

The Heritage of Celestine

By Maria Grazia Lopardi

At the foot of the Gran Sasso Massif, in the river Aterno valley sheltered by surrounding, impressive mountains, stands the town that Peter of Morrone, elected to the papal throne with the name of Celestine V, preferred above all: L'Aquila.

Here the Hermit wanted the building of the basilica of S. Maria di Collemaggio, the jewel of romanesque architecture of Abruzzo, where he, with obstinate firmness, wanted to be coronated pope.

The cardinals' complaints, with the excuse of old age and of the difficulties of a journey on mountain roads, were useless: they pleaded him to go to the Papal States and to choose, at least, Perugia or Rieti if he didn't want Rome; the old hermit was adamant: his basilica, guarded by his order, would be the place of coronation.

This firm attitude is a clear sign of some historians' weak thesis about Peter Celestine's frail character, who would let the Church run serious risks because of his ineptitude to say "no" to the powerful.

Such is the case, for example, of the cardinals who, pleading Celestine to spare them an uncomfortable journey on rough roads, were explicitly and repeatedly given a negative answer.

Why did he want to privilege L'Aquila so much, a town built less than half a century before by the inhabitants of the surrounding castles to set themselves free from feudal oppression?

Why did He, native of Molise, so fond of Maiella and Morrone where he found the most hidden spots to enjoy the sweet talks with God, want the spiritual centre of his piety to be L'Aquila, at the foot of the Gran Sasso Massif?

This question can only be answered in part and will be confirmed by future history: many people think that in this town or nearby,

something very special would happen and attract the attention of the world, and it's not by chance that Celestine's remains rest in the Basilica which saw him Pope.

Let's keep this question in mind and go forward in time: we reach our century where you can almost feel and breathe human beings' expectations, stirring their sleeping consciences towards a choice that will define the future of the very next millenium: an american writer, whose destiny is to become famous, writes a novel that incredibly shakes from numbness habits and conventions, inviting men to join in a precise spiritual path.

With "The Celestine's Prophecy", a novel whose plot focuses on the search of an old manuscript, James Redfield suggests everybody, from an accessible point of view, all the development steps which suddenly awake a great number of god's searchers, who find in it useful suggestions to carry out the conversion of our times, which is shifting our look and attention from the outside to the inside, searching for God not so much in stonework temples, as more in the tabernacle of the human heart and in facing the devil's temptations not only by accusing the others, the evil ones, but truly facing the shadow of our unconscious.

Several millions of people in the world read Redfield's book and the following ones through which he investigates the course traced by "The Prophecies": many millions come to know the name of Celestine as in execution of a big plan ...

For the readers of the first nine enlightenments included in Redfield's book, Celestine is a maya place in Peru, but in the "Tenth Enlightenment", for an inspiration of some kind, the teachings of the old manuscript are linked to Celestine V and to the Franciscan Spirituals.

It was 8th of June 1996 when I read the pages of the "Tenth Enlightenment" dealing with Pope Celestine and the protection he granted the Spirituals, regarded as heretics and forced to hide in natural offered shelters to avoid incurring punishments the Inquisition willingly intended to inflict them.

Redfield also adds an extremely important remark where he points out that the Church will have to solve the gnostic dilemma, since they induce to imitate Christ, but then they persecute whoever tries to do it.

That morning of June I leave my house thinking about what I had read and intending to investigate my knowledge of Celestine V; I think the lawyer Amedeo Cervelli, a very cultivated man who, in the past years, had organized a series of lectures on the occasion of the Celestine Forgiveness, might help me.

As soon as I arrive at the town main street, my wish comes true: I meet Mr Cervelli and I submerge him with questions. With usual kindness and competence he answers with a wealth of details and at the end of our conversation, just before saying goodbye to each other, he opens a packet he holds in his hand: he produces a book entitled "Law Sources of L'Aquila Forgiveness " of which he's the author and tells me its going to give precise answers to all my questions.

He adds the volume was destined to someone, of whom he tells me the name I'm not going to repeat for the reason I'll point out soon, but since he didn't meet him, he gives the book to me.

I'm amazed since at the time of the meeting I'm telling about, I had just finished reading the novel "The town and the hope" where a modern Jesus acting in a suburb of an American city, was hindered by a Satan's follower whose name, with a Latin ending, is the same of the original receiver of the book!

What does it mean, that Celestine is diverted from the Satan's follower to me, that I've been following a gnostic path for years?

I tell about these incredible coincidences the Celestine Circle, already acting for a long time, and all the members are infected by a feverish enthusiasm: we read a lot of books about the story of Celestine V and we often visit his cristal urn in S. Maria di Collemaggio, leaving apart our sound laicism.

We put precious elements altogether and we notice that the Pope defined by history "of the big refusal", identifying him with the famous sentence by Dante , was by no means a simple-minded,

unable to run the world affairs, a naive who did whatever the powerful asked him to do, with the risk of letting the Church lose their at the time unlimited power.

It is apparent, as it always happens in history, written by winners as everyone knows, that an awkward figure has been underestimated and all forgotten without having to reckon with the plans surpassing human history ...

Who's the winner? Who's Satan's disciple Celestine needs to be diverted from so that he can carry out a precise mission seven centuries after his death?

To bring you to an answer you'll give by yourselves, I have to, first of all, introduce you Celestine better and so tell you about the "Coincidences" through which Life suggested me a magnificent plan of salvation of the 2000 humankind with the crucial role of the neglected, so called "of the big refusal" pope.

So Peter Angelerio was on his hermitage of Morrone when, on 17th July 1294 Charles II of Anjou and his son Charles Martello, together with cardinals, bishops and pilgrims bring him the news of his election to the papal throne: after a first reaction of dismay, understandable for one who had dedicated all his life to the solitary search for God, he asked the noble nuncios to be able to retire to ask God how he should behave: he finally accepted, the Lord had told him it was the right thing to do.

Official history explains that this event was determined by Peter's worries about the Church, deprived of a leader for 27 months, but probably something else occurred to the humble instrument of Providence.

In the second half of the XIII century, people were waiting for a big event: the by now forthcoming age of the Holy Ghost as prophesied by Joachim of Fiore, who died in 1202 in the convent of S. John in Fiore, in Calabria, a Cistercian, founder of the florence congregation, "of a prophetic spirit endued", as Dante described him in the XII poem of Purgatory.

The monk, who devoted to the exegetic study of the Holy Scriptures, according to the 42 generations, 30 years old each,

shown in S. Matthew's Gospel from David to Jesus determining on the whole the Father's age (Old Testament), and calculating as many for the Son's age (New Testament), had envisaged the year 1260 as the beginning of the third age in the history of humankind, that of the Holy Ghost, where a new awareness would define human feelings thanks to the Holy Ghost's understanding power. He also foresaw a reformed and holy Church and the preaching of the *Evangelium aeternum* once the "literal" step of interpretation had been overcome.

The monk's teachings, neglected while he was alive, arose the reaction of the Church foundation – accused of being corrupted and not holy – that in the IV Lateran Council in 1215 condemned the Joachimite conception of the three states and later branded the Joachimites as heretics.

The most extremist orders and the Franciscan Spirituals in particular welcomed with enthusiasm Joachim's theses which foresaw an antipope as the emergence of the Antichrist, but also a spiritual Pope "of humble appearance with a big soul". Moreover the Apocalypse Angel would appear to announce the time of accomplishment.

The popular consciences were really shaken by the apocalyptic visions of the Calabrian hermit: their longing for the divine, for an age of love after the darkness of an age ruled by the law of the stronger and by the induced submission of the weaker enduring it in the hope of afterlife reward, spread with such a contagious strength as to arise enthusiasm and fanaticism.

In every place, with the spiritual excitement of an age where divine energies shook numbness from the matter, an excitement that reaction stakes attempted to get back into the line of acceptable orthodoxy, inside and outside convents people lived waiting for the events prophesied by Joachim of Fiore to come.

It wasn't difficult for the contemporaries to regard S. Francis as the Apocalypse Angel and Celestine as the Spiritual Pope "of humble appearance with a big soul", and since the Calabrian prophet relied on the "viri spirituales" to accomplish the age of the Holy Ghost, the Franciscan Spirituals, who probably derived their name just from

the Joachimite expression, felt themselves as the predestinates to prepare the grounds of the Ecclesia spiritualis in substitution of the corrupted Ecclesia carnalis.

They lived waiting eschatologically for a third age, convinced that the Announcer Angel of the Apocalypse was Francis of the "*non bullata*" Rule and of the Testament and that a Pastor Angelicus would come, the Pontiff of the spiritual Church and of the *universalis renovatio*.

To explain the historical background of the time, it needs to be highlighted that the spiritual excitement typical of the age and inducing the searchers of the divine to turn to evangelic principles, worried a lot the rich Roman Church, powerful and corrupted. As it happens every time the mighty fear to lose their power, there was a very violent reaction which stands for one of the most blood-stained pages in western history.

If the Council of Verona in 1184 limited themselves to excommunicate heretics, that is those who professed a doctrine different from the one established, for the most part, by the Council of Nicea in 325, Innocent III aimed at the physical annihilation of Cathars by announcing the crusade against the Albigenses. Those who participated in the crusade were granted the full remission of sins by the Pope, and later on a more limited indulgence also granted those who carried firewood for the stakes.

The Holy Inquisition was established as a means to find out heretics: among the most fervent inquisitors was Dominique of Guzman who in 1215 had founded the Dominican Order, soon renamed "the Lord's dogs", and successfully engaged in the fight against heresy.

Entire populations were slaughtered and terror spread indistinctly among heretics and catholics because a rumour, an accusation suggested by envy or the desire to get someone off in a way or another were a good reason to be trapped by the Inquisitors' violent methods ...

It was the triumph of fanaticism and religious intolerance. In this historical context of legalized violence and sadism can be placed the

age of the Holy Ghost which should have begun in 1260, according to Joachim's calculation.

It's easy to figure out what hopes arose when an extraordinary event occurred: at the death of Nicholas IV, after a conclave of about two years, the cardinals, who until then couldn't come to an agreement, unanimously voted Peter of Morrone, the eighty-year-old hermit, founder of the brotherhood of the Holy Ghost in 1260, with a rule even more severe of the Benedictine one.

Incredibly the persecutions against the heretics ceased and, more than that, the new Pope protected the franciscan spirituals, who had been hiding to escape stakes, reorganizing them in the Order of Pauperes Eremitae Domini Celestini. The Spirituals let Celestine know Joachim of Fiore's prophecies which deeply impressed him: all his life had been dedicated to the search after the most intimate contact with the divine, carefully following the evangelic teachings.

It can be easily figured out how much suffering the hermit of Morrone had to endure because of the corruption of the Church, and how much he dreamed of changing them into a community of Christ's disciples, like the original Ecclesia, busy to work on themselves to follow the course indicated by the Holy Scriptures.

Peter Celestine was indisputably a follower of the Calabrian monk as a noteworthy detail reveals: when he was elected pope he chose the name of his predecessor who, not without resistance, recognized the Order of S. John in Fiore: Celestine III.

The biographies and studies about Peter of Morrone refer to the meeting between the newly elected Celestine and Angelo Clareno, leader of the Abruzzo Spirituals, who, his heart full of hope, dared to risk the stake coming out of the wildest hiding places, the heretics' usual shelters.

In the book "Celestine V" – Nuova publishing – Ottorino Gurgo writes that when Celestine and Clareno's looks met - so similar was their search – Celestine called Clareno "brother", recognizing Him as a highly spiritual creature, a God's madman who would renounce everything for the Gospel.

That's the way Celestine transformed the Spirituals into His Poor Hermits, a new order whose leader was the same Angelo Clareno.

When Peter of Morrone's fame declined, the Spirituals reverted to the former, clandestine life and were again persecuted as heretics.

Some of them, among whom Clareno, crossed the Adriatic sea in the hope, maybe, that Joachim of Fiore's prophecy, according to which Christianity, dead in the western world would come back to a new life in the eastern world, would come true.

So this was the atmosphere at the time of Peter of Morrone's election. It can already be regarded as a miracle the fact that, after 27 months of contrasts due to incompatible exigencies of power, the cardinals of conclave unanimously elected the poor hermit – they said they were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Also Peter, like many others, was waiting for the signs announcing Joachim's third age, among which a Pastor Angelicus "of a humble appearance with a big soul".

As humble as he was, in the silence of his soul, did he maybe feel to be called to accomplish a mission? To have to be a docile instrument of the Holy Ghost to Whom he dedicated his hermitages? Historians believe Peter had to submit not to damage the Church without Leader.

For the one who chose to leave the world to retire to impervious places, and regards the Gospel as his fundamental rule and, like Francis is married to Our Lady Poverty, it must have been a big sacrifice to be projected into the world of power, of intrigues, of riches and of intolerance towards those who share different opinions about the way of being disciples of Christ: by accepting Peter let his soul take a risk.

Did he maybe feel he had to save the Church without Shepherd? Or because he saw himself as a humble instrument in the divine plan through the Holy Ghost?

Being a sinner as a man, he wouldn't certainly deny his vision of the path towards God and would give his power not to serve material interests, those of a totalitarian king who has to defend his

reign and doctrine, but those of the Holy Ghost, to the coming of the Ecclesia Spiritualis and to the diffusion of the Evangelium Aeternum.

Could this idea have been the one to induce the hermit, who loved poverty and dialogues with God, to accept the most powerful office in the Middle Ages?

If we attempt to plumb Peter's soul, it can't be excluded.

The eccentricities of the new Pope begin soon: stubborn as a naughty child – as it's already been said – he wants to be coronated in L'Aquila, in his not yet completed basilica of S. Maria di Collemaggio.

It was in the year 1294, on 29th August, anniversary of the decollation of St. John, an extremely important detail. The Pope, who after 27 months had given the Church a new Leader, still regarded by history as an incompetent, was active from the very beginning.

The lawyer Cervelli, in the enlightening book "Law Sources of L'Aquila Forgiveness" – edited by Japadre – remarks the energy of the new pope was "hectic", while Ottorino Gurgo in "Celestine V" – Nuova publishing – writes that Celestine "... without asking for advice, took a series of decisions giving many the impression the hermit friar, elected Pope against his will, would be less compliant than expected".

To begin with, the evening of his coronation he granted those who, confessed and truly repented, would go to S. Maria di Collemaggio on the day of St. John, an annual plenary indulgence "universis Christi fidelibus".

Such an event, documented by the bull of 29th September 1294, is extremely important if we consider that the Church had been making use of the indulgences, until then, to induce people to carry out their plans, for example participating in the crusades (Urban II in 1095), offering money to the building of churches or engaging in the struggle to heresy.

The only precedent was represented by the Assisi forgiveness obtained by S. Francis for the visitors of the *porziuncola* on 2nd August and verbally given by Onorio III.

Celestine didn't only give an annual forgiveness simply determined by going to Collemaggio with a repented soul and in peace with God, but he also made use of such a revolutionary formula as to question, later on and uselessly, the authenticity of the bull since it is "incorrect according to the doctrine" (as remarked by Lopez in *Celestine V – The Forgiveness of Collemaggio – edited by G. Tazzi*). As a matter of fact, indulgences used to wipe out temporal punishment, neither sin nor guilt, while Celestine contemplated the absolution of both punishment and guilt!

It's clear that the new pope had wanted to privilege S. Maria di Collemaggio and L'Aquila, if we consider that the old basilicas with the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul were in Rome and the Pope would have had to choose, more logically, the papacy.

Why such a predilection for L'Aquila?

This mountain town received a new impulse thanks to the plenary indulgence *universis Christi fidelibus*.

Celestine really wants to grant all Christ's believers the indulgence, that is to say not only to social privileged, or so called privileged because they accomplished plans for the Church, but to everybody, rich or poor, who went to Collemaggio with a worthy soul to deserve the divine benevolence. In a time where people have no rights, Celestine states the right of every believer of Christ, referred to His free judgement.

In his already quoted work the lawyer Cervelli remarks: "Now, the bull of Forgiveness, an act of *aequitas canonica* directed to the *cives romani imperii*, as a source of right on the local universal plan has deeply affected *in spiritualibus* and *in temporalibus*, has contributed to create a new legal order; it has caused trouble in the established order and has given rise to new and revolutionary attitudes. All this can be historically confirmed through a surprising documentation."

The destination of the bull *Universis Christi Fidelibus* " ... leaves no doubt on the formal universality and peremptoriness of the message, which represented a new and extraordinary event for all humankind, for all men on earth, who as God's children were by now equal, which represented an overwhelming event in medieval society (*a burst of the supernatural, as Manselli would say on the temporal plan*), with unexpected developments within the theocracies that are the more perfect the more absolute is their power and the more the individual is deprived of his/her freedom and initiative" (p.131).

"So it's about... a benefit whose origin and destination were plebeian and popular, directed to satisfy social, spiritual, civic, popular and individual demands coming from beneath: the benefit pre-established disrupting tendencies of absolutism ..." (p.132). Celestine, therefore, makes everyone a law subject, a citizen who can freely benefit from the indulgence, and accomplishes the equality for all God's children who are willing to receive the light. The bull granted forgiveness of all sins as if they had never been committed, but the necessary and further condition to enter the Church of S. Maria di Collemaggio was to be "sincerely repented and confessed".

Repentance is obviously an interior act, and so seems to be the required confession, since in a document such as the papal bull it would have been natural to refer to the sacrament of the Communion, too, through the different formula "confessed and communicated", hadn't Celestine spoken about a soul confession.

If such a hypothesis is correct, the new Pope's choice of satisfying the spontaneous popular spirituality is confirmed – and it's not through Rome – *letting everybody not only take the initiative to go to Collemaggio, but also create the interior conditions – repentance and soul confession* – to be forgiven, in complete autonomy, by intercession of nobody else.

The Christ's believer becomes the protagonist of his/her religious path and his/her devoutness is an intimate fact between God and the subject, without intermediaries.

Celestine's first deed, the granting of Forgiveness, was revolutionary as wanting to be coronated outside Rome and the Papal States; even more surprising is a fact that let the Forgiveness survive notwithstanding Boniface VIII's will to "*revoke it, erase it, annul and invalidate it*" – just to be clear about his intentions.

Since the beginning, the bull of Forgiveness has been given to the local government authorities and, since Celestine had also relieved all the monasteries of the Order of any episcopal jurisdiction – another incredible initiative of the hermit Pope -, the Bishop of L'Aquila didn't have any authority on the church and monastery, not even on the celebration of Forgiveness. Indeed, a chapter of the old town statutes stated that every year the local government authorities invited the Bishop and Clergy to join in St. John's Day. The Forgiveness was and is just a lay, highly spiritual, but not a religious event of the Church.

What sort of strangeness is this?

Even nowadays the bull of Forgiveness is read on every occasion by the town Mayor! Why didn't Celestine give the bull to the Bishop?

Was he aware, perhaps, - so he wasn't so naive - that the Church as an institution would try to destroy the inconvenient paper and the privilege granted to S. Maria di Collemaggio and to L'Aquila?

What sort of Forgiveness was Celestine's and what sort of Church did this Pope belong to if the official Church, through the Bishop, was simply invited to join in it as a common Authority?

The oddities of the event are far from being over. Among other Celestine's deeds, of no specific interest in this context, are other, shocking ones as the ones quoted above: he removed the franciscan inquisitor from Spoleto, imposing on the monastery of St. John in Fiore – that of Joachim of Fiore – a man he trusted, a certain friar Francis, relieved S. Spirito and all the monasteries of the order of the episcopal jurisdiction, relieved of tithes the order's possessions and confirmed them, "decided that no bishop could ever impose obedience on his monks nor prevent them from the building of convents, even inflicting the interdict on those who would try to impose their jurisdiction on the Celestines' monasteries (O. Gurgo, quoted).

He let abbots bless with the pontifical rite and absolve believers.

If we add he pretended that the Abbey of Montecassino was no longer named Benedictine but Celestine and removed Charles II from the preceding commitment to let Cardinals free to leave his reign, the suspicion the naive Peter Celestine had something in mind is well justified.

Moreover, after stressing the fact his old age didn't let him go neither to Rome, nor to Perugia, nor to Rieti for the coronation, he left without hesitation with Charles Anjou to Naples confirming he had no intention to enter the State of the Church.

A further, incredible event is the nomination of 12 new cardinals, 7 French and 5 Italians, among whom Thomas of Ocre and Francis of Atri, both belonging to the Celestine congregation.

Official history explains such unadvised choices because of the great influence Charles II exerted on the new Pope, but one might well assume Celestine wanted to create an autonomous force to sustain his cause, thinking it right to withdraw the order from the bishops' jurisdiction and, at the same time, advising the Pope to stay outside the Pontifical State and away from the influence of the Roman Cardinals' powerful families.

It's not by chance that among the 12 designated cardinals there are no Roman ones who could have possibly limited and counterbalanced the power of the Church of Rome.

It's been pointed out that to the charges against Celestine for the nomination of no less than 7 French, whose names were probably suggested by Charles II, facts showed they were all well worthy of it. Another move to consider is Celestine's decision to appeal, on 28th September 1294, to the Constitution about the modalities to elect the Pope, which was enacted by Gregory X in the Council of Lyon not only to avoid delays during the papal election, but also because it was innovative in an odd way: the set of rules had to be applied both in case of death of the Pope and of voluntary renunciation of the task.

So, just a month after the coronation, Celestine was thinking about giving up, yet he did a lot to attack the institution. It may well be supposed, therefore, that Celestine's moves, far from being regarded as naive, rash actions of someone unable to rule, seem to be the clever manoeuvres of someone with a precise plan.

However, if it's true that Peter was a Hermit who had denied the values of the world, as the leader of the hermits of S. Damiano or of Morrone, who called themselves Celestines afterwards, he showed outstanding skills of organization: when he went to Lyon in 1274 to rescue his congregation from the danger of suppression, facing a 4 month, winter journey, he could tell Urban IV about a good 16 convents in Abruzzo only, that would certainly increase both in Italy and Europe.

His successor, Boniface VIII wasn't wrong when he feared a schism and was worried about the destiny of the Church-power: as a jurist and an absolute monarch, he thinks the Bull of Forgiveness is extremely dangerous, so in the letter of 18th August 1295 addressed to the Prior of Collemaggio he declares to revoke, cancel, delete and annul it asking for its immediate return since the benefit granted by Celestine doesn't reconcile the needs of the sovereign authority of the Church and doesn't help the salvation of the soul, giving offenders the chance of dropping the reins.

Celestine's Bull, therefore, stands for an attack on the Institutions and a cause of moral laxism.

The document wasn't given back because it was in possession of the town Court, nor ceased the constant pilgrimage to S. Maria di Collemaggio on the occasion of the Day of Forgiveness.

On 18th November 1295 there follows a solemn speech in S. Peter against the indulgence of Collemaggio: Boniface confirms the revocation and condemns "all those who would join the Forgiveness of L'Aquila".

All this made no real impression, so on 23rd July 1296, before the Day of Forgiveness of that year, the Pope writes, therefore, a long letter to the Bishops of Marches, Umbria, Latium, Abruzzo, Campania and Tuscany, to the Dominican Priors, to the

Administrators of minor orders and their vicars, ordering to put up in every town and church the revocation of the Bull and to forbid by any means the pilgrimage of believers to the Forgiveness of L'Aquila.

There was nothing to do about it, a large crowd continued to gather in Collemaggio ignoring the papal disapproval: Celestine prevailed even dead (he died on 19th May 1296).

Lawyer Cervelli, whose work has constantly inspired us, said he had been invited to lecture in Trieste about Celestine and the Forgiveness because in that town, so far away from L'Aquila, there was a committee that organized the pilgrimage in Abruzzo.

The town of L'Aquila has been given an antithetic position towards Rome: the latter was the seat of papacy, the former was the centre of true evangelically inspired popular movements, the latter hosted the Ecclesia carnalis, the former the Ecclesia Spiritualis.

Celestine's gift to all believers of the Ecclesia in L'Aquila was so fearful to Boniface that he, careless about the lack of logic he showed, clearly desperate for not being able to stop this phenomenon, was obliged to adopt a commonly used means: in the same way as a heathen temple was destroyed by the building of a church and the sacred groove was christened by dedicating it to a saint, Boniface thought of diverting the pilgrimage focused in L'Aquila by imitating the Forgiveness: so he established in Rome the first Jubilee for the year 1300.

In Cervelli's work we read (p. 140-141): "as you know, Boniface's act wasn't very successful, so he, wanting to restrain the movement of the Forgiveness of L'Aquila, which was, by now, threateningly spreading (as the letter itself shows, sent to all the Italian territory), and attempting to control in some way its incidence on the Christian community, was compelled to invent and announce, for the first time in history, the Jubilee of 1300 which essentially repeated in Rome, with a sovereign, emphatic aim, the Forgiveness of L'Aquila".

The accusations levelled against the Bull of Forgiveness, that is an attack on the authority of the Church and moral laxism, were, so it

seems, no more valid if compared to the state reason of striking the Church of L'Aquila and Celestine.

It was all about the clash of irreconcilable models of devoutness, as love and law, knowledge and dogma, faith and beliefs are, and the world of today is the development of that victory and of that defeat: if all that happened, it probably depends on the fact that Humankind wasn't ready for the Church of Love. This subject was postponed until the following centuries ...

So, after 700 years a group born in the name of Celestine after reading a book by an American writer is facing the greatness of a personage who has always been worshipped by local authorities, but it's never been deeply known, even if instinctively loved.

Why – we ask ourselves – are we dealing with Celestine V?

Why did he forcefully come to meet our lives?

Certainly not for a purely historical interest.

I open again the book I wrote about this event, "Il Colle magico di Celestino", from which I've drawn out passages already quoted and I resume the series of coincidences which have answered this question.

We come to November 1996 and precisely on the 9th of this month I go to a conference about the teaching of Rosacroce: there I meet Clarice of Rome, but born in Abruzzo, who, knowing nothing about my interests on Celestine, tells me about a call she got from a Calabrian friend (like Joachim of Fiore) who recounted a dream about a personality telling her she would solve all problems through forgiveness.

When she, still dreaming, inquired about the identity of this personality, he answered: "I am Celestine".

While Clarice and I are talking Mary of Vasto comes closer; during our journey, she had already told me about a dream: underneath the room where Rosacroce have their meetings there was the body of a personality covered by a sheet of glass, who looked like a saint or something similar.

At first we give the dream a negative meaning since the presence of a corpse lets us think about a phenomenon of crystallization of

Rosacroce's force field, but when Mary realizes we're talking about Celestine, as if she recognized the personality of his dream, she cries out: "That's Celestine, that's who he is!"

Such a coincidence is too meaningful to be ignored: does it mean, perhaps, that both Celestine's and Rosacroce's energies and message are similar?

It would seem so, according to what Redfield writes, since their course follows the Church of St. John (as distinguished from the Church of S. Peter), aiming at overcoming this world to get the wisdom of the heart in a deep encounter with God.

Gnostics call this knowledge coming from the heart, this wisdom or universal understanding SOPHIA, a feminine name meaning the female aspect of the divinity (to the gnostics God is father-mother), as Mary shows or Isis before, Demeter or the Great Mother of all traditions.

With regard to this it's interesting to point out that in a partial list of Celestine places in Italy found out in a book, a good 23 are dedicated to the cult of Mary, which spread out considerably in the Middle Ages thanks to Bernard of Chiaravalle, the author of the Templars' rule, who were devotee to the Virgin, too. Speaking of the Templars, coincidences incredibly link their history with Celestine's.

The only piece of information I've got about the relationship between Celestine and the Templars was, at the beginning of my research or I'd better say of the meeting life has promoted between Celestine and I, the circumstance that the monks-warriors had hosted him when he went to Lyon in 1274 to rescue his order from suppression.

It was a "coincidence" to let me get further information about the dwelling where the hermit stayed, which later on became a monastery of the Celestines: it happened so that I went with a friend of mine, Piera, to an antique dealer, who noticing I was looking about among old books, invited me to choose one he would like to give me.

It was a 1700 collection about the History of the Church and I pointed to a volume which probably included the period when our Peter was Pope.

Back home, I eagerly skimmed through the antique book written in 1782, entitled "Ecclesial History", eighth tome, by abbot Bonaventure Racine, and on p.116 I found out the following sentence: "... arrived in that town (Lyon) where he found accomodation in a house that had belonged to the Templars and presently was a monastery of his order". This coincidence happened on 22nd July 1997.

The first days of October of the following year, from the untidily kept documents on a shelf at home emerges a magazine of 1979 about Catars: a chapter in particular deals with the castle of Montsegur biult on a hill which is part of the massif called Tabe or Tabor in the south of France and whose fame is linked to the strenuous defence of the Catars, the pure of the Church of Love slaughtered by the joined forces of the Inquisition and of the King of France, the former aiming at repressing heresy, the latter aiming at getting hold of the Languedoc.

In the following chapter of the pamphlet a point is developed: the castle had been built against any military rule and looked more like a solar temple, with a plan reproducing the constellation of Bouvier-Boote, that is the ploughman and "... they say the places under the sign of the ploughman are those where the earth gets the most astral influences."

The planning of Montsegur recalls a similar plan: I take the book "Abruzzo dei Castelli", edited by Carsa, and on p. 37-38 I find a picture of the Castle of Ocre taken from above. It seems very similar to Montsegur, with its lengthened shape which becomes narrower at one end. What's the meaning of such a coincidence? That the castle of Ocre might have been an initiation place?

This statement might sound quite weird, hadn't I already got another piece of information: among the well-known landlords of the fortress was a "Magnus Magister Templarorum", Thomas of Ocre (Francis Peter according to P. Gerolamo Costa in "Il Convento di S. Angelo d'Ocre e le sue adiacenze", edited by Officine Grafiche

Vecchioni, L'Aquila) whose portrait is kept in the council hall of L'Aquila.

Thomas might be Gualtieri of Ocre's brother, Frederick II's faithful collaborator.

A Thomas of Ocre – the same one? – was also one of Celestine's companions, who was nominated cardinal by the same Celestine. Strange coincidences.

The same day, captivated by the idea of a Templar presence in L'Aquila close to Celestine somehow, I resume one of Charpentier's classics, "The mystery of Templars", edited by Atanor, Rome, 1974, and I find out, among other things, the following statement: "nearby Lyon many of them (the Templars) might hide in convents".

So, the antique dealer's book had already mentioned that Peter had been hosted in Lyon in a Templar house which had later on become a Celestine convent.

Might we suppose a passage of Templars in the Celestines' rows?

Or, in any case, a transmission of something from the Templars to the Celestines?

The change of the Lyon dwelling into a Celestine convent might suggest a positive answer. My mind recalls some thoughts I've already expressed: on his way back from Lyon, as soon as he arrived at Collemaggio, Peter dreamt about the Virgin who supposedly invited him to build there a church in her honour.

The Virgin was very much worshipped by the Templars who filled Europe with black Virgins, powerful symbols for esoterism scholars.

The legend might conceal an office which Peter gave the Templars – who had helped in Lyon – namely the building of a Church in Collemaggio.

I start thinking rationally about some dates related to the building of the church: in 1287 the Bishop of L'Aquila Niccolò of Sinizzo addressed Peter of Morrone, the abbot of St. Spirit of Maiella and all brothers a bull authorizing both the building and the possession of an oratory or a church in the place called Collemaggio, " ... and as

to the church and oratory he dispensed them with any diocesan law and any episcopal jurisdiction ...".

Five days after two monks of S. Spirit, Stephen of Calvelli and Bartholomew of Trasacco bought a piece of land in Collemaggio from Rogata, daughter of the late Berardo called Torri.

In truth Antonio Serramonacesca ("Celestine V" – edited by Iapadre) writes that the two monks had already settled the buying affair by 1281 and in 1283 "the pious hermit was delighted when he saw the laying of the church foundations, which would be beautiful like lace made by fairy hands" (p. 119).

If Peter came back from Lyon in 1275 and in the same year he got the order by the Virgin, it's clear that within a few years he was able to raise funds, to make a plan, to buy the land and build a church that, to Mario Moretti's opinion, Superintendent to the Monuments and Fine Arts Office, who has to a great extent restored the building its former look depriving it of the baroque facing, saw a widening of the side aisles in 1300 but its present look and the way we look at it reflect the wishes of the Supreme Pontiff.

S. Maria di Collemaggio was consecrated in 1288 and in 1294, not yet completed, could witness the coronation of Celestine.

How were the funds raised? Who made the plan? Who carried it out?

If we suppose the Templars are concealed behind the Virgin, we can't discard the hypothesis – which would give an easy answer to the formulated questions – according which the same knights tradition gave the merit of bringing from the Holy Land " ... some papers with the secret of the building" (Charpentier, "The Mystery of the Templars") seemingly helped Peter to make his plan.

Did the Templars, therefore, want Peter to build Collemaggio? And why? To maybe wanting again to move energy to sacred places?

On the following day, 5th October 1998, continues the wave of "coincidences" I'm telling according to the order and the precise moments they occurred.

In the book by Lopez, "Perdonanza-Collemaggio" (edited by Tazzi, L'Aquila), there is a chapter entitled: "The hill and its name" where it's stated Collemaggio was in the territory of Torre or Torri and the name Collemaju or Collemadium in Latin might derive from "colle maggiore" or from "colle di Madio", a quite common name at the time, that is hill of May, the month of flowers, called maju in dialect.

If we keep in mind the tendence to double consonants typical of L'Aquila, especially "b" and "g", another hypothesis Lopez never contemplated strikes me: Collemaggio might derive from collemagione, that is the hill where a Templar house was built, or included in the territory of a house.

So Collemaggio extraordinarily refers to a Templar presence which shouldn't cause surprise if in 1310 the order was prosecuted in L'Aquila, and if in Ocre, on the outskirts of town, there was a "Magnus Magister Templarorum".

The coincidences on the same day don't cease to amaze me: turning over the pages of Charpentier's "The Mystery of the Templars", I read on p. 102 that according to P.V. Piobb, the prophecies of the French clairvoyant Nostradamus weren't written by Nostradamus, but by the Templars and the true nature of the obscure texts is seemingly that of "instructions given beyond time, to future individuals".

At this point of the book are the "prophecies" I'm going to write out:

<p>Il divin verbo sarà dal cielo segnato che non potrà più procedere innanzi di colui che chiuse, il segreto dischiuso che vi marcerà al di sopra ed avanti" (II, 27)</p>	<p>The word of god will be ill-favoured and will not be able to proceed no more of the one who sealed, the unveiled secret that will rot from above and in the future" (II, 27)</p>
<p>"chi aprirà il monumento trovato e non verrà a chiuderlo prontamente male gliene verrà". (IX, 7)</p>	<p>"the one who will open the monument found and won't readily come to close it will be ill-struck". (IX, 7)</p>
<p>"messo tesoro tempio, cittadini esperici in quel ritirato luogo segreto il tempio aprire" (X, 81)</p>	<p>"the treasure in the temple put, Hesperia citizens in that sheltered secret place the temple open" (X, 81)</p>

The "unveiled secret", the "monument found", "the secret place", make me immediately recall Collemaggio and the supposed crypt (from the Greek *cryptos* = hidden, secret) newspapers wrote about in the August of 1998, too.

To this regard some of my friends and I go to the underground rooms of the basilica, before newspapers gave readers the news: you gain access from the cloister on the right where a well testifies the presence of water running underneath the building, a fundamental element which, according to the logic of builders of medieval cathedrals, would exalt the effects of the energetic net.

It's true that if you go inside from the small door opening on the right side, looking at the façade, you are let inside small rooms and one in particular has got an arched vault, perpendicular to the main nave.

In that position the crypt of the church can be hardly found, but the newspapers suggested it might be an ordinary chapel built on the hill. Someone, however, got the idea to open a passage from one of the above mentioned rooms: the breach on the wall shows the existence of another walled room which doesn't seem to be the crypt, yet, which is normally placed underneath the point of intersection of the arms of a cross, if not subject to particular energetic needs, stretching towards the apse.

The daily newspaper *Il Centro*, 1st August 1998, reports what the person in charge of Forgiveness said with regard to the possible existence of other rooms in the vault: "We have reasons to believe there is a construction underneath the basilica of a highly historical, religious and cultural value". "We think it's the place where Celestine went to pray".

If we put the above elements all together, I can't stop my fantasies and I imagine the existence of a Templar treasure underneath S. Maria di Collemaggio, not so much a treasure of gold and jewels, but rather of teachings about the art of building, about the origins of Christianity.

Coincidences continue: I happen to see a book I read a few years before.

It was about a "Sindone una trama templare" (Christ's Sindon, a Templar plot, by Carlo Giacché) and I'm amazed to read on p. 96: "... But even other elements convinced us of the existence of the Sindon. Among these a peculiar event narrated in a famous paper called the Schifman's manuscript, whose edition, which some believe of Masonic inspiration, is dated 1745". "In this book ... you read: ... the (Grand Master Jacques de Molay) confided him (young count of Beaujeu, both G. M. William of Beaujeu's and Jacques de Molay's nephew) later on that the casket he was going to give him contained the most precious relic that Baldwin, king of Jerusalem, had given the order: St. John's forefinger of the right hand ..." and other elements of the Templar treasure, among which the scrolls with the mysterious knowledge of the order.

"After these statements Moley made young Beaujeu swear he would save everything and take care of it for the Order's sake until the end of the world ..."

What's been reported couldn't let me uninterested for a simple reason: on p. 326 of Antonio Serramonacesca's book "Celestine V" are listed the relics kept in S. Maria di Collemaggio as they result from a Latin inscription kept in the same church, too.

Well, in addition to a good part related to Celestine's body, there is a very particular relic: "*Hic est index Joannis Baptistae Praecursoris Domini*", that is St. John's forefinger precursor of our Lord!

The possible connection between Celestine and the Templars Life had presented me with an incredible sequence of coincidences induced me to read again Charpentier's "The Mystery of Templars" which made me look back on a past of more than ten years ago.

As a matter of fact this book is underlined by someone else, with a rather tremulous hand: the same person noted down the following sentence on p. 206: "... there is the problem of the Order's survival beyond the gallows, condemnation and secrecy, that presumes a transmission, a transmission which hasn't come to an end, yet and might cause a dramatic revision of history ..." "the following sign : Here's the key!"

The notes and underlined sentences belong to a dear, deceased friend, an old writer who was such a passionate scholar about the Templars' mystery as to be convinced, while in hospital because of some heart complaint, that he was carried off because he had

dared too much in this research. The fact is he died leaving me and another friend some papers that have been kept for years with no one having the heart to look at them again and reveal the message highlighted by the writer that *"humankind has slipped into a parallel world, into a wrong dimension ..."*.

I pass this point over because I don't want to expatiate upon this, but the incredible becomes daily life when a sequence of coincidences bring me back to the time of the events regarding my friend the writer and another friend from Rome sends me a book of the professor and now writer, too, Giuliana Conforto dealing with, among other things, the theory of dynamic systems according which a system can become unstable and looks for another condition of stability through the so called "bifurcation" from one level of energy to two levels, both distinguished from the ordinary one.

On p. 323 of the book entitled "LHU, men's cosmic game" – edited by Noesis – I read: "The earth is a unique world which will be divided into two worlds, both new, different one from the other and both different from the present one".

"The bifurcation will be, according to the theory's provisions, instant or quite so, and between two distinguished levels of energy, one inferior and one superior to the original one: the two levels might even correspond to two distinct universes, if the scissors between the two were wide enough".

"If such is the case the level or universe with an inferior energy would be more trapped than the present one in the Platonic cave ...".

I'm really impressed because according to the esoteric teaching humankind has been regularly exposed to a very powerful energy, not of this nature, reacting to it either by a new rise or by a relapse and that after the age of Celestine, of the Templars, of the legends of Graal, there was supposedly a bifurcation of the system with men falling to a vibratory level, as wars, famine, pestilences testify, and a part of them "risen" to a more luminous universe.

Is this the reason why the Templars didn't defend themselves? Is it they weren't interested in staying on earth or had they ended their mission by then? The problem comes up once again after 700 years now, when the energies of Aquarius are giving men again a new

impulse to vibrationally jump: it's stated by the theory of dynamic systems, it's been stated for a long time by various esoteric schools.

I now tell about a last coincidence: while I was going to a conference about the teachings of Rosacroe I heard the following statement: "... the first beam of the Holy Ghost has penetrated into the terrestrial atmosphere during the Middle Ages, at the time of Catars, Templars, of the legends of Graal, the second one, that of realization, is doing it now ...".

Now I understand why the age of Celestine and Templars was so incredibly joined to our age, almost overlapping it, and why they are of great interest today with such a treasure to offer humankind of 2000! Celestine comes up in all his splendours throughout the centuries to give us the fundamental instruments to become transparent, light, as suggested by the ritual of heart weighing in Old Egypt: the heart had to be lighter than a feather to let the soul gain access to the divine dimension.

In a world craving for love, seven hundred years after his existence, Peter Celestine imposes himself by the teachings which are the essence of every spiritual course: the faith in a God you listen in the silence of your heart, the power to forgive, the renunciation to one's self.

The faith is an interior knowledge no one can teach, that you won't find in any book, that you can only experience yourself. It's the power to feel God, to see Him everywhere, to understand His signs: it's an interior strength that lets you to an abandonment, that lets you to be driven by it even when our intellect doesn't understand the plan, it's knowledge imposing itself on conscience, nourished by the sacred energy running throughout the universe.

The experience of God, no matter how limited, softened because of our sleeping consciences, is worth more than any common creed, than any second hand knowledge.

Throughout his life Celestine, who lived in the silence of hermitages, who asked God for advice as to the opportunity to accept the election to the papal throne, who made himself a

meek instrument, not of the powerful of those times, but rather of the Holy Ghost to accomplish the divine plan, testified to this faith, to this interior certitude, to this firm strength he truly experienced.

The faith is feeling that what happens has to happen and there's a reason for everything even if opposed to the wishes of our self; the faith is not believing in an ideology, it's living sure to overcome every fear because the divine Intelligence appeases the tumults of our minds and hearts with a warm touch that seems to pervade all our being soothing and comforting it.

The faith is feeling, even through our faulty senses, that God befalls us, shows himself when our human personalities, with all their beliefs, arrogance, formalities are put aside, give everything up.

Even forgiveness, which shows the fundamental message of our Pope, is one of the elements offered by every spiritual path as an instrument to set ourselves free from the impedimenta hindering the way towards the Light, making us feel heavy, dull, thick.

The act of forgiving comes from the heart to set us free from resentment, hatred, bitterness, which are mortal poisons for those who keep them inside and for those subject to them; forgiveness can't be imposed, can't be mentally chosen because it's opportune, because it helps us feeling better: it's the result of a new awareness for which we are not separated from any element of the universe, and if there is an offender it's because, on the other side, there's another feeling hurt, showing the opposite derangement and that needs to see a weakness indicated by the offensor and to forgive himself something.

Celestine again, as shown by Petrarch in his passionate defence of the resigning Pope, gave up the most wanted power, but more than that he truly followed his path towards God without caring too much about the judgement of cardinals, kings, monks and friars, of the people who cheered him.

If we acknowledge the fact that our lives are totally influenced by the judgement of others whom we give the power of letting us

feel good or bad according to how they express their opinions about us, I think the highest sign of Celestine's spirituality is just the fact he placed God above any human idol, because an idol is represented by every person or authority preferred to God.

By ignoring whatever human judgement, we mean succeeding in the defeat of those masks which are our egos and which only find their value in the approval of others and are always busy to get more and more, we mean we realized our "initiation death".

So the impersonal Force of the Universe, the Intelligence of the Divine Mind can find a way in the defence of our ego to show itself: it's like an impersonal, invisible presence which is, still, undoubtedly felt.

To become aware of it means to let oneself be pushed by the cosmic energy throughout the school of life, developing an understanding of our mission, unique like every man's is, special because God needs our minds, our hearts, our arms to the development of his plan.

This Celestine's path towards freedom and enlightenment.

The meaningful coincidences confronted me with a message sent by a past of over seven centuries ago, but sound in any time, and the same coincidences let me meet other people who, without knowing the reason of their interest about a XIIIth century Pope, are dedicating their time and energy to know more, to find out a secret which is part of him and which has apparently been perceived by an American writer, unknown before.

In the subtle plot of life where past, present and future end in the eternal present, Celestine's mission, begun in the XIIIth century, is seemingly destined to be accomplished seven hundred years after: in carrying out a plan where men, at their best, only see small, fragmented parts, it seems that the same men have to catch the opportunity given to choose their destiny, that the age we are living in and we're soon going to live in its realization is the age of the Holy Ghost.

Life, driving me towards a charming adventure, induced me to look at Celestine's personality with my own eyes, that is I wasn't influenced by the historical version which wanted to diminish the

Pope who gave up the greatest power of those times: the most powerful western man got naturally rid of the rich garments to wear again the coarse habit inside which he felt poor in goods and Spirit, a crucial condition, according to the evangelic tradition of pauperism, to aim at the Kingdom of Heaven.

Celestine probably faced up to the law of dialectics according to which a system can't be changed from the inside because the breath of the idea, the energy animating the intention of a radical change can't be forced within a stiff force which is naturally inclined to perpetuate an asset assuring the preservation of the same system and of the same power, of course.

Life, the Divine Breath, the Beam has to naturally flow beyond rules which tend to limit it, like a container where you try to put running water.

The result is something different, it's not Life flowing anymore, but it's the concept it's been trapped in, it's not Truth anymore but opinion: we are all prisoners of what we believe in!

These beliefs have to be replaced by a faith which is knowledge, which is based on the personal conscience, which would have equally emerged from it in the same way, hadn't you never heard about something similar on earth.

Even what I'm telling you about now would become a creed if not tested through "the mind of the heart", if not interiorly agreed upon, and not so much according to the head's logic, but rather to a feeling deriving from a secret part of our being.

I "feel" that inside us there is the seed of "the one who has to come", of the shining being created by the magic divine alchemy. I "feel" we are waiting for a Messiah who has to be born by the sacrifice of our ego, by the little veil of appearances and beliefs we held on to, to play our role on the world stage.

This law of faith certainly induced Celestine to abandon the idea of improving an institution that was just busy with defending its own power and couldn't do anything else because it would have

fallen in an age where the empire tried to impose its supremacy by freeing itself from the spiritual investiture.

The Pope, who was more or less aware of this, didn't accept any compromise and it was just his conscience to lay the foundations for a new church where the believer, that is the one who has faith, is the protagonist, just in the same way as he/she goes to Collemaggio by his/her choice to be forgiven by the grace of God.

Peter's quick election – a coincidence is also the repetition of the name of the first Pope, like Celestine's lay one, initiator of a new Church! – had the difficult but fundamental task of scratching the unflinching building of the medieval Church, marking a turning point in the evolution of all western civilization as we said with regard to the birth of a new concept of man, a citizen and not a subject, a holder of rights and no longer a passive receiver of ecclesial benevolence or of civic power.

Peter's favouritism towards his order, which was rescued from ecclesial jurisdiction, his preference for the "heretic" devoutness of the Spirituals, the fact he entrusted the municipality the bull of Forgiveness of L'Aquila, do seem, rather than the acts of a mad Pope, unable to run power, logic steps to shift the attention of believers waiting for the age of the Holy Ghost from the Church of Rome he never entered.

Had Celestine reached Angelo Clareno, leader of the Spirituals who had to hide again after the resignation of his friend and protector, on the other side of the Adriatic sea, he might have led, thanks to a charisma people deeply loved, a Christian movement whose essence is the search for God, the overcoming of the world, where people don't have to believe in a doctrine, but they only have to answer an interior call.

If this didn't occur, if God didn't want it, it's probably because the Hermit Pope had to plant a seed and not accomplish, had to give a new impulse to a transformation whose results were to revalue men and to induce the Church to lose its temporal power.

Celestine's plan had to wait for the "right" time to be carried out, Christ's return in "Spirit and Truth", namely the Comforter, the Holy Ghost so much loved by Celestine.

"The one who has to come" before showing itself in men's hearts, is an Energy field, an Intelligence, a Conscience entering man, opening to him and inviting him at the same time to get lost with confidence in It.

It's the energy of Aquarius people talk so much about, that is, after seven hundred years, as the esoteric tradition says, the Light repeating its descent of love into the darkness, with the hope, for us, that this time the darkness will receive and recognize it for its power of making us, once again, God's children.

Maria Grazia Lopardi
Via Borgo Rivera, 3
67100 L'Aquila
(Italy)

By Maria Grazia Lopardi - L'Aquila

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