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(edited) Archangel Michael defeating Lucifer, by Hubert Gerhard, 1588, façade of Michaelskirche, Munich.

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# WHAT ARE WE LEARNING? LESSONS FROM A “KRISIS”

Dear Living Stones,

Covid-19 is a big crisis. Crisis means “decision” in the Greek language (*krisis*). In “Living Stones language” it means creativity and a renewed experience of God.

Living Stones is now becoming a “bigger house” through a lot of new online LS meetings, all around Europe and America. We are hosting more and more people, longing for a home while closed in their houses. But where is the “house of God”? Lord, we ask you the same question as your first disciples had: “Where do you dwell?” Where can we “remain” at home with you? Your answer was simply “come and see!” And we have only begun to take our first steps...

## **BEING A(T) HOME**

We are all at home. Everyone is at home. There are no more churches in our life, like in the “Heavenly Jerusalem”, as we read in the Book of Revelation (Chap. 21 and 22). The very last symbol of the very last book of the Bible speaks of a new city “without temple” because city and temple coincide. The whole city is now a temple. This means that the spaces of our daily life are all spaces to encounter God.

Is this not the real aim of the churches? No church was built for itself, but the sacred building was built to invite people to find God in their current life. Is this not at the heart of our LS evangelisation



to the visitors? We never intended for people to just find God in churches, but our guided visits were always oriented to help people develop their encounter with God at home. Even our name “Living Stones” implicitly refers to our invitation for people to pass from the relationship with a building to the relationship with living persons, “from church to Church”. And, ultimately, is it not the deepest goal of the sacraments? Is not the eucharistic bread, in its highest purpose, intended to open our eyes to recognise the presence of God in everyday bread? Is this not the fulfillment of our life? As St Ignatius maintains in the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises: it is “to find God in everything”.

Well, now we are being tested on whether we were ready for such a fulfillment. As Living Stones, we have always desired to help the Church, but we were far too often just “helping churches”. Now finally we can. And we must. If our highest desire has been to explain the art of churches as big parables of our encounter with God in daily life, now we can directly help people in their encounter with God in their own daily life. In our domestic context we now have the same function that a church building has in the urban context of a neighbourhood. Now we are really “Living Stones” of a new temple which coincides with the city and with each one of our houses.

When the Jews lost their temple and were exiled in Babylon, they first thought they would never be able to encounter God again, since God’s house was the Jerusalem temple. But they soon discovered that God had walked with them all the way to Babylon; they discovered they were themselves the “House of God”.

I think as Living Stones we were especially called in this time to discover our houses as the “House of God”. The house of God is exactly the space we inhabit since we actually “are” the house of God: praying at home; involving parents and cohabitants in some spiritual dynamic; being

witnesses of hope and joy for those who lost their courage; transforming injured relationships into spaces of mercy and reconciliation. As Living Stones, we can transform “living in a house” in “living at home”. Because God is not “somewhere else” but “at home”, in our houses.

Too often we were elsewhere, absent from our houses, because we never truly felt “at home”. And we searched for “home” outside: in our travels, in “exceptional experiences...or even in churches. Living Stones was born encountering people in their nostalgia of being at home. Now we can do nothing if not to be “at home”...if we are able to, that is. Now we have no churches, no travels, no amazing discoveries. And we experience something which has, from far away, the taste of a “last judgment”. We stand before our daily truth. Covid-19 has revealed what we often tried to hide by fleeing elsewhere. Some are rediscovering in these days a deep desire for God and are experiencing a renewal in their spiritual life and a healing of their closest relationships. Others are suffering under the deterioration of conflicts and the revelation of illusions.

Well, perhaps we were not yet ready for the fulfillment of the heavenly Jerusalem. Perhaps our houses were not yet completely the “House of God”. The gap between the situation in our houses and a house that can be called “house of God” was too large. This distance was, indeed, a “judgment”. But now we understand what the mercy of God entails: the filling of this gap. The heavenly Jerusalem is the promise of the full-fulfillment of this distance that will reconcile the house of men with the house of God. As “living stones” we are called to announce this mercy, to proclaim this reconciliation, this bringing together, and to work towards filling this gap.

At this point, the material distance in our towns and cities, between our houses and our beautiful

churches appears like a 3-dimensional image of this gap. Covid-19 revealed to us that it can be filled only by the grace of God, and that the most beautiful thing in life is to collaborate actively with this grace of God.

During the online LS Easter Triduum, I was especially moved while reflecting on how we can collaborate in the filling of this gap. Living Stones was born to show the Beauty in the churches. Now we can show the Beauty in the Church, and in so doing we discover what was essentially hidden behind our first attempt. We discover what Living Stones *is*, because we discover what Living Stones is called to *be*.

I am also very moved by a large number of lay people, especially fathers and mothers who, although quarantined with their children, are rediscovering their “priestly” vocation, which is a dimension of every baptised Christian. They are rediscovering the beauty of praying with their children before going to sleep or saying grace over the meal. They are discovering what Pope Paul VI referred to as the “domestic church”. After all, we read that the first Christians “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2: 46). Some of you are also experiencing a similar situation. Even the decoration of an apartment, the organisation of our domestic space, is a way to discover one’s own house as a “House of God”. And this is a kind of fulfillment in the “charisma” of Living Stones.

But since our houses are not yet completely “temples”, and since we do not yet feel completely “at home”, we will probably return from this “exile”; we will probably soon return to our sacred buildings, and we will probably soon resume our LS services in more and more churches. But remember this: we will not get this opportunity because we are “strong”, but because we were not yet ready. And when we will once again explain the beauty of a church, please do not forget that this is not our final aim. Living Stones means much more.

## **WRITING THE GOSPEL AGAIN**

The time of Covid-19 was also a time of absence. But absence is the womb of the language. The baby who misses the breast of the mother begins to cry out and will later pronounce “mama” or “papa”, when he or she notices their physical distance.

In the second half of the first century, Christians used to gather in prayer in the presence of an eye-witness of Jesus: Peter in Rome, Andrew perhaps in Romania (Dacia) or in Byzantium, Thomas in southern India, John in Ephesus, others in Antioch... they were all announcing the death and Resurrection of Christ, through the narration of episodes from His life and the report of fragments of His teachings which they could recall from memory. The common prayer of the community was based on the presence of these eye-witnesses. For these first communities the encounter with the Lord was made possible by the physical presence of these witnesses. The Church itself was possible because of the presence of these privileged figures.

Around the 60s and 70s of the first century, however, these direct disciples of the “Master” began to die due to their age or persecutions. An immediate question thus emerged: How could the community keep praying together if the witnesses of Christ were no longer present? Should they stop praying? Should they stop gathering? Should they stop being Church?

It is precisely in this shocking absence that a genius of a man (in terms of faith we often say: “inspired by the Holy Spirit”, but let us just say “genius”), probably called Mark, invented a new literary genre: the “Evangelion” (the “Gospel”). He combined several elements he had heard in the previous years (perhaps taking notes) from Peter and the apostles and produced a text aimed to provide the community with a similar experience to that when the first disciples were still alive. Mark was probably helped by the example of Paul who substituted his own presence with epistles containing his “living announcement” (the “kerygma”). In a similar way, the Gospels are not a “life of Jesus from Nazareth” but a “Good News” (this is the meaning of the Greek word “Evangelion”). It replaces the “Good News” the apostles were announcing when they were building communities and introducing them into the prayer. The “kerygma” that allowed them to encounter the Lord. Today we consider these texts as the most sacred texts we have. For us, they truly are the Word of God—the Word where we encounter the Lord. The Gospels changed billions of lives. These texts were not only a “minor substitution” of the apostles’ speeches; they were a great creation and a deeper understanding of our faith—a huge grace.

Covid-19 puts us in a situation which is not so different. The normal way by which we used to “encounter the Lord” has suddenly disappeared. We

no longer have the sacraments, we no longer have the physical experience of what were “witnesses” for us: the community, some brave priest celebrating, the atmosphere of a sacred context. We therefore need a new “Mark”.

In Living Stones, I believe we do have the potential of “new Marks”. The “online Church”, will not desperately try to “transport” our old Church through the screen. It will, however, discover the potential of this new context as a means to create something new, which will become for a lot of people a new way to encounter the Lord. For instance, I am very touched by the role of music in our online events. And I am also very surprised that new people are joining our groups in such a particular moment (apparently so unfruitful). And I was moved to tears while listening to the “Passio” on Good Friday during our online Triduum—the several different voices which created something like a “world Church” across borders and oceans. I admire the research many of you put in the creation of new ways of expressing faith (and the Beauty of faith!) online. This will also be a treasure worth keeping and cherishing when we return to our churches of stone.

## BEING ONE BODY

In this “exile” one other gap remains: we were not created to be in front of a screen, but in front of another human being and, ultimately therefore, to be in front of God. The human flesh is the sacrament of the presence of God. We are slowly understanding that the nostalgia of the human body is also the nostalgia and yearning for God. But it is remarkably similar to a long fast. Our perception of the body is being purified and revealed as a perception of the presence of God.

In this quarantine, the struggle in our body is like a “final purification”. Some of us are becoming very fat; others have completely lost the order of their daily timetable. We thought that we would have plenty of free time, but the time often disappears like smoke in days without rhythm. The *krisis* of Covid-19 reveals the relationship with our body. And we are now in a better position to understand what the Fathers of the Church repeated, around seventeen centuries ago: the fulfillment of salvation is the body; we better understand that the final promise is the “resurrection of the flesh”. As St Paul says: our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. As

Living Stones, we used to highlight the sacredness of temples, now we are called to help others to discover the sacredness of bodies.

Without flesh, time, or relationships, and yet we are “time” promised to become eternity, we are “relationships” promised to become communion. As a result of a viral pandemic (affecting all people), we suddenly became aware of our responsibility towards other bodies, everybody. We are constantly being reminded: “when you sneeze, please cover your face with your forearm!” As if all of humankind were dependent on our forearm. But this is exactly it! The bodies of others are all “in our hands”, in our arms. We are bodies building a unique body.

And finally, we now better understand that the Temple is not only my individual body but the body of the community, the body of humankind. We are called to renew this body through our personal body. And I think we are here touching one of the deepest levels of the vocation of Living Stones. The physical presence of our bodies among people and in the churches, the way we manage our bodies, the way we allow them to be a temple of the Spirit, indeed contributes to building the body of the Church, the body of humankind.

And you know this very well: some audio-guides and some apps are much more efficient and functional than our artistic explanations. However, being there with your body, you also provide a completely different experience to those entering the church. You are the message because the whole message of the building is simply what you say with the sacrifice of your bodily presence: “God”. And you also know this: formation could easily be done by individually listening to recorded lectures or praying on biblical texts. But the physical participation, even if through a screen, is such a privileged experience! It is actually the “preview” of our final promise. It is the “way home” where we can listen to the words: “Come and see!”

The Lord bless you,  
Fr Jean-Paul Hernández SJ



# München

by Matthias Scheidl



eine lebensvolle stad

München ist das größte Dorf Deutschlands, heißt es. Es ist sogar ein Millionendorf. Knapp 1,5 Millionen Menschen (Ende 2018) leben hier. Und doch hat es München verstanden - und versteht es noch heute - den Großstadtcharakter zu kaschieren und seine dörflichen Strukturen sichtbar zu halten. Tatsächlich fühlt man sich hier dank zahlreicher Grünanlagen und Biergärten und der Isar zumindest dem Augenschein nach fast auf dem Lande. Dazu gesellt sich das sonst dem ländlichen Raum vorbehaltene Gefühl, dass jeder jeden kenne—gemeint ist hier eine eigentümliche Fähigkeit, miteinander zu kommunizieren, zu leben und zu feiern. Kein Wunder also, dass gerade in München das weltgrößte Volksfest, das Oktoberfest, alljährlich veranstaltet wird. Selbst bei derartigem Mega-Event geht der Münchner Charakter nicht verloren, weil sich auch die vielen Nichtmünchner ohne größere Schwierigkeiten den Bräuchen, Trachten und Trinksitten der Einheimischen anpassen

können. Das macht wohl die beinahe magische Besonderheit Münchens aus: Die Stadt zieht Menschen in ihren Bann, wandelt sie nach ihrem Muster und macht sie so zu leidenschaftlichen Bürgern der hiesigen Lebensart. Sie prägt das Bild einer Stadt, in welcher der christliche Glaube und Tradition, politisches Machtbewusstsein und Repräsentationsbedürfnis, kulturelle Vielfalt und wirtschaftliche Prosperität—mal konkurrierend, mal harmonierend—die Stellgrößen einer geschichtlichen Entwicklung darstellen.

Münchens Weg in die Geschichte beginnt mit einem Streit um's Geld. Im 12. Jahrhundert wurden neue Handelswege erschlossen, neue Märkte und Städte gegründet. Und es kam nicht selten vor, dass Machtansprüche



lt mit dorfcharakter



gewaltsam durchgesetzt wurden. 1158 übernahm Herzog Heinrich der Löwe die Kontrolle des Salzhandels. Er ließ dafür kurzerhand eine Brücke in Oberföhring niederreißen, die in der Hand des Bischofs Otto von Freising war, und eine neue bei den „Munichen“ („Mönchen“) bauen—so wurde damals das Gebiet um eine Klostersiedlung (*forum apud Munichen*) genannt, das mit kleinen Dörfern besiedelt war. Mit dem „Augsburger Schied“ vom 14. Juni 1158 wurde die Rechtmäßigkeit der Tat Heinrich des Löwen bestätigt. München erhielt das Markt- und Münzrecht. Der Handel florierte und die Bevölkerung wuchs rasant an. Bald schon wurde die Stadt an der Isar das Machtzentrum Bayerns. Die Wittelsbacher, eines der ältesten deutschen Hochadelsgeschlechter, stiegen im 13. Jahrhundert zu Herzögen Bayerns auf. München wird 1255 Residenzstadt der Wittelsbacher und bleibt es bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Die Finanzkraft Münchens ermöglicht den Ausbau der Stadt mit zahlreichen repräsentativen Gebäuden. Sie sind Ausdruck des Machtanspruchs der Wittelsbacher, beispielhaft im Bau der neuen Veste als Hofresidenz. Der Bau der Liebfrauenkirche (1468–1488) als Kollegiat- und Pfarrkirche (die älteste Pfarrkirche St. Peter wurde um etwa 1180 erbaut), der St.-Michaelskirche (1583–1597) samt Jesuitenkolleg als Bollwerk des katholischen Glaubens gegen die Reformatoren oder der Theatinerkirche St. Cajetan (1663–1675) zeugen noch heute in eindrucksvoller Weise vom christlich-katholischen Glauben der Wittelsbacher und der Bürger Münchens.

Not und Elend, Krankheit und Tod und die Belagerung Münchens durch die schwedischen Truppen König Gustav II. Adolf infolge des Dreißigjährigen Krieges vermochten nicht den Katholizismus zu schwächen, sondern der Glaube erfuhr geradezu eine Renaissance. Kurfürst Maximilian ließ aus Dankbarkeit für die wundersame Errettung Münchens zu Ehren der Muttergottes auf dem heutigen Marienplatz eine auf einer Marmorsäule vergoldete Marienstatue (1638) nach dem Vorbild der Maria von Loreto errichten und proklamierte Maria zur Schutzfrau Bayerns. Eine Welle der geistlichen Erneuerung durchzog Stadt und Land, eine Offensive von Glaubensverkündigung, katholischer Bildung und Erziehung und für damalige Vorstellungen zeitgemäßen Formen von Volksfrömmigkeit, wie zum Beispiel die Wallfahrt ins nahegelegene Maria Ramersdorf oder Maria Thalkirchen. Hieraus entstanden viele der Bräuche

und Traditionen, von denen noch heute einige gepflegt werden.

München gestern und heute. Scheinbar immer weniger Menschen können im 21. Jahrhundert mit den geistlichen und kulturellen Errungenschaften vergangener Tage etwas anfangen. Wie damit in einer Zeit umgehen, die keine Pause kennt, die ständig im Wandel begriffen ist? Digitalisierung, Klimawandel, Werteverchiebung, - das sind nur einige der Begriffe, die für den Wandel unserer Zeit stehen. München ist wandlungsfähig. Mit jedem neu zugezogenen Bürger verändert sich das Bild der Stadt, und die Stadt verbildlicht sich in jedem Neubürger. Diese besondere Qualität Münchens wurde bereits 1782 vom Geschichtsschreiber Lorenz Westenrieder in anderer Weise formuliert: „Es ist hier gut sein, und wer nur eine kleine Zeit zugegen, will hier seine Wohnung bauen.“ Die Münchner, übrigens, bauten zahlreiche Gotteshäuser, damit Gott bei den Menschen wohnen kann. Es ist zum Markenzeichen der Stadt geworden: die Frauenkirche mit ihren beiden Türmen.

## MUNICH: A LIVELY CITY WITH THE CHARACTER OF A VILLAGE

It is said that Munich is the largest “village” in Germany, a village of millions. Nearly 1.5 million people (end of 2018) live here. And yet Munich has managed—as it may indeed be understood—to conceal the city character and to keep its village structures visible. In fact, thanks to numerous green spaces and beer gardens and the Isar River, one might easily feel as if he or she are in the countryside. This is accompanied by that notion that everyone knows everyone—a quality with is otherwise reserved for rural areas. This implies a peculiar ability to communicate, live and celebrate with one another. No wonder, then, that the world’s largest folk festival, the Oktoberfest, is held every year in Munich. Even with such a mega-event, that character so typical of Munich is not lost, because anyone coming from beyond the territory of the village-city may easily adapt to the customs, costumes and drinking habits of the locals. This is perhaps the almost magical peculiarity of Munich: the city captivates people, transforms them according to their pattern and, thus, makes them passionate citizens of the local way of life. It shapes the image of a city in which the Christian faith and tradition,



political awareness of power, and the need for representation, cultural diversity and economic prosperity—sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonious—represent the parameters of a historical development.

Munich's path into history begins with a dispute over money. In the twelfth century, new trade routes were opened, new markets and cities were founded. And it was not uncommon for claims to power to be enforced by military force. In 1158, Duke Henry the Lion took control of the salt trade. For this, there was a bridge in Oberföhring, which was in the hands of Bishop Otto von Freising, and had a new one built by the "Munichen" ("monks")—this was the name of the area around a monastery settlement (*forum apud Munichen*) that was populated with small villages. With the "Augsburger Schied" of 14 June 1158, the legality of the act of Henry the Lion was confirmed. Munich was granted market and coin rights; trade flourished and the population grew rapidly. Soon the city on the Isar River became the power centre of Bavaria. The Wittelsbacher, one of the oldest German noble families, rose to Bavarian dukedom in the thirteenth century. Munich became the residence city of the Wittelsbacher in 1255 and remained so until the twentieth century. Munich's financial strength enabled the expansion of the city with the building of numerous representative buildings. They are an expression of the Wittelsbachers' claim to power, exemplified in the construction of the new Veste as a court residence. The construction of the Church of Our Lady (1468–1488) as a collegiate and parish church (the oldest parish church of St Peter was built around 1180), the St Michael's Church (1583–1597) and the Jesuit College as a bulwark of the Catholic faith against the reformers or the Theatinerkirche St Cajetan (1663–1675), still testify impressively to the Christian-Catholic faith of the Wittelsbach people and the citizens of Munich.

Hardship and misery, illness and death, and the siege of Munich by the Swedish troops of King Adolf Gustav II as a result of the Thirty Years War, could not weaken Catholicism, but faith experienced a renaissance. Out of gratitude for the miraculous salvation of Munich in honour of Our Lady, Elector Maximilian erected a statue of Mary (1638), gilded on a marble pillar on today's Marienplatz. This statue was modelled on the Virgin of Loreto, and this moment also proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the protector of Bavaria. A wave of spiritual renewal permeated the city and the country—a force towards

the proclamation of faith through Catholic education and contemporary forms of popular piety, such as the pilgrimage to nearby Maria Ramersdorf or Maria Thalkirchen. This has led to many of the customs and traditions, some of which are still maintained today.

Munich yesterday and today. Apparently, fewer and fewer people in the twenty-first century can apply and make proper use of the spiritual and cultural achievements of the days gone by. How are we to deal with this in a time that does not know how to pause, how to be still; in a world that is constantly changing? Digitisation, climate change, the shift in values – these are just some of the terms that stand for the change of our time. Munich is capable of change. With each new citizen, the image of the city changes, and the city is illustrated in every new citizen. This special quality of Munich was already formulated in 1782 by the historian Lorenz Westenrieder, albeit in another way: "It is good to be here, and those who only want to spend a little time here want to build their own apartment here." The people of Munich, by the way, also built numerous places of worship so that God could live with the people. It has become the hallmark of the city: the Frauenkirche with its two towers. ■

### Matthias Scheidl

Deacon at the Frauenkirche, Munich



Kirche dominates  
of Munich





**In Deutschland wird in diesen Wochen und Monaten sehr viel über Reform der katholischen Kirche diskutiert. Das ist gut und notwendig. Meiner Ansicht nach aber ist etwas Anderes noch notwendiger: Alle Christen, denen die Sache Jesu Christi am Herzen liegt, sollten vor allem in geeigneter Weise von Gott sprechen.**

Ich bin der Ansicht, dass für unzählige moderne Europäer Gott nahezu keine Rolle mehr spielt. Sie sind keine schlechten Menschen, engagieren sich sogar vielfach für die Nächsten, leben korrekt. Vor allem die Flüchtlingsaufnahme vor fünf Jahren hat das christliche Denken vieler Bürger gezeigt. Aber Gott kommt im Denken der meisten Bürger nur noch verschwindend selten vor. Wenn aber nicht in guter Weise von Gott gesprochen, dann verschwindet er aus der Gesellschaft. Das wird bestätigt durch die Studie „Schweigspirale“. Diese hat wissenschaftlich gezeigt: Wovon in den Medien und sonst viel gesprochen wird, davon wird dann immer mehr geredet.

Wovon wenig gesprochen wird, davon ist immer weniger die Rede. Wenn eines Tages in Europa niemand mehr z.B. von China sprechen würde, dann würde die europäische Gesellschaft eines Tages meinen: Es gibt kein China. Wenn in Europa einmal ununterbrochen nur von Brasilien gesprochen würde, dann würde man den Eindruck haben, Brasilien läge vor der Haustüre. Also: Wir sollten in geeigneter Weise von Gott sprechen. Das ist nicht so einfach. Gott ist ja nicht irgendeine „Sache“. Von ihm kann man nur bescheiden und unaufdringlich sprechen, indem man andeutet, Gott im eigenen Leben ernst zu nehmen. Vor allem sollten wir aber auch entsprechend leben. Worte müssen durch die Lebensform glaubwürdig werden.

Und noch ein Zweites: Wir sollten versuchen, Jesus Christus so gut wie möglich zu kennen, damit wir von ihm sprechen können. Viele Europäer haben wohl oft nur ein Klischee von Jesus Christus. Sie kennen ihn vielleicht nur als Guten Hirten oder als Richter oder eben als Gekreuzigten. Dass er auch stürmisch, provozierend, herausfordern, umstürzend, kulturprägend ist, davon haben sehr viel Menschen, auch viele Getaufte kaum eine Ahnung.

Jesu Christus, der Mann aus Nazareth hat mehr als alle anderen Persönlichkeit der Geschichte vor allem Europas geprägt. Die Bergpredigt ist ein Kulturgut, ebenso wie der Dekalog eine Kulturgut ist. Religion ist nicht einfach Privatsache. Religionen prägen Kulturen. Freilich haben die Christen in ihren Kirchen auch unzählig viel Böses getan mit

der Unterdrückung der Frauen, Hexenprozessen, Kreuzzügen und zuletzt Missbrauch von Minderjährigen. Das überdeckt die kulturprägende Wirkung Jesu Christi. Seine Bedeutung ist aber auch erkennbar in der Musik etwas von Bach, in der europäischen Malerei und Baukunst, in den Domen und Kapellen, in der Literatur.

Weil die Bibel lehrt, dass der Mensch nach dem Bild Gottes geschaffen ist, fand zunächst das Volk der Juden, dass die Würde des Menschen unantastbar ist. Und weil dies so ist, haben die Europäer langsam die unantastbaren Menschenrechte erkannt. Unzähliges, was in unseren Verfassungen steht, geht auf den Juden Moses und auf den Juden Jesus zurück. Der Jude Paulus brachte es nach Europa.

Nur wenn wir unsere Geschichte, vor allem die der Kultur kennen, kann Europa seine gesellschaftliche Bedeutung bewahren. Sprechen wir von Gott und Jesus Christus!

## DO WE KNOW JESUS CHRIST? ARE WE TALKING ABOUT GOD?

Over the past recent months, there has been a lot of discussion in Germany about reform within the Catholic Church. That is good and necessary. In my opinion, however, something else is even more necessary: all Christians who care about the belief in Jesus Christ should, above all, speak of God in an appropriate manner.

For countless modern Europeans, it seems, God is almost irrelevant. Of course, this is not to say that this makes one a bad person! Indeed, these very people are often committed to their families, neighbours, and even foreigners; they live correctly. The reception of refugees five years ago, for instance, has shown the Christian thinking of many citizens. But God is only increasingly rare in the mindset of most citizens. If one does not speak of God in a meaningful and wholesome way, God disappears from society. This is confirmed by the “Spiral of Silence” model, a theory proposed by the German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. This has scientifically shown that “people who have believed that they hold a minority viewpoint on a public issue will remain in the background where their communication will be restrained; those who believe that they hold a majority viewpoint will be more encouraged to speak.”<sup>1</sup> For instance, if one day no one in Europe were to talk

about China, then European society would one day think that there is no China; if in Europe only Brazil were to be talked about continuously, one would have the impression that Brazil was on its doorstep. With this same reasoning in mind, we should therefore speak of God in an appropriate way. Naturally, it is not that simple. God is not some “thing”. One can only speak of God modestly and unobtrusively by suggesting that one should take God seriously in one’s own life. Above all, however, the way we live ought to be a reflection of the way we speak; words become credible through our way of life.

Furthermore, it is necessary to seek to know Jesus Christ as well as possible, so that we may indeed speak of Him. We often build some form of image or cliché about Jesus Christ. One may think of him as the Good Shepherd, the Universal Judge, or as the Crucified One. However, he is also troublesome, provocative, challenging, overturning, culturally radical—characteristics of which a lot of people, even many baptised, have little idea or, at least, speak little of.

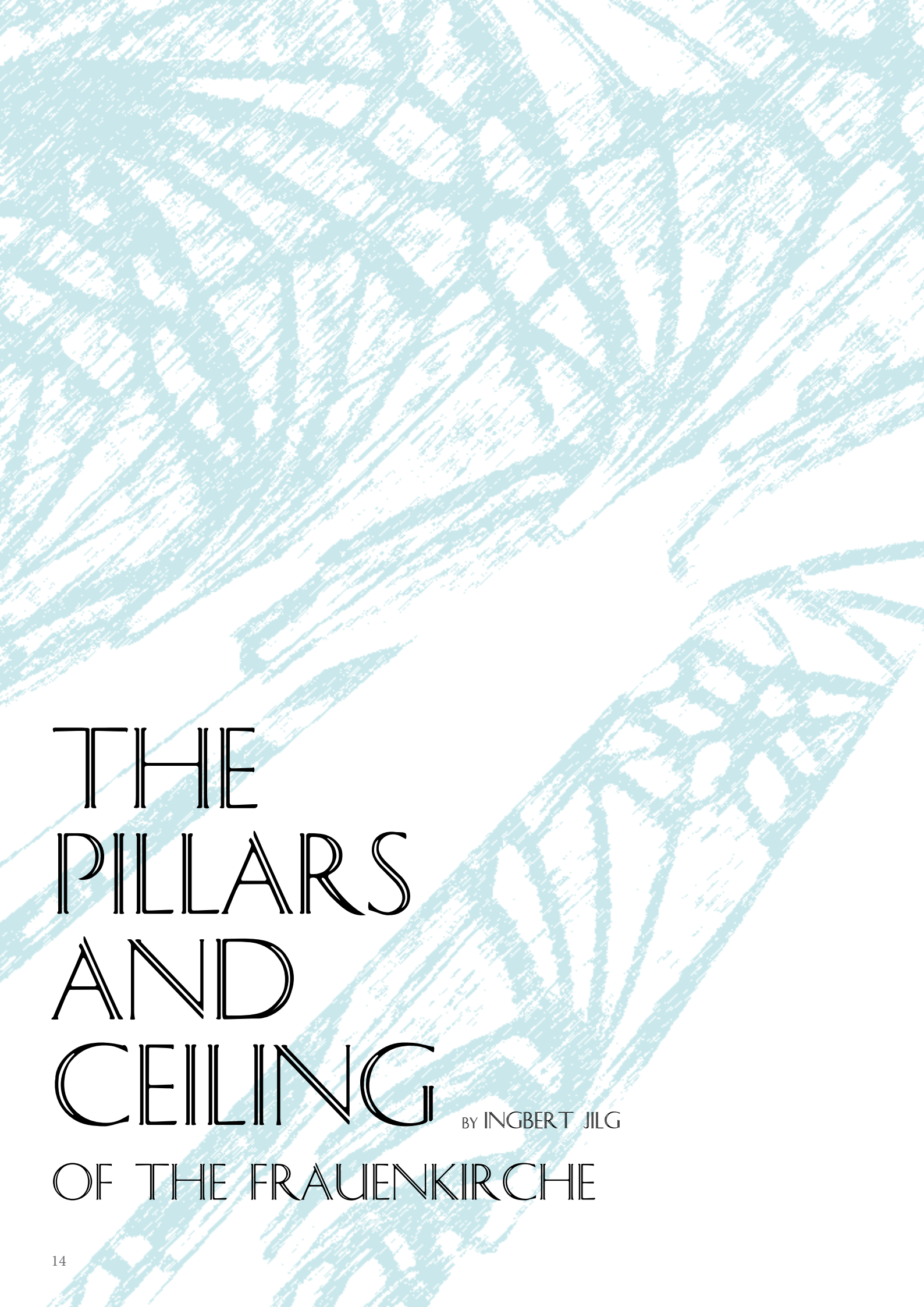
Jesus Christ, the man from Nazareth, has shaped the history of Europe more than any other personality. The Sermon on the Mount is a cultural asset, just as the Decalogue is a cultural asset. Religion is not simply a private matter; religions shape and transform cultures. Of course, Christians within the Church have also caused much harm, for example, when we think of the oppression of women, witch trials, crusades and, most recently, abuse of minors or vulnerable people. This masks the cultural impact of Jesus Christ. And yet, its significance is also recognisable in the creation of beauty, in the music of Bach or Vivaldi, in European art and architecture, in the cathedrals and chapels, in literature.

Because the Bible teaches that man is created in the image of God, the Jews first established that the dignity of man is inviolable. Europeans, too, have slowly acknowledged human rights as inviolable. Countless articles in our constitutions go back to the Jews of the time of Moses and the Jews of the time of Jesus. Paul—the Jew and the early Christian—brought it this view into Europe.

Only if we know our history, especially that of culture, can Europe retain its social significance. Let us therefore speak of God and Jesus Christ! ■

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<sup>1</sup> Richard West, Lynn H. Turner, *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 411.



THE  
PILLARS  
AND  
CEILING

BY INGBERT JILG

OF THE FRAUENKIRCHE



**The Cathedral of Our Lovely Lady, or as it is mostly called, the Frauenkirche, shares a common feature with most European cathedrals, that is, it is a Gothic style building. This, however, makes it special among the Living Stones communities, who oftentimes are to be found serving in Romanesque or, more commonly, Baroque churches. It would, therefore, be worth explaining some basic fundamentals of Gothic style architecture and the ideas behind it.**

While the Frauenkirche has some distinct features, its structure and concept follow characteristic Gothic principles. At first sight, when looking at the façade, observing the filigree ornaments and high glass windows, one immediately recognises the distinguished Gothic style.

The outer appearance is the first and foremost thing that shows off that it is a Gothic building. Of course, this can be recognised only if one has at least some rudimentary knowledge about this style. From experience, however, it seems that many visitors, in fact, do not recognise this style or what we mean by it—be it that they do not think about classifications of this kind, or do not have enough knowledge of historical styles. And admittedly, I would say that the Frauenkirche is not as elaborated as other Gothic churches or cathedrals, so its style might be recognised only with respect to the details.

In addition, there are several forms that would fall under the umbrella of the Gothic style, with additional variations that have been developed by different European countries and localities. There is, first and foremost, the French Gothic style, the English Gothic style, and the German Gothic style, among others. The beginning of the Gothic style was in France, and it is this which is most diffused and, therefore, popular. Moreover, there are three chronological classifications, all with varying degrees of architectural and sculptural elaboration: namely the Early, Classical, and Late Gothic style.

The Frauenkirche was constructed between 1468–1488, that is, towards the end of the Middle Ages in Europe and during the epoch of the Late Gothic style. In accordance to the place, it was erected in the German Gothic style. Notably, the remarkably short time of construction, in comparison to other constructions of this kind, is largely due to the use of bricks rather than stone. Nonetheless, the Frauenkirche has the appearance of an imposing and colossal construction; as the visitors approach the building they are often impressed by its massive proportions, particularly with its double towers. While all Gothic style cathedrals are certainly impressive, their scale is to a certain extent “reduced” as attention diverts to the ornamentation and sculptural elements and reliefs on the walls and pillars, particularly on the façade. The Frauenkirche, however, is not as decorated, so its colossal construction remains uncontested and takes centre stage. The high towers at the front, on the west end of the cathedral, are especially dominant when approaching the building. They do not have spires, nor do they carry pinnacles as can be seen in other Gothic style buildings, but are cupped, instead, by balloon-like tops, which resemble the dome of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. All in all, seen from the outside, the Frauenkirche gives the impression of a monumental medieval building.

As one enters the cathedral, the atmosphere within is certainly striking. While most churches are built in such a way so as to create an environment





(opposite) The Frauenkirche, Munich, in c.1900.  
(right, top) South wall of the Frauenkirche, Munich.  
(right, bottom) Ceiling ribbing of the Frauenkirche, Munich.

different from ordinary life, Gothic style cathedrals are especially unique in this way. They evoke an atmosphere in which earthly existence seems to be transcended. In fact, Gothic style cathedrals are meant to recall the perfection of the macrocosmos, that is, they are to represent the perfection of God's creation. This is achieved by means of mathematical and geometrical rules and principles in construction and design. Thus, if one stands inside the Frauenkirche and looks up to the ceiling, one sees a structure of linear ribs combining and shaping star-like forms. This kind of ceiling design is common to Gothic style cathedrals and may hint at the perfect order in the universe. Mathematics and geometry are indeed fundamentals of Gothic architecture. They allow humans a look into the way the cosmos is organised and reveal its order. Furthermore, they transcend material and complex thinking, generally resulting in clarity of the mind.

Another basic principle of Gothic architecture is its skyward orientation. All elements direct upwards, as the mind should ultimately be directed towards the heavens and towards God. This principle is realised in the Frauenkirche through the use of high columns, windows, and the height of the architectural framework in general. In contrast to the English or Slavic Gothic style, and even several German Gothic churches and cathedrals, however, there are hardly any elaborated spires. This very characteristic element is completely lacking. The double towers reach hundred metres in height though, while their arrangement is similar to that of other cathedrals, that is, at western end of the long axis of the nave, over the main portal.

The interior is nowadays composed of elements from different epochs, since it has been redesigned many times, with several Baroque interpolations as well as more modern elements introduced during the restoration period following the Second World War. Some of the original Gothic style interior has survived though, including several statues, the two rows of unpainted portraits of biblical characters in the choir, and many stained-glass windows, for example, the large one at the East showing scenes from the life of Mary. Nevertheless, due to the many Baroque style paintings and decorations, the atmosphere on



the interior of the Frauenkirche is not as sublime as one expects in Gothic ecclesiastical buildings. Nonetheless, the modern styled elements do fit quite harmoniously into the Gothic fabric, as it seems to me and other visitors.

In conclusion, it can be maintained that the Gothic style of the Frauenkirche may help to recall a distinctive time of Christianity, and is certainly something that may impress the majority of visitors. ■



Fig. 1  
Wilhelm Geyer, stained-glass window  
showing scenes from the Genesis, 1961,  
Frauenkirche, Munich.  
(© Mayer'sche Hofkunstanstalt München /  
Photo: Wolf-Christian von der Mülbe)



# MADONNA

## MA chi è questa DONNA?

### Le vetrate della Cattedrale di Monaco di Baviera aiutano a conoscere meglio Maria da un punto di vista biblico

scritto da Renato Dávila

“Come si chiama questa chiesa?” Molti visitatori rispondono “la Cattedrale”, altri rispondono “Frauenkirche”. Per i non tedeschi faccio la traduzione della parola Frauenkirche: “chiesa della donna”. “E chi è questa donna per la Chiesa?” chiedo ancora. E quasi tutti rispondono entusiasti: “Maria”. “E chi è Maria?” ...“La madre di Gesù”. “E poi?” Tantissimi rimangono zitti incluso i cattolici. Perciò colgo l’opportunità per spiegare didatticamente attraverso le finestre la vita di Maria insieme a Gesù secondo il Vangelo. Solitamente inizio spiegando la storia, la struttura e l’elaborazione di queste vetrate.

Questa chiesa gotica del XV secolo (1468–1488) possiede una luminosità che altre chiese di questo stile non possiedono. Solitamente tendono a una mistica oscurità. Questo è da una parte all’altezza delle vetrate laterali, che sono alte ben 25 metri, e al fatto che i  $\frac{2}{3}$  superiori di queste sono costituiti da vetro semi trasparente, che lascia filtrare la luce solare alterandone poco il colore e la luminosità originarie. La restante parte inferiore di queste vetrate è invece colorata e dedicata a un determinato tema. Solo le cinque finestre dietro al coro sono interamente colorate.

Tutte queste vetrate furono rifatte dopo la seconda guerra mondiale, mantenendo la forma, i disegni e i colori originali e seguendo la tecnica della pittura diretta sui vetri. Invece, le tecniche adottate fino la metà del 1500, fondevano insieme piccoli pezzi di vetro colorato, similmente a quanto accade con le pietre dei mosaici.

Il senso teologico di Maria per la Chiesa si trova non solo nel Vangelo ma anche in altri passi della Bibbia tanto nell’antico come nel Nuovo Testamento. Perciò la prima vetrata (Fig. 1) che spiego ai visitatori, fatta dal pittore tedesco Wilhelm Geyer (1961) è quella proprio della Genesi, il primo libro della Bibbia. Infatti in questa finestra vengono rappresentati i sei giorni della Creazione, ciascuno all’interno di un medaglione rosso. Le tonalità utilizzate sono solo di blu e di grigio. Il settimo giorno è incorniciato all’interno di una mandorla rossa e rappresenta in alto la Santissima Trinità immediatamente più in basso le figure del primo uomo e la prima donna: Adamo ed Eva.

La figura di Eva è stata già dai Padri della Chiesa sempre accostata a quella di Maria, così quella di Adamo a quella di Gesù. Gesù infatti è il nuovo Adamo, l’uomo grazie al quale tutti siamo stati giustificati, a differenza del primo Adamo, l’uomo per mezzo del quale tutti siamo stati associati alla morte e al peccato; Maria Vergine è la nuova Eva, colei che come ci dice il Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica, n. 511: “ha cooperato alla salvezza dell’uomo con libera fede e obbedienza. Ha detto il suo ‘fiat’ *loco totius humanae naturae*—in nome di tutta l’umanità: per la sua obbedienza, è diventata la nuova Eva, madre dei viventi”.

Eva, diversamente da Maria, aveva disobbedito al Signore e ubbidito invece al serpente. Così mangiò il frutto dell’albero che sta in mezzo al giardino e ne diede ad Adamo. Per questo il Signore disse al





Fig. 2  
 Max Lacher, stained-glass window showing  
 representations from the Book of Revelation,  
 1965, Frauenkirche, Munich.  
 (© Mayer'sche Hofkunstanstalt München /  
 Photo: Wolf-Christian von der Mülbe)

serpente in Gen 3: 15, *lo porrò inimicizia fra te e la donna*. Questa donna biblicamente, tuttavia, non è Eva, ma Maria e il motivo lo possiamo ben capire anche dalla collocazione di questa vetrata non a caso nella capella dell'Annunciazione della Cattedrale (infatti vi troviamo anche un quadro barocco con questa scena del Vangelo di Luca). In questa cappella dunque, l'inizio dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento vengono a convergere, facendo convergere le figure di Eva nella vetrata e quella di Maria nel dipinto.

Attraverso Maria è possibile anche conoscere molto sulla vita di Gesù bambino e adolescente. Infatti, proseguendo in questo cammino con Maria arriviamo nel lato nord della cattedrale, dove si trova la vetrata del Rosario (Fig. 3) di Josef Auer (1961), dedicata appunto ai diversi misteri di questa preghiera, in cui si meditano anche scene della vita di Gesù giovane con sua madre Maria. È interessante inoltre osservare come anche nel Vangelo che Gesù si rivolga molte volte a Maria con l'appellativo di *donna*. Anche nelle sue ultime parole sulla croce: *Gesù allora, vedendo la madre e accanto a lei il discepolo che egli amava, disse alla madre: 'Donna, ecco tuo figlio!'* (Gv 19: 26).

Sempre per rimanere sul tema di Maria come Nuova Eva, donna la cui progenie schiacerà la testa del serpente, è possibile volgere lo sguardo accanto all'altare maggiore della chiesa, dove si trova la finestra dedicata all'Apocalisse (Fig. 2), sviluppata dal pittore Max Lacher (1965). Qui Maria si erge come "donna apocalittica". Infatti questa vetrata descrive molto bene i primi versetti del capitolo 12 dell'Apocalisse, in cui si parla di una donna vestita di sole, in piedi sulla luna e in testa una corona di dodici stelle. Nella vetrata questa donna è raffigurata su una falce di luna di fronte a una ghirlanda di raggi che appare nei toni del blu e del rosso, delineati a loro volta da contorni degli stessi colori. C'è poi un drago vivacemente colorato che le appare sottomesso, gettandosi ai suoi piedi. Anche questa donna era incinta, come si può vedere ancora nella vetrata, nel suo ventre si distingue una specie di rosa circolare, al cui interno, se guardiamo più in dettaglio si può apprezzare la faccia di un bambino. Se questo bambino fosse Gesù, la donna

rappresentata dovrebbe necessariamente essere Maria, come in effetti è. In Ap 12: 5 su questa donna apocalittica è scritto: *Essa partorì un figlio maschio, destinato a governare tutte le nazioni con scettro di ferro, e suo figlio fu rapito verso Dio e verso il suo trono. Gesù è maschio, governa tutto ed è asceso al cielo per sidersi alla destra di Dio Padre. È chiaro come l'esegesi ci porti quasi ovviamente a concludere che questa donna dell'Apocalisse sia a tutti gli effetti Maria.*

Ma come mai nella Genesi si parla di un serpente che tenta Eva e in questa scena appare un drago sconfitto da Maria? Proseguendo più avanti ancora con il capitolo 12 precedentemente citato, si parla anche della guerra nel cielo tra Michele e i suoi angeli contro un drago e i suoi angeli. Proprio l'apocalisse chiarifica inequivocabilmente che il drago e il serpente sono due immagini che rappresentano la stessa figura in questo caso ossia Satana: *E il grande drago, il serpente antico, colui che è chiamato diavolo e il Satana e che seduce tutta la terra abitata, fu precipitato sulla terra e con lui anche i suoi angeli.*

(Ap 12: 9). Continuando ancora con la lettura, vediamo che si scatena la persecuzione del drago contro la donna, ma Maria ha un nemico, che alla fine non è riuscito a prenderla. Questo vuol dire che il serpente non era mai riuscito a toccare Maria con il peccato e per questo si dice che Lei è Immacolata. Per finire in Ap 12: 17, *allora il drago si infuriò contro la donna e se ne andò a fare guerra contro il resto della sua discendenza.* Noi cristiani siamo discepoli di Gesù e consideriamo che Maria è nostra madre; *Poi disse al discepolo: 'Ecco tua madre!'* (Gv 19: 27). E da quell'ora il discepolo l'accollse con sé, e di conseguenza siamo noi i suoi figli, la sua discendenza, e siamo consapevoli, che il serpente ci farà sempre la guerra, perché custodiamo i comandamenti di Dio e siamo in possesso della testimonianza di Gesù.

## **THE WINDOWS OF THE CATHEDRAL OF MUNICH SERVE AS AN AID TO UNDERSTAND THE VIRGIN MARY FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

"What is this church's name?" Many visitors answer: "the Cathedral", while others respond "Frauenkirche". For those who do not speak or understand German, I translate the word Frauenkirche as "Woman Church." "And who is this woman for the Church?", I ask again. And almost everyone responds enthusiastically: "to Mary." "And who is Mary?", I persist. "Jesus' mother", is the reply. "And then?" Many remain silent, including Catholics. Therefore, through the windows, I then take the opportunity to explain the life of Mary and Jesus, according to the Gospel. I usually start by explaining the history, structure and development of these windows.

This fifteenth-century Gothic church (1468–1488) has a brightness that other churches of this style do not possess. They usually tend to a mystical darkness. This is largely a result of the large side windows, which are up to twenty-five metres in height, and also due to the fact that the upper two-thirds of these windows are made of semi-transparent glass, allowing more sunlight to filter in by altering its original colour and brightness. The rest of these stained glass windows is coloured and dedicated to a particular theme. Only the five windows behind the choir are entirely colored.

All these stained-glass windows were redone after the Second World War, although the original shape, designs and colours, were maintained. Even the technique of directly painting on the glass was retained. However, the techniques adopted until the middle of the sixteenth century involved the fusion of small pieces of stained glass, similar to what happens with the stones of mosaics.

Mary's theological meaning for the Church is found not only in the Gospel but also in other passages of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. So, the first window (Fig. 1) that I typically explain to the visitors, made by the German painter Wilhelm Geyer, in 1961, is that inspired from the Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In fact, this window represents the six days of Creation, each represented within a red medallion. The shades used are only blue and grey. The seventh day is framed inside a red almond with a representation of the Holy Trinity at the top, immediately below the figures of the first man and the first woman: Adam and Eve.

We find, as explained even in the writing of the early Church Fathers, the close comparison between the figure of Eve and of the Virgin Mary, and so, that of Adam to that of Jesus. Jesus, in fact, is the new Adam, the man through





Fig. 3

Josef Auer, stained-glass window of the Rosary, 1961, Frauenkirche, Munich.  
(© Mayer'sche Hofkunstanstalt München /  
Photo: Philipp Graf Schönborn)

whom we have all been justified—unlike the first Adam, the man through whom we have all been associated with death and sin; Mary the Virgin is the new Eve, who, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 511) tells us: “has cooperated in the salvation of man with free faith and obedience. She said her ‘fiat’ *loco totius humanae naturae*—‘in the name of all humanity’: for her obedience, she became the new Eve, mother of the living”.

Eve, unlike Mary, had disobeyed the Lord and obeyed the serpent instead. Thus, she ate the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden and gave it to Adam. That is why the Lord said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman.” (Gen 3: 15) This woman, biblically, however, is not Eve, but Mary, and the reason we can understand this also comes from the intentional placement of this window; it is located in the chapel of the Annunciation. In fact, here we also find a Baroque painting of this scene, as described in the Gospel of Luke. In this chapel, therefore, the beginning of the Old and New Testament converge, bringing together—reconciling, even—the figures of Eve in the stained glass and that of Mary in the painting.

Through Mary, it is also possible to know a lot about the life of the infant and adolescent Jesus. In fact, continuing on this journey with the Virgin, we arrive on the north side of the cathedral, where we find the window of the Rosary (Fig. 3) by Josef Auer, produced in 1961. This window is dedicated to the different mysteries of the Rosary—the prayer to the Virgin—in which scenes from the life of Jesus as a young man with his mother are also meditated. Notably, we even read in the Scriptures that Jesus often turns to Mary with the nickname ‘woman’. For instance, the moving last words of Jesus on the cross: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’” (John 19: 26).

Remaining on the theme of Mary as the new Eve—a woman whose progeny will crush the head of the snake—one can observe, beside the nave of the cathedral, a window dedicated to the Revelation (Fig. 2), as envisioned by the painter Max Lacher, in 1965. Here, Mary stands as the ‘Apocalyptic woman’. In fact, this stained-glass window describes the first verses of Rev: 12 very well: A woman is dressed in the sun, standing on the moon, and on her head is a crown of twelve stars. In the stained-glass window this woman is depicted on a sickle-shaped

moon in front of a garland of rays that appears in shades of blue and red, outlined in turn by contours of the same colors. We also observe a brightly coloured dragon that appears to have been subdued by her, throwing itself at her feet. Even this woman is pregnant, as is visible also in the window; in the area of the womb stands out a kind of circular red, inside which—if you look closely—could be observed the face of a child. If this child is a reference to Jesus, the woman represented here should therefore be Mary. In Rev 12: 5, we read of this apocalyptic woman: “gave birth to a son, a male child, who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre.’ And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.” Jesus is male, he rules everything, and has ascended to heaven to sit to the right of God the Father. It is clear how the exegesis leads us to naturally conclude that this woman of the Apocalypse is indeed, and in all respects, Mary.

But how is it that in the Genesis we read of a serpent that tempts Eve while in this scene we see a dragon that is defeated by Mary? Continuing further with Rev 12, mentioned above, reference is also made to celestial war between Archangel Michael and his angels against a dragon and his own angels. The book of Revelation makes it clear that the dragon and the serpent are two images that represent the same figure: “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” (Rev 12: 9). Reading further along the passage, we see that the persecution of the dragon against the woman is unleashed, but Mary has an enemy who ultimately failed to conquer her. This means that the serpent never managed to touch Mary with sin and for this reason it is said that she is unblemished and pure of sin, Immaculate.

To conclude: “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.” (Rev 12: 17). We Christians are disciples of Jesus and consider Mary as our mother, and mother of the Church; “Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” (John 19: 27). As a result, we are his children, his offspring, thus becoming aware that the serpent will always provoke us and challenge us to war, because we are guardians of God’s commandments and witnesses of Christ. ■



# ERHÖHTER BLICK:

## JOHANNEISCHE ASPEKTE IN DER RAUMKONZEPTION

### VOM CHAOS ZUR ORDNUNG

Wer die überlaufene Haupteinkaufsstraße Münchens durch eines der beiden Portale der Michaelskirche verlässt und das Innere des Gotteshauses betritt, der lässt das Chaos der Stadt hinter sich und tritt ein in einen Raum, der förmlich von der Ordnung Gottes kündet. Großstädtische Enge und Ziellosigkeit bekommen durch die St. Michaels-Kirche eine ungeahnte Weite und einen Bestimmungsort vor Augen geführt.

Während die Lichte des Raumes, über die sich das gewaltige Tonnengewölbe gleich einem luftigem Himmel erhebt, das Gefühl von Unendlichkeit vermittelt, in der man sich zu verlieren vermag, ordnen zwei Achsen die Kirche und haben eine blicklenkende, Orientierung schaffende Funktion. Längs- und Querschiff werden jeweils von einer der Achsen durchzogen, die vom Christusereignis handeln. Die Längsachse bildet exemplarisch Stationen des "Lebensweges" Jesu ab; die Querachse setzt drei Weisen der Präsenz Christi ins Bild.

### DEN ERHÖHTEN IM BLICK

Was die Konzeption von St. Michael betrifft, so erweckt sie den Anschein, an vielen Stellen *Topoi* johanneischer Theologie in einen begehbaren Raum überführen zu wollen. Allen voran sei hier die Erhöhung Jesu genannt, in der Jesu Existenz kulminiert. Angekündigt wird die Erhöhung im Kirchenraum durch die überlebensgroßen Engel des Kirchenschiffs, die den gesamten "Lebensweg" Jesu begleiten und deren Gegenstände aus der Passionserzählung auf die Kreuzigung hinweisen.

Zur Erhöhung gehören für das Johannesevangelium wie für den Kirchenraum von St. Michael zwei Aspekte: Zum einen die Erhöhung Jesu am Kreuz, zum anderen die Erhöhung Jesu zum Vater. Beide Aspekte werden in St. Michael dargestellt. Während das Kreuz den ans Kreuz Erhöhten zeigt, befindet sich der zum Vater Erhöhte im Auszug des Hochaltars. Beide Darstellungen werden durch den Kirchenraum zusammengehalten. Zum einen durch den Altarraum, den das Kreuz eröffnet und der Hochaltar abschließt, zum anderen





**Was wir im Auge  
haben, das prägt  
uns, dahinein  
werden wir  
verwandelt, und  
wir kommen wohin  
wir schauen!**

**Heinrich Spaemann  
(1903–2001)**

**Cedric Büchner**

## **DER KIRCHE ST. MICHAEL**

durch die Blicklenkung. Vom Eingang der Kirche aus betrachtet, richtet sich der Blick zunächst auf das Kreuz, bleibt aber nicht bei diesem stehen, sondern wird darüber hinausgelenkt. Das Kreuz von St. Michael will mit der Statue des in den Himmel Erhöhten, der als Weltenherr im “geöffneten Himmel” dargestellt ist und über dem die Engel “auf- und niedersteigen” (vgl. Joh 1,51), zusammengesehen werden. Der Gekreuzigte ist der zum Vater Erhöhte; der im Himmel Herrschende ist der am Kreuz Erhöhte.

Jene Abbildung des in den Himmel Erhöhten korrespondiert mit der Christusskulptur an der Portalseite der Kirche. Beide Figuren, die sich im Aussehen und in der Darstellung ähneln, stehen für die johanneisch gedachte Grundbewegung der Heilsveranstaltung, die sich in Christus ereignet, und rahmen die Hauptachse des Kirchengebäudes. Während das segnende Christuskind an der Portalseite für die Menschwerdung, die Inkarnation, steht, symbolisiert der österliche Christus im Altarauszug die Erhöhung, die am Kreuz beginnt und beim Vater ihr Ziel findet.

### **EINE IDEALE HALTUNG**

Ein biblisches Beispiel für den Blick, der über das Kreuz hinaus dem Erhöhten gilt, stellt die Frauenfigur zu Füßen des Gekreuzigten dar. Während man—mit dem Johannesevangelium—unter dem Kreuz mindestens vier Personen erwarten würde (Joh 19,25), steht in St. Michael eine einzige Frau an deren Stelle, die szenisch die Kreuzigung mit der Auferstehung zusammenhält (Joh 19,25; 20,1–18). Es handelt sich um Maria Magdalena. Schaut man der Figur in die Augen und betrachtet ihren Blick, so weist dieser über das Kreuz hinaus. Die Haltung, die Maria Magdalena in St. Michael vor dem Kreuz einnimmt, ihr “Durchschauen” des und ihr Festhalten am Kreuz, bezieht sich auf die biblisch nach der Kreuzigung erzählte Begegnung mit dem Auferstandenen, der ihr zusagt: “Halte mich nicht fest; denn ich bin noch nicht zum Vater hinaufgestiegen. Geh aber zu meinen Brüdern und sag ihnen: Ich steige hinauf zu meinem Vater und zu eurem Vater, zu meinem Gott und eurem Gott.” (Joh 20,17)



The chancel of the church of St Michael, Munich, with a view of Giambologna's Crucifix and the altarpiece. (Photo: Christoph Lohmer)

## EINSICHT IN DIE PERSON JESU

Die Zeuginnen-Rolle, zu der Jesus Maria Magdalena am Auferstehungsmorgen auffordert, übernimmt sie auch in der Münchner Innenstadtkirche. Sie zeigt den Besuchenden wer Christus ist. Ihr Verständnis der Person Jesu prädestiniert sie, stellvertretend an jener exklusiven Position im Kirchenraum zu stehen und eine christologische Schlüsselrolle einzunehmen. Am Grab bekennt sie den Auferstandenen als "Rabbuni" (Joh 20,16); in St. Michael eröffnet ihr sprechender Blick, dass der Gekreuzigte der Erhöhte ist. Für diese Identifikation eignet sich im Kirchenraum von St. Michael kein anderer Ort so gut wie dieser. An dem Punkt, an dem sich die eingangs genannten Achsen treffen, auf den alle Aufmerksamkeit hingeeordnet ist, verdichtet sich die Raumaussage in den Augen einer Frau, die vor dem Kreuz steht und deren Blick den Menschen Christus erschließt. Sie steht damit *pars pro toto* für das, in was sowohl das Johannesevangelium als auch der Kirchenraum hineinführen wollen: ein vertieftes Verständnis der Person Jesu.

## AUGENBLICKLICHE BEZIEHUNG

Wer den Kirchenraum von St. Michael betritt, dessen Augen werden von der chaotischen Reizüberflutung der Einkaufsstraße auf ein geordnetes Zentrum hin fokussiert. Was in der Stadt zuweilen aus dem Blick gerät, wird durch den Bau in wenigen Augenblicken ins Auge gefasst: Irdisches Leben ist in eine himmlische Dynamik hineingenommen und erfährt eine ungeahnte Weite, wenn es in Beziehung zum Erhöhten steht. Dem erhobenen Blick kann sich im Raum von St. Michael keiner entziehen. Weder Maria Magdalena, noch die feiernde Gemeinde. Christus zieht, in den "Himmel" des Altarraums erhöht, alle an sich (vgl. Joh 12,32).

## JOHANNINE ASPECTS IN THE SPATIAL CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH ST MICHAEL

## FROM CHAOS TO ORDER

Stepping into St. Michael's Church by one of its two portals is like leaving the chaos of Munich's shopping streets behind and entering a space that really proclaims the order of God. Metropolitan narrowness and aimlessness are turned into an undreamed expanse that leads to a place of destination.

The nave, over which the enormous barrel vault rises like a spacious heaven, conveys the feeling of infinity in which you can lose yourself. Meanwhile, two axes put the church in order and guide the visitor's gaze. The longitudinal and transverse naves are crossed by one of the axes which represent Christ's coming and presence. The longitudinal axis illustrates exemplary stages of Jesus' "path of life"; the transverse axis visualises three ways of Christ's presence.

## FOCUSING ON THE ELEVATED

When it comes to the setting of St Michael's, an intention to transfer *Topoi* of Johannine theology into a walkable space seems to be inherent. Above all is the exaltation of Jesus, where Jesus' existence culminates. In the church interior the exaltation is proclaimed by the larger-than-life angels of the nave, who accompany the entire "path of life" of Jesus and whose instruments of torture from the story of Passion refer to the crucifixion.

For both the Gospel of John and for St Michael's Church, two aspects are part of the exaltation: Jesus at the cross and Christ's ascent to the Father. Both aspects are represented in St Michael's. While the cross portrays the exalted at the cross, Christ's elevation to the Father is depicted at the top of the high altar. Both are kept together by the sacred space: On the one hand there is the presbytery, which begins with the cross and ends with the high altar, while on the other hand there is the visitor's directed gaze—the orientation and perspective of St Michael's itself. At the church's entrance, the view is initially directed to the cross. However, it is ultimately directed beyond. The cross within St Michael's wants to be considered together with the statue of Christ



Mary Magdalene, detail from Giambologna's Crucifix, 1594.  
(Photo: Anton Brandl)

elevated to heaven, which presents him as the Lord of the world in the “open heaven” on whom angels “ascend and descend” (cf. Jn 1:51). The Crucified One is the Elevated One; the ruler in heaven is the one exalted at the cross.

The illustration of the ascent into heaven corresponds to the sculpture of Christ on the side of the church's portal. Both figures, which are similar in appearance and composition, represent the “action of salvation” (incarnation and exaltation) as John the evangelist presents it, and which takes place in Christ. Furthermore, they frame the main axis of the church building: while the blessing infant Jesus next

to the portal symbolises the incarnation, the Easter Christ in the excerpt of the high altar symbolises the exaltation, which begins at the cross and finds its final destination with the Father.

### AN IDEAL ATTITUDE

A biblical example of the transcendent view that goes beyond the cross is embodied in the female figure at the feet of the Crucified One. In relation to the Gospel of John, at least four people would be expected underneath the cross (Jn 19:25-26). However,



in St Michael's there is only one single woman, who dramatically connects the crucifixion with the resurrection (Jn 19:25; 20:1-18). It is Mary Magdalene.

If one looks into the eyes of the figure of Mary Magdalene and focusses on her gaze, it can be noticed that her eyes are fixed on a point beyond the cross. Mary Magdalene's posture in front of the cross is thus a reflection of her "looking through", while her holding on to the cross refers to the biblically-told encounter with the Risen One, who tells her: "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my

Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (Jn 20:17).

### **INSIGHT INTO THE PERSON OF JESUS**

Mary Magdalene, who is called as a witness by Jesus in the "morning of resurrection", gives testimony in the inner-city church of Munich: she shows the visitors who Christ is. Her understanding of the person of Jesus predestines her to occupy such an exclusive position in the church and, thus, to take a Christological key role. At the tomb she acknowledges the Risen One as "Rabbouni" (Jn 20:16); in St Michael's, it is her revealing gaze which determines the Crucified One as the Elevated One. No other place within St Michael's Church is as suitable to confirm this identification as the one she has, where the two main axes of the church cross each other and where the attention is concentrated. The spatial statement crystallises in the eyes of the woman who stands in front of the cross. Her view is opened up to Christ and embodies what both the Gospel of John and the church want to lead to: a deeper understanding of the person of Jesus.

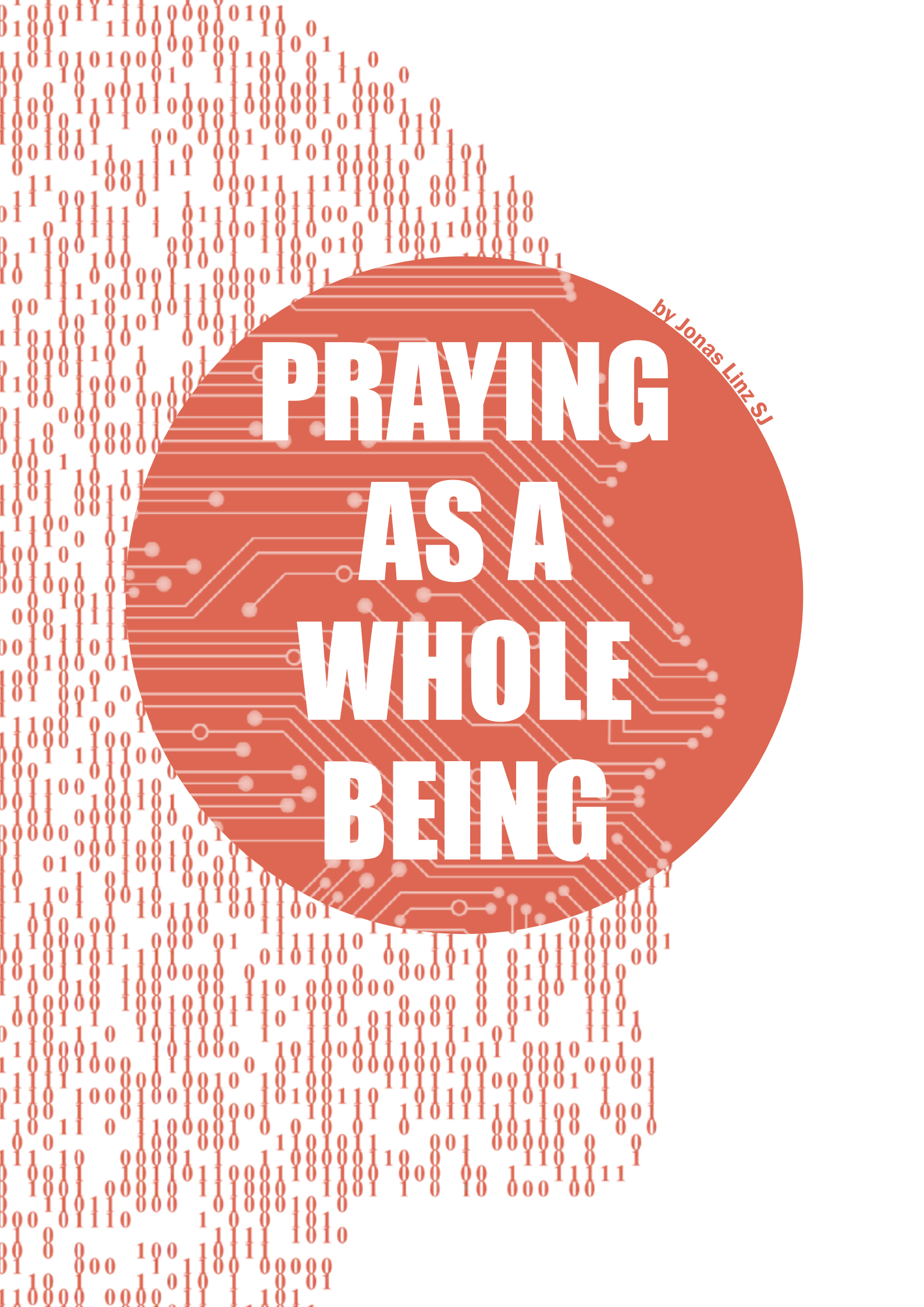
### **INSTANTANEOUS RELATIONSHIP**

The eyes of those who enter St Michael's Church of Munich are diverted and redirected from the chaotic over-stimulation of the shopping street into an orderly centre. Whatever in the city is sometimes out of sight is immediately brought back. Earthly life is taken into a heavenly dynamic and experiences an unimagined width when it is taken into relation with the Exalted. Nobody can escape or resist this upward and lifted gaze in St Michael's Church. Neither Mary Magdalene, nor the celebrating congregation or the visitor who enters the church. Christ, elevated to the "heaven" of the sanctuary, draws everyone to himself (cf. Jn 12:32). ■

**Cedric Büchner**

Living Stones München (St Michael)





# **PRAYING AS A WHOLE BEING**

*by Jonas Linz SJ*



**If you ask me what I think is at the very core of Ignatian spirituality, I would at some point come to the fact that it refers to the human as a whole. But what does it mean to be a (whole) human being? Perhaps, to get closer to an answer it would help to consider what separates us from other beings.**

Maybe I should apologise for being so frank but let us be clear: We are no angels! So, lean back and relax; what I intended was not in a moral sense. I am referring to the understanding that angels, like humans, are rational beings, but unlike humans, they do not possess a physical body. So, for us, standing in front of God as human beings surely means standing there as creatures of reason and—I ought to stress this—as bodily creatures. Our nature as creatures embodied in physical matter became dignified by the incarnation of Christ. Praying, in my understanding, thus implies to be present with the body. This is also important as a means. My body is a bridge to other aspects of human nature due to the reciprocity of mind and body. Becoming aware of one's own bodily sensations offers valuable clues as to what is going on in my mind. What am I feeling right now? Where are my thoughts? Thoughts and feelings leave a certain "colour" in the mind, influencing the occurrence of other thoughts and feelings and, thus, affecting my actions. I can trace these "colours" through the awareness of physical sensations. But it is not simply monodirectional. I can also use my body as a tool to put myself in the right mindset. Standing, sitting, or kneeling, are postures that we usually maintain during mass. They express different approaches to the different elements of liturgy. When we kneel, for example, we express reverence for God, who is always greater.

So, let us remember this: we are no angels. We have a body and, as a matter of fact, we share this with all living animals. In order to distinguish ourselves from the animals, while still keeping in mind our relation to them, Aristotle's concept of the *rational animal* will serve us well. Rationality is, indeed, a central feature of our nature. This is a feature that we should also be mindful of in our prayer life. Ignatian spirituality puts a great emphasis on reflection. The examination of conscience is the best example of this. We are invited to look back on our day, on the past hours, and reflect on them in the form of prayer. It is God who speaks to me as an individual and, therefore, I am invited to trust my experience. It is my responsibility to find the

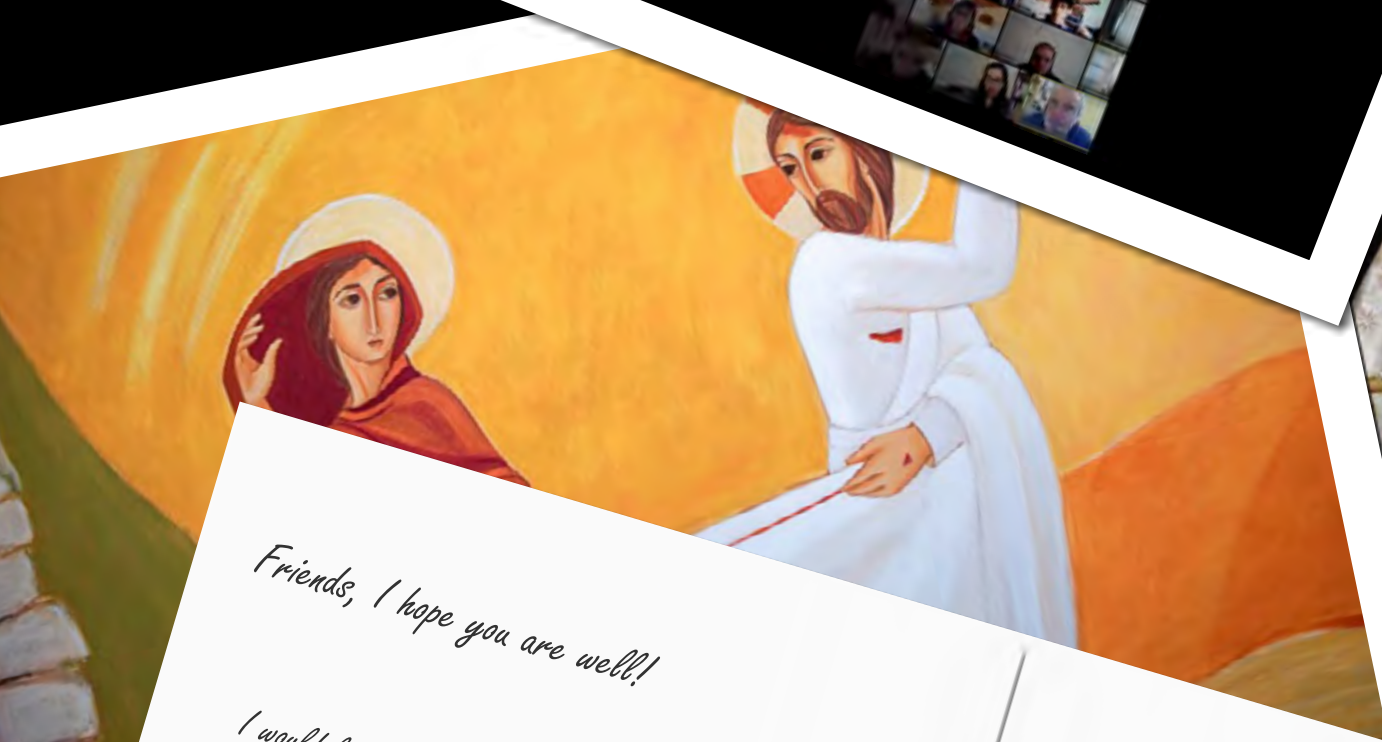
insights that God wants to offer me. But take caution, for this can easily be misunderstood as: "Well, so if I am on my own, I have to find things to be a good Christian—in particular a spiritual one. And the more I find the better." There are at least two points which should be addressed: prayer can be considered as a dialogue between me and God, between creature and Creator, and therefore, it is not about producing things on my own; secondly, this understanding of prayer would lead to a pressure to perform. For Ignatius, however, this is not about the quantity of what we do:

For it is not knowing much, but realising and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul.

This quote leads us to another aspect of our human nature. It does not disregard the rational part, but by using the expression "relishing", it infers that it should be in some way connected to our emotional condition. Ignoring this dimension, one could be led to think of men and women as if they were computers, consisting of hardware and software—they have a *corpus* and also something that resembles rationality. But what they do not have is the inner richness of feelings—that "colour", which accompanies our rational processes. The binary columns of ones and zeros are colourless, so to speak; they lack the ambiguity which comes along with our multilayered being. If we want to talk about the human being as a whole, about what makes us so unique, then the emotions and inner motions must not be neglected. Leading a spiritual life includes the whole person with its emotional inwardness, which is the playing field of the spirits. Honouring this part of human life also means taking it into prayer, coming to Him with all the ambiguity of our being. We are asked to be open to ourselves and to God, with all the different inner motions.

The unifying power is God, through whom all of our being converges—body, thought, and feeling. A wholesome prayer life takes into account the whole human. There may be moments when we want to emphasise this or some other aspect more, but we should not forget that we are called to be whole with all that we are. So, let us become human, let us indeed become whole. ■

A SPECIAL MOMENT OF ONLINE PRAYER  
**LS EASTER TRIDUUM 2020**  
9-12 APRIL  
PRAYING FROM HOME, TOGETHER



*Friends, I hope you are well!*

*I would like to share just a few words about the online prayer organised during this year's Easter Triduum... Here goes: from the perhaps a somewhat crazy idea of creating in a virtual way an Easter meeting with all the communities of Living Stones scattered around the world was born a magnificent experience of exchange and sharing. Suddenly our rooms became places of prayer, reflection and meeting, even if separated by many kilometres we felt united and close celebrating Christ's Resurrection. Christ who was present with me in my home as never before!*

*Keep safe!*



*with all good wishes,*

*Michele (LS Fribourg, SWZ)*



Hello everyone!

This Triduum was a great surprise! As a new Living Stone, I have been very well welcomed and have experienced a strong sense of community throughout the celebrations and small sharing groups. I also remember the incredible richness of the meditations based on pieces of art and introduced by various communities. I feel as if I had met you all and I hope I will get to know some of you better in future events! For the moment, let's keep on being creative, in communion through prayer, reflection and friendship!

Stay safe!



Warm wishes,

Lucas Franek

Living Stones Frauenkirche,  
Munich (Germany)



With love in Christ,

Aby & Humberto  
(LS Mexico City)

### A VERY DIFFERENT BUT SPECIAL TRIDUUM

A regular Triduum is lived in Church, with all our community. But this one, was different. And even though we are forced to stay at home, it was nonetheless a very special one.

We experienced both the virtual mass and moments of prayer with our friends from Europe, and with a Mexican Priest in Guadalajara Mexico, and we could be able to confirm that Christ lives in our heart, so, it is in our heart where we shall live every and each mass, not only in this special and difficult situation.

We got also the opportunity to be in the distance together, and to celebrate Humberto's birthday on the Saturday of Glory, in a special virtual reunion with friends from Rome to Santiago de Chile, from Mexico City to Canada, and even Burgos, Spain. And we feel that we had the opportunity to live exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to teach us: to live in community and in love.









# THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

Along the arms of the crucifix, gathers the Christian community; the symbol of identity, of memory, of mystery, of scandal, of tragedy and loss, of hope and salvation. During this year's Easter Triduum, which saw many members of Living Stones gather together in a novel way for several moments of prayer and sharing, seven crucifixes were contemplated and commented on by different LS communities. What resulted was a profound meditation on the reality of suffering, on the beauty of self-giving love and on the transformative power of divine grace.

But before we recall these seven reflections, we will first take a look at another striking crucifix found not only at the centre of the church of St Michael, in Munich, but also at the centre of Giambologna's masterpiece.

## **GIAMBLOGNAS MEISTERWERK IN ST. MICHAEL, MÜNCHEN**

St. Michael im Herzen Münchens ist ein epochaler Bau (1583–1597). Mit ihm kam die Römische Renaissance über die Alpen. Die Kirche des Münchner Jesuitenkollegs steht auf der Schwelle von der Renaissance zum Barock.

Die bayerischen Herzöge hatten sich im Reformationszeitalter für den katholischen Glauben und die katholische Reform entschieden. Deshalb die Nähe zu dem neu gegründeten Jesuitenorden, der über Bildung der Jugend die Kirchenreform beförderte. Herzog Wilhelm V, ein gebildeter und frommer Renaissancefürst, beauftragte erstklassige Künstler aus Florenz, Kolleg und Kirche der Jesuiten in seiner Residenzstadt zu planen und zu errichten. Es war vor allem der in Italien ausgebildete Niederländer Friedrich von Sustris (1540–1599), der aus der Florentiner Werkstatt Giambolognas die Bildhauer Hubert Gerhard (1540–1620) und Carlo Pallagio (1538–1598) mitbrachte.

Der Bauplan für St. Michael orientierte sich an den altchristlichen Basiliken, besonders der Maxentius-Basilika in Rom. Allerdings wurde die ursprünglich heidnische Architektur vom christlichen Geist umgeformt. Der Grundriss bildete die Kreuzform ab. Der Zentralraum, von einer 22 Meter breiten Tonne überspannt, war wie eine Triumphstraße für den Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen gestaltet. St. Michael hat eine christologische und kosmologische Grundkonzeption.

Die Mittelachse zieht die Linie vom kindlichen Pantokrator unter der Empore bis hinauf zum wiederkommenden Christus mit der Weltkugel an der Spitze des Hochaltars. Der Betrachter wird durch das Tonnengewölbe unter die Weite des Himmels gestellt. Er folgt im Blick nach vorne dem Lebens- und Leidensweg Jesu. Das Sonnensymbol mit dem IHS-Zeichen unter der Empore, an der Spitze des Hochaltars, im Triumphbogen und über den beiden Querschiffen markiert die vier Himmelsrichtungen und damit die universale Bedeutung der Person Jesu Christi.

Der Crucifixus von Giambologna stand zusammen mit der knieenden Maria Magdalena im Kreuzungspunkt von Haupt- und Querschiff. Die Mittelachse steigt von hinten, vom jungen Jesus, dessen Leidensweg abgebildet wird, über das Kreuz zur himmlischen Herrlichkeit, zum wiederkommenden Christus, der von der Mandorla des Hochaltars aus die versammelte Gemeinde segnet. Erst in den Querschiffen und vor allem im Hochchor tauchen die Heiligen auf. Sie sind die Garanten der Seligkeit für alle, die an Christus glauben. Der Hochaltar stellt in diesem Konzept das Tor zum Himmel dar. Deshalb hatten Herzog Wilhelm V. und seine Frau Renata in der Vierung mit Blick zum Altar ihre Hochgräber geplant. Dieses Projekt wurde nicht verwirklicht. Doch das Kreuz stand, zusammen mit einem Kreuzaltar, über 200 Jahre zentral unter dem Triumphbogen.

Der Bronzekorpus am Kreuz zeigt einen jugendlich-kraftvollen Leib mit einem zur rechten Schulter geneigten Haupt. In der Renaissance sollte Christus, in Anlehnung an antike Aktfiguren, als "der schönste von allen Menschen" (Ps 45: 3) erscheinen. Er wird von Giambologna als Triumphator über den Tod in seiner makellosen Schönheit gefeiert. Das schmerzliche Hängen des Körpers am Kreuz und die Herzwunde sind nicht einmal angedeutet. Michelangelos folgend formte der Flame Jean de Boulogne (italienisiert: Giambologna) Christus als vollendete Gestalt, die den 1483 aufgefundenen Torso des Apoll von Belvedere übertraf. "Es gibt kaum einen schöneren Männerkopf in der europäischen Kunst," meint der Kunsthistoriker Peter Steiner.

Ein Schüler Giambolognas, Hans Reichle (1570–1642), schuf zu dem Kruzifix die Figur der Maria Magdalena, die am Fuß des Kreuzesstammes kniet und diesen mit dem Blick nach oben, zum Antlitz Jesu hin, umarmt. In dieser Geste persönlicher, intimer Christusverbundenheit bündelt sich die spätmittelalterliche Frömmigkeitsbewegung der Devotio moderna, aus der heraus die Exerziten des heiligen Ignatius entstanden sind. Wie überhaupt der gesamte Bau von St. Michael Ausdruck der Exerzitienspiritualität ist: Der Mensch





Central view of the high altar and Giamobologna's Crucifixus in the church of St Michael (Photo: Anton Brandl)

betrachtet den Lebensweg, besonders das Leiden, Sterben und die Auferstehung Jesu, und geht seinen eigenen Glaubensweg unter den Strahlen der göttlichen Gnadensonne, die ihm von der Spitze des Hochaltars her entgegen scheinen. Die Engel mit den Leidenswerkzeugen im Hauptschiff tun kund, dass der schwere Lebensweg Jesu von guten Geistern behütet und geleitet war. Das Kreuz, das zwischen dem unvollkommenen Opfer des Alten Bundes (östlicher Seitenaltar) und der Anbetung der Hostie auf dem westlichen Seitenaltar aufragt, bringt die Mitte des christlichen Glaubens durch seine zentrale Stellung zum Ausdruck. Gleichzeitig wird in Verbindung mit dem Gemeindealtar die zentrale Botschaft jeder Eucharistie ins Bild gesetzt: "Deinen Tod, o Herr, verkünden wir und deine Auferstehung preisen wir, bis du kommst in Herrlichkeit." Der Blick zum Hochaltar als Tor zum Himmel, die Versammlung der Apostel und Heiligen in den Nischen des Hochchors unterstreichen diesen Ausblick auf die Vollendung, die als schon gegenwärtig gefeiert wird.

Dieses Kreuz, das—wie die bisherigen Ausführungen zeigen—in die Mitte der Kirche gehört, wurde 1819 aus dem Zentrum entfernt. Der Jesuitenorden war inzwischen aufgehoben. Der damalige Probst von St. Michael, Augustin Karges, schrieb, dass der Kreuzaltar "die gefällige Harmonie des Ganzen...störe". Das "Einfache und Erhabene dieser Kirche" werde vershandelt, die freie Sicht auf den Hochaltar behindert. Der neu ernannte Hofbauintendant Leo Klenze (1784–1864) schloss sich dieser Argumentation an. Im Zeitalter des Deismus, der ein direktes Eingreifen Gottes in die Schöpfung zurückdrängte und ablehnte, meinten manche, ohne Mittler und ohne Kirche auszukommen. Das Kreuz erschien als mittelalterliche Verwilderung. Kreuzfixe wurden auch an anderen Stellen entfernt.

Kirchenrektor Pater Karl Kern SJ (geb. 1949) kam 2015 zu der Überzeugung, dass diesem großen Kunstwerk aus ästhetischen und theologischen Gründen der Platz im Zentrum der Kirche gebühre. Das dunkle Material und seine sperrige Form stehen im Gegensatz zu dem hellen, abgerundeten Raum. Das Kreuz muss stören. Es ist der "Skandal" (Paulus), in dem die Weisheit Gottes aufstrahlt (vgl. 1 Kor 1: 22-24). Der Gekreuzigte ist der wahrhaft Attraktive, in dem Gott alles an sich zieht (Joh 12: 32; 6,44). Das reflektierende Licht lässt die Plastiken trotz ihrer metallischen Starre lebendig erscheinen. Mit Maria Magdalena als Inbegriff der gläubigen Seele hat die Gemeinde eine Vorbeterin, deren Blick das Angesicht des Geliebten sucht. In der Verbindung mit dem Altar wird deutlich: Der Priester und die Gemeinde sind hingeordnet auf Christus. Er lädt als Auferstandener zum Herrenmahl ein.

Im Bild des Gekreuzigten als Ausdruck vollkommener Schönheit kann Erlösung geschaut und erlebt werden. Am 8. November 1594 schrieb der Florentiner Erzherzog Ferdinand an seinen Verwandten, den Wittelsbacher Wilhelm V, nach München: *Il corpo, una cosa, non solo di pietosa devozione, ma notabile ancora per la bellezza dell'artificio, et maestria*. Mit diesem wunderbaren Geschenk der Medici an die Wittelsbacher hat St. Michael seinen künstlerischen und spirituellen Mittelpunkt wieder erhalten.

## THE CROSS IN THE CENTRE

### GIAMBOLOGNA'S MASTERPIECE IN THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL, MUNICH

The church of St Michael, in the heart of Munich, is an epochal building (1583–1597). With it came the Roman Renaissance in the North of the Alps. The church of the Jesuit College in Munich stands on the threshold between the Renaissance to the Baroque. The Bavarian dukes had opted for the Catholic faith and supported the Counter-Reformation. Hence the closeness to the newly founded Jesuit order, which promoted the Catholic Counter-Reformation in the formation of youth. Duke William V, an educated and devout Renaissance prince, was a patron of first-class artists and architects from Florence and commissioned the Jesuit College and church. It was above all the Dutchman Friedrich von Sustris (1540–1599), trained in Italy, who brought with him the sculptors Hubert Gerhard (1540–1620) and Carlo Pallagio (1538–1598) from the Florentine workshop of Giambologna.

The blueprint for the church of St Michael was based on the old Christian basilicas, especially the Maxentius Basilica in Rome. However, the original pagan architecture was re-shaped by Christian theology and principles. The floor plan outlined the shape of the cross. The central room, covered by a twenty-two-metre-wide barrel roof, was designed as a triumphal road for the Crucified to the Risen Christ. The church of St Michael, thus, has a basic Christological and cosmological concept.

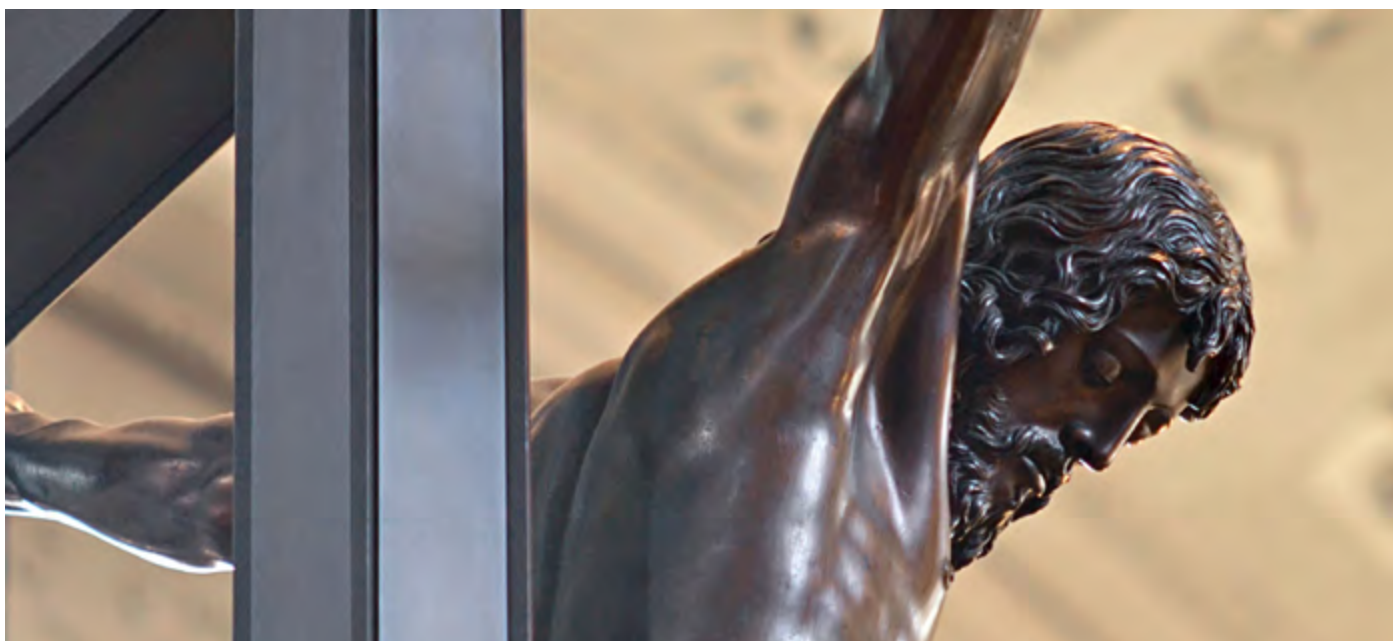
The central axis draws the line from the childlike Pantokrator under the gallery to the re-turning Christ with the globe at the top of the high altar. The faithful are placed under the vastness of the sky through the barrel vault. Through their gaze they follow Jesus' way of life and suffering. The symbol of the sun, with the IHS insignia, under the gallery and at the top of the high altar, is located in the triumphal arch, and above the two transepts are marked the four cardinal directions; the universal meaning and centrality of the person of Jesus Christ are thus emphasised.

The Crucifix of Giambologna stands, together with the kneeling Mary Magdalene beneath, at the crossroads of the main nave and transept. The central axis rises from behind, from the young Jesus, whose path of suffering is depicted, continues over the cross to heavenly glory and to the returning Christ, who blesses the assembled congregation from the mandorla of the high altar. Only in the transepts, and especially in the high choir, do the saints appear. They are the witnesses of bliss for all who believe in Christ. With this interpretation in mind, the high altar represents the gateway to heaven. That is why Duke William V and his wife Renata had planned their graves in the fourth bay with a view to the altar. Unfortunately, however, this project was not realised. But the cross, together with a cross altar, stood centrally under the triumphal arch for more than two hundred years.

The bronze body on the cross shows a youthful and powerful body with a head tilted to the right shoulder. In the Renaissance, Christ, inspired by ancient nude figures, was to appear as "the most beautiful of all men" (Ps 45:3). He is celebrated by Giambologna as triumphant over death in his immaculate beauty. The painful hanging of the body on the cross and his wounds are not even hinted at. Following Michelangelo's example, the Flemish Jean de Boulogne (Italianised: Giambologna) shaped Christ as a perfect figure that surpassed the torso of the Apollo Belvedere, discovered in 1483. "There is hardly a more beautiful man's head in European art," claims art historian Peter Steiner.

A disciple of Giambologna, Hans Reichle (1570–1642), created the figure of Mary Magdalene, kneeling at the foot of the cross, embracing it as she looks upwards, towards the face of Jesus. In this gesture of personal, intimate attachment to Christ, the late Medieval piety movement of the *Devotio Moderna* is brought into play. From here also originate the exercises and retreats of St Ignatius. Just as the entire building of the church of St Michael is an expression of the spirituality retreat: man looks at the way of life, especially the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, and goes on his own path of faith under the rays of the divine sun of grace, which





seem to radiate from the top of the high altar. The angels with the instruments of suffering in the main nave make it clear that the difficult life path of Jesus was guarded and guided by good spirits.

The cross, which rises between the imperfect sacrifice of the Old Covenant (eastern side altar) and the adoration of the host on the western side altar, expresses the centre of the Christian faith through its central position. At the same time, in conjunction with the church altar, the central message the Eucharistic prayer is put into the picture: “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and we praise your resurrection until you come in glory.” The idea of the high altar as a gateway to heaven, highlighted by the gathered apostles and saints in the niches of the choir, further underlines this view of completion, of fulfilment, that is being celebrated now, in the present.


This cross, which belongs in the centre of the church, was displaced in 1819. The Jesuit order had since been abolished. The provost of the church of St Michael at the time, Augustin Karges, wrote that sculptural group of the cross “disturb” “the pleasing harmony of the whole.” The “simplicity and sublimity of this church”, in his view, was being disrespected, while the free view of the high altar was obstructed. The newly appointed court builder Leo Klenze (1784–1864) agreed with this argument. In the age of Deism, which pushed back and rejected a direct intervention of God in creation, we also find the belief in the absence of a mediator and even of a Church. The cross appeared as a medieval wilderness. Crucifixes have also been removed elsewhere.

In 2015, Church rector Father Karl Kern SJ (b. 1949) came to the conviction that this great work of art, both for aesthetic and theological reasons, deserves to reclaim its place in the centre of the church. The dark material and its bulky shape stand in contrast to the bright, rounded space. The cross must disturb. It is the “scandal” (St Paul) in which the wisdom of God shines (cf. 1 Cor 1:22-24). The Crucified One is the truly attractive one, in whom God draws everything to Himself (Jn 12:32; 6:44). The reflective light makes the sculptures appear alive despite their metallic rigidity. With Mary Magdalene as the epitome of the believing soul, the congregation has a pre-worshiper whose gaze seeks the face of the Beloved. In connection with the altar, it thus becomes clear: the priest and the Church are ordered towards Christ; as the Risen One, He invites us to the Lord’s Supper.

In the image of the Crucified One, and in the expression of perfect beauty, redemption can be seen and experienced. On 8 November 1594, the Florentine Archduke Ferdinand wrote to his relative, Wilhelm V from Wittelbach, in Munich: *Il corpo, una cosa, non solo di pietosa devozione, ma notabile ancora per la bellezza dell’artificio, et maestria*. With this wonderful gift from the Medici to the Wittelsbach people, the church of St Michael has regained its artistic and spiritual centre.

### **Karl Kern SJ**

Rector, church of St. Michael, Munich



This is the Crucifix of “El Cristo de Burgos”, “Christ of Burgos”, which is inside the Cathedral of the city. It is a fourteenth century carving, made of wood, but covered by leather to give off a sense of realism, which especially comes through in the rendering of the wounds which are painted on the skin. Christ’s head, arms, legs and also fingers can be moved, as it is used in a kind of public “performance”, a re-enactment of the crucifixion, the descent from the Cross and even the burial of our Lord, every Good Friday.

It was first placed in an Augustinian convent next to the city, where it received a huge devotion from people, and became quite famous; in fact, its veneration spread out all over Spain, South America and the Philippines. There is also a chapel dedicated to it in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. St Teresa of Jesus prayed in front of this Crucifix when she arrived in Burgos, as well. Nowadays it is placed in the Cathedral in a chapel that takes after its name: “Capilla del Cristo”, “Chapel of the Christ”. There, the Holy Mass is celebrated every day, and is opened for personal prayer and for the sacrament of the reconciliation.

The huge devotion of the Crucifix which it garnered over time incites a lot of curiosity and wonder. What is it about this image of our Lord on the Cross that has touched so many souls? In truth, these kind of images with realistic appearances, hair and clothing, are not very common in the north of Spain and, usually, they are not greatly appreciated in this area. But perhaps, on pausing for a moment to reflect upon it, as a piece of religious art, it could also have a message for each and every one of us.

St Teresa praying before this image comes to mind. Her own path of holiness was related to the humanity of Christ and the *Ecce Homo*. The Christ of Burgos is indeed a very realistic carving, with a lot of wounds and injuries, suffering on the Cross, to the point of death. Perhaps it is precisely this suffering that connects so many people along so many years. The one who stands in front of this Crucifix may immediately recognise the suffering of this crucified man. And He suffered a lot, He suffered to death. We all carry much pain, and so can be understood by God, because Jesus was in great pain as he hanged from the cross. And not only can we be understood by God in our afflictions, but also we can connect to Him, once again through our Lord Jesus Christ. Staring at the Christ of Burgos, at His mistreated Body, therefore helps the viewer to enter into communion with God through His suffering on the Cross.

There is something striking in Christ’s face too. In spite of being on the brink of death, and with such a damaged body, the face imparts a sense of calm, not quite smiling but almost; in peace. In the most terrible suffering, our Lord seems to be calmed. It is as if though Jesus was suffering in His Body and Soul, and yet there was something upholding it all. This is the experience of the Christian sense of suffering. It is very difficult to explain, but surely, every living person has some experience of this reality. When a terrible suffering befalls our life, with the grace of God, it can be mysteriously affronted supported by a layer of faith and strength, which does not eliminate pain but allows us to walk ahead. Staring at the Christ of Burgos, at His expression of serenity, is thus also a reminder that suffering can be lived in a mysterious but meaningful way, thanks to faith.

This crucifix of “El Cristo de Burgos” can help us to join our Lord in the suffering of the Cross and to realise that, ultimately, we are not alone in our pain and suffering, but are held up by God.





FR. DIEGO LUIS  
(LS BURGOS)



IN  
RI



#2

THE "KORNIS CRUCIFIX"  
CLUJ/KOLOZSVÁR/KLAUSENBURG, ROMANIA

This is an eighteenth-century copy of a sixteenth-century crucifix, located in a chapel of the Franciscan church in Cluj, Romania. The original was produced in a Transylvanian workshop, and is located in a Franciscan church, the so-called Alserkirche, in Vienna.

The copy from Cluj was made in 1713, at the request of count Kornis Zsigmont, the then governor of Transylvania and one of the most influential Catholic personalities of his time. The crucifix was first located in one of his mansions (Mănăstirea/Szentbenedek), and in 1731 was donated to the Franciscan church in Cluj and placed in the Holy Cross chapel, which also shelters the graves of the Kornis family. Soon after, the crucifix became the centre of quite a popular local cult.

Jesus is represented here in the so-called "heroic type", with a powerful musculature, looking rather like an athlete, and as such very human. Also, if we were to focus on the hands, we would notice that they are clenched, as if he were in a fight, in a struggle. And he actually is in a fight. This is the final battle between the incarnate Word of God and the ultimate enemy: death. Here, death is visually represented by the cross, and Jesus is fighting and struggling against it.

**Lord Jesus, you  
who experienced  
our suffering and  
our fears, in your  
final struggle  
you conquered  
death. Since then  
we know that evil  
does not have the  
last word over  
your creation.  
Please grant us  
your strength and  
your resilience  
in our daily  
struggles against  
indifference,  
against hate,  
against  
discrimination,  
which all  
represent the  
death of our  
souls.**

DAN RUSCU (LS CLUJ, ROMANIA)

#3

## JESUS SERA EN AGONIE JUSQU'À LA FIN DU MONDE

(JESUS WILL BE IN AGONY UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD)  
FROM GEORGES ROUAULT'S "MISERERE"

This image could be a stained-glass window with the light shining through, a photo edited in black and white, or even a painting. However, it is a replica of a print using India ink on a copper plate in rotogravure. The artist is Georges Rouault, a French Christian artist who made his mark in the beginning of the twentieth century. This print is part of a series of fifty-eight prints, considered as one extensive artwork called *Miserere*. The *Miserere* prints are displayed in the church of St Séverin in Paris where we usually have our services.

In *Miserere*, the artist shows the suffering of the human being, his sins, his faults, and his hopes. The figure of Christ is illustrated in four out of the fifty-eight prints, including the one we see here, which represents the crucified Christ. It reflects the strength and the heart of the *Miserere* series: the passion of Christ meets the passion of humanity. Christ is not in heaven. He is on the cross as soon as suffering strikes every man and every woman. The text accompanying the image says: *Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world*.

This print shows Christ's ultimate fragility; he is nailed, his arms up high. We do not see the full length of his arms, nor do we see his hands or legs. It seems that they are not needed anymore, that the essential is elsewhere now. The "INRI" inscription is not visible either nor is the wood of the cross. Behind the figure of Christ is a neutral background, without showing any specific landscape; the crucifixion cannot be limited to any place or time. What is left is the crown of thorns, discreet and seemingly falling down. It is the only attribute reminding us that this figure is the Son of God.

All our attention is put on the bust, and especially on his face that is in terrible agony. It is deformed by signs of pain and sorrow, as if he had been crying but without tears. The misery is profound, like a screaming lamentation, yet in complete silence—a speechless cry to his Father. His son is there, almost dead. Our Lord gives Himself here, on this cross, on this place where He will

always accept His Father's will until the very end; dying with these chains—suffering and death—in order to dwell in them, to overcome them and to finally liberate us from them.

He is also nailed naked, without clothing, without protection preserving what is most intimate, making him even more vulnerable. Jesus is exposed naked on the cross, experiencing the violence of being seen by all, in such inequitable conditions compared to the clothed spectator.

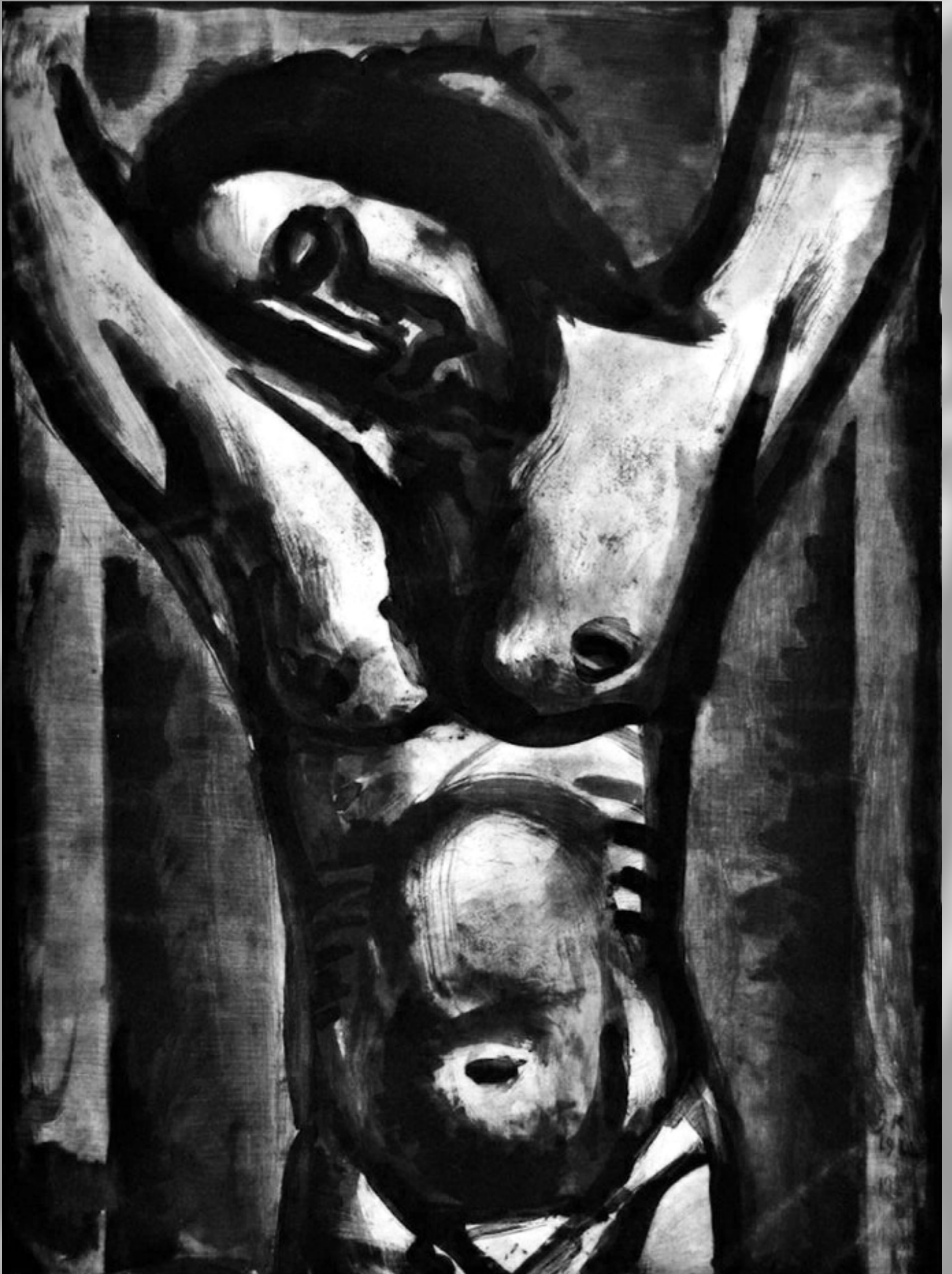
It is because he is naked and because he has lost everything that makes him unique; the crucified Christ carries all the crucifixions of our humanity. He carries our own crucifixions when we are confronted with the absurdity of suffering in its various forms: sickness, violence, mockery, manipulation, physical and sexual abuse, death.

Nevertheless, the most fascinating is the white in the image, the light that shines. It gives this artwork all of its meaning. It testifies to the prowess of the artist, who, through his engraving technique, has to remove matter to create a void, spaces that are not printed and therefore remain white. Digging deeper into the print, bringing out the light. This gesture can inspire us to empty ourselves to let this light shine through. Therefore, it changes our perception of Jesus' tortured body. Being in pain, this same body already shows the signs of resurrection. It is the great mystery that, although we do not fully comprehend it, we may nonetheless accept and live with Christ.

In its own way, this work reveals to us what the crucifixion of Christ, and every crucifixion we go through in our lives, can be: it is not an explanation for our suffering, nor is it a response. It is a sign of faith. We are not alone in the darkness of our sufferings; Christ is with us in this darkness and brings his light to it.

ALMUDENA MOUNIER-TEBAS  
(& LS PARIS)





#4

## IL CROCIFISSO DI SAN DAMIANO

BASILICA OF ST CLARE, ASSISI, ITALY

At the beginning of the month of March, the Basilica of St Clare (where the crucifix of San Damiano is located) was the first church in Assisi to close its door. Some days before we took a picture of the crucifix, in which we can see the shadow of the crucifix resembling a pair of big hands.

Thousands of people are familiar with the life of St Francis. He was the son of a rich merchant of Assisi and wanted to become a knight in order to gain glory and honour, but something radically changed the course of his life. This change happened in the church dedicated to San Damiano.

San Damiano is a beautiful and peaceful place outside the walls of Assisi. At the time of St Francis, the church was already falling into ruins, so, it is at least a thousand years old and there were buildings here for many centuries before that. The name of the church originates from the plague saints Cosmos and Damian, popularly venerated in the area.

After St Francis' possibility to become a knight fighting in a terrible struggle between Assisi and Perugia, in the year 1205, a lot of things in the life of the young man rapidly changed. He understood that his life was not to become a knight and nor was he to become a rich merchant as his father. Francis was in trouble. He didn't know what he really wanted and what he had to do. One day he entered in the ruins of the ancient and abandoned edifice of the church of San Damiano, and saw the crucifix (which in truth is an icon). As he stood before the crucifix, he prayed: "Most High glorious God, illuminate the shadows of my heart. Lord, give me right faith, sure hope and perfect love, good sense and understanding so that I may always follow your holy and true commandments". To his great surprise Jesus replied to him saying: "Go Francis and repair my house, which, as you can see, is falling into ruin".

He first concentrated on repairing the church buildings of San Damiano and nearby churches. But his great "repair" to the Church was the founding of the Franciscan Order.

In one of the most difficult moments of his life Francis looked for something that could help him but ended up finding much more. He met somebody who really loved him!

An unknown Umbrian artist painted the original crucifix in the twelfth century and it is strikingly iconographic in character; for this many identify the artist as a Syrian monk, since it was known that Syrian monks were present in the area at that time. In 1257, the Poor Clares left San Damiano, taking the crucifix with them. It is for this reason that we find the original crucifix in the Basilica of St Clare.

This iconographic Crucifix does not express the horror of death by crucifixion, but the nobility of eternal life. The most striking element of the San Damiano Crucifix is the figure of Christ as a source of life, radiating the hope of the Resurrection. Christ looks directly at us with a compassionate gaze, triumphant and regal. He seems to support the cross, standing in His full stature. His hands spread out serenely in an attitude of both supplication and blessing, which the iconographer has further emphasised through Jesus' tranquil and gentle expression.

Jesus spoke to St Francis more than eight-hundred years ago, but he "speaks" to us even today. After reflecting on the prayer of the young Francis and the meaning he could have at that precise moment in his life, it might be illuminating for us too, to contemplate what meaning it may have to pray with the same words of St Francis in this difficult time that we are all living.

"In your hands, Lord, I entrust my life." We can express all our gratitude for the gifts we receive from Him and ask him to imprint this mystery of love in our heart, so that we may become a living experience of His love.

In 1205, St Francis opened his heart to God's love. We can do the same: to open our heart to God's amazing grace. We have a lot of dreams and projects that had to be cancelled, postponed, reconsidered or even, radically changed. This is the moment to deeply understand ourselves, to think seriously what we are doing in our life, which is a gift. Some hours before his death, Francis said to his brethren, "I have lived my life. God will show you how to live your life"... in joy.

RAFFAELLA & SARA  
(LS ASSISI)





#5

## THE CRUCIFIX IN THE "GARDEN"

CHURCH OF SAN GIOVANNI BATTISTA, MATERA

The Crucifix in the church of San Giovanni Battista in Matera, Italy, was made between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. The artist is not known, although probably originating from Matera or, at least, from the South of Italy. This crucifix has experienced a sort of pilgrimage before finding its place in its current location as it was in fact commissioned for the church of St Augustine in Matera, where it hung until the beginning of the twentieth century.

However, the parish church of San Pietro Barisano, suffered several architectural problems that made it necessary to move the parish to that of St Augustine, with its own crucifix. Because of this, the crucifix experienced its first displacement and it was brought to a different rock church called Madonna dei Derelitti. After just a century, this church started to fall into a derelict state due to the effects of the weather and lack of care, so it was necessary to once again move the crucifix to a well-protected place. It was the second displacement of the crucifix. The third displacement was the one that brought the crucifix to its final location, at the church of San Giovanni Battista, in 2018.

*The crucifix the builders rejected has become the cornerstone of this church and of the people of Matera.*

Within its new location, the crucifix gained new meaning. Therefore, we must first also understand the main theme of the church. Observing the columns closely, and more carefully at the capitals, one will notice several decorations of vegetable, fruits and flowers. This same kind of decoration may be observed in the main apse of the church, behind the crucifix. The main theme is then that of the Garden, a holy Garden. The whole church is built as if it were a delicious and gorgeous garden, the place in which you can stay with the Creator, who created Man. Such a garden reminds us almost immediately of the Garden of Eden, the Heaven of Earth. There,

Man brought death to the Earth because they wanted to be like God; now here, with this crucifix, the son of God brings life to the Earth making himself a mortal man.

The forbidden fruit of Eden, so desirable, fascinating and captivating, which was stolen from the tree by humanity, here cannot be stolen anymore, since the new fruit is Christ himself, crucified in a new tree—the cross. His sacrifice is unconditional, totally free.

This kind of crucifix portrays what we call the *Christus Patiens*, the suffering Christ. Christ does not have a glorious expression or even a calm and serene look, like in other crucifixion typologies. Here, Christ suffers and therefore is not as beautiful as the forbidden fruit. In this way, this representation allows people to see the naked truth and think about themselves, about their own pain, while serving as a reminder that in their suffering they are not alone.

Moreover, in the perspective of the garden, we see that, with the grace of God, our sins become the place in which we can encounter Him. The wound produced by the fruit of sin is turned into the wounds of Christ, the fruit of the salvation, from which new life-giving blood flows for all those who are hungry and thirsty. In the same garden in which we lost ourselves, God can transform our sins into communion.

What, therefore, can we take from this crucifix? We can, perhaps, take a moment to focus on the physical wounds of Christ remembering those instances, those experiences in our lives in which we felt protected by them, in which we received the grace of God who turned our sins into communion with Him.

DAVID SARROCCO  
(& LS MATERA)









#6

## THE LORD OF POISON

CATEDRAL METROPOLITANA DE LA ASUNCIÓN DE LA SANTÍSIMA VIRGEN MARÍA A LOS CIELOS,  
MEXICO CITY

According with the legend, in the eighteenth century, there was a rich devoted man called Don Fermín, who went to mass very early in the morning every day. At the end of each mass, he would place a golden coin at the feet of a statue of Christ in the church, and finally he would kiss the feet of the image of Christ before leaving.

Don Ismael Treviño, was another rich man, but was also a very jealous man, who hated Don Fermín, and wanted to see him dead. He found a perfect way to murder Don Fermín, by poisoning, a poison that did not act quickly but invaded the body slowly and in a few days would have the expected effect. Don Ismael mixed the poison in a cake that was given to Don Fermín, who ate it oblivious to the danger he was in.

Don Fermín entered the Church as always, and when he finished and kissed the feet of Christ, a black stain spread over the whole figure, saving Don Fermín of the poison he had just ingested. When Don Ismael saw the scene, he regretted and confessed his crime. The noble knight looked at Don Ismael and was filled with compassion for him. He quietly forgave him and embraced him like a brother he had not seen in a long time.

Nowadays, this statue is the most revered in the Cathedral of Mexico City, especially by people seeking relief from their pain and illness.

This sculpture and its legend, reminds us that sin is a poison to the soul and that Christ, with his death and resurrection, has absorbed our sins. Christ cleanses us and protects us from sin, even when we are not aware of the danger, as long as we fully trust and live in communion with him. This allows man to lead a clean life, a baptised life, through the blood, death and resurrection of Christ.

**I beg you,  
oh dear Lord,  
that the poison of sin  
no longer penetrate  
my heart;  
make it pure  
exercising all the  
works that are to  
your liking.  
It is what I ask you  
in honour  
of your admirable  
transfiguration,  
with what you  
greatly manifest  
in your infinite  
power.**

ABY & HUMBERTO (LS MEXICO CITY)

#7

## AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CRUCIFIXION

BASILICA OF SANTA SABINA, ROME

Scenes of the crucifixion are extremely hard to find in early Christian art. Indeed, this small wooden panel is the first known image of the crucified Christ with the two thieves that was intended for public display, yet dates from more than four hundred years after the Passion. It is not even displayed prominently, located as it is in the top left corner of the high wooden doors that mark the entrance of the basilica of St Sabina on the Aventine Hill, in Rome. This is all the more striking given the fact that the doors likely had a didactic purpose—to illustrate the doctrine of faith to catechumens waiting to be received in full communion with the Church. Why, then, was there such reticence in representing one of the central mysteries of the Creed?

In fact, our bewilderment would have bewildered early Christians. It is as if too much familiarity with the Crucifix has veiled our eyes, so that we are not shocked as we should be by the image of the Son of God dying in front of us the cruellest, most shameful death. Perhaps we could get closer to the horror it evoked, when capital punishment by crucifixion was still fresh in people's memories, if for a moment we tried to imagine Him standing in front of a firing squad or sitting on an electric chair. If you feel this thought is unbearable—well, that is a perfectly sane reaction.

How did Christians manage to go beyond pure horror while thinking about the crucified Christ, and even dare to represent Him hanging from the Cross? Two important developments took place in the years before the panel of St Sabina appeared. The first was the abolition of crucifixion as a legal way of carrying out executions by Constantine the Great, in AD 337. The second was the process by which the Church gradually defeated heretics who could not accept the idea that Christ is at once fully God and fully man, yet one Person, forever. In AD 430–431, one of these heretics, Nestorius, was condemned by Pope Celestine I—the same pope who promoted the construction of the basilica of St Sabina.

A proper understanding of the two natures of Christ, united in one Person, allowed the unknown artist of St Sabina and his public to overcome horror with hope, and terror with trust. Being fully man, Christ dies. Being fully God, Christ cannot die. Being one Person, what is true of one of His natures is also true of His Person as a whole, thus he *personally* experiences death and *personally* experiences life everlasting. So, look—He is hanging from the Cross, a tomb looms in the background, but His eyes are wide open. Simply by carving this pair of open eyes, the artist of St Sabina manages to represent Christ as suffering and vanquishing death at once. And since the key to victory over death is prayer to the Father Almighty; look again—His arms are nailed to the wood, but also bent and lifted up in a prayerful posture. Crucifixion becomes the ultimate Lord's prayer.

This has a further implication. If we learn how to pray like Him, we learn how to die like Him—surrendering our will to the Father so that we can look upon Him with our eyes wide open in Paradise. Looking at the figure of the thief standing at the left of the Lord, we feel that the thief learnt this lesson very well. He stretches out his arms, not just because he is forced to by the executioners, but because He wants to pray as the Lord does, to die as the Lord does, to enter the Kingdom as the Lord does. And indeed, he gets from the Lord what he asks for—just look at his smile.

Unfortunately, the facial expression of the other thief, the 'bad' one, is too worn out to be identifiable. Compared to Christ and the good thief, his arms seem much more rigid, as if his paralysis by sin lasted until he died. But if we take a step back and observe the whole group, we can notice it has a striking resemblance to the catacomb iconography of the three youths in the fiery furnace. And as the three youths prayed together and were saved together, perhaps, the artist dared to hope that even the wicked thief repented at last, bent his arms, and smiled in the glory of resurrection. ■





ALESSANDRO MONTI  
(LS ROME I)



If we try to convey the meaning of a piece of art, for example while giving a guided tour in a church, we have to take into account the two major options of perceiving a piece of art: sensual/intuitive and intellectual/reflective. These two ways depict the two main groups of human perceptive capacities. These two dimensions are not mutually exclusive but mutually complementary. They also do not necessarily follow each other in a particular way. (Stephen Greenblatt has coined the terms *resonance* and *wonder* for these two types of approaches to artworks, I am following his analysis in the subsequent paragraphs.) But if we want to make an artwork accessible for someone, we ought to decide on one method at a time. The question is, which approach should we choose when giving a guided tour?

- If we want to appeal to a sensual/intuitive aspect, we would have to “stage” an object in a way that promotes its ability to affect the recipient. This is primarily the responsibility of the people who produce the artwork and “operate” the place of its installation. Ideally, a piece of art is staged in a way that promotes wonder. Wonder often flows from a certain unfamiliarity with the object. This could kindle a desire to give the experience an additional rational framing.
- Accordingly, the second possibility is to follow a more intellectual approach. We usually first make some research about the historical, socio-economic, conceptual, spiritual, etc. “background”, which has (most probably) influenced the creation of the work of art; to extract some important factors and try to communicate them. By contextualising an object, we make it accessible by means of showing its various connections and “apertures” to the surrounding world. We try to explain the interests of the patron, the intentions of the artist(s), and how an artwork may have affected its contemporary recipients. The object as a catalyst of wonder stands at the other end, while the contextualized object facilitates a connection. Finding this context is typical work for art historians and, as far as the works are rooted in a sacred context, also for theologians. I want to emphasise that there is also the necessity of explaining doctrine principles underlying a work of art (and this applies particularly to “older” artefacts and buildings).



Let us consider the example of the church of St John of Nepomuk in Munich (the so-called *Asamkirche*), an impressive exponent of Late Baroque architecture, which was built between 1733–1746. The visitor is downright overwhelmed by the multitude of coloured imagery in this relatively small church. Without further information, the visitor will probably remain in this state of “wonder”. Now it is the guide’s responsibility to provide a framework for the visitor’s experience. In the case of St John of Nepomuk, this might include telling the person about the brothers Egid Quirin Asam and Cosmas Damian Asam, who designed the architecture and visual imagery of the church. One could here, for example, mention their encounter with Roman Italian Baroque art.

Another important aspect is the situation of urban planning at that time. When Egid Quirin Asam purchased the plot for the future church there were houses all around. This factor led to the peculiar lighting situation (note that the apse-window was not included in the original plans) and overall shape of the edifice. And finally, it would be most important to explain the Christian doctrine regarding sin and forgiveness because the church was intended as a confessional church for the youth. The patron, St John of Nepomuk, patron saint of the seal of confession, was chosen for this very same reason.

When we observe a work of art hitherto unknown to us, our first reaction (if we allow ourselves to be affected by it) is probably one of awe and wonder. We are amazed, but the object of our amazement remains detached from us. The guide cannot *make* someone experience something when encountering a work of art, but is obliged to give him or her all the information needed to contextualise and understand the experience.

In the context of a Christian church, this must also include placing doctrinal information at the visitors’ disposal while—simultaneously—preserving their freedom to interpret the experience in an adequate way. This is especially true if we regard our guidance as an act of testimony. ■





**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

**IT IS THE LORD! IT IS THE LORD!**

*by Dr Regina M. Frey*



## HOW THE TESTIMONIAL OF PATER RUPERT MAYER SJ (1876–1945) LASTS UNTIL TODAY

There is hardly a guiding tour in the Church of St Michael without somebody asking about the bronze sculpture at the right side of the church. “Who is that head flying in midair all alone? Who was that man whose face has such a prominent look?” As simple and little the reminiscence might be, as full and precious is the testimonial of the life of Fr Rupert Mayer SJ (1876–1945). He is one of the few people every person born in Munich is familiar with, and when passing by his tombstone in the city centre, lighting a candle is a well-known tradition. So, who is this man with the prominent look?

It is quite difficult to find “one face” of Fr Rupert Mayer. Though, if asked for, his last exclamation brings it all together: “It is the Lord...!” Throughout his whole life as a man of God, his Ignatian preaching was about the Lord. Born in 1876, he lived to see both World Wars, and not only see them but even played an extraordinary part in them. In anticipation of the First World War, Fr Rupert Mayer asked to be with the soldiers on the battlefield where he didn’t hesitate to stand in the first line—not to fight, but to be with the dying men and to comfort the wounded. It was here that he lost his left leg and, due to his later hobbling motion, he was fondly nicknamed “Klumpfuß” (lumping foot) by the locals of Munich.

When war was over, he swiftly became a well-known preacher in Munich. He helped the soldiers to settle down again; he visited all political parties to help stabilise a complex political situation; stood in front of his church and collected money for the poor and gave spiritual exercises to students.

In all his duties, his open eyes saw the problems and habits of daily life; his heart yearned for a Christian life that was simple and possible for everybody. For example, some years after the war, he discovered that many people skipped Sunday Mass so as not to miss the train heading for the Alps, a popular skiing destination. So, he chose to celebrate Sunday mass at the earliest possible hour in the morning at the parting gate of Munich’s Central Station. In his preaching and lecturing he chose topics relating to daily life (for instance, on child education) and spoke about a Christian way of life. He didn’t change his method, not even in 1933 when the NS-regime took over, or in 1936 with the outbreak of the Second World War, even though he was very

aware of the dangerous ideas going around. His criticism of the NS-regime in his homilies wasn’t too explicit, but it was just enough to have him watched closely, as he was by then a prominent and influential person within the Catholic community, not only of Munich but in all around the region of Bavaria.

One Sunday, in April 1937, around 6000 people came to listen to his homily in a little Bavarian town. As he concluded, he admitted: “I feel that I will not have much time any more to speak and to preach.” And he was right. The papal encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*, the first and only papal encyclical that was ever written in German, was published in March 1937, and caused an increased tracking of Catholic priests and monks. Fr Rupert Mayer was forbidden to speak and preach in public, but he asked his superior to be allowed to defy the order—to disobey—in spite of the danger he would have to face: “I would suffer more, if I had to keep silent.” So, he kept on preaching.

In the following years, he was arrested several times and had to stand trial—trials which ended with a dead sentence for most members of the resistance. But Fr Rupert Mayer, suffering more and more by his old battlefield injury, lived to see the end of the Second World War in exile, and returned to a completely destroyed Munich. His church, St Michael, was nothing more than a ruin—only the front and west walls still stood, although much like a skeleton. Sick to the bone, he nonetheless continued his work as a preacher, spreading hope and aid to the people recovering or still suffering from the horrors of the war. It was the Day of All Saints, the first day of November 1945, when he elevated the Eucharistic bread in the Chapel of the Cross, exclaiming: “It is the Lord... the Lord... the Lord!” It was at that point that he lost consciousness; he had suffered a severe stroke. The story goes that he didn’t fall over or sink to the ground because of his wooden leg. For some moments he remained standing there, unconscious at the altar, until the people next to him realised what had happened. It might be seen as a symbol for his upright life, in spite of all the suffering and persecution. He died on that same day.

Until today, his graveyard in the middle of Munich’s city centre is a place to find rest and peace. He is honoured as a man with many gifts: a fearless preacher, an innovative priest, a simple believer. Often, when asked by tourists about his life, there is but one thing to say: His example will remain within our city, with our people, with our community. ■



# READING BETWEEN THE LINES:

“Warum habt ihr euch für dieses Camp angemeldet?” Es ist Donnerstagabend. Wir haben gerade gemeinsam die Messe gefeiert und sitzen nun auf Stühlen und Sesseln im Halbkreis. Die meisten haben eine lange Reise hinter sich. Mein elf Monate alter Sohn schläft erschöpft im Kinderwagen. “Warum habt ihr euch für dieses Camp angemeldet?” wiederholt Gudrun Nassauer, die uns als Theologin während dieser Tage begleitet, ihre Frage. Ich merke, wie ich langsam zur Ruhe komme und sich meine Gedanken auf die Suche nach einer Antwort begeben.

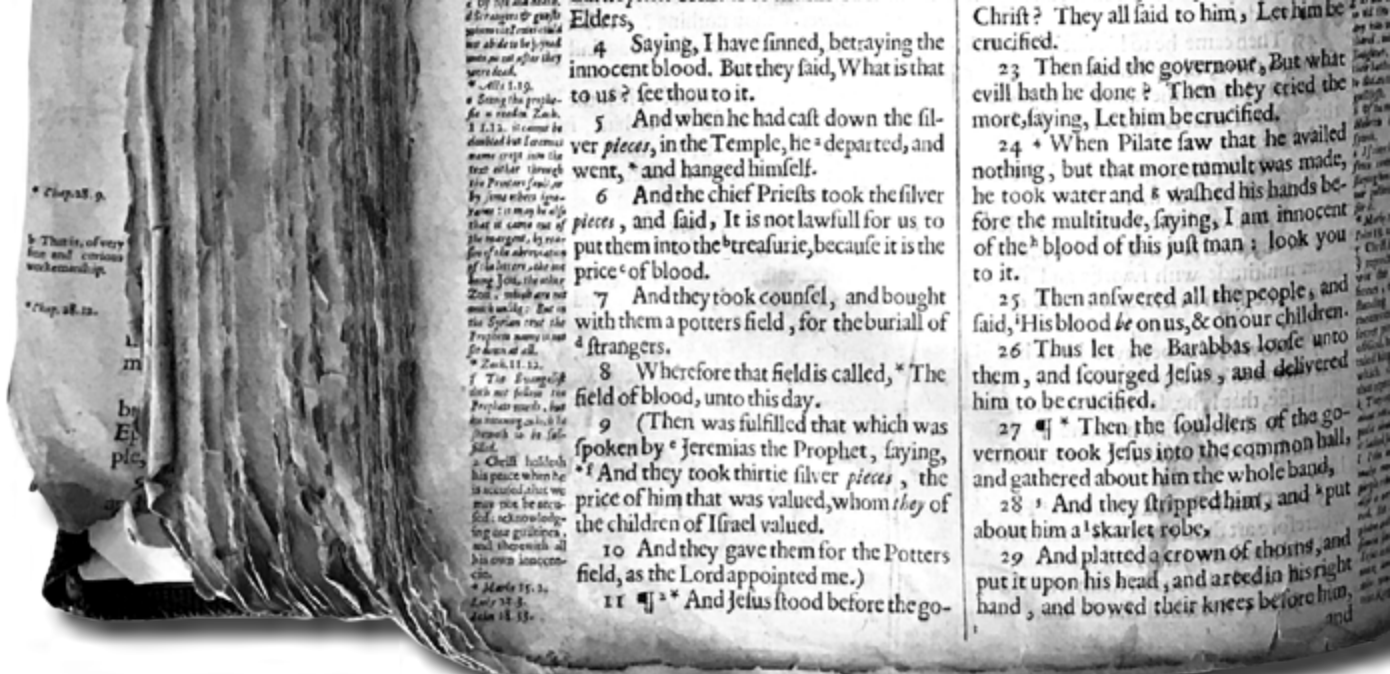
Nun, da ich sowieso in München lebe, hier Teil der Pietre vive-Gemeinschaft bin und zudem momentan noch Elternzeit habe, bietet es sich natürlich an. Ich möchte nach einem Jahr Zeit mit meinem Sohn gerne mal wieder den Geist auf etwas anderes lenken. Aber geht die eigentliche Antwort nicht viel tiefer? Als Pietre vive gebe ich Führungen mit einem ganz besonderen Hintergrund. Und um diesen lebendig zu halten, brauche ich Anregungen und Wissen: Wie kann ich einen Text, den ich schon viele Male gelesen oder gehört habe, neu entdecken? Wie kann ich schwere Passagen durch historisches Wissen besser einordnen?

Unsere Antworten fallen ganz unterschiedlich aus: es ist ein besonderes Camp und alle bringen ihre Fragen und Sehnsüchte mit. So werden die nächsten Tage viele Fragen gestellt und beantwortet, wir diskutieren und philosophieren, rätseln und begreifen.

Mit viel Elan gibt Gudrun Nassauer uns einen Einblick in den geschichtlichen Hintergrund der

Bibel. Dass die Bibel aus vielen Büchern besteht, wissen wir. Aber was es für die Interpretation heißt und wie sie sich zusammengesetzt hat oder warum manche Texte nicht aufgenommen wurden, obwohl sie beispielsweise von Jesus handeln, erfahren wir. Wir entdecken, dass in vier Evangelien drei verschiedene Versionen von Jesu letzten Worten existieren. Dass wir es nicht mit einem “Foto”, sondern eher mit einem “Gemälde” zu tun haben. Was unterscheidet die Bibel von allen anderen Texten und was von guter Literatur, fragen wir uns. Wir begreifen die Bibel hier als „inspirierten Text“: Er ist nicht fehlerfrei. Er ist nicht objektiv. Er ist auch nicht von Gott diktiert, sondern eingegeben. Er ist nicht frei von der Geschichte der Erzählenden. Aber es ist das einzige Buch mit der Garantie, dass wir darin Gott begegnen können.

Erfüllt von neuen Erkenntnissen und der internationalen Gemeinschaft feiern wir zusammen die Messe, singen und beten, essen und spülen ab. Wir besuchen den traditionellen Weihnachtsmarkt in München, werden in den beiden Pietre vive Kirchen der bayerischen Hauptstadt geführt und manch einer staunt über die Kälte hier—wie gut, dass es Glühwein gibt! Gestärkt an Leib und Seele machen sich am Sonntag alle wieder auf in ihre Heimat: Bereichert durch viele Antworten, aber auch mit neuen Fragen, immer auf dem Pilgerweg des Glaubens. Denn das, was ich heute von Gott verstanden habe, kann morgen schon nicht mehr gültig sein...







## BIBLICAL EXEGETICAL CAMP

“Why did you sign up for this camp?” It is Thursday night. We have just celebrated mass together and are now sitting on chairs in a semicircle. Most of us have had a long journey. My eleven-month-old son sleeps exhausted in the baby buggy. “Why did you enroll for this camp?” repeats Gudrun Nassauer, who is accompanying us as a theologian during these days of biblical formation. I notice how I am slowly coming to rest and how my thoughts are starting to look for an answer.

I live in Munich now and I am a part of the Living Stones community here. Apart from this though, I am on maternal leave at the moment – so it was of course a good opportunity to attend. After a year of spending time with my son, I would like to turn my mind to something else. But doesn’t the real answer go much deeper than that? As a member of Living Stones, I give guided tours with a very specific background. And in order to keep the tour alive, I need inspiration and knowledge: How can I rediscover a text that I have read or heard many times before? How can I better put in context difficult passages through historical knowledge?

Our answers are quite different: it is a special camp, and everyone brings their questions and longings with them. So, within the next days, many were the questions asked and answered; we discuss and philosophise, wonder and comprehend.

With much enthusiasm, Gudrun gives us an insight into the historical background of the Bible. We know that the Bible consists of many books. But we learn what that means for its interpretation, how

it was composed and why some texts were not included, even though they are about Jesus, for example. We discover that in the four gospels there are three different versions of Jesus’ last words. We are not dealing with a “photo”, but rather with a “painting”. We ask ourselves what distinguishes the Bible from all other texts and what is good literature. We understand the Bible as an “inspired text”: it is not error-free. It is not objective. Also, it is not dictated by God, but it is inspired by God. It is not devoid of the narrators’ own stories. But it is the only book with the guarantee that we can meet God within.

Abuzz with new insights and fulfilled by experiencing the international community, we celebrate mass together, sing and pray, eat and wash the dishes. We visit the traditional Christmas market in Munich, give guided tours in the two churches of the Bavarian capital. Many people are amazed at the cold here—oh, the comfort of mulled wine! Strengthened in body and soul, everyone sets off again on Sunday for their home country, certainly enriched by many answers, but also with new questions, always on the pilgrimage of faith. Because what I have understood about God today, might no longer be valid tomorrow... ■

**Anna-Lena Dávila**  
Living Stones St Michael,  
München



“

If a pagan were to come and tell you:  
‘Show me your faith’, take him inside the church  
and show him the decorations which adorn it,  
and explain to him the series of paintings.

ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS  
(8<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

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