned with the body and, consequently, with the whole of the person” (p. 254). On the “third day” Jesus met in His living person witnesses with a name, such as Peter or the Lord’s brother James, and women witnesses such as Mary Magdalene. In this sense, the Pope notes, “it is also important that the encounters with the risen Lord are not just interior events or mystical experiences – they are real encounters with the living one who is now embodied in a new way and remains embodied” (p. 268).

The Pope also deals with the philosophical objection that the Resurrection of Jesus goes against the laws that govern nature. He urges us not to rule out new experiences in history that go beyond what we are accustomed to so far. He writes: “The Resurrec-
tion accounts certainly speak of something outside our world of experience. They speak of something new, something unprecedented – a new dimension of reality that is revealed. What already exists is not called into question. Rather we are told that there is a further dimension beyond what was previously known. Does that contradict science? Can there really only ever be what there has always been?... If there really is a God, is he not able to create a new dimension of human reality, a new dimension of reality altogether?" (pp. 246-247). And thus, to question the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus is to question the reality of God.

With the Resurrection of Jesus the question of God does not remain confined within the limits of intellectual speculation, but presses on us as question on the historical reality of the body. The Pope rightly reminds us that the apparitions of the risen Jesus "in the mysterious combination of otherness and identity" have their closest parallel in the theophanies of the Old Testament (p. 267). Here we find a compelling reason for the fact that already from Easter it emerges clearly that Jesus belongs to the mode of being of God (cf. Jn 20, 28). The Pope concluded the discussion with the words: "Jesus' Resurrection points beyond history, but has left a footprint within history. Therefore it can be attested by witnesses as an event of an entirely new kind". Benedict goes on to say: "Only a real event of a radically new quality could possibly have given rise to the apostolic teaching, which cannot be explained on the basis of speculation or inner, mystical experiences. In all its boldness and originality, it draws life from the impact of an event that no one had invented, an event that surpassed all that could be imagined" (p. 275). But how can this event reach people in the twenty-first century?

The need for a new evangelization
With his interpretation of Jesus' words: "But the Gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mt 13, 10), Pope Benedict recalls a significant episode in the history of the Church (p. 44). Bernard of Clairvaux had to chastise the then Pope, Eugenius III. Bernard wrote to him: You are "indebted also to the infidels, the Jews, the Greeks and the pagans... I admit that, with regard to the Jews, you are excused by time; for them a determined moment has been established, that cannot be hastened. First must come the pagans as a whole [cf. Rm 11, 25-27]. But what do you say about the pagans themselves?... What had your predecessors in mind... to halt evangelization, while disbelief is still widespread? Why has... the word that runs fast stopped"?

Pope Benedict does not need to be chastised on the subject of evangelization. As the interview-book Light of the world shows, inter alia, he has a very realistic view of things. He well knows that in large parts of Europe and North America there has been a dramatic decline in the Christian faith. Benedict XVI is not only aware of the need for a new evangelization, but also has taken organizational steps in that direction. With his book on Jesus, however, he offers a very personal contribution to the spreading of the faith. Christians should help him in this effort. One possibility would be to give his book about Jesus to friends whose faith is faltering or who are seeking a way to faith. The important thing is that this gift should become an opportunity for a dialogue in which we, too, discuss our faith. A particular strength of the Pope's book lies in the fact that it brings together two things. Readers will find a historically credible image of Jesus Christ, one relevant to their lives. But they will also find an indication of the personal faith of Pope Benedict. In the first volume, he referred to "intimate friendship with Jesus on which everything depends" as "its point of reference" for the Christian faith. I am convinced that with the second volume the Pope has managed to achieve what in the introduction he indicates as his desire. He has actually been enabled to approach "the figure of Our Lord in a way that can be helpful to all readers who seek to encounter Jesus and to believe in him" (p. xvii).

Notes
1 Jesus of Nazareth. From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, Vatican City 2011.
5 Abba. Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte, Göttingen 1966.
6 De consideratione III, 1, 2-3.
7 Benedict XVI, Light of the world. The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the times. An interview with Peter Seewald, Vatican City 2010, p. xvi.
8 Joseph Ratzinger [Benedict XVI], Jesus of Nazareth, Vatican City 2007, p. xii.
Behold my heart where you were born, you faithful, you my Church, as Eve was born from the rib of Adam. See how the lance opened it, so that the door of Paradise was opened for you”. In a homily in the first half of the fourteenth century, St Anthony of Padua seems to anticipate a devotion to the Sacred Heart which over the last centuries of the history of the Church has had an enormous circulation, linked to the figure of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque.

This nun of the Order of the Visitation, founded in 1610 by St Francis de Sales, in the 43 years of her short life was blessed with extraordinary gifts. Jesus appeared to her several times: He had chosen her, He told her, to make known to the world His Sacred Heart, the source of His infinite love for men.

She was born in 1647 in Lavethcourt, a village in the heart of France not far from Paray-le-Monial, the place where she spent her religious life. She was the fifth daughter of Claude Alacoque, a lawyer and notary of King Louis XIV.

She was first raised in the castle of Corcheval, in the home of a godmother, and then at a boarding school run by Poor Clare nuns.

Thus Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque

by Giovanni Ricciardi

In these pages, some illustrations by Mauro Cavallini, taken from the book Saint Margaret Mary, Éditions du Signe, France. Above, Margaret, at four, learned to pray in the castle of Corcheval.
of Charolles. There she learned to pray and to love Jesus so ardently that the sisters allowed her to make her First Communion when aged nine, an exception in those times. Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary: this was what most attracted and touched the little Margaret. “The Most Blessed Virgin”, she wrote about her childhood, “always took great care of me; I resorted to her in all necessities, and she rescued me from great dangers”.

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The special protection of Our Lady would accompany her especially during the long illness that saw her confined to bed for four years, from age ten to fourteen, and those that followed, until she entered the convent.

They were difficult years in which Margaret lost her father and a sister and became, so to speak, a “stranger” in her own house. Relatives who had been called by her mother to administer their goods in fact deprived her and Margaret of all freedom, treating them as servants. When Margaret asked for a decent dress to go to church, they refused and she was forced to borrow it from a friend. Moreover, they often didn’t even allow her to go out. “I did not know where to take refuge,” the saint wrote, “if not in some corner of the garden or the barn where I could go on my knees and open my heart with tears to God”.

Then her mother also fell ill and was cured only through the
love, care and prayers of Margaret, who in the meantime grew and began to wonder what was God’s will for her. Her mother wanted to see her married and the mother of a family, but Margaret’s deepest desire was to consecrate herself to the Lord: “I was consumed by the desire to love Him”, she would later say.

At 22 she received confirmation, adding the name of Mary to her baptismal name, and a few years later, eventually winning over the resistance of her family, she was able to realize her dream of becoming a nun, with her entry into the Visitation convent of Paray-le-Monial, on 25 May 1671.

“Like a canvas waiting for the painter”

When she entered the convent she found herself lost among the rites and Latin formulas that she did not understand. She then asked the mistress of novices to teach her to pray. She replied: “Place yourself in front of Our Lord, like a canvas waiting for the painter”. Sister Margaret Mary did not immediately understand, and some time later while she was reflecting on the meaning of those words in her heart, she heard an inner voice saying to her, “Come, I’ll teach you”. At that moment, the saint recalls, Jesus came close to her giving her a great peace. He would look after everything.

Her love for Jesus made her spend many more hours than her fellow sisters in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and they began to regard her with distrust and suspicion; they thought she wanted to show off, and so entrusted her with the most menial tasks, to keep “her feet on the ground”. For example, they sent her to the convent field to mind a donkey and its foal, to ensure that they did not encroach on the garden. Once, Sister Margaret Mary, lost in prayer, forgot them, but despite this, much to the surprise of the
other sisters, the animals did not cause any damage.

Life went on, divided between prayer and work. Sister Margaret Mary was put in charge of the convent infirmary, and was at times forced to suffer the harshness with which the superiors treated her. Margaret did not respond to the allegations and tried to be obedient in every little thing.

Beloved disciple of the Sacred Heart

All this was the prelude to the first appearance and the revelation of the Sacred Heart to Sister Margaret Mary, and the mission entrusted to her to make it known to the world, which occurred on 27 December 1673: “My Divine Heart”, Jesus said to her, “is so impassioned with love for men and for you in particular that, unable to contain within itself any longer the flames of His burning love, it feels the need to spread it through you and to show itself to them to enrich them with its precious treasures that I will reveal to you and which contain the sanctifying graces”.

From that day on Jesus appeared to her many times. During an appearance in 1674, Jesus asked her for two simple and concrete things: to receive communion every first Friday of the month and to spend an hour in prayer every Thursday from 11:00 to 12:00 pm, in memory of his sufferings in the Garden of Olives, and to ask for mercy for sinners. Prayer and sacraments, therefore: the usual ways that open to the grace of God. That is to His Sacred Heart.

To these practices, for all those who would follow them, Jesus attached promises, asking Sister Margaret Mary to make them known to the world. Margaret didn’t know what to do, surrounded as she was by the distrust of her fellow sisters, who would not even allow her to get a picture of the Sacred Heart and display it publicly. But Jesus encouraged her. In one of His appearances He told her: “Do not fear anything. I shall reign in spite of my enemies and anyone who tries to oppose Himself”. “This comforted me greatly”, adds the saint in her autobiography, “because I wanted nothing more than to see Him reign. I entrusted to Him then the task of defending His cause, while I suffered in silence”.

And in fact, very soon she was offered help, in the person of the Jesuit Father Claude La Colombière, who was for many years her spiritual director, and who recognized the revelations received by Sister Margaret Mary as truly inspired by God. He encouraged her, supported her cause before the the superiors of the Visitation, and he himself became an apostle of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Margaret Mary, lost in prayer, forgets to check that the donkey and the foal do not graze in the garden of the convent.

But the animals do not cause any damage.
In one of His appearances He told her: “Do not fear anything. I shall reign in spite of my enemies and anyone who tries to oppose himself”. “This comforted me greatly”, adds the saint in her autobiography, “because I wanted nothing more than to see Him reign. I entrusted to Him then the task of defending His cause, while I suffered in silence.”

Gradually, first of all her convent, then some families, then very many people already during the life of Saint Margaret Mary adhered to the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which after her death, enjoyed an extraordinary diffusion, so that, less than one hundred years after the death of Margaret Mary, Clement XIII was asked to establish a feastday of the Sacred Heart for the whole Church and learned with amazement that there were already 1090 confraternities in the world devoted to it, and was persuaded to grant this feastday on 6 February 1765.

Pope Leo XIII was then to fully take up the message of Saint Margaret Mary, consecrating the entire world to the Sacred Heart on 11 June 1899. Twenty years later, on the hill of Montmartre in Paris, where Saint Denis was martyred with his companions, the great Basilica of the Sacred Heart which dominates the capital of France was consecrated.

Parallel to these public acts, devotion to the Sacred Heart became increasingly popular throughout the Catholic world.

As for Margaret Mary, in her last years she was constantly asked for spiritual advice and an increasing number of people wanted to see and touch the one who had seen and touched, like Thomas, the Heart of Jesus. But this only increased her desire to live apart, the aspiration she had summed up in one of her phrases: “Everything from God and nothing from me; all of God and nothing of me; all for God and nothing for me”. This sentence was the simple response to the loving words that Jesus had addressed directly to her a short time before: “I am your life and you will not live anymore other than in me and for me”.

Margaret Mary, mistress of novices, receives a gift of a drawing of the Sacred Heart from them.
Promises of the Sacred Heart

Many promises made by Jesus to the devotees of his Sacred Heart are to be found in the writings of St Margaret Mary. The ones listed here, taken from the Saint’s letters, remind us in a concise and easy way of the graces related to this devotion.

- I will give them the graces necessary for their condition in life.
- I will grant and maintain peace in their families, I will comfort them in their afflictions.
- I will be their refuge during life and especially in death.
- I will pour abundant blessings on all their labors and enterprises.
- Sinners shall find in My Heart the source and endless ocean of mercy.
- Tepid souls shall become fervent.
- Fervent souls will rise quickly to great perfection.
- My blessing will descend on places where the image of my Sacred Heart is exposed and venerated.
- For priests and those who work for the salvation of souls, I will grant the grace of touching the most hardened hearts.
- Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written forever in My Heart.
- To all those who receive Communion on the first Fridays of nine consecutive months, I will give the grace of final perseverance and eternal salvation.

On 6 February 1765 Pope Clement XIII institutes the Feast of the Sacred Heart and Paray-le-Monial becomes a place of pilgrimage
“... and he went away, to go from victory to victory”  

(Revelation 6, 2)

by Lorenzo Cappelletti

To quote oneself is always embarrassing. To write an introduction to oneself even more so. But, putting aside the embarrassment, because it doesn’t have to do with a personal motive, let’s come straight to the point: why are we reposing this article, originally occasioned by the publication, close in time to some tragic moments of conflict, of a book on the crypt of Anagni Cathedral? Because, apart from that contingency, it can also help us interpret the present moment precisely because it faithfully follows of one of the finest pictorial depictions of the verses of the Revelation to John on the opening of the seals (excluding the seventh, significantly). Which is after all the actual reason why, especially during the first Christian millennium, use was made of the Revelation to John as a key to reading the time between the Resurrection of Our Lord and His return. Therefore of the time that is also ours.

So, what does the Johannine text accompanied by that fine and poetic pictorial material tell us today?

Many things, but first of all that the events of history, mysteriously and yet in actual fact, have no other leading thread than the reaction to the inexorable victory of Jesus Christ (who won and still wins) over the fratricidal war of men, over hell and over death. In addition to proceeding legitimately in search of the numerous causes and effects of historical facts, one must also take into account that a struggle is always reflected in them that has to do with the rebellion and acceptance of Christ’s victory. A struggle so profound and universal that it cannot be stated or understood completely in prose, but in the form of the overcharged images of the Revelation to John.
Paradoxically, the reason for the reaction to that inexorable victory of Christ is that it reveals Him, it does not reveal a mystery of death, but one of salvation, it does not cause fear, but puts an end to fear, it is inexorable but it is merciful, it is definitive but it is patient. That’s why “Jesus invites us not to allow ourselves to be afraid”, wrote Cardinal Martini on Sunday 27 March on the front page of Corriere della Sera.

It is interesting, from this point of view that, according to the letter of the text of the Revelation to John, at the opening of the sixth seal that signifies the imminence of the end (cf. Rev 6, 12-17), the end does not occur but instead the order is given to the four angels at the four corners of the world to hold back the winds of destruction so that they do not devastate the land or the sea or vegetation until God’s seal has been set on the foreheads of His servants (cf. Rev 7, 1-3). May the Lord, Who is patient and merciful, grant us peace. Good reading.
Then, in my vision, I saw the Lamb break one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures shout in a voice like thunder, ‘Come!’ Immediately I saw a white horse appear, and its rider was holding a bow; he was given a victor’s crown and he went away, to go from victory to victory.

When he broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature shout, ‘Come!’ And out came another horse, bright red, and its rider was given this duty: to take away peace from the earth and set people killing each other. He was given a huge sword.

When he broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature shout, ‘Come!’ Immediately I saw a black horse appear, and its rider was holding a pair of scales; and I seemed to hear a voice shout from among the four living creatures and say, ‘A day’s wages for a quart of corn, and a day’s wages for three quarts of barley, but do not tamper with the oil or the wine.’

When he broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature shout, ‘Come!’ Immediately I saw another horse appear, deathly pale, and its rider was called Death, and Hades followed at its heels. They were given authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague and through wild beasts.

When he broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of all the people who had been killed on account of the Word of God, for witnessing to it. They shouted in a loud voice,

‘Holy, true Master, how much longer will you wait before you pass sentence and take vengeance for our death on the inhabitants of the earth?’

Each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little longer, until the roll was completed of their fellow-servants and brothers who were still to be killed as they had been.

In my vision, when he broke the sixth seal, there was a violent earthquake and the sun went as black as coarse sackcloth; the moon turned red as blood all over, and the stars of the sky fell onto the earth like figs dropping from a fig tree when a high wind shakes it; the sky disappeared like a scroll rolling up and all the mountains and islands were shaken from their places. Then all the kings of the earth, the governors and the commanders, the rich people and the men of influence, the whole population, slaves and citizens, hid in caverns and among the rocks of the mountains. They said to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us away from the One who sits on the throne and from the retribution of the Lamb. For the Great Day of his retribution has come, and who can face it?’

Next I saw four angels, standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the world to keep them from blowing over the land or the sea or any tree. Then I saw another angel rising where the sun rises, carrying the seal of the living God; he called in a powerful voice to the four angels whose duty was to devastate land and sea, ‘Wait before you do any damage on land or at sea or to the trees, until we have put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.’
A pocalyptic or conformist? Although there exists this alternative, which is not an alternative at all, between Utopia and acquiescence, The Revelation to John has always claimed to throw a truer light on the affairs of history, to offer an incommensurable and yet supremely realistic perspective, neither apocalyptic nor conformist. And today, as a war bigger than we are rages, we feel the need of this light more than ever.

The apocalyptic cycle featured in the crypt frescoes of the Cathedral of Anagni south of Rome represents both Christ’s victory which has come to pass and his ongoing war against war itself, hell and death.

by Lorenzo Cappelletti

The word, “apocalypse”, as anyone with even just a smattering of knowledge of Holy Scripture knows, means revelation, a demonstration, an unveiling. “A revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him so that he could tell his servants..."
what is now to take place very
soon”, the first verse of the Prologue
tells us and it is repeated almost
word for word at the end (The Reve-
lution to J ohn 1,1 and 22,6). After
his victory Jesus Christ, “the faithful
witness, the First-born of the dead,
the highest of earthly kings” (The
Revelation to J ohn 1,5), shows the
apostle J ohn, who is “in ecstasy”,
removed from history, all that is truly
coming to pass in it. As the great ex-
egete Heinrich Schlier writes in the
opening lines of his famed essay on
The Revelation to J ohn published
in the collection of articles, Le
temps de l’Église (Casterman,
1961): “The Revelation to J ohn is
the only New Testament book with
history as its theme. It was therefore
by meditating upon this book that
Christian reflection on history devel-
oped”. It was reflection expressed
through the centuries not only in
words but also in images and colors.

Anagni, in the crypt of the
cathedral of this fateful town south
of Rome, is home to a series of fres-
coes begun when Joachim da Flo-
re’s († March 30, 1202) mental
elaborations on history were start-
ing to become known. By contrast,
Anagni’s magnificent works illus-
trate a concept of history born of
the traditional meditation on The
Revelation to J ohn still in vogue
then and of which Augustine’s De
civitate Dei is paradigmatic. Until
the breach formed by Joachim with
his tripartition of history in succes-
sive ages of the Father, the Son and
the Spirit, it was not even conceiv-
able that the historical fact of Christ
could ever be surpassed in time by
any later age of the Spirit, the
bringer of a greater grace. The
event of Jesus Christ was conceived
as the beginning of the end of the
world. According to thinking of the Augustinian and Thomistic stamp, “Christ is not the hinge of history by which a changed and redeemed world has its beginning and by which an unredeemed history which had resisted until that moment is abandoned; Christ is, rather, the beginning of the end of history. He is ‘redemption’ to the degree that, with Him, the ‘end’ begins to shine forth in history. Redemption consists (from a historical perspective) in this phase now begun while history, so to speak, still proceeds ‘per nefas’ for a certain period, leading the ancient age of this world to its end” (Joseph Ratzinger, St Bonaventure. La teologia della storia, page 211).

Because its intent was to interpret the time of the Church as the ultimate time sub gratia and not to depict what lies beyond that, Anagni’s apocalyptic cycle consists purely in scenes drawn from the first 12 chapters of The Revelation to John and from its three successive septenaries (the seals, the trumpets and the bowls). The series chooses to represent only the seals and stops just as the seventh seal is about to be opened. It chooses, that is, to stop at the proclamation of judgment and is unconcerned about exploring the more vivid aspects of that judgment’s promulgation and execution. (The “political and spiritual instruments full of power and degeneration” [Schlier] that today seem to fit the letter some of the prophetic visions in Chapters 13-18 of The Revelation to John had probably still to be devised).

Thus, in this pictorial version full of grace, is represented in a supremely composed manner the inexorability of the victory brought by Jesus Christ as well as the elements of a fight which, certainly, is still being fought but which can no longer strike fear. For, in Anagni, the war and death (The Revelation to John 6, 4-8) that force eyes wide open in fear, the stars that change color (The Revelation to John 6,12) are but two little circles in the quiet breath of an angel. The dragon with the ten horns (The Revelation to John 12, 3) is just a little dragon under the feet of a serene archangel, while all the honor, strength and beauty are reserved for Him who sits on the throne, for the Lamb, for those who share his glory and who are wearing the regal crown of victors, for the 24 elders, for the virgins and the martyrs aligned in almost musical arrangement.

Christ, is the manifestation of a force triumphant over the world

At the center of this entire pictorial series, in the heart of the apse bowl and in the midst of the four living creatures and the 24 elders, we find the victor, the Lamb in the act of opening the seven seals that had kept the book closed, book that no one could open until his victory had come to pass. This made John weep and it makes us weep, too, again and again in the presence of the humanly inexplicable mystery of history. But “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed and so he will open the scroll” (The Revelation to John 5,5), we read, the pages of the book now wide open. Weep no more!

To the right and left of the central apse, on an atypical triumphal arch and on the vaulted ceiling next to it, are the scenes corresponding to the opening of each seal. They start on the right with the representation of the four horsemen who emerge when the first four seals are opened. But they cannot be said to be the four horsemen “of the apocalypse” in that they do not all symbolize the same sovereign forces of destruction, as if the ultimate unveiling coincided with an ultimate destruction, as if the end goal were the...
end itself. Not so. Unlike the theories that continue to be expounded by a corps of critics too scared to look upon reality for fear of having to forego their preconceptions and so lose their very identities, here, according to the traditional interpretation of Chapters 6, 1-2 and 19, 11-16 of The Revelation to John read in coordination with each other, the struggle begun by the first horseman is against the other three. The first of the four horsemen (he is riding a white horse, wearing a crown and holding a bow according to the letter of The Revelation to John 6,2) is also covered with a cloak, soaked in his own blood, and he is crowned with many coronets of glory divine, says Revelation 19,13: he is the Word of God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords who, as the Vulgate tells us (The Revelation to John 6,2), exivit vincens ut vinceret, emerged victorious to win what remains to be won. Christ has won. It is Christ who wins still. “From where did he emerge if not from the open seal?”, wrote Ambrosius Autpertus, abbot of the great Carolingian Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno, whose crypt houses

Above, in the arch, the angel rising from the East cries out not to begin the devastation until the seal of the living God has been set on the foreheads of his servants. Left, in the vault over the arch, the angels set at the four corners of the earth hold back the winds of destruction.
another beautiful cycle of early-Medieval frescoes inspired by Autpertus’ comments on The Revelation to John. The white horse does indeed seem to emerge from Anagni’s principal apse bowl, where the Lamb is opening the seals. The horseman is about to loose an arrow in the direction of the second horseman who, fleeing, looks back in terror.

The first horseman’s duty is to trigger an inexorable victory. The horse is stepping. There is no agitation in the stretching of the bow, just firmness of hand, without visible aggressiveness. All the second horseman can do is flee at the gallop. It is not the war that strikes terror; the war itself appears to be terrorized and it has to run, brandishing in its own defence its huge sword in both hands, swinging it around and around above its head. But the huge sword, however daunting, does not defend; it had been given to him to offend, to “take away peace from the earth and set people killing each other” (The Revelation to John 6,4). How to defend oneself now from an arrow?

In the lower panel of this same scene, death too has the same terrorized look as war. He gallops off on a deathly pale horse followed by the devil, nude and winged, who rides the crest of the dark hell holding a great pair of scales that weighs without pity. Just as war is hunted down and tries to flee the King triumphant, so Death is tracked and seeks to flee hell, a second death. In a verse transcribed under the scene, the designer of these frescoes diligently explains that there are two pairs of horsemen: Has per picturas bis binas disce figurams (see the figures represented in these paintings two by two). But this two-by-two parallel perspective is only partial because hell and death are, in their turn, hunted down by the first horseman and their fate is to end up in the burning lake (The Revelation to John 20,14).

The force triumphant over the world represented here, a force which, winning again and again, primarily protects peace, is the exact opposite, then, to the usual interpretation of a panorama of destruction and terror that overwhelms all things. (This concept of the apocalypse is said to have been elaborated at the height of the Middle Ages, but probably coincided with the later millenaristic and gnostic-like interpretation devised by Joachim that was to become prevalent).

The theme continues and becomes clearer in the vaulted ceiling over the scene of the four horsemen. Here, four angels set at the four corners of the scene dotted about with flowers, are bringing to the ground four horned and winged figures. This is not the allegorical struggle between good and evil, as the critics have so often suggested in their belief in the ghosts of their own manichaeen preconceptions. Rather, according to The Revelation to John 7,1, it signifies protection from the winds of devastation, the preservation of the conditions that allow life on this earth. Like peace, nature too is preserved from harm by the King triumphant and full of mercy: Tu, victor Rex, miserere. How far the letter of The Revelation to John is from the hallucinatory machinations some people claim for it, people with ghosts in their heads and hatred in their hearts: “Next I saw four angels, standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the world to keep them from blowing over the land or the sea or any tree. Then I saw another angel rising where the sun rises, carrying the seal of the living God; he called in a powerful voice to the four angels whose duty was to devastate land and sea, ‘Wait before you do any damage on land or at sea or to the trees, until we Vault VIII representing the promise (which Abraham receives after Melchizedek’s blessing featured in the adjacent vault) of a descendancy as numerous as the stars in the heavens...
have put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God’ (The Revelation to John 7,1-2)”. Another angel, who appears to be scaling the lower arch, is pointing to a scroll containing these words. He is holding a cross in the form of a lance from which hang the alpha and the omega.

Is this cross merely the iconographical attribute of the angel? Just a detail? No, that slender cross (which “is the sign of the Trinity that we all receive in baptism”, wrote Saint Bruno, bishop of Segni, in his comments on this verse of Revelation), is the ultimate reason for all that is represented. The aim of the war that the King triumphant is waging against war itself, and the aim, too, of the peremptory order by the angel with the seal (which is just another way of intending “the Risen Christ”, as Beda, Ambrosius Aurelianus and so many others tell us), to suspend all destruction, is to allow, through baptism, a sublime descendancy as numerous as the stars according to the promise, to enjoy celestial, incomensurable happiness: promissa posteritas caelesti felicitate sublimis writes Augustine (De civitate Dei 16,23).

Several times (at least three) the baptismal seal is represented in the Anagni crypt in the form of the monogram of Christ’s name and yet no critic has ever considered this worthy of note. It is almost as if the promise made to Abraham that he would father many peoples, a descendancy as great as the stars in heaven, will be fulfilled in something other than baptism (but, after all, even the promise has never been acknowledged by critics of Anagni’s Vault VIII, thus blocking Christianity’s entire “mechanism”, as Péguy would put it); as Jesus whispered to Nicodemus that night in Jerusalem and as Peter said in a loud voice after the death and resurrection of the Lord: “You must repent, and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to himself” (Acts 2,38ff).
A short time

In the symmetrical lay-out of this series of scenes, the opening of the fifth and sixth seals is represented on the other part of the triumphal arch framing the principal apse.

More time is given, not just so that all those whom the Lord calls may be marked with the baptismal seal, but also so that all those who must be killed, are killed propter Verbum Dei et propter testimonium quod habebant. In fact, the souls of those who were sacrificed, who received the baptism of blood in martyrdom, that is, and who are calling for justice to be done at last, are told “to be patient a little longer [tempus modicum], until the roll be completed of their fellow-servants and brothers who were still to be killed as they had been” (The Revelation to John 6,11). To help them be patient, the One who sits on the throne dresses them in stoles of glory washed white in the blood of the Lamb. Having been given these, they will be able to wait in peace, in the knowledge that others will come to complete the number of martyrs and so hasten the definitive redemption.

The time of waiting is nevertheless brief, the time of history is truly a tempus modicum: “The Lord is not delaying the fulfilment of his promise ... This brief interval of time seems long to us because it continues yet; but as soon as it is over, we will realize how short it was” (Saint Augustine, Commentary on the Gospel of John 101,6). Time has become short after the victory of Christ. And, on the opening of the sixth seal, the sun and the moon on the façade of the left arch change color and an angel prepares to breathe a wind that will make the stars fall from the sky like a storm shaking figs from the tree; another angel bears the golden incense-burner through which, even as the scent of the prayers of the saints rises, will soon fall on the earth the wrathful fire of the One sitting on the throne and of the Lamb.

If the brevity of the time tries the patience of those who await justice, in the dragon it arouses a “wrathful lust for power born of the anguish of the time that is escaping his hold”, wrote Schlier in the essay we mentioned. Alongside the dragon in the small right apse, and like that marvelous scene painted on the counter-facade of the Civate church on Mount Pedale not far from Lecco, North Italy, the Anagni frescoes also once featured a work, now lost, depicting the Ascension of the Lord, or, as Revelation puts it, the taking of the child “straight up to God and to his throne” (cf The Revelation to John 12, ...
5). It is, in fact, “with the Ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven”, Schlier continues, “that the dragon, the ideal figure of all things satanic, of the absolute power of egoism, is hurled down to earth”.

Having now precipitated to earth by virtue of the Ascension of the Lord, the dragon “sprang in pursuit of the woman” (The Revelation to John 12,13), who escapes him, however, on the wings of an eagle (and we find her again with the son and near John in the small left apse). And so the dragon “went away to make war on the rest of her children, who obey God’s commandments and have in themselves the witness of Jesus” (The Revelation to John 12,17). The dragon, at Anagni, ends up with the 18 martyr saints, or those who have the witness of Jesus in themselves, 18 being the numerical value, as all the Fathers and Medieval writers tell us, of the initials IE of the name, Jesus. (The number of the beast – 666 – is a crudely false distortion of this). In Civate, too, there are eighteen martyr saints in the frescoes inside the little dome of the ciborium: “That is why they are standing in front of the throne of God and serving him day and night in his sanctuary; and the One who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them” (The Revelation to John 7,15).

Above, in the left apse, Maria Virgo virginum is surrounded by two holy virgins and by the two apocalyptic witnesses, the virgins John the Baptist and John the Evangelist featured on the triumphal arch. Below, the holy virgin pilgrims, Aurelia and Noemisia, depicted in the lower part of the left apse area.
But the martyrs, who die “to render the future revealed by Christ accessible even to their enemies”, are not alone in dying, which is to say in tangibly exposing “the anachronism of a world which still now presumes to assert itself”, as Schlier writes. The virgins die, too, obeying. The whole area of the small left apse is dedicated to them, revolving around Mary, Virgin of virgins. Te nimis implorant virgo iubilant et adorant. Dum tibi subduntur natum moriendo secuntur. These verses echoing the Ambrosian hymn, “Iesu corona virginum”, run along the small left apse in the panel separating the Madonna and Child (surrounded on top by two holy virgins and by the two Johns) from the story of the chastity and martyrdom of Secondina below. “How they implore you, how they praise you and venerate you, O Virgin. While to you they submit, dying, they follow your Son”. And this is all any poor sinner wants to do and experience, sinner neither virgin nor martyr who, a participant in the triumphant love of Christ, has for centuries contemplated the ceilings of the Anagni crypt in repentance and devotion. “When I think that a man, a young man, an individual, cannot marry a woman except through the love of Christ – it seems I’ve already said this before: except through the love of Christ – when we say this we feel all the immensity (immensity means not commensurable, not comparable in size), the incommensurability of a point of view, which is the point of view, but also the point of rebirth, of the birth of re-birth” (Ligu Giussani).
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