

## Failure to Communicate



**Pope John XX III**

Drawing by Giacomo Manzuù

Studies for sculpture of Pop John XXIII

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### **What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate**

*God idea is really taking a beating these days:*

*It is being said, He is dead,*

*They left for the coast,*

*Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

*And now the faint voice of  
the distaff side of the family,*

*She is having her hair done.*

Like most people today I am some what confused about this very human idea of a supernatural Creator Deity we call God. Others have different names, but their languages hold this same idea of a Supreme Supernatural Being. They say God looks like us or rather we are made in the image of God. Not until modern times, relatively speaking, thanks to Jewish, Christian and Muslim Divine Revelations, has this Supreme Being been brought into finer focus for us to consider and accept or reject. Prior to these Revelations, early tribes and civilizations had a pantheon of Gods closely associated with the particular needs of the people and their society. This pantheistic period of man seems to convey the notion that only those born after these Revelations are the Chosen People of God.

As one grows older, the God-head image begins to change from seeing God from a personal expression to one of seeing God through the kaleidoscopic lens images of human life experiences, especially the very human realities of Fate and Destiny. At times these puzzling powers seem to be as great or greater than that of the former subjective God. Fate and Destiny affect every human ever born regardless of religion, race or gender. We recognize and experience their presence in our lives whether we live on a remote island in a vast ocean or as one of several million people living in a giant modern metropolis. Death is the final inevitable fate of everything living on earth while human birth is not only the miraculous reality of human life but also a promise of a future eternal existence. Between birth and death Fate and Destiny work their awesome and special powers. Events and situations occur to people without their consent, knowledge or expectations. For many life becomes a harsh purgatory while others remain relatively unscathed.

This search for the identity and nature of a God-head and of the power and force of Fate and Destiny has been going on for 30,000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. It is first seen in the world of Homo sapien man, the first people to demonstrate the skills of navigation and give birth to the idea of Art in etchings and paintings found in the caves of Sicily. This nascent idea of art suggests a mind's quest for spirituality and sets a graphic style of communication for generations of artists to follow. They have faithfully followed this early school of human expression.

Poets also have something to tell us about this mystery:

About suffering the were never wrong,

The Old Masters, how well they understood

Its human position:...

Thus begins W. H. Auden's 1940 poem Musee Des Beaux Arts, which is a reflection of his viewing of Pieter Brueghel's painting The Fall Of Icarus. Brueghel (1525? - 69) depicts a boy falling from the sky while another skates precariously on a frozen pond. Both these silent dramas are placed in a broader scene of busy people at work and play who take no notice of the tragedies happening in their midst. The twenty-three lines of this poetic masterpiece tells us more about human Fate and Destiny than a theological or philosophical treatise could ever hope to do.

Another Old Master, Giuseppe Verdi in his remarkable collection of great operatic compositions, created in 1862 La Forza Del Destino (The Force of Destiny) a compelling and powerful story which brings to worldwide audiences a highly dramatic portrayal of the inevitability of the Fate which awaits each of the opera's three main characters. A sense of impending tragedy pervades the entire opera, a musical masterpiece of theatrical blending of the human emotions and character reactions to true love, accidental death, curses, oaths, revenge, duels, warfare, religious refuge and forgiveness. Verdi himself was not spared personal tragedy, although he lived to be eighty-eight years old, a worldwide famous artist, a very rich man with a life filled with honours, rewards and applause. His early life as a student and budding composer was marred by the premature deaths of his first wife and their two children before he was thirty-seven years old. Three artists, three mediums, four centuries apart, -- with one point of view -- the power and mystery of Fate and Destiny in everyday life.

Like God, Fate and Destiny cannot be known any devotee of the Jewish cabala learning will quickly advise. To these scholars even the name of God is unknowable. Only when Fate and Destiny touch our very own do we begin to understand and recognize Fate and Destiny's power and dominion over the affairs of mankind.

So how far have we come, after two thousand years of Christianity, over five thousand years of Judaic Law and fifteen hundred years of Islamic Prophecy, understanding spirituality since the Sicilian cave drawings were painted and etched. We now live in a world, split into two on every social and economic level known to mankind -- with fractures within fractures. The twentieth century has given birth to two Great World Wars. These were the first wars to engage diverse groups of nations against each other on three continents. Previous wars were one-on-one battles fought mainly for territorial gain and economic advantage. The two Great Wars were wars of economic and social ideology and were the first to barbarically kill millions of innocent civilians where they lived and worked by means of aerial bombings of civilization's major cities. The excessiveness of this new approach of a sky borne rain of terror and death culminated in the 1945 unleashing of atomic power over the skies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which incinerated, vaporized and maimed two hundred thousand civilians on the ground below. These were the first victims of this newest and unkindest cut of all -- a holocaust lasting only a minute or two, but one that will remain forever in the minds of civilized men.

During earlier centuries major and important ideas, inventions and explorations grew in the minds of men and gave birth to new worlds of the Italian Renaissance, the Americas and Electricity. These centuries were dominated by three notable empires -- the Holy Roman Empire, the British Empire and now the American Empire, which aggrandized itself at the expense of the European destruction from 1939 to 1945. Today, it reigns supreme and unchallenged in its autocracy. It has the bomb and has demonstrated that it will not hesitate to use it.

Is this the kind of world free humble innocent people want to live in? Have the powers of Destiny and Fate led us to this scenario of one nation's hegemonic globalization of the world or could it be that Christianity, Judaism and Islam have failed in their spiritual mandates? All three religions acknowledge the existence of a single transcendent God who reveals himself through, the Law and Revelation, the prophets, the life of the people and in events of history. Moral conviction and practice are equated with just living according to their sacred writings and histories. All three also require that its followers be people of prayer, faith, hope and charity. Their God is said to be benevolent, merciful, providential, wise, just, loving, holy, glorious, peaceful, eternal and full of truth. If these descriptions of their God are accurate and absolute, what then has been wrong with

God's plans for his people in recent history?

Rabbis, Priests and Mullahs spend much of their life in daily prayer and advocate and teach the faithful to do likewise in order to recognize their God and to gain the spiritual and secular benefits by doing so. Thousands of prayers have been formalized and taught which are the most sacred and time honoured that have been sanctioned through the centuries. Each religion owns a prayer book which sets out the official and exact prayers of the faith. Can and do these prayers alter or define one's Fate in life, the world's Fate? A host of Saints in the Roman Catholic Church have been designated as benefactors and intercessors for special needs of the faithful. This raising of the mind and heart of God in adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition has been found by many to be miraculous and profound in its power to cure, heal and sanctify -- others have not. Does prayer's power pale in the face of the power and force and Fate and Destiny -- which power will win the hearts and minds of future generations of humanity? Unless religion regains favour with people by way of spiritual renewal, it may end in a victory for those who see the world, as the early civilizations did, and act in those ways that best suited the pantheists.

The Roman Catholic Church has made its first hesitant steps towards a genuine renewal of the entire institution and its place and influence in the world under the leadership of Pope John XXIII, Angelo Cardinal Roncalli, who was elected Supreme Pontiff of Rome in 1958. His selection by the gathered Cardinals of the Church proved to be an august decision which, in due time, would awaken the faithful to the birth of a new spirit and to a new period of Church history. Formerly Catholics paid little attention to affairs of the Vatican and were not involved in the religious and secular workings of Rome. The Vatican existed primarily for the concerns and needs of ordained clergy. The Church belonged exclusively to the clergy!

On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII announced to the Church and to the world that a General Council of the Church would convene in Rome to discuss and define the secular and spiritual life and mission of the Church in the World. He opened the first session of the second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962. A total of 2,860 delegates participated in the momentous work which lay ahead of them for the next three years. The Council formulated and promulgated sixteen dogmatical, liturgical and pastoral constitutions, all of which reflect the Council's basic pastoral orientation toward renewal and reform. Catholics and non-Catholics around the world saw the work of the Council as a grand and noble vision for a Church and a people wanting to look far ahead. His death in 1963 was a slow and agonizing bed of tears not only for John himself but also for the millions of Catholics and non-Catholics in the world who followed his last days on earth via television reports daily. He remained faithful to the very end to his flock which John always saw as everyone on earth.

Since 1978 the Church has been on a long and slippery descent and is now a Church in anguish. It must soon regain its spiritual and temporal powers to fulfill the promises of its Founder to his Apostles: *"I have made you a light for the Nations so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth."* <sup>(1)</sup> Today the hierarchy of the Church in Rome appears to be thoroughly unprepared and stubbornly unwilling to lead the faithful to this higher ground of spirituality. They, as do most local bishops in the church, like to think that they are busy in their important pastoral responsibilities, but usually this busy business is more related to other areas of human concerns than the spiritual development of their flocks. Some are also guilty of dampening the fires and talents of some of their pastors under their jurisdiction and guidance, who have the ideas and the courage needed to relight the parish fires of spirituality. They spend much of their time, and that of others, putting out social, legal, personnel and public relations fires. These secular responsibilities are better handled by professional lay people. Handing these responsibilities over to properly trained people would free up thousands of ordained clergy to deal daily exclusively with the work of developing the spiritual growth of their parishes and their dioceses. In the past forty years nothing new has been put forward or built in local communities which reflect the spirit and decisions of Vatican II. Tired old buildings, with tired old priests who are equipped with tiring old pews filled with bothersome books and papers and tired old organs to work with. As a group, contemporary Church leaders are visionless, and seemingly without courage. Military trained saints and bishops in the Middle Ages of the Church, such as Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua, and Ignatius of Loyola, would be ashamed (*Acts of the Apostles: 13-47-48*) of this present day retreat from doing battle with today's antireligious forces at work in the world. For two thousand years the Church has proclaimed its

sublime mystery of The Holy Trinity. This century alone has given birth to the formation of its own odious unholy trinity of state powers based in London, Washington and Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, precious copies of the Vatican II Documents gather dust on thousands of bookshelves around the world. According to one knowledgeable Vatican insider Pope John XXIII knew before he died, that his Council was in the hands of those who would destroy what he loved most. <sup>(2)</sup> In his remarkable insightful book *The Utopia of Pope John XXIII*, Giancarlo Zizola, author, journalist, and Vatican observer, confirms Father Malachi Martin's eye-witness observation of possible Vatican post Council mishandling of Pope John's precious vision of looking far ahead for the Church and the people of the earth. He writes:

Consequently, there was a vigorous return to the thesis which proposed that Roncalli represented, at the summit of the ecclesiastical institution, an exception to the rule of a Church considered unreformable; that the Council had been a crack in the Catholic monolith and pure folly;...

John was thus reduced to an alibi and made to appear as a rare flower to be worn in the lapel of a Church dressed as always, where tradition is confused with antiquarians, and where simple technical and modernizing adjustments of the old dress is mistaken for renewal.

<sup>(2)</sup> Malachi Martin: *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church*. Page 274 ISBN 0-3\*\*-12665-1

<sup>(3)</sup> Zizola Giancarlo: *The Utopia Of Pope John XXIII* 1974 Page 359 ISBN 0-88344-520-4

Zizola's passionate research into the meaning of Pope John's life and the work of the Second Vatican Council was dominated by the certainty that Pope John does not belong to the past but to the future of society and of the Church and that his utopia was emergent and at work designing horizons upon which the church, whether it likes it or not, is called to work out its very survival.

As a result the Roman Catholic Church is now a Church in disarray. It faces a steep decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life, an ominous slump in church attendance, weak leadership by bishops, strong factionalism on the left and right, and a general decline in religious belief and practice.

The Vatican has excluded one-half of the world's Catholic population from the Church's deliberations and judgements. Women are not represented on the top councils of Rome for reasons that are centuries old. They do not have to be ordained, just invited to participate. Can they contribute to the spiritual life of the Church? One quick look around the modern world will satisfy any doubting Thomases left in the Church. The Vatican has let everyone down. They have ignored second Vatican Council decisions and its plea for needed and dramatic changes in the Church's life in the world. They have left local parishes and pastors high and dry in their present state of liturgical renewal confusion and doubts. They have abandoned Catholic institutions and fellow priests in their decades long pastoral struggles in Central and Southern America. This region of the world, home to the world's largest Roman Catholic population has a history of needed civil wars and revolutions, has now

given birth to orchestrated covert military and paramilitary acts of civil terrorism, much of which has been directed at Catholic institutions, programmes, and clergy. Murders and assassinations of religious and priests have not been met with due outrage or prompted strongly worded condemnation from Rome. This hands-off attitude has been adopted in the name of Middle Ages conservative philosophy and theology. Liberation Theology must pass from veiled whispers to official recognition and given a voice within the hierarchy of the Church. The Church's presence in the world has devolved into a series of worldwide Papal tours and visits which look very much like Rock concert tours. Once the Pope leaves what then? Who and what will remain to carry on the spiritual work of the national and local parishes forward into the turbulent years which may lay ahead for the faithful of the land?

The Church will soon have a new Pope, but will it have a new hierarchy, a braver way of doing things, and newer ways of thinking about the spiritual growth and welfare of its local parishes, their

congregations and their pastors. Will they make use of new communications tools to meet the need of evangelization and moral and liturgical education of Catholics worldwide? The Church in this regard has two options. The first is to embrace and engage modern communications technology and bend and shape it to fit their needs and purposes. The other and highly unlikely course is to once again take to the streets, the highways and byways of the land, preaching the Word as Francis, Anthony and Ignatius did. They cannot carry out their sacred mission by remaining in their rectories and churches and expect the people to come to them.

They do not have much time to establish a true renaissance of the liturgical and spiritual life of local parishes as the barbarians are now at the door. The battle ahead will be for the hearts and minds of their flocks. Ideology is the principle underlying the future of national and international social and economic conflicts. Today's world is faced with an economic and political revolution, which if allowed to go to extremes may cause the destruction of our fragile society and rob it of its moral basis and establish a terrible race of dominators who would reintroduce their discipline into the world and reestablish the necessary hierarchies with the cracking of economic and nuclear whips.

Christian belief is not always a comfort,  
But a bleak acceptance of a dark mystery.

**Morris West, Author**  
**1916 - 1999**