

Settimo Cielo



di Sandro Magister

23 mar

Coronavirus. But the Church Also Suffers From the Contagion of Empty Rhetoric



- > Italiano
- > English
- > Español
- > Français

> All the articles of Settimo Cielo in English

*

Published as received. The author, well known to the readers of Settimo Cielo, a philosopher and historian by training, taught sociology of religion at the University of Florence and at the theological faculty of central Italy.

*

THE PLAGUE OF BANALITY

by Pietro De Marco

At the global juncture of the pandemic underway, there is no trace of a contribution from the Church "mater et magistra" that would measure up to its universal motherhood and teaching office. This has also been observed through statements of various accents in Italy, such as those of Marcello Veneziani, Massimo Introvigne, **Gianfranco Brunelli** of "Il Regno", and **Enzo Bianchi** of the monastery of Bose. Years of pious ecclesial chatter about leaven, evangelization, and prophecy stumble across the unexpected obstacle of an epidemic that immediately dramatized and verticalized everything, between life and death.

This inability to speak is in fact aggravated, against all hope, by the ideology of a Church as "prophetic minority" and inevitably the utopian, weak surrogate of a church "militans."

Even the moving prayer of Archbishop **Mario Delpini** amid the spires of the cathedral of Milan appeared without the intention of authoritativeness - on the chair of Ambrose! - starting from the minor, almost private way in which the prelate presented himself to the cameras and to the world, instead of with the suitable liturgical vestments. I understand that everyday dress and skullcap are enough to make a debut with "O mia bela Madunina" instead of "Recordare Domine testamenti tui et dic Angelo percutienti: Cesset manus tua" ["Tell your devastating angel: Stop," from 2 Samuel 24:16, introit to the Mass "pro vitanda mortalitate vel tempore pestilentiae"]. But what matters most is that the invocation of the archbishop of Milan was dominated, as almost everywhere in the Church now, by relational recommendations, of good Christian etiquette, to be kind, generous, hospitable, not by fundamental, historical-salvific visions, and only weakly by God as interlocutor. The invocation to Mary itself, more practiced by the bishops, sometimes has the flavor of a concession to the popular that we carry within us, a thing of the heart rather than a conviction of the intellect. But the public worship of God, including through Mary, is "logikòs."

Let us not be told that this is the new, irreversible style of the Church. This style instead reveals a dramatic fear, first of all in the ecclesiastical world, of the testimony of the "mater et magistra" as has always been practiced in the tradition of the Church; besides being lack of faith in votive prayer, in solemn questions of intercession.

Who so far has been capable of verticality? Where is the frankness of raising words of repentance and penance, when even Lent imposes its daily exercise? This has certainly been done by many humble people, capable of asking for divine protection, the intercession of Mary and the saints, together with the request for forgiveness. It has been done in religious orders that have remained true to themselves, in cloistered monasteries that resist.

Of course, coming in late, even **Pope Francis** has done something, which however is not enough to indicate to men how to see themselves under the unknowable but always provident will of God. In fact, in his interview with "La Repubblica" of March 18 there is only one mention, important as it may be: "I asked the Lord to stop the epidemic," since the other point of departure: "All are children of God and have his eye upon them," is diluted in the too human surrogate of the "good things in which [even he who does not believe in God] believes" and of the "love of the people he has around him."

The contemporary meditation of Cardinal **Camillo Ruini** on TG2 Post is richer and more explicit: "We must believe [...] that we are not alone, [...] because [...] the Christian knows that death does not have the last word. This must be said, [...] when one speaks of hundreds of dead [...]. This is why the risen Christ is our great hope." And further on he adds to the common exhortation to the rediscovery of everyday affections: "The rediscovery of our relationship with the Lord goes along the same lines;" and with a particular thought to the loneliness of those dying in intensive care: "We hope that the people who are there [...] will say a good word to them, that through them they may feel that they are not abandoned. And above all I would like to pray to the Lord to make them feel that he is close and waiting for them, as the Father in the parable was waiting for the prodigal son."

But thought keeps coming back to a widespread, perceptible reluctance to pray. The Christian who has immersed himself in "life" or in the nothingness of mysticism, or in invisibility, can have neither the words of prayer nor someone to address them to. Besides, what has become of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who once opposed cold theological analysis? That God has become a sort of ideality, which the modern Christian is eager to cleanse from the "stains" of Judgment, wrath, and punishment, to make of it a cloying entity. Therefore: "God has nothing to do with it." Furthermore, we are under the illusion that keeping God out of our historical tragedies is, in addition to being respectful, excellent apologetics.

It has never been like this. The relationship between God and the suffering of men is an eminent part of religious reflection, from the ancient tragedians to the major Christian thinkers. Knowing this keeps us at the level of the mystery of man; otherwise everything slips towards the futile. And then, who will ever invoke in need a God who "has nothing to do with it?" And in fact he is not invoked. Open instead the Psalms of anguish, of lamentation, of trial. Psalm 88 should be proclaimed aloud:

"Lord God of my salvation,
before you I cry day and night. [...]
I am full of misfortunes,
my life is close to the grave.
I am counted among those who go down into the pit. [...]

You have cast me into the deep pit,
in darkness and in the shadow of death.
Your anger weighs on me
and with all your waves you submerge me. [...]
I am a prisoner without escape,
my eyes are consumed in sorrow. [...]
Your anger has gone over me."

In truth, it has not been long that the Lord has punished Christians, Catholics, with the new leprosy of banality. "I sink into the mud and have no support," shouts Psalm 69:3. Some like this weakness, and to the prayer for salvation oppose a "cupio dissolvi" which is confused with the humiliation of Christ. But the arch, or the bridge, that leads from suffering to the "Domine exaudi orationem meam / et clamor meus a te veniat" ("and let my cry come to you," Psalm 101:2) demands the will to be, against nihilistic abandonment, and therefore to identify and judge evil.

We have already experienced, over the decades, that a Church that proposes itself as a "soul supplement" (it is much more, indeed it is not this) cannot avoid drift. The reference to the person, if it is not founded in divine revelation and does not find its horizon of meaning there, is reduced to a fragile and rhetorical humanistic assumption. And that is not true which is too often said, that "we love God in our brothers," since without the fulfillment of the first part ("You shall love the Lord your God," Mt 22, Mk 12), the first and greatest commandment, the second ("and your neighbor as yourself") will necessarily produce forms that are too human, illusory, or improper. For everything the unforgettable beginning of Psalm 127 applies:

"If the Lord does not build the house
in vain do the builders labor.
If the Lord does not guard the city
in vain does the watchman keep vigil."

It is unmistakable that the objective of "renewing society" today replaces, in moralistic and indeterminate terms, that lay ideal of "consecratio mundi" which, with its limitations, maintained in the age of Vatican Council II some continuity and coherence with the salvific-sacramental moment and with the universality of the Church as the City of God on earth.

A true, prophetic biblical minority is a reality in dialectic with the People of God extended to the ecumene. Never did the People of God, not even as the remnant of Israel, coincide with the circle of the prophet. The Catholic Church, the small group of the elect, cannot coincide with the sect, that is, with the small group of the elect, now "saviors" rather than saved. A thousand prophetic minorities, even the desirable ones, are not the "Catholica," which is potentially made up of the majority of men (in conformity with the "missio"), held together in the communion of the Mystical Body.

Only knowing themselves co-responsible, in the Church, for the infinity of ordinary men and for the baptized in the first place, can give words to the clergy and hierarchy. The words are those of age-old sacred history. Today they must be a call for help and acts of penance, founded in the God who creates and elevates. The words of utopia, proudly founded in the myth of the future, in the not-yet-existing that alone gives meaning, are exhausted quickly and miserably.

The great contemporary plague teaches us that we should free ourselves from the trappings of ecclesial rhetoric that suffocates us, "in capite et in membris." It has neither wings nor depth of gaze; it is conspicuously incapable of anything other than a consoling and benevolent speech. To display such words, it was certainly not necessary that the love of God be revealed in the pain and in the cosmic power that, nevertheless, we will celebrate at Easter.

(sm) Where Pietro De Marco writes that the Christian worship of God cannot be only "a thing of the heart" because it is "logikòs," he is quoting St. Paul in chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans: "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.... This is your spiritual worship." The Greek original is "logikè latrèia," in Latin "rationabile obsequium," and as such in the Roman canon of the Mass. A magnificent, unmissable and liturgical exegesis of this formula is in the public audience held by Pope Benedict XVI on January 7, 2009:

> **Saint Paul. Spiritual Worship**

Condividi:



23 marzo 2020

English

NESSUN COMMENTO

1 commenti sono disabilitati.

CHI SONO



Versione italiana



English version



Versión española

CERCA NEL BLOG

Cerca



Dal 2002 al 2016 quindici anni di notizie, analisi, documenti sulla Chiesa cattolica. In italiano, inglese, francese e spagnolo

From 2002 to 2016 fifteen years of news, analysis, documents on the Catholic Church. In Italian, English, French, and Spanish

De 2002 à 2016 quinze ans d'informations, d'analyses, de documents concernant l'Église catholique. En italien, en anglais, en français et en espagnol

De 2002 a 2016 quince años de noticias, análisis y documentos sobre la Iglesia católica. En italiano, inglés, francés y español

NEWSLETTER

Italiano English Español Français

Vuoi ricevere l'avviso di ogni nuovo articolo?

Per cambiare il tuo indirizzo o altri dati:

Per annullare la tua iscrizione:

ARTICOLI RECENTI

Francesco e le messe senza popolo. La parola alla difesa

Come la piccola Chiesa del Bangladesh risponde al coronavirus. Un missionario ci scrive

How the Little Church of Bangladesh Is Responding to the Coronavirus. A Missionary Writes To Us

De qué modo la pequeña Iglesia de Bangladesh responde al coronavirus. Nos escribe un misionero

Messe senza popolo. Che ne è della Chiesa in Italia? I pareri del teologo e del giurista

"Essere o non essere". La questione capitale delle messe in TV

"To Be Or Not To Be." The Capital Question of Masses on TV

"Ser o no ser". La principal cuestión de las misas televisadas

Pro e contro le messe in TV. Una lettera dal Regno Unito

For and Against Mass on TV. A Letter from the United Kingdom

marzo: 2020

L	M	M	G	V	S	D
						1
2		4	5		7	8
				13	14	15
			18		21	22
				27	28	29

LINK

01. Santa Sede

02. Sala stampa

03. Vatican News

04. L'Osservatore Romano

05. La Civiltà Cattolica

06. Il Sismografo

07. Diplomazia pontificia

08. Vatican Insider

09. Avvenire

10. La Nuova Bussola Quotidiana

11. CNA

12. ACI Stampa

13. ACI Africa

14. Crux

15. Asia News

16. UCA News

17. Bitter Winter

18. Zen

19. Religionsdigital.com

20. Corrispondenza Romana

21. Rossoporpora

22. Rod Dreher

23. Opzione Benedetto

24. LifeSite News

25. Edward Peters

26. messainlatino.it

27. Lo Straniero

28. L'Isola di Patmos

29. InfoVaticana

30. Il Regno

31. A. Grillo

32. A.M. Valli

33. finesettimana.org

34. Catholic World Report

35. First Things

36. The Catholic Thing

37. MondayVatican

38. NCR - Pentin

39. Ross Douthat

40. Jason Horowitz

41. Francis X. Rocca

42. Religion News Service

43. KNA in English

44. Pew Research

ARCHIVI

Seleziona mese