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THE JUSTICE AND
WRATH OF GOD

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J. Galati

THE FATHER'S JUSTICE

It is commonplace to appeal to God's justice when we can't take the law into our own hands. Even the expression "*May God reward you*" – used in many countries as a way of thanking someone – sounds like a double-edged sword: "*May God reward you... in good times and in bad*".

Ecclesiastical terminology, in a more subtle way, uses the saying: "*I give you thanks... coram Domino*", that is, putting everything before the Lord's Truth and justice.

In short, it is common to appeal to God in the same way we appeal to an avenger who can attack when we aren't able to. It is a sign of our repressed hunger for the revenge we all harbour and which we would like to satisfy by simply delegating God – almighty as he is – who can take our place without compromising himself and, above all, without compromising ourselves.

We want God to be our personal avenger, who is on our side and who therefore must strike whoever strikes us. And, if he doesn't do so, we repudiate him like the brother of the prodigal son:

"He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him: He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your

orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf..."
(Lk 15: 29-30)

Like the "good" brother, we too ask the Father to take the law into his own hands (the way we want it) against whoever hurts us.

In the case of the Gospel it is evident how we "good people" even distort the truth of the facts: the prodigal son didn't swallow up his father's goods, but those that were due to him by inheritance and which perhaps tempted the "good" brother.

However, when we don't love, it is difficult to distinguish the Truth. Our passions immediately make us invoke justice.

Therefore it is a good idea to explain the relationship that exists between Justice, God and us.

WHAT IS JUSTICE?

In a strictly juridical sense it is "*The moral virtue for which each one is given what he deserves, and which respects other people's rights*". The dictionary continues: "At times the concept of justice is connected to the idea of punishment".

Instead, in a biblical sense, God's justice is above all the concrete faithfulness to his covenant, which He manifests: by answering our prayers (Psalm 116:1-9); by guaranteeing justice and righteousness (Jer 9:23-24); and by ensuring forgiveness (Psalm 51:14) and salvation (Psalm 85:8-11; Is 46:12-13).

Thus God's justice is identified with his will or act of salvation.

Modern languages no longer use this positive meaning of divine justice, which is fundamental for biblical language; therefore we must keep it in mind for a precise understanding of the message of the Gospel, because in it also God's justice is substantially his will of salvation that He fulfilled through Jesus Christ and for which he justifies man, that is, he gives him justice (Rom 1:17; 3:21-26; Phil 3:9). We quote the latter:

"...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith". (Phil 3:9).

On these assumptions, we must first of all do away with the idea of a God who has a cane in his hand and who, at our slightest gesture, is ready to strike whoever we don't like or whoever hurts us.

THE POWER OF JUSTICE

Administering justice is the greatest power.

In ancient times the king, sitting on his throne with all the symbols of authority, had the specific jurisdiction to listen to the parties and deliver the sentence.

God the Father is the highest authority, and this power is fully acknowledged and attributed to Him.

However, the Father doesn't want to be the judge of his children: what father would want to judge and condemn his children?

And for this reason he delegates his Son, so that he may exercise this power towards his brothers:

"Nor does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to his Son". (Jn 5:22)

The Son always says "yes" to his Father, and he accepts this task: however, it is no less difficult for him as it is for his Father. Thus he comes to earth with this divine power – marvellous and dreadful – to absolve and to condemn. But he only uses it to absolve:

"Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.." (Jn 8:4)

As in the past (Mt 9:11; 12:2; 12:10; 15:2; 19:3), the clever people of that time now also try to make Jesus fall into a human trap: if he absolves, he will be charged because he goes against the law; if he condemns, his figure of merciful Master will disappear...

But Jesus is God, and he certainly won't allow himself to be ensnared by His creatures:

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”. (Jn 8:7)

In a much more manifest way Jesus will use this power on the Cross to absolve and to condemn, when he responds to the people's provocations (“Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” Mk 15:32) with the power of His Love:

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do”. (Lk 23: 34)

On the cross Jesus bears witness to His infinite capacity of Love and all his “juridical” intelligence, and is even able to find, before hell, the technical justification for absolution: the accused – all humanity – are acquitted because of mental incompetence. This is not a “pious justification”: in reality, during the Passion, men were so possessed by evil that they were no longer able to decide for themselves.

WHO JUDGES US?

Therefore the Father gives the Son the authority to judge; however, the Son doesn't use it to condemn us, but to absolve us. In fact, he continuously comes to our defence, even now in Heaven: *“We have an Advocate with the Father”* (1Jn 2:1).

So then, if Jesus has the authority to judge and absolves us and justifies us, who is it that accuses us and condemns us?

“The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, which is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world”. (Rev 12: 9)

He is the great Accuser:

“Now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night”. (Rev 12:10)

Every move we make is submitted to judgement before God's court, and Satan acts as the “public prosecutor” who doesn't allow a word to go by without going through it with a fine-tooth comb. For this reason Jesus urges us not to speak without love and

against Love: “*Whoever says to his brother, Raqa..*” (Mt 5:21). Before the particular judgement we will undergo after our death, we undergo an endless judgement in which Satan acts as our accuser, Jesus is our defense attorney and in the end the Father will pronounce the verdict.

However, we have already stated that the Father doesn’t want to judge and condemn us and for this reason he hands over all authority to judge to his Son who uses this power only to justify us and absolve us.

Satan accuses us, but he doesn’t have the power to condemn, because only a judge has this power.

Therefore, who condemns us? In summary: the Father and the Son renounce judgement; Satan accuses us, but he can’t pass the final sentence. So who condemns us?

It is we who judge each other and condemn each other.

To understand things better: Jesus, who always does what he sees the Father do (Jn 5:19), in turn gives us his authority to judge: His Love for us isn’t less than the Father’s love, and he doesn’t want to judge and condemn those he has loved and loves to the point of giving his own life for those (Jn 10:15; 15:13) whom he calls “friends” (Jn 15:15) and who he unites to himself in divine filiation (Jn 17:22).

Jesus loves us with total Love and gives us himself and everything he has: His Blood and His Flesh (Lk 22:19-20; Jn 6:54); His Mother (Jn 19:27); His Father (Mt 6:9; Jn 14:7; Jn 14:23; Jn 15:15); His Spirit (Gal 4:6); His ability to work miracles (Jn 14:12; Lk 10:19; Mk 6:7-13; 16:17-20; Mt 10:1).

He even gives us His authority to judge (Jn 20:22; Mt 16:19; Mk 16:16), but it is an authority that stings, and he tells us how to use it: by absolving, as He did, otherwise it will fall upon us:

“...For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you”. (Mt 7:2)

There is nothing Jesus recommends more insistently than not to judge, and in the prayer to his Father he makes us say that if we do not forgive, He cannot forgive us.

THE GREAT TRAP OF HELL

Judgement is the great trap that hell continuously sets for us, placing a barrier of non love between us and our brothers: by adding judgement upon judgement, each one ends up isolated in a coffin: then there is solitude, despair and hell on earth.

Judgement kills Love, paralyzes Mercy and gives the green light for the “justice” Satan continuously asks for. And this is true for every single person and for all humanity.

Thus judgement is the means Satan uses to involve everyone and everything. If we play along with him, we will be involved in his infernal vortex and we will make the Father’s Love vain.

The beast’s great plan is finally clear: it knows that “it has but a short time” and wants to involve as many creatures as it can in this rout.

For this reason he uses all means, especially the media, to spread only realities of violence, corruption and death: most people accept them, get involved in them and are overwhelmed in the great process of death, being marked “on their hands and on their foreheads”. And we have all understood this and agree on it. What we haven’t understood is an ever more subtle game: Satan, with this continuous moral violence, wants to exasperate the few who haven’t accepted his demands, causing them to cry: *“That’s enough! Lord, since we cannot stop this avalanche of death, intervene with Your Justice!”*.

And this would mean the end. We must become clever, certain that the Father, in His Mercy, is more powerful than Satan’s “justice”.

Let us not commit the foolish error of biting the bait that the beast throws to us by means of his

prophets of disaster. We have the prophet of prophets – the Pope – who shows us broader and more valuable horizons:

The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word "mercy," moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy "with loud cries." These "loud cries" should be the mark of the Church of our times, cries uttered to God to implore His mercy, the certain manifestation of which she professes and proclaims as having already come in Jesus crucified and risen, that is, in the Paschal Mystery. It is this mystery which bears within itself the most complete revelation of mercy, that is, of that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threats. (Dives in Misericordia, 15)

In 1982, commenting on this passage in Volume I of “God is my Father” we wrote:

“Let us do away with all sterile controversies, let us stop pointing at each other for the cause of evil. This is the game of the devil who doesn’t want us

to hold on to the only true source of salvation: the Father's Mercy. We are in a spiral of hatred which can only be broken by the Father's Love, and the Pope – the prophet of mercy who resounds the mercy of all prophets – has pointed out the way to us: what are we waiting for to follow it?

With "loud cries" let us ask for mercy for everyone, and with the prophet Joel we will experience that "the Lord is the hope of his people". (God is Father Vol. I)

Let us conclude our reflections by commenting briefly on what Satan – according to recent declarations made by some of his followers – has apparently "revealed": his triumph is at hand. What triumph is he talking about?

The triumph of "his" justice: therefore everything and everyone will be overcome by his fury of death and violence.

I am not shaken by the revelations made by prophets who say they come from God, therefore neither will I be perturbed by revelations made by prophets who say they come from Satan.

If what they go about saying is truly from hell, then this declaration sounds like a challenge and we will accept it and we thank him for having confirmed something we have known for a long time: the Father

of lies announces his defeat; the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is at hand.

That is, the triumph of Mercy, because Mary certainly cannot "triumph" over billions of children overwhelmed in a vortex of death. However, this depends on us.

It's time to stop listening to the prophets of disaster who, perhaps with the best faith, play Satan's game by discouraging and terrorizing spirits.

Instead, it's time to follow the Prophet of prophets – the Holy Pontiff – who, from the chair of Truth, reminds us that we have "the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy...that is, of that love which is more powerful than death, more powerful than sin and every evil, the love which lifts man up when he falls into the abyss and frees him from the greatest threats". (Dives in Misericordia, 15)

GOD'S ANGER

Let us now examine another of God's attributes, his "anger": in the Old and New Testament, including the Our Father and the episode of the Temple. Please forgive me if I quote the Dictionary often in order to define the meaning of certain words, but I believe it is necessary. As a starting point, let us take the letter a Priest sent us:

*“Rev. Father Andrea,
I have closely followed what you have written on
“God is Father” and, even though I esteem the
arguments with which you try to demonstrate that
God is only love and mercy, I believe that this idea
is limited and thus incomplete. And it could be
dangerous as well, because ultimately an all “lov-
ing” idea of God could create problems for sev-
eral Truths of the faith, including sin, judgement,
hell, etc. with great confusion among the faithful.
And with our serious fault.*

*Haven’t you ever found in Scripture expressions
that confirm the concept of a God who punishes,
who actually “takes revenge”, who manifests him-
self, not only with his love but also with His holy
anger?*

*Haven’t you ever meditated, in the New Testament,
on the episode in which Jesus, although he calls
himself “meek and humble of heart”, explodes
with all his anger against the merchants and
money-changers to the sound of whip-lashes?
Does this perhaps mean that Jesus wasn’t angry
with those profaners?*

*God is also mercy, but he isn’t only mercy. There-
fore I believe that when you speak about Him you
should bear in mind all his attributes, including
his justice and his anger. Of course, he is a “meek
and humble” God, but he is also a “just” and
“dreadful” one. I’ll spare the quotes, which you*

*are well able to compare, but I fraternally invite
and exhort you, in the name of the priesthood
which together we must bear witness to in truth,
not to give an incomplete and thus false idea of
God.*

*Please have faith in my best wishes for you, and I
pray that the Lord may give you his light.*

Fraternally

Priest(signed letter)

Dear brother in the Priesthood,

I thank you for what you have written to me; I feel
it is a painful need of your spirit. I also thank you for
urging me to make an examination of conscience and
deepen my knowledge of Scripture in order to know
our God better and make him known. I understand
your pastoral concerns and the Lord will reward you
for what you have told me: advising the doubtful,
teaching the ignorant and admonishing sinners are in-
cluded among the works of spiritual mercy.

However, allow me to point out to you that I have
never questioned the reality of sin, judgment and hell:
I have only tried to explain that only those who want
to, go to hell and God doesn’t hurl us there crying out
to us “you cursed one...”.

Also, God cannot “get angry” (this word is so
horrible, the Palazzi dictionary defines it as “being in-

fectured by rabies” that is by “An acute, infectious, often fatal viral disease of most warm-blooded animals, especially dogs, that is transmitted by the bite of infected animals; figurative: “fit of anger, madness”). Please don’t use this word anymore, not even when you are referring to humans.

I have meditated for a long time on the topics you suggested, and I realized that – in responding to you – a whole article was coming out. I am sending it to you and to all my Friends with the best wishes of Peace and Joy for Easter.

I thank you once again. Pray for me and bless me.
Fr. Andrea

WHAT IS “WRATH”?

According to the dictionary it is: “*A disorderly gesture of the mind for which we are violently upset with someone*”. Therefore it isn’t a nice thing. Besides, bearing in mind that wrath – together with arrogance, avarice, lust, gluttony, envy and sloth – is a capital sin, it is difficult to speak well of it.

Therefore, speaking about wrath as one of the attributes of God means “attributing to” God himself “disorderly gestures of the mind which arouse Him violently against someone”. And this, frankly, sounds like blaspheme, since God is infinite perfection and wrath is a sin, in fact one of the capital sins.

And to add “holy” to the word “wrath” doesn’t improve the situation, which on the other hand worsens it by making it even more contorted and ambiguous: a capital sin cannot be called “holy”, not even with the best intentions. And I believe there is not much to object to in this regard. Therefore, to speak of “God’s holy wrath” is at least improper.

Let us now see how the “wrath of God” is interpreted in the Old Testament.

THE “WRATH OF GOD” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We would all expect Sacred Scripture to solemnly deny the concept of the “wrath of God” which sounds like a blaspheme and which is actually such.

Instead, it is traumatic to note how the dictionary’s definition of the word “wrath” is almost identical to the Biblical Dictionary’s definition of the “wrath of God” in the Old Testament:

“The wrath of God is God’s reaction to everything that is an attack to his majesty and his moral perfection”. (SEI Theological Dictionary)

In any case, divine wrath is usually considered as the punishment for our sins, not the explosion of the bad mood or jealousy of an arbitrary or whimsical God, but a just God. The release of his wrath is presented as the revenge for the punishment brought to his majesty.

At times, however, Yahweh’s wrath is described as a violent passion that must be unloaded in order to be calmed: *“When I have wreaked my fury upon you I will cease to be jealous of you, I will be quiet and no longer vexed”* (Ez 16,42).

At other times in Scripture we find the mysterious essence of God’s wrath that is taken out on the just and on sinners, as in the book of Job:

*“God does not relent
...With a tempest he might overwhelm me, and
multiply my wounds without cause;*

*He need not suffer me to draw breath, but
might fill me with bitter griefs.*

*Though I were right, my own mouth might condemn me;
were I innocent, he might put me in the wrong.*

*Though I am innocent, I myself cannot know it; I
despise my life.*

*It is all one! therefore I say: Both the innocent and
the wicked he destroys.*

*When the scourge slays suddenly, he laughs at the
despair of the innocent”*. (Job 9:1 foll)

May God save us from this God. How can we justify this terrible idea of God and his “wrath”?

The answer to this question would require lengthy reflections, which we will try to synthesize in a few concepts: man, after sin, loses the idea of God the Father and Master (Gen 2:19-20) and feels fear being instilled in him (Gen 3:10). This new sentiment – which doesn’t come from God but which Satan has instilled in him – will distort the image of the paternal aspect of God and substitute it with that of an “irascible” and revengeful master.

Man, created in “God’s image and likeness” (Gen 1:26), with sin becomes violent and, as he begins to re-

discover the idea of God, he creates an idea of Him “in his own image and likeness”.

This incorrect idea of God is the heritage of all ancient religions. Greece summarizes them in its Olympus where gods and goddesses determine the destiny of man according to their moods, which are a transference of the moods of man who has lost his former state of nobility and purity.

The Holy Spirit had to play along with man because the latter – having left the stone age with a heart of stone and a club in his hand – wasn’t able to go beyond the idea of a God “*in his (man’s) image and likeness*”: if man is terrible in his wrath, God will be infinitely more so because he has more power. For this reason the expression “Who will save us from the wrath of God?” was recurrent; and men didn’t hesitate to sacrifice human lives in order to appease the “enraged” divinities.

The Incarnation will be necessary in order to allow man to finally rediscover the true face of God in the Son of God who became the son of man.

THE “WRATH” OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The “wrath” of God in the Old Testament is contrasted in the New Testament with the Love of the Father who doesn’t “take revenge” for the offences he receives, but dissolves them in His Mercy which is “*more powerful than sin*” (Dives in Misericordia, VIII); which doesn’t strike the sinner but “is made sin” and pays for everyone. For the first time the true Face of God is made manifest: “Our Father...” (Mt 6:9).

However, the old concept of the God who loses his temper, who takes revenge and who almost provokes us to evil is persistent: proof of this are various liturgical expressions and the interpretation of the Our Father, which was actually passed on to us by twisting the original version.

We believe it is appropriate to examine the situation here as well, by examining the introductory prayer to the Our Father in the Mass and a few expressions of it.

“WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO SAY: OUR FATHER”

For centuries, the Holy Mass has used this introductory formula to the Our Father, and it has remained effective even after the last liturgical reform:

“Taught by commands that bring salvation and formed by the divine instruction, we have the courage to say: Our Father...”

Which is like saying: *“Lord God, with little conviction, with very little spontaneity and with much fear, we dare to call you Father. But do not get angry with us: we do it only because your Son, our Saviour has commanded us to do so...”*

In order to have a better understanding of what we are saying, let us make a comparison. Suppose that an elder brother explains to his younger brother that, after many years of war, their father, whom the little boy has never met, is finally coming home. To prepare him for the meeting, he talks about him as the kindest person in the world, precisely because it is his father. And suppose that, while the father meets his son and with tears of joy is opening his arms to hug his little boy, he hears his son say:

“Excuse me sir, I don’t know you. But since my older brother commanded me to do so, I dare to call you: “Father”. However, do not get offended, I do it only because my brother ordered me to...”

How will that father feel after hearing his little boy’s words?

Well, the only difference that exists between an

earthly father and our Heavenly Father is that the Latter is infinitely more a father than all the fathers in the universe together, because He is the source of every paternity.

The Love of all earthly fathers is only a small spark of that which is the love of the heavenly Father, who is Father, only Father, and who is moved and melts with tenderness when he is called “Father!”

Let us consider the following: Jesus calls his Father with the most intimate name “Abba” only once, during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:36), which is the moment of greatest union with the Father in his earthly life. Therefore, in his moment of greatest suffering, he considers Him more than ever a Father and not an unshakable and revengeful Judge who vents his wrath on Him.

After Jesus’ ascension, “God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out: Abba, Father!” (Gal 4,6). The Spirit raises this “cry” incessantly, because he wants to glorify the Father in our soul at every instant, at our every breath and at our every heartbeat.

And at every moment we should repeat “Father, Father, my Father...”, or rather “Abba!”, which is the witness of our filial intimacy with Him.

“AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”

Every day we turn to our Heavenly Father with the prayer Jesus taught us but, without realizing it, we

pronounce a terrible blasphemy. Let us examine the two words using a dictionary (De Felice-Duro):

“Lead” = *“To direct into a certain attitude or behaviour, to put into a certain condition”*

“Temptation” = *“Natural or provoked impulse or stimulus to carry out enticing, but illicit, unjustified, inconvenient or inopportune actions”*.

From which we must conclude that God, our Heavenly Father, could *“direct us into carrying out enticing but illicit, unjustified, inconvenient or inopportune actions”*, behaving towards us like Satan, he who is pure evil and hatred and who Scripture presents to us precisely as the *“tempter”* (Mt 4,3).

And this is what we have repeated for centuries, millions of times a day, in our private and public prayers, even in hymns... Poor Father of ours, poor Daddy who – after having given us His only begotten Son to deliver us from temptation – hears us say to him over and over again, in hundreds of languages: *“...and lead us not into temptation!”*.

The strange thing is that this translation is incorrect, because the correct version is: *“And do not allow us to fall into temptation”*. And a stranger thing is that no one has ever corrected this expression.

Fortunately, even God’s sense of humour, like all of his attributes, is infinite.

Is there an explanation for this strange way of addressing God? I think so. The Catholic Church has inherited a lot from the Jewish world, and it hasn’t succeeded in getting rid of ancient beliefs, even though Jesus did everything possible and impossible to make us understand that the Father is Love.

Obviously, the Spirit that cries Abba still hasn’t managed to pierce our hearts, and we feel closer to the spirit of my brother’s letter.

However, David, Jeremiah and Job didn’t receive Jesus’ teaching and witness of love, and therefore they have an excuse. How can we justify this obtuseness towards the Love of the Father who has loved us to the point of sacrificing his Only Begotten Son on the cross for us?

JESUS DRIVES THE VENDORS OUT OF THE TEMPLE

“Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart”, (Mt 11:29), Jesus exhorts.

Jesus responds to Philip – who reveals to him his hidden fear of the Father in his request: *“Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us”* (Jn 14:8) – using an expression that should remove all false fears of God: *“Philip, Whoever has seen me has seen*

the Father. How can you say: Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (Jn 14:9-10).

If the Father is in the Son and the Son is meek and humble of heart, it follows that even the Father is meek and humble of heart. In fact, the Father is only most tender Love that doesn't want and cannot use any kind of violence, and therefore won't even be able to come to the end of times with a destructive power.

The objections that are regularly made to this statement are well-known, and our brother priest has reminded us of a few: God, in addition to Love, is also Justice. Several pages of the Old Testament present him to us as relentless in his justice; and, in the New Testament as well, does Jesus perhaps not give a powerful manifestation of his "wrath" precisely in the Temple, when he drives out the merchants with a whip?

So let us examine this passage, which is familiar to us all, even those who have never read the Gospel, and which each one of us quotes with conviction in order to justify his own violence:

"(Jesus) found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there. He made a whip out of

cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. (Jn 2:14-22)

The storm Jesus provokes in the Temple is not symbolic: it is a true earthquake that upsets men and things.

Maria Valtorta "sees" and describes the scene with more lively tones:

"Jesus has nothing in his hands. Only his holy wrath. And with his hand, walking swiftly among the stands, he spills the coins so meticulously

arranged according to quality, overturns tables, and everything falls to the ground with a crash, amidst the clatter of bouncing metals and wood that is struck and cries of anger, dismay and approval. Then, having snatched from the hands of some stable boys the ropes with which they tied the oxen, sheep and lambs, he makes a hard whip, in which the knots that are used to form the nooses become whips, and he raises it and twirls it and lowers it, mercilessly. Yes, without mercy”.

(Maria Valtorta, *The Poem of the Man-God*, Pisani 1975, vol. 2, p. 80)

In front of this scene, we all feel entitled to speak of “God’s holy wrath”, justified by the prophecy of David and motivated by the real moral decay of the Temple: a “wrath” that bears witness to God’s Justice, which at a certain point says: “that’s enough!”.

And just as the Son overturned coins and stands, so will the Father, when we’ve gone too far, make the world explode with his “wrath”: In fact, it will be the “dies irae”, which is so dreaded and considered imminent.

We point out once again, and we will always repeat it, that God cannot really get angry, because He is infinite Peace. And neither was He able to “get angry” when He became incarnate because – even though He

is clothed with mortal flesh – His divine nature has always ruled absolutely over every human authority and passion.

So, did Jesus “fake” everything in the Temple? No, Jesus did everything “seriously”, and he was certainly very “indignant” (indignation: “feeling for which one flees with contempt from something or someone” is very different from “anger” and “wrath”).

However, in order to interpret this episode correctly, we must make some remarks that will take us further. First of all, let us try to reconstruct the scene by using some elements given to us by the Gospel.

LET US RECONSTRUCT THE SCENE

The vendors and money-changers go to the temple guards and the high priests to excitedly relate the incident and ask for the protection of their rights as merchants who have a regular license and who pay their taxes regularly. They argue a bit about the matter and then the priests, guards, stall keepers and merchants go to Jesus who, holding his head high in his authority as Man-God, is ready to stand up to the screaming crowds.

The “power” radiating from Jesus was too great, and it is still in the air; no one has the courage to attack

him directly. Besides, before the incredible confusion which prevails, a doubt crosses the Jews' minds: might Jesus be the long-awaited Messiah, the great leader who will guide the long-awaited revolt of the Jews and free them from Roman oppression? The question they ask Jesus is almost respectful:

“What sign can you show us for doing this?”

This is the question Jesus expected and provoked. There is a pause of silence, fear and hope for the investigators and more so for his apostles and supporters, who were also devastated by the incident. In the general silence, over the crowd who waits in agony – and is ready to make him king if his answer is in accordance with their expectations – they hear the voice of Jesus who says in a loud and solemn voice:

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”. (Jn 2:9)

This response takes everyone, both friends and enemies, by surprise. It is humanly absurd, illogical, and the bystanders immediately point it out to him:

“This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?” (Jn 2:20)

There is a general disappointment. The tension falls. *“He is not the Messiah – his enemies say – he is a poor madman...”*. The verdict spreads among the crowd: *“He isn't the Messiah... he is a poor madman; so mad that he says he will rebuild the Temple in three days...What a pity, we hoped... He is mad, poor man...”*.

It is perhaps precisely for this reason that they don't put him in jail and don't charge him for the damages: the clever Temple keepers take the flashy opportunity to defame the troublesome master and thus debase his powerful action of grace.

The apostles are the most dismayed; they must absorb the repercussions of the insults hurled at their Master and, deep down, they too are perplexed. They would like to ask for an explanation, but they don't dare to. Jesus doesn't say a word. The episode will remain a great question mark which will often reappear to disturb their faith. Only after Jesus' death will they understand:

“But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken”. (Jn 2:21-22)

None of the commentators of this passage (to my knowledge) has advanced the hypothesis that Jesus may have revealed himself on this occasion as the Prophet who was giving the most powerful message in history. In order to understand this assertion, let us examine who a prophet is and how he expresses himself.

WHO IS A PROPHET?

The word prophet comes from the Greek *profetes*, from *pro-femi*, which according to an ancient concept means “to predict”; according to the modern explanation it means “*to speak, to express for (someone else)*”. In our case, a prophet is someone who speaks in the name of God, driven by the action of the Spirit of Yahweh.

The Lord speaks to prophets: a) through dreams; b) through visions; c) through ecstasies. In biblical language this word means the behaviour of man who “invested with an external strength – in our case the Spirit of God – feels he is shifted away from his order, no longer subject to the command and guidance of his reason in his normal state” (Dictionary of the biblical concepts of the New Testament, EDB, ad vocem).

Ecstasies can be related to symbolic gestures by which prophets explain their prophecies. In this case it is a prophetic gesture, accompanied by an oracle or prophetic speech.

“PROPHETIC GESTURES” AND “ORACLES”

When Yahweh wanted to make some particularly important truths penetrate into minds and hearts, he made the prophet – in ecstasy – perform spectacular and shocking gestures, which made their preaching visually evident and thus forced people to reflect. These gestures are also called “symbolic actions”. Here are a few examples:

By God’s command, Jeremiah buys an earthenware flask and breaks it in the sight of the priests and elders, saying that Jerusalem will be destroyed in this way (Jer 19:10);

Ahijah, the Shilonite, divides his cloak as proof of the imminent division of the kingdom (1 Kings, 11:29 foll);

Ezekiel mimes the hasty flight of one who goes into exile in order to point out the future deportation (Ez 12:6-11).

Thus presented, the prophecy didn’t need long comments; few words were sufficient – precisely oracles or speeches – to convey the message God wanted to give.

JESUS, THE PROPHET OF PROPHETS

In the episode of the Temple Jesus reveals himself in his authority as Man-God, conveying a prophetic message that goes well beyond Israel and which divides the history of the spirit of man in two parts: the temple made of stone must be replaced by the temple made of flesh, GOD LIVES IN MAN!

In order to express this revolutionary truth, which concerns men of all religions and all times, Jesus uses the prophetic style of the Old Testament in its fullness, using prophetic gestures and oracles.

The prophetic gesture is the demolition of the whole market, which symbolizes the future destruction of the temple of Jerusalem and of one's body; the oracle are the few words he pronounces: "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*".

This is perhaps the strongest moment of the whole apostolic life of Jesus and the Power which flows from Him is superhuman. Valtorta describes Him as follows:

"Jesus is dreadful. He looks like the archangel set on the threshold of Paradise lost. He has no blazing sword in his hands, but he has rays in his eyes, and he strikes down mockers and the impious."
(ibid. o.c.)

Jesus is in the Temple, which for the Jews was the only seat of divinity, and on this occasion he reveals himself more than ever as Master and Prophet. He must explain to everyone the words he pronounced to the Samaritan woman:

"The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth". (Jn 4:21-24)

Jesus, in other words, must shift the axis from the Temple made of stone to the temple made of flesh: God doesn't live in a material structure, but in man.

For the Jews this message is difficult to accept: it is the end of the Jewish people as the "only" people of God; it is the collapse of their plans for a national revolt; it is admitting that all men (even the Samaritans and Romans!) have the same spiritual dignity. The Jews didn't acknowledge Jesus' prophetic power, and for this reason they formulated the question in the wrong way: instead of asking: "*What sign can you show us for doing this?*", they should have asked him: "*What do you intend to show us with this sign?*".

Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man. In the Temple he explodes in all his prophetic Power, just as in the last Supper and on Calvary he will reveal himself in all his priestly and royal dignity.

PADRE PIO, THE “PROPHET” OF GOD

Whoever knew Padre Pio from Pietrelcina up close often witnessed his manifestations which were superficially classified as acts of nervousness and impatience.

During the month of May, while preaching at San Giovanni Rotondo, Father Bonaventure from Cavallana, a Capuchin, witnessed one of these “explosions” against a man who had gone to visit Padre Pio, and he remained traumatized by it. Later on he spoke about it to Padre Pio, saying: *“Father, you really lost your temper this morning...”*. Padre Pio answered him with a smile: *“Truly I say to you, I have never lost my patience and I have never lost my temper in all my life...”*.

What were these “explosions”? They were powerful vibrations of the Spirit which had to break barriers or encrustations that paralysed the action of Grace in souls. I had my own personal experience, during one of my encounters with him. I had gone to visit him after months of frantic work for a mission he had en-

trusted to me. I had only received humiliations, and I went to him hoping for tenderness and comforting words.

Instead, as soon as Padre Pio entered the sacristy, he started to yell with such a powerful voice of thunder that I feared the church would collapse. The few words he pronounced – nine, to be exact – seeped inside me and were like bombs that exploded deep down inside me, causing a sort of interior earthquake.

I remember the scene well: everyone was laughing as if Padre Pio had told a joke, while I would have wanted the floor to open up so that I could hide beneath it.

Two minutes later I joined him in the internal arcade of the new church, and I knelt down on his left, ready for a second wave of bombs. Instead, he looked at me with infinite tenderness.

Thinking I had done something wrong to him, I asked him if he no longer wanted me to come to him. He looked at me surprised and saddened: “Come whenever you like” he answered and, almost afraid that I would take advantage of this permission, he added: “Come whenever your superiors send you!”. I tried to stutter: “But before... you.... in the sacristy...” and he looked at me with astonishment, as if I was making a strange speech which he couldn’t understand. Finally, with the brisk manners that distin-

guished him, patting me on the head, he dismissed me and said: “Now let me continue praying!” and he sunk into his hood again. I had the impression – which was probably wrong – that he didn’t even realize what had come forth from his person a few minutes before.

I returned home reflecting on what had happened and on those nine words which exploded inside me. Only later did I understand that those nine words were the “oracle” that had irreversibly destroyed the hard “inner structure” of my “ego”.

This kind of explosion, with a tremendously more powerful charge – like a nuclear warhead! – must have taken place that day in Jerusalem, when Jesus turned the Temple upside down.

THIS IS THE HOUR OF GOD’S WRATH

Dear Brother Priest, dear Friends,
this is the hour of “God’s wrath”. This is the hour of the Father and everyone must bend to God’s will at this hour. The Father is tired of waiting, he is tired of seeing us suffer, and he is tired of seeing us smacked by Satan because it is He Himself that is mortified in his children.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to get rid of some waste residues that could have corrupted the idea of God considered as most pure and total Love.

The Father has said “that’s enough” and, through his Son, is coming in our midst with power:

“ Then I saw the heavens opened, and there was a white horse; its rider was (called) "Faithful and True." He judges and wages war in righteousness. His eyes were (like) a fiery flame, and on his head were many diadems. He had a name inscribed that no one knows except himself. He wore a cloak that had been dipped in blood, and his name was called the Word of God. The armies of heaven followed him, mounted on white horses and wearing clean white linen. Out of his mouth came a sharp sword to strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he himself will tread out in the wine press the wine of the fury and wrath of God the almighty. He has a name written on his cloak and on his thigh, "King of kings and Lord of lords". (Rev 19:11-16)

We invite you to read this passage from Revelation with the interpretation we have tried to give with regard to the “fury and wrath of God”.

The “sharp sword that comes out of his mouth to strike the nations” is the word of God which will resound as thunder in the consciences of a bewildered and desecrated humanity, which has become obtuse to

the voice of the Spirit and which will resound first of all in each one of us, in order to destroy our “ego”, the true demon we bear inside us and to give us new life. Only in this way will we enter the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the dimension of the Spirit and of Love.

If, with these reflections on the “wrath of God”, we have lead someone to believe in the Father’s Love in a more concrete way and thus prepare himself for the last battle in the best of ways, our wish for Peace and joy that we sent at the beginning has already come back to us increased a hundredfold. Thank you.

May our Father, who is most tender and powerful in His Love, smile at us and fill us with joy in these times which we hope more than ever may herald the Light to enlighten the thick fog in which we are immersed.

Index

THE FATHER’S JUSTICE.....	5
WHAT IS JUSTICE?.....	6
THE POWER OF JUSTICE.....	8
WHO JUDGES US?.....	10
THE GREAT TRAP OF HELL.....	12
GOD’S ANGER.....	16
WHAT IS “WRATH”?.....	20
THE “WRATH OF GOD” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.....	21
THE “WRATH” OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	24
“WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO SAY: OUR FATHER”.....	24
“AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”.....	26
JESUS DRIVES THE VENDORS OUT OF THE TEMPLE.	28
LET US RECONSTRUCT THE SCENE.....	32
“What sign can you show us for doing this?”.....	33
WHO IS A PROPHET?.....	35
“PROPHETIC GESTURES” AND “ORACLES”.....	36
JESUS, THE PROPHET OF PROPHETS.....	37
PADRE PIO, THE “PROPHET” OF GOD.....	39
THIS IS THE HOUR OF GOD’S WRATH.....	41