Massimo Coppo

From the land of Assisi and of Francis the Spirit of prophecy





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"To Marcello Ezekiel Ciai Prophet of Assisi"



"The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy" (Apoc. 19, 10)

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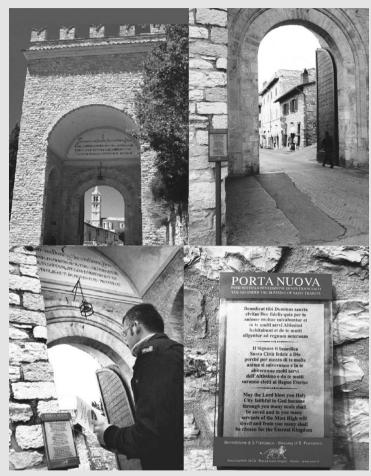
Aerial view of Assisi

OBJECTIVE

"Go, Francis, and repair my house which, as you see, is lying in ruins": God truly spoke in Assisi, eight centuries ago, to a young man whose mother had him baptised John but whose father, Pietro di Bernardone, it is said, later wanted him to be called Francis.

"More tragic than war is the silence of God" – wrote John Paul II – "The Creator in silence seems closed in Heaven, not revealing Himself any more...One feels alone, abandoned, deprived of hope..." Well, the objective of this book is to demonstrate that, precisely in this glorious land of Assisi, visited every year by millions of people from all over the world, God has once more broken His silence and is again truly speaking to the Church and to the world. A singular "privilege" for Assisi!

"Lord, may the prophets never miss in your people!": so Pope Francis prayed at the end of a sermon in which he said that a Church without prophets lacks the very life of God. But God has raised a true prophet, since many years, just in Assisi, in the very land of St. Francis from whom the Pope, first case in the history of the church, wanted to take the name. This book tells the unique conversion of this prophet, Marcello Ezekiel Ciai and his troubled and uplifting spiritual experience, where you can pick up quite many striking similarities with St. Francis. His suffered charisma has concerned not only the beloved Assisi, of which he prophesied the famous earthquake of 1997, but the whole Church and the Vatican, even in the person of John Paul II, and in a very special way, also of Pope Francis ... as if Marcello Ezekiel was called to prepare the way for this new Pontiff, and to support him in his courageous and irreversible work of reforming the Church. But the book talks also of the community "Bethlehem Families" gathered around Marcello in 1980 in the Benedictine spirit of laboriousness, sharing of goods, service to the poor and to the Church. A unique "prophetic" story in the mystical Umbria, that after enlarged in an active Christian voluntary association, the IACA: where the miracles of faith and the mysteries of prophecy intertwined with exciting episodes and initiatives of social commitment and human solidarity.



Assisi, Porta Nuova, with the plate offered from the association IACA to the city of Assisi. One can read there, in italian and in english, the propghetic blessing, that Saint Francis pronounced on his city before dying, inscribed in latin in the arch of the gate:

"May the Lord bless you Holy City faithful to God because through you many souls shall be saved and in you many servants of the Most High will dwell and from you many shall be chosen for the Eternal Kingdom"

On the background the campanile the Basilica of Saint Clare.

Fragments of a prophetic story



While he was hunting on the shores of Lake Trasimeno near the old airfield of Castiglione del Lago..

THE SEED

"While he was hunting in the marsh of Lake Trasimeno near the old airport of Castiglione del Lago, a man of the land of Assisi, Marcello Ciai, in the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month of the year thousendninehundredseventyseven, had a vision that left a deep sign in his life, converting it to God".

The story is fully reported in the first chapter - "Prologue" - of the book "The Sachet with 10 sheaves", a collection of prophecies, visions and mystical experiences of this prophet of Assisi. The book was edited in few copies by the Association IACA in 1995, and has been recently republished. The famous writer and essayist Guido Ceronetti, after meeting Marcello whom he had asked to speak personally, wrote about him and his community in a long article on "La Stampa" of Turin dated March 6, 1998. He referred in the article about the amazing vision had by Marcello at the Trasimeno Lake, together with another prophetic vision that the same had received in 1981, in which Marcello foresaw the attempt to John Paul II a few days before it happened. The account which Marcello made about this most particular experience lived at the Trasimeno Lake arouses a sense of mysterious, sacred fear:

"My gaze was attracted upward unexpectedly and irresistibly. I looked up toward the east and there... a long, fantastic, perfect formation of figures like big magnifying glasses came out of the vault. They had the grey colour of smoke and proceeded two by two, going straight ahead. Suddenly four of these opalescent forms detached from the others and lowered themselves down slowly until they touched the reeds in front of me. I had the clear perception that the forms were animated. Still before I succeeded in moving towards them, I saw them launching upward like a flash, to rejoin the others that were disappearing through the cloudy vault."

France – the first country to do so – decided to make public a dossier of UFO sightings from which it results that one of the first cases reported is precisely that of a large flying object in the form of a lens, which was seen by the passengers in a commercial airliner.

Actually, however, there is something much more profound in the Trasimeno episode of what can be read about 'normal' sightings of "unidentified flying objects", as well as the outcome of this uncommon event was not an immediate sensationalism. Marcello spoke about it only years later because, as one reads in the "Prologue" of the above quoted publication, "following this vision he was ill for three days; and remained disturbed by it for a long time. But from then on he began to look up on high, to open himself to celestial and invisible reality, to search for that which transcends the mind and human knowledge, to think about the supernatural, about God".

Francis of Assisi chose Trasimeno as one of the places to which he would withdraw on retreat. Perhaps, at the end of one of those periods of forty days he spent there fasting, praying and suffering for others, he left there a special prayer and blessing: a seed which, centuries later, would germinate there on the shores of the lake to the benefit of one of his fellow-countrymen, and with him of many others. Who knows...

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ADVICE FROM A FRIEND

What Marcello had been looking for, until that moment, had been money, success, women... like many others. Happiness, in other words. As many imagine it to be. And in matters concerning worldly affairs he had achieved a certain amount of success, in a variety of commercial and industrial activities. With the desire to improve his life, he also became interested in understanding human potential, the power of the mind, the language of dreams...But now a sense of the divine, the transcendent moved him to say before going to sleep: "If you are there, you are God, you are Father, You are Love, and I am your son: is it possible that you don't find a way to communicate with me?" After some time in which Marcello with perseverance turned to the sky this simple, sincere prayer, the answer came from the Father, and it was: Jesus Himself, the Word of God, the Love of God, sent to Marcello through a stupefying celestial encounter, reported in the following chapter. In the meantime Marcello asked for spiritual help from those who he believed were living a true faith experience. He had, among his friends, a 'believer' who had already given up his professional career and the comfortable background from which he came. Irresistibly called to live alongside the young, and not so young, needy not only and not so much of a 'centre of help' but of someone who would love them and suffer with them to the bitter end. This 'good friend' knew how to give Marcello some 'enlightening' advice: "Every night, before you lie down, turn towards the east, and read this psalm..." Marcello, like a diligent apprentice, faithfully followed this suggestion to the letter and, every night, before going to bed, read aloud: "You who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, and abides in the shade of the Almighty, say to the Lord: My refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I trust... " A separate treatise could be written on the significance of this Messianic psalm (no. 90[91] of the Psalter): it must have been very dear to Our Lord, because Satan quoted it to Him in the desert – in a misleading way, obviously – to induce Him to make a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, not on the back of an donkey, but flying down from the pinnacle of the temple...

THE ANSWER OF THE FATHER GOD

I met Marcello two years after his conversion. I was full of doctrinal certainty and of moral inconsistency – at that time I was running a University Bible Centre in Perugia – but that man spoke to me about the Lord Jesus as though he really knew Him...and that is exactly how it was, because he had truly 'seen' Him. I was very sceptical and cautious about mystical phenomena: I had come across so many false examples. But what I began to learn of Marcello's spiritual experiences, and what of which I have been then a witness for many years, has left me in no doubt as to the reality of that which this man has received from God.

I remember one of the first occasions when I went to see him, in the house where he lived on the slopes of Mount Subasio, it was in 1980. He lived there modestly by then, but he had other 'riches' to display. Opening a volume of the Italian Encyclopaedic dictionary at a comparative table of ancient alphabets, he pointed out three letters of the Southern Semitic alphabet: he had 'seen' them, and jotted them down on a note pad, when he awoke, in a night vision which had definitely changed his life, two years previously. Of that event, with so many of his other spiritual experiences, fully shared and published much later on, we record here only a part: just enough to give a taste of "how good is the Lord", and how unfathomable and fascinating is his way of dealing with us humans, just so that he may see a little good will in us.

"While I was sleeping, I was raptured in Paradise. In the place where I arrived, seated around a long table, there were some men who were praying, under the guidance of He whom they called "Master": a majestic figure who stood out amongst them, with a beard, long hair, and an inscrutable face.

For me, there wasn't a place around the table, however, I saw an inviting stone on the ground and there I sat down, right in front of He, who was the Lord Jesus... The Master handed to me with His right hand, a kind of writing-pad and said to me: "Now you read." understood that I had to read, really me, I took the writing-pad shyly, fearing that I couldn't know how to satisfy the Master. It was a hard and difficult moment for me. I began to read the first page, but my reading wasn't fluent because I didn't understand well. The Master insisted however, until I read better, and so I recommenced from the beginning and read correctly. All of a sudden I found in my hand, something like a small blue-shining board on which there weren't written words, but square signs in relief, unknown to me, like engraved on the surface itself. These signs I could see with my own eyes and feel with my finger tips, but I couldn't decipher and nonetheless read them. Therefore I stopped not knowing how to go ahead; I felt regret for not knowing how to accomplish what the Master had asked to me. But some of the men that I had seen before turned to me and said: "We will help you, do not worry". It was only after seven months that I saw those characters again, with amazement, in a table of ancient alphabets, in an encyclopaedia that had recently been delivered to me at home. Among the Southern Semitic characters, I recognised the letters BETH, HE and HETH. I also discovered that they indicate the corresponding stanzas of Psalm 118(119). A psalm unique of its kind, in which, with a constant tension between love and fear, the servant of the Lord asks and obtains that God may reveal his teachings to him directly, in the deepness of his heart. Thus it was that this psalm became my constant and fervid prayer."



One consideration must be added to the story of this wonderful celestial encounter. In the vision that changed his life, Marcello did not see a Jesus with a smiling and endearing expression, but " a majestic figure... with a beard, long hair, and an inscrutable face.." Time after, he saw again and recognized that face in an itinerant exhibition on the Holy Shroud, staged by Monsignor Ceccobelli - current bishop of Gubbio - on the outskirts of Perugia. Today we live in the culture of images, between being and seeming to be. With the advent of smartphones, many people have the mania for taking photos and being photographed, maybe to show one's face - or one's video - on facebook or youtube, always smiling, of course. But the photograph that the Lord Jesus has left of himself imprinted in the Shroud of Turin, is of a different kind: it is the image of true love, with a capital "L", which suffers and offers himself for others, always. In the year 2000 we went several times to Turin in whose "Duomo" is preserved that shroud who wrapped Jesus' body in the tomb. And we brought this testimony to the then Archibishop of Turin Cardinal Saldarini: "Our community was founded by a man who has seen Jesus and has seen Him with exactly the same appearance as the face of the Shroud". The Cardinal was busy but had time to exclaim "How fortunate that man!"



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GENESIS OF A COMMUNITY

When you hear Marcello speak of his conversion, he had felt himself searched for by God rather than having searched for God. Now, it is a blessed and sacrosanct truth, the fact that God is searching for all of us, as it is expressed in many unequivocal passages of the Sacred Scripture (for example the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy that "God...desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth", 1 Timothy 2. 3-4); a truth sanctioned by the very words of Jesus: "the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19.10). But it is also true that God, in his inscrutable benevolence, bursts into the life of some in quite spectacular fashion. The only thing is that these 'privileged' people are really called to witness and to suffer for the good of many. The fact is that the life of Marcello was totally oriented towards trying to please that Jesus by whom he had felt himself sought out and of whom he had remained fascinated. He had fallen in love with Christ and, therefore, wanted to follow his Word: there is perhaps no better way to exemplify what it really means 'to be Christian'. That Love drove him to do penance for the sins that he now saw in his past life, for the wrong he recognized that he had done to others; and to seek out brethren to love, with whom share the burdens and be "of one heart and one soul only": precisely as he was reading that the believers in the first Christian communities did, as reported in the Acts of the Apostles. In response to his prayers, in 1981 a strange little community began to gather around Marcello and his family, in his house at Viole of Assisi: a community composed of people from a variety of countries and cultures, having in common the desire to put into practice the love toward God and the neighbour, united in the effectual sharing of material goods, talents, capabilities, joys and sorrows...

AT VIOLE

Viole - now "San Vitale" - is a little village a few kilometres from Assisi, in the direction of Foligno. The house where we lived for the first years was an old, two-story farmhouse that had been



restored. It was situated above the village and surrounded by an olive grove on that stony 'red earth' which is so good for olives, but not so good for cultivating. Nevertheless, we managed to make a vegetable garden and the products we obtained surprised everyone. There was a hen-house as well, and also a young goose which wandered around freely but which Marcello had managed to tame: we had to track down where she laid her eggs, whole baskets full. Marcello lived there for some time before the community came into existence and already something out of the ordinary had taken place: such as when the woman who helped around the house reported that on the previous evening she had seen, from her own house further up the hill, a fire burning on the roof. And on that very evening Marcello was in the house at prayer with some believing friends.

Members of the community began to be seen in the village, dressed in coloured tunics, greeting people with the salutation "love and peace"; when they were not going about dressed in sackcloth, with bare feet, even beating their breasts... These are things to which we shall return. But, in the meantime, their presence frightened the local people and indicated the presence in the community of something profound, serious and a little mysterious. A little bit above the house, a narrow country road winds along the slopes of Subasio and then climbs to a small chapel dedicated to St. Anthony, Abbot, Marcello used to withdraw to that spot for prayer and penance, sleeping in a stone hovel built above an old abandoned quarry; and sometimes the whole community went up there, leaving Viole at dawn to arrive in time for the Mass said there by a singular German Conventual Franciscan priest: Father Beltram. Marcello had met him there during one of his retreats, as answer to his fervent prayer, how can be read at length in the already quoted book "The Sachet with 10 Sheeves".

LOVE AND PEACE

"At that time" wrote Marcello in the note that was to serve as the basis for a Rule to present to the Bishop "I proposed that we should greet each other by saying 'Love and Peace' (Amore e Pace), convinced that true peace can come only from the love of God. This salutation is not a convention, nor just something for the sake of being original, but must be felt from the depths of the heart..." Well yes, it was a difficult salutation for us who offered it, and if it did not come "from the depths of the heart" it grated on people's ears, and on ours too.

Nevertheless, it conveyed a real message for everyone, in that land of Assisi where so many manifestations in favour of peace have multiplied over the years. Peace has a name and a face: that of Jesus Christ. Because it is only through Him that we can obtain the forgiveness and the love of God, so that we can then forgive and love those around us, friends and enemies. It is only in this way that we can live in peace, reconciled with God, with anyone who may have done us wrong, with the very vicissitudes of our lives.

Father Pietro Giorgi, an elderly Franciscan from the Monastery of San Damiano, asked us if he could use our salutation in his correspondence. We willingly consented: we were aware of his paternal affection for our community, he considered himself 'one of us' and came to see us once, and we too went several times to the Monastery where, amongst other things, he was responsible for the conference room. He had grasped, beyond any 'semantic abuse' that may be made of such an expression, the more profound meaning of, and the intimate connection between, these two words, said and written in that order: 'Love and Peace'.

WE DRESSED IN COLOURED RAGS

In a special issue of April-May 2006, dedicated to 2000 years of Christianity, the monthly magazine "Focus", referring to groups and movements which arose in the XXth Century, among others, commented: "In the Eighties the 'Centoniani' got this name because they dressed in rags ('centoni')". It was us who wore the 'centoni', tunics and half-tunics which we produced in the community by stitching together pieces of variously coloured material. Naturally, they looked odd to most people: to the Bishop as well, out of respect for whom, in fact, at a certain point we had to put them aside. But they actually sent out a profound message, above all for we ourselves who wore them: because we had obtained the variously coloured patches by tearing into pieces the most elegant clothes that we had, as a sign of a clean break with the vanity and affluence of the world. The intention of the variety of colours, on the other hand, was to exalt the wonderful creativity of God, and the beauty of nature created by Him. Recently I heard that St. Francis asked people to give him pieces of coloured material which he used to patch his habit. Well, what about that! We keep a photograph of the community, barefoot and in those multicoloured clothes, livening up a Liturgy at San Rufino, the Cathedral of Assisi. Marcello – who, before his conversion, frequented one of the best tailors in Perugia - was wearing a 'centone' made from pieces cut from old sheets. A fine way to humiliate himself in front of everyone, and also to remind himself not to be a 'whitened sepulchre' (as the Lord had said to him).

IRREGULARS

Most of the members of the community were 'irregular'. Beginning with Marcello: with the ongoing separation from his first wife, although he had loved her very much and with whom he had two boys. And then united with a beautiful Dutch lady, of Indonesian origin: Sylvia Constance, "the delight of his eyes". His matrimonial situation would later be regularized with the annulment of his first marriage: a Monsignor offered his services, at no cost, to put the case before the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Perugia. Marcello could then remarry in Assisi, in the Cathedral of San Rufino whit Sylvia Constance from whom he had eight children, four boys and four girls.

But before that Marcello was an 'irregular' and for his case, before the annulment, many religious to whom he had turned said that "there was nothing that could be done." Another 'irregular', Angela Grösser, was Austrian. At that time Austria was not a member of the European Union and her father – a 'big shot' in Vienna, head of the Civil Engineers with the title of 'Senator' - managed to have her extradited from Italy when her residence permit expired. With the justification – absolutely specious – that she had neither valid motive nor means of support to remain in Italy. She was actually committed to a Viennese psychiatric hospital, from which she made a daring escape. By now Angela felt called to live in the little community at Viole of Assisi. A ski instructress, as well as a teacher of languages, she crossed the Alps with ease, avoiding the border controls, to return to Assisi. There the community too - especially Marcello - had been put under fire with a campaign of defamation unleashed by the influential Senator Grösser and his wife. She was twice confined to the St. Scholastica women's prison in Perugia for contravention of the Travel Order by means of which she had been extradited.

But in the end she triumphed and obtained a regular residence permit to remain in Assisi. Angela later became President of the IACA: she had won over the 'generals' on the field of battle!.

But some of us in the community were also irregular, because of Evangelical churc: a real headache for the ecclesiastical hierarchy. I remember the first time old Fr. Lamberto came to us at Viole of Assisi to celebrate Mass and give us Holy Communion. He also brought a document from the Bishop to be signed by those who used to be Protestants¹: it was a formal abjuration of their former Evangelical faith. "The abjurations first" – Fr. Lamberto insisted – "then the Holy Communion". Marcello roared: "The Body of Christ is not subject to contract!". So we received before the Holy Communion...

¹ Translator's Note: These persons had already been received into the Catholic Church

A BLESSED RULE OF LIFE

It was the Lord who took care of giving a Rule to our so 'irregular' community: and it was the Rule of St. Benedict. Many, hearing of a community of Benedictine inspiration coming into existence in ultra-Franciscan Assisi, ask me: "Why on earth?" I reply: "Because that's the way God wanted it"; and that is not just a figure of speech.

Of the many precious revelations that have marked the spiritual journey of Marcello, and of the community with him, this is the one that gives me most pleasure to relate, because it seems to me to be of great spiritual significance and also because I was directly involved in it. One day Marcello told me that the Lord had shown him a book to read, written by a "certain St. Gregory": a book which had had great success in every century (in short: a best-seller!). It will never ceases to surprise me how, at times, God almost seems to be playing with souls who entrust themselves to Him in all simplicity: as was Marcello, who was searching for the wisdom of God to be able to help those united with him in that eventful spiritual adventure.

St. Gregory the Great! The great Benedictine Pope who lived at the end of the VIth Century, the fourth and last of the Fathers of the Western Church. The relevant vision had been most profound and charged with spiritual significance it can be read in full on the internet where we felt that it should be published, together with other spiritual 'pearls'. The fact is that Marcello sent me to the 'Fonteviva' religious bookshop in Assisi to look for this important book. Running the bookshop was Don Aldo Brunacci, dean of the cathedral priests, holder of an important decoration conferred by the President of the Republic for having lavishly done everything in his power, during the last war, to save the persecuted Jews. "How's your prophet getting on?" he asked me kindly. When I gave him the information I had from Marcello, he told me to bring him

St. Gregory's Pastoral Rule, his best known book, intended for bishops and turning out, over the centuries, to be a veritable treasure for popes, kings, princes and all in a position to govern. A most important manual for the direction of souls. From the Pastoral Rule Marcello went on to read the Rule of St. Benedict which St. Gregory has handed down to us in the second book of his Dialogues. It was in this way that the community modelled itself on the Benedictine Rule: "Ora et Labora" (Pray and Work).

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ORA ET LABORA

That house where Marcello lived, above the little village of Viole of Assisi, immersed in the tranquillity of the olive groves, began to resound to the psalmody provided for by the Rule of St. Benedict. We followed all of the Liturgical Hours: beginning with *Matins* and Lauds; getting up in the middle of the night and immersing ourselves in a long 'Office' of psalms, readings from the Bible and from the Fathers of the Church. Then, at dawn, Prime; Tierce; Sext at noon; None, Vespers, Compline... We chanted all 150 psalms of the Psalter in the course of a week and, in addition, we had made a collection of hymns and songs that we had composed ourselves. The Word of God - read, listened to or chanted - and the writings of the Holy Fathers echoed in our minds and hearts, even when we moved on to work activities. The Rule of St. Benedict shaped every aspect of community life. Meals, for example: on certain days, or periods of the year, we adults ate once a day, in other periods twice. At table, there was always a reader on duty, who ate at the end. The bell rang periodically during the day to call us together for prayer: the implements of work were put in a safe place and we hurried to gather together with the brethren for the Word of God; anyone arriving late lay prostrate on the ground. Yes, because the bell was the voice of God which called us to detach ourselves from earthly things to think of heavenly things. One day we will have to leave all...For the adults the food was rather frugal. During certain periods of need, we gathered herbs from the field or went up Subasio to collect edible berries, but then Providence always came knocking at the door of the house. Just as had happened in the time of St. Benedict: when the last drop of anything to eat had gone, in the morning the monks found sacks of flour left anonymously at the door of the monastery.

We had all left our 'secular' jobs and put everything we had in common. Because of this, the well-off Viennese family of Angela had thought it better to disinherit her; and she had happily signed the renunciation of her part of the inheritance. The 'community property' – a sort of 'Christian communism' – to many looking at us from outside seemed too impracticable an operation ("things that were all very well at the time of the first Christians"). Some outsiders predicted that this mad community adventure would not last more than three years. Nevertheless we read that it was how the first Christian communities lived and we believed that we too could live the same way:

"And all they that believed were together" - writes St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles – "and had all things in common... And the multitude of believers where of one heart and one soul, and one claimed private ownership of any possessions." (Acts 2,44; 4,32). To put all one's property in common something achievable, all things considered, and fundamentally liberating – as the means for achieving a more binding and true communion of hearts in the love of Christ: which is the foundational and ineradicable character of any true Christian community. It is difficult to share the spiritual climate in which we lived in those years. We had taken the Word of God seriously; and we had taken seriously the Benedictine Rule which God had put into our hands. We felt that we were dealing with God Himself, not with a human project, nor with a man of undoubted charisma and so much good will as was Marcello. We breathed that holy 'fear' which stirred the first communities: "And fear came upon every soul; many wonders also and signs were done by the Apostles..." (Acts 2,43). And 'signs and wonders' really did happen: that would deserve another book. One at least I want to relate here...

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Austin was a young Nigerian student whom I had known at the Institute of Surveying (Istituto per Geometri) at Terni where I had taught for a few years. He was always ill, complaining of severe headaches, even resulting in black-outs; he had already undergone surgery but with no success. I invited him to come to Assisi, to the community, where he met Marcello, who began to pray for him until the Lord revealed that the young man was possessed by ... evil spirits! Austin confirmed that he had been the object of sorcery in the difficult family and cultural situation from which he came, because of the rivalry existing between his father's two wives. So Marcello, unaware of the canonical norms which re-strict the carrying out of an exorcism to priests who "are notable for their piety, knowledge, prudence and integrity of life", found the faith and force of love to pray over him, with imposition of hands: liberating him from the spirits which were tormenting his soul and making him ill in his body. I find it hard to forget how Austin writhed about, slobbering and howling. But finally we saw his face, which before the exorcism was contorted and covered with blisters. now after the prayer healthy with smooth, velvety skin. The stabbing headache was gone and he testified that he felt a peace never before experienced...

Yet, as Jesus said in the Gospel, if a person who is freed from the evil one does not become truly converted, then his final state can be worse...It was thus that during a community prayer Marcello had for Austin, who was asking to become part of the community, a vision which was far from being encouraging and which he shared as he had received it: Austin was... a predator who smuggled gold! At this he knelt down, trembling all over and confessed that, with his cousin, he was trafficking gold bullion from Nigeria...

AT ROCCA SANT'ANGELO

Rocca Sant'Angelo is a little hill village on the northern edge of the Commune of Assisi. Above the village there is an ancient farmhouse, the 'Casone' (the Big House), of historical architectural interest, and some smaller rustic



houses, surrounded by olive groves, a few arable fields and woodland. In the above aerial photo one can see the four houses of the community, each with its own name and its own story: the Fienile (The Barn); the "Casone" itself, the "Casetta" (the little house) and the "Casa sulla Roccia" (the house on the rock).

We managed to gain possession of this rustic property in 1981. We needed a place where we could carry out our 'ora et labora' as there was no more space for us in the house at Viole of Assisi and also a small house on the groudfloor for one of the brethren who was unable to walk. In the meantime something decisive for Marcello and the entire community took place. In the summer of 1981, Marcello felt a call to make a forty-day retreat in prayer and fasting, isolating himself on the upper floor of the Fienile, which at that time was unfurnished and lacked any comfort. Only a board for a bed, a tiny table and a chair. He nourished himself with the same food which, 25 centuries before, God had prescribed for the prophet Ezekiel: 300 grams of bread, made with the flour from a mixture of cereals, beans and lentils, and a litre of water per day. Well, so Marcello later wrote about his retreat, in a note for which some priests had pressed him, and which he first of all submitted to his confessor (who wanted it to be given the title: "Fragments of a prophetic story which the Lord is accomplishing in the land of Assisi"):

"On the 15th August 1981, the feast of the Assumption, I withdrew myself for forty days, as it were into the desert, in the former barn of a farmhouse at Rocca Sant'Angelo... I wanted to imitate Jesus, Moses and St. Francis. I was sure that I would come out of this 40-day period edified and with so many good things to give the brethren. The parish priest, Fr. Augusto Drago, with whom we had established an excellent relationship (the Lord had given me a vision in which he had shown me Fr. Augusto even before we met him: in the vision he was removing a large stone which was blocking my path), for the occasion celebrated Holy Mass, giving me Holy Communion and his blessing for this my 'Lent'... For me it was an indescribable mystical experience; the Lord also inspired me to write down a prophecy, which I immediately submitted to the discernment of Fr. Augusto, a professor, amongst other things, of Patristics and Sacred Scripture... He said that after having read it he became ill, to the point of being unable to sleep. He affirmed that what was written could only have come from the Lord. He even said so publicly, celebrating Holy Mass immediately after my retreat ended".

But then the same Father Augusto was frightened for the tone of that prophecy - later in 1995 Marcello had 4 other prophecies, after a most serious infarct - because it scourged the false pastors: « they let themselves be called "father", and they aren't fathers... whoe to you priest and friars, who heard yourselves...».

Although convinced of the authenticity of the prophetic vocation of Marcello, he told him that Marcello could never relay on his help, so he withdraw and then then became even enemy: it was the beginning of much suffering for Marcello and the whole community; especially when the prophecy began to be spread in Assisi. But "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown" Jesus clearly warned, and also "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown" (St. Luke 4:24, St. Mark 6:4).

29

AT GAICHE

Gaiche is a tiny, early mediaeval hamlet, about thirty kilometres from Perugia, with a rather special history since, seven centuries ago, it was a little 'Republic' with its very own Constitution. Many people know it for one reason or another and speak fondly of it. When we began to establish ourselves there – in 1986 – 'Gaiche Castle' was still a ruin. Later the ancient boundary walls were rebuilt, followed by the restoration of the Castle and the houses of the old internal habitable zone. Well, this is how Marcello, in the previously-cited brief note of 1989 – "Fragments of a prophetic story" – recalls how we arrived at this beautiful and secluded mountain niche in Green Umbria:

"In July of 1986 a certain inheritance came into my hands. Almost at the same time an agricultural property at Gaiche of Piegaro was offered to us on unbelievable terms, such that we saw the hand of God in it. There was a farmhouse in need of restoration, a large barn that seemed almost like a temple and a spring called after the "Blessed Leopold" which, by all accounts, was a prodigious source of water. The whole community believed it was the will of God and we decided to make the purchase. In the meantime, if nothing else, this allowed my family and I to move. Beginning in this way to get ourselves out of the ghetto where...we were being walled in." The "ghetto" related to the difficult situation that Marcello and his community were experiencing in Assisi at Rocca Sant'Angelo. But that displacement wanted to be the start of a wide-ranging mission, time to bear witness of love and peace in the world. We moved back and forth from Rocca Sant'Angelo to Gaiche in an old van converted to a camper, 'l'archetta' (the Little Ark). Sometimes we got stuck on that road which twisted and turned as it climbed up from the village to the house, which was immersed in briars up to the second floor. There was no electricity, at night we hung up paraffin lamps, at the outside corner of the house we put a large gas-operated

night-fishing lantern. We had a small gas-operated refrigerator, no telephone (there were no mobile phones in those days, subsequently we began to equip ourselves with 'walky-talkies'). We were enthusiastic about that place, even if it needed so much work, almost like pioneers. The local people regarded us with curiosity, a bit of suspicion and a touch of sympathy, they called us "those of love and peace". We lived like that, with neither light nor telephone, for about three years. Marcello withdrew to pray, either in the little dilapidated chapel of St. Anthony the Abbot, a few kilometres away and partly hidden in the vegetation, or in a somewhat secluded and most charming part of the property which we had named the 'paradise zone'.

The first work we undertook was on the access road: we made up a list of those whom we called 'friends of the spring', those who came more or less regularly for water from Blessed Leopold's Spring. The Commune furnished a few lorry loads of crushed stone and these friends helped us to spread it out on the road and fix up the drainage. Next, in an area where there had been several forest fires in the past, came the very urgent need to clean up the internal roads: a very demanding job, considering the size of that mountain property (around 148 acres).

We obtained an agreement on this matter with the Comunità Montana, who also helped with their machinery to return abandoned fields to cultivation. Then we turned our attention to cleaning up and putting back on duty the surrounding abandoned and degraded woodland. We carried out all this work with extreme care and attention for that environment which every now and again revealed indications of past human activity: here dry-wall terracing, there 'lunettes' made with juxtaposed stones around the trunks of the olives.

¹ State Organisation responsible for environmental concerns in mountainous areas.

Or else old grapevines still clinging - trained up - maples. There is much that might be added concerning the preciousness of these 'signs' left there by generations of simple, often poor, farmers: and on the variety of the local flora and fauna as well. But other "signs" happened, signs of the divine benevolence that meets the human faith. As when an alarm arrived from Gaiche at the community center of Rocca Sant'Angelo: a fire had flared up on top of Montalvino and was advancing menacingly towards the guesthouse, fed by a strong wind blowing in that direction. Just time to look for some implements suitable for the emergency, then we rushed in a great hurry to get there as fast as possible. Marcello, who at that time was on retreat in those hills, had already gone up towards the top, while the vehicles of the Forest Ranger and a water tanker of the Comunità Montana were arriving and a Canadair was flying over the area dropping foam extinguishing agent. When we too arrived the situation was already under control: the wind had changed 180 degrees and was now decreasing while blowing the flames back towards the area already burned: a veritable wonder. The event had surprised everyone. A warrant officer of the Forest Ranger reported to his commanding officer how Marcello had been there at the fire front praying for God to make the wind reverse, when it seemed that nothing further could be done. His superior, a colonel, however had something to object: had that not been a selfish prayer, turn round only to save the woods and the house belonging to the Association? Not a bit of it: Marcello had prayed God for the fire to be restrained and be extinguished without doing any further harm to anyone; and this is precisely what happened, thanks to the unexpected change in direction of the wind...

IN SACKCLOTH

From the beginning of the community, in times of individual or community penance we wore the sackcloth. We took the "bales" – those which are sold in convenience stores of agriculture products to bag wheat or other grains – and we sewed these "sacks" for ourselves, that we wore barefoot, as a sign of penance for us and for those we observed us.

The people 'read' this message in a Franciscan vein; but when walking in sackcloth from Rocca Sant'Angelo to Assisi, hearing some pious lady saying to her grandchild "look at Saint Francis!", one felt thoroughly ashamed. Inside that sackcloth there was no fervent devotee of the saint; there was a wretched christian apprentice who needed to feel a bit of cold, and some thorns under the feet, to shatter pride and hardness of heart... At times we went in that garment to Assisi, in front of the Basilica of St. Francis, on the occasion of the visit of some politician, or for some other important event which filled the Basilica square with fine cars and important people, to call to mind that the true 'spirit of Assisi', the spirit of St. Francis was quite another thing: it was a spirit of love for Christ and his poor, of penance for one's own sins and for those of others, and of yearning for salvation from that 'second death', that death which never dies, in short the eternal hell, of which the saint speaks even in his beautiful Canticle of the Creatures.

The prophetic words received by Marcello resonated abundantly in Assisi, summoning the religious and the whole Church: "Woe to you priests and friars, who herd yourselves. You are the main responsible!... How beautiful you were, oh my bride! Mother of my children, delight of my eyes, splendour for all the people. Now, you are nothing other than rotten fruit!".

We also took part, always in sackcloth, in the marches for peace from Perugia to Assisi, but as a sign of contradiction. A passage from Marcello's prophecies which we often proclaimed on that occasion was: "They speak of peace, they search for peace, but men do not even know what peace is. Only I can give peace, says the Lord..."; and we also shouted out the disconcerting words of Jesus: "Do not think that I came to send peace upon the earth..." (Matt. 10,34).

The episcopal excommunication which was laid upon us in 1994 – a very Bull of Heresy, lifted only at the beginning of 2006 – was, in some way, to be added to our account. We would have partly deserved it too as we might have been perhaps over accusatory and lacking in compassion. Yet those prophetic words had come to us from God. And those words we had to proclaim; and we do not deny them.

ABOUT PROPHETS AND PROPHECIES ...

Before proceeding in the report of this prophetic story in Assisi, some explanation is necessary, because there is much confusion concerning what the Holy Scriptures - and first of all Jesus Himself, the divine prophet - teach concerning prophecy. It's a very important, fascinating and even controversial topic. Jesus not only said, "Beware of false prophets" (St. Matthew 7:15) - there are many of them around indeed! - but said also: "Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward "(St. Matthew 10:41).

And for me that has really happened in having welcomed Marcello, who brought me back into the Church and guided through all these years in the path of the Saints. But still, as one can read in Marcello's prophecies, the Lord recriminates that his prophetic word is "forgotten, denied and shunned". In the prophecy "To the Pleasure seeking City" (Rome) one reads: "To you house of Israel, and to you house of Peter, I address myself. Why do you say: the word of the prophets is like the wind that has passed...?". When you think about, the refusal of prophecy somehow concerns both Israel and the Church: Israel because it doesn't yet recognize in Jesus Christ the Messiah prophesied by its ancient prophets; the Church because it escapes to seriously consider that "Gospel of the end" that so widely speaks of the return of Christ as the fulfillment of the history of the world and of the Church itself. And indeed a climate of suspicion or total rejection towards prophecy, is widely spread in the Church up to the point of setting aside or even twisting the very prophecies of the Holy Scriptures. Just think about how the book of Revelation is treated, the only book of the Bible in which a blessing is promised for those who read it or listen to it. But this precious handbookof salvation for the last times - our times! - is degraded from eminent ministers to a book of past things: déjà vu, "wind that has passed"!

Some have the unfounded belief that after Jesus, the Divine Prophet, there is no more reason for other prophets. But Jesus himself said that he would send prophets in the midst of his people, and in the Acts of the Apostles the intervention of prophets who steer the missionary activity of the Church is evident, prophets who anticipate events to which the Church must be prepared. As an example one reads that the Church of Jerusalem started beforehand to raise funds for the poor following a prophecy of a prophet named Agabus who predicted a great famine, that actually raged under the emperor Claudius (Acts 11.38). Marcello's prophecy of 1995 on the collapseof the world economy comes to mind, that foretold, amongst other things: "manufacturers, business-men and stylists will be confused and will turn pale. The economy will collapse and the workmen will be dismayed". In that very same year 1995 Marcello - recovering from a serious illness - prophesied even on the earthquake that hit Assisi two years after. He shared also this detailed prophecy to his priest, and it was divulgated over the time. The prophecy spoke of earth splitting and eardrums (tympanums) broken: and in fact the lower square of the Basilica of St. Francis was split in two by the earthquake, and the "tympanum", triangular structure on top of a chapel aside of the bell tower, was broken in the center.





But in Marcello's prophecies dramatic and peremptory warnings recur concerning the Islamic terrorism, burning question of our times. Eight centuries have passed since when St. Francis went to the sultan of Egypt to announce to him the Gospel of peace, with the hope - then disappointed - that the sultan would be converted. Now the scenery has changed, Islam grows numerically within our western countries, and at the same time the Islamic terrorism grows. " The horse inside the doors will breed virulent stallions..." one reads in Marcello's prophecy " To the pleasure seeking City ", of 1995; " ... But here the true horses, those mounted by cruel and victorious warriors trample against and towards you. They have erected a bastion, and there the holy war is being prepared!..". And even the prophecy of the Vatican, of the same year, admonishes: " your allies are arming themselves, cruel warriors lie in wait at your door. Will the puppet-like guards of the royal palace be able to defend you? Every protection is demolished, oh house of Peter! ". This prophecy ended with a heartfelt appeal to mourn for the Church: "cry, cry oh daughter of Sion: too great is my mourning and my desolation, for those days of terror wanted by the Lord, God of hosts". It was because of her faith in Christ and her tears of love for her sisters and the city of Assisi, that Saint Clare scared away the Saracens who had already entered into the Convent of Saint Damiano, thus saving also the whole town of Assisi. A great example to follow, now that the Islamic terrorism is amongst us.

But is it so difficult to distinguish the true from the false prophets? Jesus doesn't make it too difficult, he says that they can be recognized from their fruits. Besides the fact that his prophecies are fulfilled, a true prophet lives in penance, for the reason of the often painful things he is called to announce: as if he himself suffered in advance.

And in addiction normally a prophet is also persecuted from the part of the Church itself (see the next chapter!). Finally, the prophet's heart is a heart that loves God and God's people. No better example there maybe than the following canticle written by Marcello Ciai in 1995: when he had recovered from a very bad heart attack that had made us even despair for his life. Here it is:

"By day a pain in my heart, at night a sirene. My heart stood still at the weight of the mantle that has become twice as much. I try with my eyes to look upwards. The sky is dark, there aren't even any stars, and the moon is far away. All the sufferings of the world did not succeed to enter in my heart, which has burst. My tent has been pulled off; What will happen to the sheep? All the evil rests upon it. The moon turns red, the sun turns pale, the earth staggers like a drunk. - I cry like a swallow and trill like a dove. My eyes are weary of looking up -I say to my doctor: "each one of us has a vocation, you, for the healing of bodies, me, for the healing of souls. You find your body in the silence of a room; my soul, I look for it in the uproar where they slaughter the oxen and cut the throats of the herd, they eat meat and get drunk on wine. I look for it, I look for it but I don't find it. And when I find it I lose it. My heart beats strongly. Then it stops".

HERETICS IN ASSISI...BUT NOW NOT ANYMORE

"Well, what do you think of that! So heretics still exist, then?" exclaimed someone, between surprise and amusement, on hearing that we had been branded with that heavy Episcopal declaration. There was little to joke about: those were twelve years of severe ecclesiastical marginalization, with disturbing implications also in the sphere of civil rights for individual members of the community: there was even a question in the Italian Parliament on the matter. We learned about that 'bull' from the children of the community: complaining about their schoolmates pulling their legs, pointing them out as "heretics". "What does that mean?" they asked. Then, following a request of clarification from the Episcopal Curia, there arrived a letter in which the Vicar confirmed the bull of heresy that, without any prior notice, had been published concerning us in the diocesan monthly 'Chiesa Insieme' - Church Together - (!) and displayed on the notice boards of the churches of the Diocese. Marcello remained for a while absorbed in stroking his moustache with his fingers, as was his habit in demanding situations. But then he brightened up and, with that unfailing positive attitude of his, remarked: "It's a Honorary Degree!". However, they were really difficult years. Anyone who came looking for us and asked for information at the convent below, or in the village, was discouraged from going any further... As if we were put in a physical ghetto, in addition to the even more distressing exclusion from ecclesial communion and from the Sacraments, which had not a few negative effects on the life and the development of the community. Yet, there were those who wanted to understand our position better in this whole story, despite the wall of prejudice and distrust which surrounded us. One of these was the writer and journalist Guido Ceronetti, who asked to meet Marcello and came to Rocca Sant'Angelo, accompanied by the researcher Cecilia Gattotrocchi, an expert on sects and sundry esoteric groups...

GUIDO CERONETTI: "MARCELLO'S FUMING PROPHECIES"

In the previously cited, ample report by Guido Ceronetti on Marcello and his community, published in 1998 in the newspaper "La Stampa", there was written, among other "Fuming Orient' was the name first given to the numerous community gathered around Marcello, and it was a good one, it induced fear, but they abandoned it in favour of the more tranquil 'Families of Bethlehem' and initials which indicate, in English, a generic Christian Action... The Bishop of Assisi, after comings and goings, ended up by excluding them from communion with the Church: The breach between prophecy and the priesthood is always inescapable. However, leafing through the scorching prophecies of Marcello (now aged about sixty, white bearded and a warm human being), we read that on the first of May 1981 he had a vision of the Pope, seriously ill, on his feet 'behind a little white hospital table'. Thirteen days later Agca's attempted assassination took place and it is true that, despite his injuries, the Pope remained on his feet".

The article merits a couple of notes: first of all, concerning the prediction of the assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square. On the eve of the attempt we were at dinner in Marcello's house at Viole of Assisi. He told us to pray for the Pope because he had 'seen' him gravely ill. God alone knows why the Holy Spirit wanted to reveal to him, in advance, this tragic event. But what is certainly not without significance is the atmosphere of profound reverence towards that great Pope that is revealed by Marcello's final comment in his account of that vision: "I too was standing in front of him, in silence, like a pupil before his master". Then there is also something to add concerning the name which the community had first chosen: 'Fuming Orient'. "It was a good one, it induced fear" wrote Ceronetti. That name was, and still is, very dear to us because it was given to us by a humble farmer,

called Isidoro, from the plain of Assisi, who had welcomed Marcello's charisma with simplicity and often came to his house to pray.

I went to visit him once when he was ill: he told me of a dream in which he met Marcello and asked him: "But you, where do you come from?" and a voice answered him: "He comes from the Fuming Orient". Isidore could understand 'Orient' but not that 'Fuming'. Neither did we understand it at first, when we talked about it in the Community. But later we found such an abundance of biblical references to 'theophanies' – manifestations of God – in fire and smoke that we were astonished and, with the playful amazement of children, decided to call ourselves precisely that: 'Fuming Orient'.

That sense of amazement grew even more when we read that Dante, in his Divine Comedy, wrote that 'Assisi' should really be called 'Orient' (Paradise XI, 52-54). However, since a long time by then we had to abandon that name because in the Bishop's opinion, it smelled... of 'Masonry.'

LICENCE WITHDRAWN...

1998 was the year when the veil of silence which had been created around our community began to collapse. Four years had passed since we were 'banished' with that paradoxical branding as "heretic" in that land of a marked ecumenical and interreligious spirit which is Assisi. The first one to break that conspiracy of silence had been Ceronetti, with his article which appeared in "La Stampa" in March of that year. But at the end of October something happened which stirred up a lot of interest from the press, television and various representatives of the world of politics and culture. An international symposium on heresy was being held in the Vatican. The Jubilee of 2000 was approaching and the Church was feeling the need to purify its memory from faults committed in the past, also in the treatment of cases of heresy, such as those of Savonarola and of Giordano Bruno. There could be hope for our little community of heretical families too... We went to Rome, barefoot and in sackcloth, to try to move some high prelate who was taking part in the symposium. But under the colonnades of St. Peter's I was arrested, taken to the nearby Police Station and then to the Police Headquarters in Piazza Cavour where I was registered, my fingerprints taken, and an Exclusion Order was put into my hands, banning me from Rome for one year as a "danger to public security" and "capable of criminal acts". But that was not the end of things. A few months later, in February of 1999, I received a kind of 'warning of recourse' (it happens to many, in these days...): the Prefecture of Perugia advised me that withdrawal of my driving licence was I immediately wondered what kind of enormous infraction of the Highway Code I could have committed ("who is without sin..."). Not a bit of it: because I was subjected to an Exclusion Order, the Law prohibited me from driving a motor vehicle: I did not have "the moral requisites". That episode made many smile, especially when a cartoon appeared in the newspaper

"Il Messaggero" showing me - dressed in sackcloth - conversing with an 'arancione' and saying: "Lucky you, I haven't even got a 'pink slip' 2". The article by Italo Carmignani, commenting on the incident, on the front page of the newspaper - of 15 April 1999 ended thus: "if his group is considered heretical, what can the bureaucrats be saving up for the followers of Satan?" There was also a question put by Senator Luigi Manconi to the Minister of the Interior and to the Minister of Mercy and Justice "to know if the Ministers being addressed did not intend to verify the validity of the motives behind the decision to restrict the liberty of movement, of expression and of opinion of an Italian citizen who simply carried out a form of protest". For two years I went about on a little scooter, on which I covered – even in winter – the 50 kilometres which separated the Association's two centres. At last, at the Police Station in Assisi, my driving licence was returned: not as a concession for the Jubilee (it was December 2000), but because the Constitutional Court had declared illegal the entire body of legislation which had motivated the withdrawal of the licence. Yes, in short, they got it wrong... or perhaps not. Because, years before, the Lord had given Marcello a night-time vision which, in his writings, Marcello recounted thus: "A candle and a sickle were falling down on me from above. The candle took the place of the hammer. Yes, just a great sickle and candle were about to crush me when a myriad of stars deflected them from me and a magnificent cross appeared above me. So I was expecting oppression and affliction from the political and religious powers, but the cross would always save me". Meanwhile and somehow, however, that episode had served to stir the waters around our 'community case'; my driving licence had worked like a stone thrown into a pond....

¹ Literally "bright orange": slang term for members of the Hindu sect Hare Krishna

² Provisional driving permit

An important national tv network - Channel 5 - broadcasted a wide-ranging investigation on our community and our case, reporting about the point of view of the bishop and the opinion of Assisi's people.

We finished also on the importat Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy, published by the CESNUR¹ of Turin. Until...

¹ Center for Studies of New Religions

CHURCH TOGETHER. AT LAST!

Just as the Episcopal notification of heresy against the community " Families of Bethlehem " had been published in the diocesan monthly "Church Together" of February 1994, so also the notification of readmission into ecclesial communion was reported in the same periodical of March-April 2006. It was precisely Monsignor Sergio Goretti who withdraw the bull of heresy, the same Bishop under whose jurisdiction the community had lived that long, penitential journey as 'heretical'. And just think that to succeed him to the see of San Rufino, in Assisi, the Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino had already been nominated, author of a courageous "absolutory hypothesis" on Giordano Bruno, the great heretic of the XVIth Century. It was a great relief for the community, particularly for Marcello. Indeed, he had filed away the bull of heresy as an 'honorary degree', singular as deeply suffered authentication of his vocation and of the prophecies received, well aware, as pointed out by Ceronetti in his article in "La Stampa", that "the breach between prophetism and priesthood is always inescapable". But Marcello however had never underestimated the gravity of such a pronouncement by the Diocesan Church. For a true Catholic, the 'binding' and 'loosing' of the Church is an extremely serious matter since it is endorsed by the words of Jesus himself ("Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven" Matt. 18,18). Because of this, Marcello had several times sought - with "courageous attempts at reconciliation", as reported in the Encyclopaedia of Religions - release from that difficult canonical and ecclesial status; not so much for his own sake as from the fear that, at the moment of his departure from this world, his children, and other members of the community, could remain deprived of the embrace and the protection of 'Mother Church'.

Well, now the community can continue on its way under the secure, paternal and illuminated guidance of the new Archbishop of Assisi, Domenico Sorrentino, fully incorporated into the Ecclesial Body as a 'private association' (a definition from the Code of Canon Law; something quite different, because of its nature and purpose, from the IACA, which however has its roots in the community of Assisi).

TO THE DISCO

"Good night, father". After *compline* – the last community prayer of the day, after the evening meal – the youngsters bid good-night and withdraw. To bed? No, to...the disco. But their father doesn't know it; their mother does, as also some members of the community too, all accomplices in the hypocrisy, that hypocrisy always detested by Marcello so much and so resolutely condemned by Jesus, who in his Word unequivocally reveals what will be the fate merited by hypocrites: "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 24,51). But then, as always, the painful truth comes to light.

How but how?! So many years instilling, in the family and the community, truth, love and fear of the Lord, or at least the fundamental human values like loyalty, courage...and the children go to the disco behind your back. But, what had happened?! No, the problem is something different: what had 'not' happened? The hearts had not been ignited with that 'fire' which Jesus has said He has come to bring on earth (Luke 12,49): the vital force of love of God, love for the heavenly realities, love ready to do anything for the good and salvation of those around us, be they friends or enemies... We can preach all our life – as the Fathers of the Church teach – but if the listener does not open the heart to the Spirit of God, it is all in vain. There remains an empty religious formalism, rituality, liturgy. But, the heart lies in...the disco. Well, each to their own! "They are sleeping on the altars, where everything is reduced to a formal and exterior cult...": so stigmatised these words, received by Marcello in the first, great prophecy, of 1981. Now he was living it among his own... But, it had to happen.

Whoever has this kind of vocation is called to live, in his flesh, in his personal experience and in that of those around him, the message which God has consigned to him.

"Go, take to yourself a prostitute as wife and have children of prostitution, for the land itself has done nothing but prostitute itself by departing from the Lord" (Hosea 1,2): and the prophet Hosea obeyed. Right at the beginning, the Lord had said to Marcello: "And so you my son will be a symbol because you too cannot have Sylvia, the delight of your eye..."

It had to happen, that the wife would fall out of love with him and that the children would ally themselves with her to be able to live at last a 'normal' life, like everyone else, without so many prayers, so much reading of the Word of God, so many exhortations... And how many of those who, for a time were part of the community have quitted, often slipping away or even rendering evil for good...! It happened like that to Job as well. He too had children who entertained themselves with repeated parties, and he was a bit worried about such a state of affairs; and even his wife turned against him and his physical and spiritual sufferings (Job 1,4-5;2,9). The break-up of a Christian family? Yes, but a break-up to be put on account, given Marcello's most particular prophetic vocation. It had to happen. "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and in his own house, and among his own kindred "it is written (Mark 6,4). This is just what happened to the Lord: after three years of a glorious ministry, accompanied by signs and prodigies, his own disciples ran off in every direction, one betrayed Him, one denied Him...He was left alone. This is how it was in the spiritual martyrdom experienced by Saint Francis on discovering that Love - Jesus Christ, the True Love - was not 'loved', not even by many of his own brethren...so much did he weep that he became almost blind.

AND NOW

"The sand is running out quickly in the hour-glass of my life", Marcello sometimes says. He spends most of his time retreated in a little room of the upper floor of an old haybarn, where he stood during the first lent of penance and fasting many years ago. The roof is crumbling and it rains through it, therefore it has been temporarily covered with an awning, with all the inconveniences when it's hot in summertime, or when the wind blows strongly. His health is really uncertain, hanged by a thin thread; he knows that if one of his recurring faints lasts more than 15 seconds, he will go to stay with that Christ who deigned to show to him His face and to talk to him, and whom since that moment Marcello never ceased to love.

"No one will tear me out of his hand", he often says. Rather he is worrying for the people from whom he will pass away, beginning with his children. And there are also a few who keep on relying on him to be led in the path of truth and love, findable only in Christ; and in the prayer, called by Marcello, "the breath of the soul".

Marcello keeps on recalling them the teachings learned by Saint Gregory the Great, the Master of spirituality to whom God prodigiously directed him to guide the community gathered around him. And he never tires to repeat that humility is the only base from which the scale of virtues rises towards love: "if you see a step of humility to do, do it ten times, maybe at least one time you may have done it well...!"

But just in his condition of extremely fragile health, Marcello experiences more than ever what the Apostle Paul calls "the consolations" of the spirit. I like to refer here one of them. I love you my God and...": Marcello wakes up with this word of love for the Lord, that during his sleep echoed in his heart. "I love you my God and...", but he doesn't remember the word following the "and", so he calls Angela, a sister that like an angel assists him day and night in his suffered senescence.

Marcello asks her if these words "I love you my God and..." recur in one of the hymns to God that she had sung to him the evening before he was falling asleep. Angela thinks over it but doesn't find anything that she had sung with these words. Marcello doesn't resign himself and searches then in google these words. Soon he finds this marvellous prayer of the Holy Curé of Ars that starts just with these words: "I love you my God and...". Nothing better can show what is the sentiment of a true prophet!

"I love you, oh my God, and my only desire is to love you until the last breath of my life.

I love you, oh my infinitely lovable God, and I would rather die loving you, than live without loving you.

I love you, Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally... My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath...

I love you, oh my divine Savior, who have been crucified for me: and keep me down here crucified with you...

My God, grant me the grace to die loving you and knowing that I love you".

"The Lord keeps me yet alive" - Marcello says with conviction - "up to when I will be able to close my eyes realizing the grace to die loving Him and knowing to love him!".

ANALOGIES

Thinking of the many years of the singular prophetic story of Marcello with his community in Assisi, one can discover amazing similarities between the human and spiritual experience of Marcello and some episodes of St. Francis' life. It should be soon said that a prophet is not necessarily a "saint", and by mentioning the similarities between him and the Saint of Assisi, I don't intend do "hagiography", emphasizing the sanctity of a man who anyhow has meant and means so much for my spiritual life. Marcello himself is the first to say that the irruption of Jesus in his life and his prophetic vocation, happened to him without any personal merit, on the contrary when he was still immersed in a worldly life. Pure grace, therefore.

As St. Francis, also Marcello comes from a family of traders of fabrics. Even if he was not born in Assisi, but in the near city of Bastia Umbra, he attaches great importance to the fact of having been confirmed in Assisi, through the hands of the Bishop Nicolini, who was the promoter of the proclamation of Saint Francis to Patron Saint of Italy. And in the confirmation the gifts of the Holy spirit are poured, even if afterwards they can remain concealed, to manifest themselves years later: as in the case of the prophetic charisma of Marcello.

But the first striking similarity with Saint Francis dates back to 1978, when Marcello - who was then living in the small town of San Vitale, on the slopes of Subasio - began to have visions. The first concerned a mysterious sarcophagus in an underground of the ancient Egypt, on which the name "Ezekiel" was engraved in bright characters. A soft voice said to Marcello that he had to follow the revelations of this prophet. "Who is Ezekiel?" Marcello asked his wife at his awakening. He did not know anything about him. But it was just from a vision of the prophet Ezekiel that Saint Francis assumed that "Tau" with which he signed his letters. "Tau" is a sign much more serious of how it is now perceived from the people of Assisi and from the many tourists and pilgrims who pass throug Assisi,

and even by the very Franciscans. It is a sign that speaks of salvation from a looming extermination, which regarded then Jerusalem, but now the whole world. Only those "who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it" would be saved (Ezekiel 9: 4). And as in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, so in Marcello's prophecies severe warnings resound towards



the religious and political leaders, and a vibrant denunciation of the wide-spreading corruption in every sector of society, emerging now more than ever at any level. It should be noted that St. Bonaventura in his biography of Saint Francis, "The Legenda Major", identifies the Saint with the Angel of the Sixth Seal of the book of Revelation, who rises from the East carrying the seal of the living God (Revelation 7: 2). And the seal is precisely the Tau. Already a previous chapter of this book - the sixteenth - has dealt with a very singular connection between Marcello and the East. And also the "rapture" that marked his conversion has been reported, in which he "saw" Jesus and fell so in love with him up to the point of getting rid of anything else and giving himself to Jesus' passionate and suffering discipleship. In that vision Marcello was struck

by some letters of the old Semitic alphabet, in particular from a "He" symbolizing a man who raises his hands invoking God and his coming. We are in the time of the Seventh seal, we are near the return of Jesus, and what St. Francis did not prophesy because the time had not jet come, recurs instead in Marcello's prophecy: another chapter will deal about this.



But now I want to present here a miracle that God worked through the faith of Marcello and of which I was a witness, somehow similar to the miracle of water gushing from a cliff, immortalized by Giotto in one of his frescoes in the Basilica of Saint Francis. The Saint was ascending the Mount Verna on the back of a donkey, for the extreme weakness of his body. But the farmer who had lent him the donkey and was following him on foot, exhausted by the scorching heat, began to cry "mercy on me, I'm dying of thirst!" Francis got off the donkey, knelt down and after praying showed to the man a rock from which a vein of water had began to gush miraculously.

In the case of Marcello not long after the beginning of the community I was descending with him, both barefoot, from the Subasio mountain. When we arrived in front of Saint Benedict's Abbey, we met some workers of the Mountain Community who where vainly wearying to find a water vain that normally supplied a tank along the road. Someone was also waiting there hoping to quench his thirst, but the workers had by that time given up and were preparing to go away because there was nothing more to do. Marcello said a prayer to heaven and everyone saw the water coming back down along a metal tube from which it hadn't flown anymore since a long time, filling again the tank. Oh yes, the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever...

And finally, another analogy that can make you smile. St. Francis prophesied the election to the papacy of Cardinal Ugolino, who was the protector of the Franciscan order, in fact when he wrote to him he began his letters with these words: "To the Venerable in Christ, the Father of the whole world ...". But Marcello also has preannounced the election of Pope Francis, although in a completely unique way, with a "living prophecy." We'll talk about it in the next section of the book: "Signs".

Signs

"SACRED ECHO" IN THE HEART OF ASSISI

For years I've gone around Assisi, "encamping" every night under the arcades of the Basilica of St. Francis, as a result of a real "call" from the Lord: something that surprised not only me but also Marcello who has been and continues to be for me a precious spiritual guide. I followed him, notwithstanding many falls and contradictions, in a rough penitential journey, a real "initiation" lived for thirty years in the reserve community, of whose difficulties neither Marcello nor me could find a reason. Until we understood the universal range of the mission to which God has called us: a mission whose purpose is to light a fire of prayer and conversion to God, which from Assisi may widen throughout the whole Church and in the world. Today so many people, confused and frightened, do not know anymore neither to believe, nor to hope, nor to love. The extraordinary figure of St. Francis, whose message of joyous poverty in the radical following of Christ is more and more relevant in our times, in which the unemployed and the poor are constantly increasing; and the determinant prophecies received right by a man of this land of Assisi, Marcello Ezekiel Ciai: all this makes of Assisi "New Jerusalem", a holy place where an always greater number of people will find comfort, peace and salvation. A journalist of an Umbrian magazine, Gilberto Scalabrini, after seeing me in winter time on the square of the Lower Basilica of Saint Francis, has so reported it in an article entitled "That graduate dressed with jute and barefoot":

"I observe, almost petrified the portrait of a Franciscan very sui generis: barefoot (with his feet purple from the cold), in the habit of jute as a medieval penitent, a shoulders trap bag, stopping the few tourists who pass through the square of the lower basilica wrapped in light fog banks. He is a member of the "Community Families of Bethlehem". His name is Massimo Coppo... The small and singular community, was founded in 1981 on the slopes of Mount Subasio (at Viole of Assisi, after moved to Rocca Sant'Angelo, Petrignano of Assisi). In the beginning it was called "Fuming Orient". The name was choosed by its founder, Marcello Ciai a wealthy businessman".

In the seventies, Ciai abandoned his wealth for sister poverty. He was followed only by a few, and even today there are not many persons who have found the strength and the joy of living in harmony waiting for eternity. Those few are coming from different countries and cultures. All are joined by the love for God and the neighbour.

Only God knows which are the fruits of this testimony to which He has called ordinary "lay" believers, such as my community and myself, in the seraphic city of Assisi, this "world heritage of spirituality". But indeed the messages that we receive from so many places are comforting, from people I met in Assisi, or who have read this book. They express their gratitude and their appreciation for this mission, from which they say are getting comfort and hope.

And then a tangible and really wonderful result has been reached in Assisi. Marcello, who despite his illness doesn't renounce to come and see me there in many nights - even on the cold winter nights - to assist me and pray with me, some time ago made a request to the Mayor of Assisi to put at our disposal a small room where to retreat and pray. And here, thanks to the thoughtful intervention of the Deputy Mayor delegated specifically to our case, a little old and disused former urinal has been made available for us by the Town Council of Assisi, within a few steps of distance from the central square of the town. We have taken care to "convert" it in a place of prayer: after all Jesus himself was born in a stable!

It is a credit for Assisi, this "sanctuary" of the world, to have added to so many churces and places of worship, convents and monasteries, also this small "place" of prayer (St. Francis and his friars called "places" their temporary sites for prayer). This little chapel raises the attention of many Italian and foreign tourists and pilgrims: they take pictures of it and put little cards with their requests of prayer through a slot suitably made on the narrow wooden door. Marcello and I honor this requests when we retreat there in the night to pray. for Assisi and the work to which God has called us, for the Church and the world. So the prayer, "breath of the soul" as Marcello calls it, but also breath of a whole city, continues to rise incessantly to heaven from Assisi also by night.

It was just in a cold and rainy winter night that I reached the Sacred Eco in a suffered pilgrimage, after a request of prayer made

from Marcello who laid ill in bed. It was around 2 a.m. and I had a sense of discomfort, feeling alone and cold to tears. But then once inside I found this comforting card that someone (an angel?) had slipped into the slot of the door, a true prodigy of God's love and mercy:

"In my heart this evening, I think and pray for all the lonely people who suffer and are crying. Amen! "



WONDER AT THE VATICAN: A PILGRIM OF ASSISI ...

It was the twelfth and thirteenth of March 2013 and at the Vatican the Conclave was ongoing for the election of the new pontif after the sensational "abdication" of Pope Benedict XVI. It was me the pilgrim who stood all the time kneeling on a sewer of St. Peter's



Square, to pray for a Pope umble and close to the poor as St. Francis. But for the love of truth, and also to debunk the incredible notoriety that then felt upon me, I must make it soon clear that the initiative to go there to pray was not mine but of Marcello, or rather of the Lord who inspired him to make me go there on that sewer to support with a humble but heartfelt prayer the Church, at a time so delicate and important moment as that transition of Pontifcate.

Among the many television and journalistic reportages diffused all over the world, and the even more numerous services on the internet and social networks that began to be broadcasted all over the world, before the election of Pope Francis, an article in spanish - the same language of Pope Francis - so commented that episode:

«On the 12th and 13th of March 2013 in St. Peter's Square, there was a man dressed as Francis, barefoot like Francis, humble and patient in the rain as Francis. His name is Massimo Coppo, he is Italian, 64 years old. He was wearing a Franciscan habit of jute, with a stick and a shoulder bag, he was praying barefoot and on his knees in the rain and the cold. He prayed and prayed. He explained to the journalists that he wanted "a new Pontiff for the poor and near to them, who would speak of eternity, hell, and the return of Christ". Massimo is not Saint Francis, but Saint Francis certainly can be pleased to have been well represented».

While a journalist of a californian online daily newspaper wrote:

«A devotee of St. Francis of Assisi, Coppo, who lives in intentional poverty (sleeping under the porticoes of the Basilica of Assisi), had come to the Vatican Square to pray for the cardinals in the conclave and for the Church itself».

"I hope it will be a pope who is poor or who understands the poor" Coppo answered when I asked who he hoped the 266th pope would be. "Many people are poor and becoming poor.... A pope that speaks of eternity, of paradise, and even of hell in a world that doesn't like it."

That prayer wearing the sackcloth under the rain, which "obtained" Pope Francis, continues to be widespread by and on the media all over the world. But most of them ignore what is behind that "pilgrim of Assisi": which is infact the work that I have tried to tell in this book, which began many years ago with the miraculous conversion of a man from the land of Assisi, Marcello Ciai.

This umbrian prophet fascinated and fond of that Jesus who appeared and spoke to him many years ago, in some way has prepared the way for the current gust of "new" that is investing the prophecies and extraordinary visions, with his accompanied by great personal sufferings in his family, his community, and even in his homeland Assisi. But indeed the wind of the Holy Spirit, which as Jesus said, "blows where it chooses, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes", has since a long time taken to blow from the land of Assisi... Pope Francis among the first words pronounced from the balcony of St. Peter's Square, said to come "from the end of the world". I myself, staying there below in the midst of the crowd, even before thinking about the distant Argentina from where this Pope comes, instinctively asked myself if he wouldn't be the Pope piloting the Church towards... the end of the world! Yes, because the signs that Jesus left to warn us about how near his return really is, and He "is right at the gates", by now are all there; and they liven up the hope of those who, as it is written, are "longing for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

REJOICE: THE GREAT DAY IS NEAR!

"The great day is near": this resounding warning goes back to the first prophecy - "The Mantle" - received by Marcello in 1981. Indeed, there will be also an end to this painful human struggles of ours. "What will be the signs of your coming and of the end of the world?" (Mattew 24,3) the Apostles once asked Jesus. And the Lord did not reprimanded them for having asked a foolish question, but responded by indicating a whole series of dramatic signs which would precede his return: signs in family, social and religious life; in nature; in relationships between peoples... This is the famous, and much neglected, prophetic speech of Jesus, intended to encourage and prepare his followers for his return: "...when you shall see all these things" - and today it is really difficult to pretend not to see them -"know that he" - Jesus is speaking of himself - "is near, at the very gates...lift up your head, because your redemption is at hand! (Mattew 24,33; Luke 21,28). "Your redemption is at hand": yes, those who recognize in Iesus "the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega", as we read in the Revelation, know that the end of the world will not be a curtain that falls on the human history, obscuring and cancelling everything. No, the end of the world is truly He himself, Jesus, who will return to judge the living and the dead, and to establish that Kingdom of Heaven in which there will be finally true love, true justice, true peace. That day - clearly and repeatedly Jesus admonishes in the Gospel - will mean for many "weeping and gnashing of teeth ". But, for those who have faith in Him and entrust themselves to Him, it will be a day on which, as we read at the end of Marcello's prophecy concerning the Assisi earthquake:

"... The desert shall be transformed then and thence in garden. In a book finally they will read. Humility will listen, justice will see. The mocker and the jolly fellow will disappear and nobody will be able anymore to ruin the other for nothing. The messengers of peace will not choke and the heralds will be welcomed. The garden shall be transformed into a park and the book into doctrine. The Spirit of the Lord will embrace the earth and the dead then will love one another."



Christian
Voluntary Service:
The IACA



The "Casone", an ancient cottage of historic-architectural interest, at the main seat of the IACA in Rocca Sant'Angelo of Assisi (aerial photo)

HOW THE ASSOCIATION STARTED IN 1991

In 1991, during one of his retreats, this time made at the Convent of the Sisters of Bethlehem in the Abbey of Monte Corona, between Perugia and Umbertide, Marcello felt that an Association should be founded to share with many people the profound values of faith and practical service lived — and also suffered — during more than a decade of community life. On the other hand, for those among the members of the community and his own children, who had found that road of prayer and sanctification too difficult, the opportunity could be provided to stay and continue to work together as associates, even if with lesser spiritual demands, but always for the benefit of one's neighbour.

We had two beautiful sites in Umbria where we could carry out that deeply felt mission, directed to bring forth "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, love and peace among the people, in the family and in nature". This is the first of the aims of association, which we would later incorporate in the fist article of the Constitution. The Association was established in Assisi on the 24th April of that year, 1991. The name "International Association for Christian Action" was not intended to be pretentious: that "international" and the english wording imply the universal range of the message and of those to whom it is addressed. Besides, among the first associates there were already some of several nationalities. There are at present some sixty countries represented by more than three thousand associates of the IACA. Moreover English would have been the required language to communicate with the entire world on the internet, that precious instrument which the Association began to use in 2000.

As the logo for the Association we chose a lion, made from a mosaic of stones. Symbol of Christ "lion of the tribe of Juda", as He is defined in the Book of Revelation (5,5); sign of strength and majesty. The stones which make up this mosaic refer to what

St. Peter, the first "stone", wrote in his First Letter (2,4-5): "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals, but chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...". A curiosity regarding our logo (reproduced on the front cover): the muzzle is not exactly that of a lion. In fact, it is the muzzle of a chow chow, of which we have a little breeding stock. It is a 'primitive' race of dog: even this has a meaning. Finally, on our membership board (currently one can associate online) you can read a phrase taken from the writings of another "Lion", Lev (Leo) Tolstoy: "When the evil ones form an alliance to create a power it is necessary that the onest ones do the same". This motto is generally much appreciated by those who read it: sign of the times!

The membership board, reproduced here below is very special: it doesn't report a request of adhesion, but a blessing for the association, written in his own hand by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, when he was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. A blessing that has brought good luck to the Iaca... and even to himself who afterwards became Pope!

Vuoi associarti? Restituisci	questa scheda compilata.
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06086 Rocca S. Angelo - ASSISI (Pg) - Tel. (075) 803.84.08 - 83.95.02 - Fax (075) 803.98.10 - c.c.p. 14492060

HOSPITALITY

In the community centre at Rocca Sant'Angelo, people from all kinds of places and of every possible human situation have been received: from those who were looking for a bit of peace, to those who needed a bed and a hot meal; from those who were chasing their dream to those who were...escaping. Literally so: a case like this, certainly uncommon but also dramatic, occurred when a man arrived one day at Rocca Sant'Angelo saying that he was looking for a Christian Community. He had seen our name in the Phone Book and asked if he could stay a little while with us. That was all...or almost all.

The 'almost' came out when, after he had spoken to me – many get me to swallow what they say – he spoke then with Marcello, who persuaded him to give himself up to the local Carabinieri¹ station, with a Bible in his hand and with the promise that he would be given help in the future. In fact, that man was on the run all over Italy after having committed a serious offence. Marcello had managed to get him to admit his true situation as a wanted man. Later he went to visit him several times in the psychiatric prison where he was serving the sentence. A few years later he came back to visit Marcello: he had been rehabilitated and was now working – he had learned a trade in prison – and he also had a family, with two daughters.

But there were other very different stories, such as that of a girl, dressed in a white sheet, who was making the mythical journey to the East. She turned up one evening at the community, searching for her brother who had also embarked on the same adventure. She stood that night, then another as well, then a good dozen of years. She had found the East in Assisi, just as Dante wrote...

¹ Territorial Police Force

But the association Iaca also had a country house at Gaiche of Piegaro (Perugia) in need to be completely renovated, which could be adapted to offer hospitality to several persons. Hence, in 1998 we decided to face up to that job. In that house along the time we have received families and single persons, for longer or shorter periods. This first recovery center has been later on abandoned for the growing engagement in the headquarters of the association at Rocca Sant'Angelo of Assisi. But it remains in the story of the Iaca as an important page of its activity for receiving and giving support to needy people.

ON MISSION:

WHEN THE EARTH SHAKES

The earth never stopped shaking, at Assisi and in a wide swathe of the Apennines in the Umbria-Marche region, during that long sismic event which began on the 26th September, 1997. The "Assisi's earthquake" - that had been prophecied in details two years in advance by Marcello Ezechiele Ciai - took four lives just inside the Basilica of St. Francis: two of them were Friars.

During those days of mourning and bewilderment, we spent nights of vigil under the porticoes of that square, while the activities of the Fire Brigade, the Police, the Civil Defence and volunteers from all parts were in full swing. We were there too, with a prayer, a word of support: as we also did in the reception camps for the victims of the earthquake, furnished at first with tents and later with containers.

Some of our younger members contributed actively at the supply base at Foligno. We tried to enter discretely into the pain and dismay of those who had even seen collapsing in a moment their house maybe built in a lifetime and with many sacrifices. We offered, as far as we were able, practical help, and also a word of faith. Faith in a God who not only created the earth but who governs its destiny, even by means of unfathomable events. A God who, nevertheless, remains 'Father' for those who entrust themselves to Him...

WHEN THE EARTH SLIDES

We were walking through streets full of mud, in Sarno¹, in a ghostly landscape; we were advised not to go higher up in the town; there was a smell of death. We spoke to young and old; they invited us into their houses, where we bore witness of what we had experienced in Assisi the year before. We shared with them the words of the prophet Habacuc, who seemed to have precisely spoken of that catastrophe: "The eternal mountains were shattered... you split the earth with rivers" and so he prayed:

"in wrath may you remember mercy" (Hab. 3: 2,6,9). To speak of God the Father, Creator and Lord of the heavens and of the earth: it required courage, because their land had set in motion to come sliding down towards the town, swallowing up not only ones properties, but also dear ones dears...

Yet "Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?": so we read in the Bible, in that prophetic book of Amos which had forced itself on to our attention after the 'Assisi earthquake' (Amos 3,6). Nevertheless, however upsetting the events are through which we find ourselves living, the Lord is behind all these things: we are not at the mercy of a capricious 'Nature', now gentle now harsh, nor even of the cruelty to which the heart of man can arrive.

A difficult subject. On the other hand also the words of Jesus could sound 'hard' and difficult to accept, when they told him about the victims died under the ruins of a tower that had collapsed in Jerusalem, or about the ruthlessness with which Pilate had slaughtered pious Galileans while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple: "unless you shall be converted", he said "you will all perish just as they did" (Luke 13, 1-5). But what does "be converted" mean, if not return to God the Father and confide in his inscrutable love? Many times we saw these words brighten up the face and soul of those who welcomed them.

¹ Town in the Province of Salerno - Southern Italy - hit in 1998 by a huge landslide

WHEN THE EARTH BURNS

At the two centres of the Association, we have always kept a careful fire watching during the summer months constantly monitoring the territory day and night. Later on and for some years we have linked up with the two Mountain Communities of the Subasio and of the Mountains of Trasimeno for fire watching. Some of us took also the relative training courses. We have been supported in this work of environmental safeguard by the love of our Umbrian land, and the awareness of the devastating effect which fires have on flora, fauna, the hydrological system and the atmospheric pollution.

More than once we participated even directly, in coping with fires. At Rocca Sant'Angelo a nighttime fire was advancing rapidly from the south, where Assisi is, into an area thick with highly inflammable shrubs, especially broom. The Firemen advised against confronting that wall of flame, too high and too fierce. However, we felt that we could do it, with God's help, and so it was. In the night, illuminated by that glare, the silhouettes of several members of the community and of Marcello with them stood out, opposing the advance of the flames, beating the ground with branches and throwing buckets of water. Some in the village still talk about it...

Also at the mountain centre of Gaiche we have been involved in the extinguishing of several fires: one of which was caused by a lightning, we were the first to signal it. We have already told in this book of another fire, because Someone from high intervened to extinguish it...

DIVULGATION

"Internet, new prophet for the Word of God": this definition is by John Paul II. But wait a minute, St. Peter – the first Pope – left his fishing nets because he was called by God to become a "fisher of men". That great communicator Pope said that it is time to fish with another 'net' ... the web.

Our decision to enter this new mission field gets back to the year 2000, when Marcello was forced to stay motionless for a period of forty days after a bad fall occurred on a clifftop slippery for ice, while making an inspection tour of the community at night. He had to stay for much of his time with one leg up for the wrotten fibula, but it was precisely in this circumstance that, after much ponderation and prayer, he decided (stimulated by the words of John Paul II) to move the first steps on Internet, whose modernity at first didn't appeal to him.

After all one reads in the opening of the Book of Proverbs (1,20): "Wisdom cries out in the street; in the square she raises her voice": and on the internet a new planetary 'square' has been created, in which the wisdom of the Gospel can resonate and what has been heard "whispered" can be 'broadcasted' (Matt 10, 27). Today Pope Francis communicates also on twitter!

We have put much work, day and night, in the divulgative activity of the Iaca which in these last times has considerably enlarged thanks to the various social networks. The association is on Facebook and Pinterest (as Iaca Onlus) and on Youtube and Twitter (as Iaca Assisi).

The number of our sites has been gradually increasing, and so the number of 'visitors', who in these sites find, not only a broad panorama of what our Association is doing, the places where it works, the witness carried forward in Assisi...but also a 'prophetic' underlining of so many dramatic events in which we all are involved. Jesus rebuked his contemporaries who were experts at forecasting the weather – just like today – but unable to read "the signs of the times" (Matt. 16,1-4).

We have always sought a clear confrontation between contemporary history and chronicle, and the 'Word of God' on the other hand: without hyper moralism or easy futurology, yet at the same time taking seriously what the Sacred Scriptures say – and predicts – regarding events which often leave us perturbed or, at least, bewildered. An operation which, of course, leaves us open to misunderstandings and criticisms: but, as St. Paul writes: "...I am not ashamed of the Gospel..." (Rom. 1,16). Starting from 2007 the association has edited this book, that is in periodical updating because it reports a work in continuous evolution. The book has been translated in six languages and also in braille for sightless people.

Since 2013 another book has been published concerning more strictly the mystic experiences and the prophecies of Marcello Ezekiel Ciai (see inside back cover).

PLANS AND DREAMS

For the Association's secondary seat of the IACA at Gaiche (Piegaro) there is a demanding plan: an 'oasis'! The word conjures up coolness, stillness, water, animals, silence, strolling in the greenery...

And finally a 'dream': a Centre for research and care of victims of Altzheimer's Syndrome, dedicated to the memory of the mother of Marcello Ciai, Rina Ricciarelli, afflicted by this pitiless illness for the last 15 years of her life.

This is what Marcello has written about her:

Out of the blue she was struck with the obsession that she was not in her own house and tried to run away to go – as she said – to her own home.

She often forgot that she had eaten and kept on asking for food. She mixed up her plate with the dog's dish.

She lay down at night on the bed fully clothed, including shoes, and refused vigorously any help, from her husband or from the servant.

These and other symptomatic episodes have concerned my mother's illness.

I prayed and was granted to have her in my Community (the Families of Bethlehem) and here with the help of God she no longer tried to run away or to exchange her plate for the dish of the dog and let herself be undressed to go to bed.

Me alone she recognised and spoke to me. But I missed her embraces, her kisses, her caresses.

I remember again when I was a child, after my umpteenth escapade, she ran after me with the brush to hit me and how nice it was then to ask forgiveness on her knees, in her arms full of love.

Her kisses were then all my joy!

Because of this I launched the initiative of a Centre of welcome and studies for the victims of the syndrome of Alzheimer.

Before my death I hope to be able to embrace again someone of them.



In honour of Rina Ricciarelli Ciai, mother of Marcello

PLEASE SUPPORT THIS WORK!

It is since more than 35 years that, in the land of Assisi the singular and beneficent prophetic work started, which I searched to divulgate even if summarily, in this book. The commitment of true solidarity for the sake of many has grown, but at the same time there has grown also the need of adequate resources to realize the prefixed finalities, missions and projects.

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Thank you whatever you want to do. God will reward you, and I wish for you anyhow any good.

The Author