

Utopia and Dystopia

A reader sent us this email: *Thanks so much for putting the newly refurbished affresco in Via Arcivescovato on the cover (July 2020). I have always been enthralled by that beautiful image and am so happy the Curia, after years of resistance, finally fixed it. The previous image was lovely but sadly peeling away. We live a few meters away but have not yet seen it personally (since we are blocked overseas due to COVID).*

At the time of the First World War, in 1917, with Italy in tumult and social uprisings occurring in many regions, a local artist (from Marlia), Pietro Biagetti, painted this large fresco, using the *tempera* technique, on the external wall of the Agorà in Via dell'Arcivescovato. It is 5 meters high and 3.5 meters wide. The fresco, which represents *Cristo delle elemosine* (alms), is of the crucified Christ with Saint John and Mary Magdalene on either side. There is an alms-box near Christ's feet, where people could make contributions, perhaps to the Agorà, former convent of the Padri Serviti.

For years passing by this fresco, I too felt sadness at its state of abandonment. Often there was a bicycle tied to the railings, or trash left alongside. It seemed destined to fade away. About five or six years ago

a proposal was made by Giampaolo Sevieri to restore this artwork, but nothing seemed to change. A few years later the proposal was renewed, this time by Daniela Bartolini. She went directly to the Archbishop Italo Castellani, whose Church *Curia* (offices) are a short distance down the same street.

Soon, with the approval of Biagetti's niece Paola Cavallaro, the work was assigned to Agostini Restoratori, a company in Quarrata (near Pistoia). Rather than take the work to Quarrata, it was decided to move the delicate remains to the Agorà, behind the wall on which the artwork was located.

Finally, after years of inertia, with the fresco fading almost into disappearance, it has been restored. The clothes colored in ochre and terracotta and the earthy flesh of Christ render the fresco with an almost medieval quality. The Assessor for Urban Decorum, Gabriele Bove, and Municipal Council president Francesco Battistini approved the work, which was financed by the Cassa di Risparmio di Lucca and the Municipality of Lucca.

What an appropriate message of hope and caring, arriving as it did just before COVID closed us into our homes....

– by Norma Jean Bishop



before



after

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