

Mario Tessari
Between Historical Stylistic Eclecticism
and Concern for the Human Dilemma

Note: This essay is the English translation of an original text in Italian. The references to the images can be found at the Italian site at:

<http://www.mariotessari.it/index.php/2008-Leda-Cempellin-II-parte.html>

Part II
Meditations on mankind's origin and destiny: *The Gift of God*

In the second half of 2003, Tessari started a project that kept him engaged throughout the first half of 2004: a magnificent fresco, which unfortunately remains incomplete, titled *Il Dono di Dio [The Gift of God, 2004]*. It is located on the wall of a private home in the town of Cordenons, Italy (Figs. 26 & 27). During our conversation, Tessari has explained the main reasons why he could not finish this fresco:

Since they gave me that wall, in September 2003, I have prepared it until January 2004; then, I started the fresco and I finished the part you see in early July 2004. I made the whole thing in just a few months. I made all the drafts and cartoons in four months, and I painted it in three months and a half. And even with just a few hours a day to work on it: I was throwing the plaster at 6.30 in the morning and at midday I would already put everything away, since I had to go to work in the factory. In its original conception, this fresco would have to be made on a wall twelve to fifteen meters high; instead, the house in which I actually made it has a wall only six and a half meters high. Therefore, I often had to make changes, by reducing everything by half. I had to interrupt this fresco for a number of reasons, since I had job-related problems. Moreover, I was becoming increasingly depressed, since I had some presentiment about what I feel is going to happen one day or another to Europe, especially to Italy and more generally to the whole mankind" (Tessari 2007).

I saw this fresco for the first time in the summer of 2007, when I became acquainted with Tessari and his work. I immediately became so overwhelmed with it, that I decided to devolve an in-depth study to reconstruct the original conception, the evolution of the ideas through the

drafts until the current fresco and the main artistic and theosophical sources. What I found so fascinating, about this unfinished project, is the contrast between the complexity of the original idea behind its conception - compared to the insufficient time available and technical difficulties that arose from the inappropriate size of the available painting surface.

Previously, in Part I of this essay, *Il Dono di Dio [The Gift of God, 2004]* has been cited in a specific chronological context. Since 2003, Tessari's work reveals the beginning of a new phase, in which he believes in the possibility of salvation for mankind. The fresco in Cordenons celebrates this newly discovered hope. At the same time, the introduction of some darker tones, in the symbol of petrified mankind (Fig. 27), anticipates the admonition that will intensify in the latter works, such as *Le Idi di Marzo [The Ides of March, begun 2007]* (Fig. 25), in the hope to help humanity avoid disastrous choices for its future.

In a recent phone conversation with Tessari, I commented on this fresco by relating that it appears too mature, in conception, for the actual tools that were available to him at that time. The fact that this masterpiece originated in the 'wrong' moment and despite opposing conditions, without being completed, but still exposing all the complexity of the idea, gives it the fascination of an unexplainable 'revelation'. Tessari replied by saying that, when he was painting *Il Dono di Dio [The Gift of God, 2004]*, he felt as though he were in a rapturous trance: he felt like his hands were working under orders that were external to him¹ The analysis of this fresco will progressively reveal an extremely complex vision that considers themes and issues belonging to both Tessari's eclectic interest in a broad spectrum of theosophical sources, and his specific adherence to the Christian faith.

Beginning this study with the genesis of the work, it is extremely interesting to note that, even though it is located in a private house (a property that has no connection with the artist or his family whatsoever) it has not been commissioned to Tessari by a client. Rather, it has been made spontaneously by the artist as personal thanksgiving for a gift he has received: pranotherapy.

"I am conscious of the pranotherapy talent for 8-9 years, and I have been practicing it since then. Initially, I was not following a definite pattern; my hands would go by themselves where they were supposed to. I knew human anatomy as an artist, but not from the medical viewpoint. After a short period, I started to absorb some problems from my patients: the first three days after a massage, I was feeling very bad. After two years, I discovered that some

¹ this phone conversation occurred on July 19th, 2008.

people, whom I had previously massaged, had died of cancer. I went to visit a doctor and to have some analysis done, because sometimes I felt sick; I told him about the massages, and he replied that most probably I have not created a screen as self-protection against the illnesses I was absorbing from my patients. I started to read lots of books, especially from American scholars, until 4-5 years ago I became fully aware of pranotherapy.

I have made Il Dono di Dio [The Gift of God, 2004] completely at my expense, in thanksgiving for this gift. One day I saw the wall of an old stone house, with worn plaster. Moreover, I wanted to keep training myself by painting in greater scale and on fast execution. For these reasons, I asked the landlord's authorization and I was been allowed to work in the whole surface of the wall. From that moment on, I undertook and self-sponsored the project: it is not a commissioned work, rather it is a commission to myself, a present I have made to the people of that house, since it is not my own house, but somebody else's. I hope this will serve somebody in the future. I have done it for me, but also for so many people that I will never know. It is a way to transmit my faith, but it is also a more universal message. I believe that the human being, philosophically, needs to draw on all the truths that have a common denominator. We have to move towards the universal good, which is our own good. I am Christian, therefore I think of Christianity in terms of religious practice.² However, from the philosophical viewpoint, I am also open to other religions. Only when all the differences are cancelled, and everybody will be considered equal, will there be paradise on earth. This fresco calls us to our duty. For me, it is like a 'business card', to show whom I am, as both an artist and a man (Tessari 2007).

Numerous preparatory sketches document the intense activity around the realization of this project. The artist has not dealt with these preparatory studies according to the general practice that considers sketches as small-scale studies in preparation to working on a larger scale. On the contrary, Mario Tessari stated that

² According to Oriental theosophies, with which Tessari is familiar, one aspect of Karma is that it can never be considered as purely accidental. Indeed, we are born in a determined time and cultural context, which is very specific and absolutely the best for us; therefore, we should not "uproot ourselves from our own culture and embrace an alien one" (Hanson and Steward, 77). Tessari's religious choice of embracing Catholicism is deeply rooted in his Italian- Christian culture, and in this sense fully justified by the Karma concept. Even his artistic choice, to be intensely rooted in the Italian culture in the specific postmodern context, can be interpreted as another aspect of his adherence to Karma, rather than the result of a consciousness to be postmodern.

"I already have the ideas in my mind: the sketches show me what I am not supposed to do, since during the fast execution of the fresco I am not allowed to make mistakes" (Tessari 2007).

Besides an initial, panoramic sketch (Fig. 29), which shows an overall idea quite different than the actual fresco (Fig. 27), all the other sketches are more specific studies, which isolate some details of the fresco.

Therefore, in order to give a satisfactory and accessible understanding of the overall meaning of such a complex artwork, there is a need to first compare the initial, panoramic sketch (Fig. 29) to the current fresco (Fig. 27) in order to give a sense of the evolution of the entire idea. Then, to conceptually subdivide the fresco into specific zones, each of them corresponding to an important idea, and attempt to reconstruct the evolution of that idea from the previous stages of the sketches to the actual fresco. Finally, a summarization of the overall complex meaning of the actual fresco by using the words of Tessari himself will be presented.

An analysis of the original idea in the panoramic sketch (Fig. 29) begins the investigation. On the left-hand side of the mural, a colossal figure, with its head inclined towards the ground, is reminiscent of an ancient statue and is clothed in a robe and mantel (which denotes power and prestige) like a king or general. The depressed expression of the giant figure, accentuated by the inclined head and the position of his hands, would suggest a loss of some original power. Smaller figures jump and fall down from the colossal man, pushed by the scream or blast coming from the mouth of a giant head located to the right, which has been slightly impressed in the paper, like a ghostly entity. Below, there are clothed figures both upright and prone (see the skirt of the woman in the right).

Translated in Christian terms, this initial idea considers the giant figure as the symbol of a fallen race, lost because of its original sin. The original power that was given to him by the Creator over the entire world has been removed. The fact that the giant is symbolic of all humanity becomes apparent through the total lack of facial features. The original sin, an arrogant attempt to rise above the sky in order to become like God, is represented by a semi-nude figure³ that, like the mythological Icarus, has built wings for himself and tried to fly beyond the sky. His arrogance has irritated God Himself, who blows against him and causes his fall towards the earth.

The wings and dresses are all elements manufactured by humans. The fact that these elements are associated with mankind's decadence

³ Since nudity is described, in the Bible, as the original innocent condition of humans, the falling semi-nude figure, in Tessari's fresco, shows that the human being has started the process of losing his innocence.

(the wings are a symbol of arrogance; the dresses express the shame of nudity), reveals how Tessari, through subtle symbolism, expresses condemnation of mankind's progress, when that progress transforms into self-destruction.

The actual fresco (Fig. 27) has retained and developed some of the elements conceived since the initial panoramic study and gained in complexity.

The huge sitting figure has been reproduced on the left side of the actual fresco (Fig. 27), as it was initially conceived. The colossal figure retains the symbolism previously seen in the sketch (Fig. 29), thus becoming the symbol of the whole human race, deeply depressed. However, the figure has lost its anatomically defined traits, and has become like a giant marble statue: its substance, no longer flesh but stone, is open to interpretation. Whatever specific meanings are applied to this giant, rock-like figure, no doubt it is symbolic of a type of 'immorally-motivated' progress (although, of course, not all progress is immorally motivated), which was started by humans, as an act of arrogance, and will turn back against them, as a punishment.

The insertion of Christ in the fresco (Fig. 27), completely absent in the first panoramic sketch (Fig. 29), brings a new hope for salvation to the fallen human race: it is important to remember that the preparation of the fresco started in 2003, which has been previously described, in Part I of this essay, as an important turning point in the evolution of Tessari's work, when the sense of complete damnation described in *Girone Dantesco [Dante's Circle, 2002]* (Fig. 14) gives room to a new hope of salvation, inaugurated by such works as *Sciamano [Shaman, 2003]*.

The traditional iconography, which requires the frontal exhibition of Christ's body, has been challenged in this fresco, through the depiction of Christ seen from the back (Fig. 30).

"Christ is seen from the back because He is turned towards mankind: He turns His shoulders to the audience, because I want the viewer to be the spectator of a reality (...). After I finished half of the work, and therefore the Christ was completed, nude and seen from the back, one person observed that the image of God should not be vulgarized. I am the first one to say that: I have not shown the genitals, but I have shown Him from the back, because He is turned to mankind. The spectator, whoever he/she is, has to realize the concept that God is not something of mine, but He is for all of humanity, He is for everybody. The person who has made that observation has accepted this, by adopting a different viewpoint. Nobody knows the truth: indeed, the more the human looks for the truth, the more he/she gets further away from it" (Tessari 2007).

Between the first panoramic sketch (Fig. 29) and the actual fresco (Fig. 27), a good number of preparatory sketches (Figs. 30, 31, 32, 33, 37 show the insertion of a small male nude at an early stage. Fig. 33 represents the oldest of these sketches. The giant figure holds, in his hands, a small figure, that appears to be made in his image, and is embracing his head. A comparison between the small figure in the actual fresco (Fig. 28, detail) and the earliest of these sketches (Fig. 33) shows the former with the arms wide open, as if crucified, and the latter as expressing, through the curve of his arms, a gesture of affection to the giant head. From this observation, it can be inferred that when Tessari introduced the miniature human figure, he may have considered transforming the giant from an allegory of a disobedient and depressed mankind (Fig. 29) to the allegory of a giant Creator, from whose crack in the head a thought has emanated, and materialized, in the act of creation, in a man, who is now embracing his Creator with gratitude.

The next sketch chronologically (Fig. 36) represents a fallen man. His hybrid constitution between man and bird overlaps both the Christian iconography (referring to Adam and Lucifer respectively as most handsome terrestrial and celestial figures and who are related to the original sin of arrogance on earth and in Paradise), and Greek mythology.⁴ The two episodes of Christian religion and Greek mythology find a common trait in the theme of paternal disobedience and its devastating consequences. It is interesting to note that, in the actual fresco (Fig. 27), Icarus is not represented on the ground, irremediably fallen. On the contrary, he is represented as still falling down.

“In the original sketch, you can see Icarus falling down and also Icarus already lying in the ground (Fig. 36). The scene is complete: from the head of the giant human figure, Icarus opens his wings. There is a full consciousness of falling down, and then there is death. Instead, in the actual fresco I have painted Icarus still falling down, because in my opinion we are still given the chance to remedy our sin. We will still be safe, if we desire it. In this fresco, it is shown that God does not abandon us because of the free will we are given. He allows us to fall in every aspect: morally, physically, with destruction. But despite all of this, He still gives us a chance to rise again into new life” (Tessari 2007).

⁴ [In this last case, particularly the myth of Icarus, son of the Athenian artisan Dedalus, both imprisoned by king Minos in the labyrinth. Theseus built wax wings to fly away with his son Icarus; the latter, disobeying to his father, dared flying too high, and as a consequence, the wings dissolved by the action of the sun, and he ruinously precipitated. These observations appear in Grant-Hazel 97-98].

The inclusion of the disobedient individual (Lucifer-Adam-Icarus) turned toward the viewer in the fresco at the same height of the Christ figure (Christ is seen from the back) , creates a deep connection between the act of arrogance, which has caused the fall of men, and the counteraction of obedience by Christ, by offering Himself on the cross: celebrated by the cloud of angels (Fig. 28), in the religious perspective, presented by this fresco, Christ is seen as the antidote against those mistakes of the human progress that are materialized by the falling creature and also by the giant, petrified monster holding Christ as its last hope.

The small human figure, who in the original sketch shows gratitude to God for the gift of life before original sin is committed (Fig. 33), in the actual fresco becomes the figure of Christ (Fig. 27), who represents the gift of salvation given by God to mankind (as the title of the fresco indicates). The gift of God, initially referred to as the Creation, switches in meaning to become the Salvation.

Nudity, a symbol of innocence, is transferred from the human figure in the sketch to the figure of Christ. Another symbol of innocence, in the fresco, is water spilling from the jug (reminiscent of the Dutch art, particularly Vermeer's *The Dairymaid*), however the jug is turned upside down and held at the knees of the dejected figure, in the opposite direction of Christ. The same vertical line; the poured water, may be seen as symbolic of purity (as it is traditionally intended), and at the same time as symbolic of "*vita sorgente che viene donata*" ("*pouring life that is donated*")⁵, as Tessari intends.

In the fresco (Fig. 28 - detail), a cloud filled with trumpeting angels celebrates the salvation of mankind through the sacrifice of Christ. As some of the preparatory sketches show (Figs. 31 & 32), several other human figures were originally circling the head of the main figure. Initially, they were conceived of as women (Fig. 31), then as both women and children (Fig. 32) and finally, in the fresco, exclusively as children, yet another symbol of innocence (Fig. 30), to parallel the purity of the nude figure of Christ and the spilled water.

The face of the colossal figure in the fresco (Fig. 28-detail) is immersed in the shadow, to be intended as the obscurity of sin; in contrast to it, the body of Christ, is enlightened and frontally posed. In Tessari's first conception of the scene as Creation, he (Fig. 33) had not intended to insert a cloud of angels. However, at some point he changed his mind, and in the following sketches (Figs. 31, 32 & 37), (see the embrace of the giant by the small figure), the cloud around the head, with the celebrating angels, appears.

⁵ This observation, made in 2008, appear in www.mariotessari.it/blog/

Conversely, the most recent study (Fig. 37) gives two major clues of the progressive transformation, in Tessari's mind, of the colossal figure from an allegory of the Creator to the current allegory of a lost humanity (Fig. 30-detail). The first clue is the head of the giant figure (Fig. 37), which is immersed in a deeper shadow than in the other sketches, and will become even more accentuated in the final fresco (Fig. 30-detail). The second clue is the emergence, from the depths of the crack in the giant's head (Fig. 37), of a very unsettling dark silhouette, who is searching for help to emerge. The colossal head evolves into a human being who begins to have corrupted thoughts. If the crack in the head of the giant figure could be seen earlier as the allegory of the Creator's thoughts, which materializes in the small figure (Fig. 33),⁶ in the more recent sketch (Fig. 37), it is a sign of illness, of harmful thoughts, which presses from the interior of the skull outward through the crack.

In the fresco (Fig. 30-detail), the dark figure, previously (Fig. 37) emerging as the manifestation of immoral thought, has disappeared (Fig. 30-detail). The sin has already been committed, and now the entire face is immersed in obscurity. The clouds, surrounding the head, are extremely interesting, as they contain an ambiguity: some areas of the clouds, farthest away from the giant's head, are very bright, since they hold the celebrating angels. The area of clouds closest to the giant's head, are immersed in the shadow emanating from the skull.

Knowing that this fresco originated as thanksgiving for the gift of pranotherapy, Tessari's explanation of the aura surrounding a sick person would give the best explanation of the struggle between light and dark in the clouds surrounding the giant's head (Fig. 30-detail):

"In therapy, when a person is joyful, his/her head is like a ball of golden light. Try to imagine it, even if we cannot directly see it."⁷

It is not by pure chance that in the Byzantine iconography the Saints are represented with a halo around her heads, because

⁶ The Creation is conceived as radically different than manufacturing: while manufacturing, typical of the human beings, implies making a product through manipulation of previously existing materials, on the contrary the Creation consists in making something without using any previously existing material. The Bible refers to the Creation by making the equation between Word and God, and the Neoplatonic philosophy conceived the Creation as an act of emanation of God from Himself. In no case there is any reference to manipulation of preexisting materials.

⁷ Indeed, Leadbeater describes the subdivision of the seven charkas of the spinal cord in "lower", corresponding to the physiological functions, the "middle", corresponding to the personal functions, and the "higher", correspondent to the spiritual functions (Leadbeater 9). To the latter belongs the "Crown Chakra", located in the upper zone of the head, which in the case of a person with intense spiritual activity, is extremely bright, very colorful, rapidly vibrant, and irradiates from the head as "a veritable crown of glory" (Leadbeater 14-15).

several people have actually seen it. People with such energy are closer to God, or anyway God has placed His hands on them, so that they had healing powers, or capacity for superior thoughts. I suppose that over time we have lost this capacity to see the aura, since our eye perceives only a limited spectrum of wavelengths.

Also in therapy, the aura of a sick person is perceived as dark grey clouds. The sick person has energy problems that are outside him/her (...).

The head of the human-shaped mountain figure is in shadow, because it is obscured by the negative thoughts which come out of his mind: it is a metaphysical expression of the aura, the energy that we have in ourselves, whether we are able to see it or not. It is possible that this energy that we have around us could be transformed from shining and creative to gloomy, because our bad thoughts and actions, with the illness as a consequence (...).

In my fresco, the angels that are whirling around the head and above, address human thought in the path towards healing. My initial idea, when I was looking at the fresco from below, was to imagine this huge mountain, from which I would discern this head obscured by clouds, and in front of the clouds, a whirling dance of angels towards this tunnel, as Bosch also has done in one of his paintings, which represents the passage to another life. I do not refer to death solely as passage, but also to a possible passage in this same life, a new and different way of seeing and interpreting things, and as a consequence a new way of interacting with them. If you have an extensive knowledge, through it you are more likely to overcome obstacles and find alternative ways to reach your goal, without having to arrive there through a negative process. We could reach a pace, a serenity, a harmony in this life without having to die before realizing it" (Tessari 2007).

The meaning carried by the giant head has changed, from representing the Creature losing the original powers given to him by God (Fig. 29), to representing the Creator himself (Figs. 31, 32, 33 & 37), to representing the moral 'sickness' of mankind through the progress of history until the current state (Fig. 28-detail).

Originally (Fig. 29), God was conceived as the giant face, on the right, who blows against the falling man in order to punish him. Then, in those intermediary steps just mentioned (Figs. 31, 32, 33 & 37), God becomes the giant head. Finally, in the actual fresco (Figs. 27, entire & 34, detail), He is represented as a whirling spiral (Fig. 34), similar to the one visible in *Ascension to the Empyreus*, 1500-1504 by Hieronymus Bosch. Therefore, God is not visible any more, as a human form. In his place, the figure of Christ manifests Himself to mankind. This image makes visible what is said in Giovanni 14, verses 8-9: "Gli dice, Filippo: 'Mostraci il Padre e

ci basta'. Gli dice Gesù: 'Da tanto tempo sono con voi e non mi hai conosciuto Filippo? Chi ha visto me, ha visto il Padre. Come puoi tu dire: 'Mostraci il Padre?'" ("Show us the Father and it will suffice to us. And Jesus said to them: 'I have been among you for so long, and still you did not recognize, me Phillip? Who has seen me, has seen the Father. How can you ask me: 'Show us the Father'"?).

In the closest proximity of the whirlpool, a horse appears from a cloud of angels (Fig. 27): it is probably a mythological figure, an echo of several royal figures in triumphal chariots (an example, the *Aurora* [Dawn, 1613-1614] by Guido Reni, which has been frescoed, in the Baroque era, on the ceiling of Casino Rospigliosi in Rome). In this sense, the horse accompanies the triumph of victory for a king over his enemy in war. This figure represents the connection between Heaven (either the whirlpool-God or the clouds, or both), His domain, and the humans, since he is evicting the male figure, thereby reiterating the expulsion of Adam from the Garden of Eden, the expulsion of Lucifer from Heaven, and the expulsion of Icarus from the sky.

The fallen men are condemned to earn their existence through work and suffering. Since the original sketch (Fig. 29), they have been represented in both genders, male and female, but without specific roles. Instead, in the actual fresco (Fig. 38-detail) the symbolic roles have been clearly connoted.

The human figures are, from the left to the right: a boy in the foreground, playing with the water; a girl, carrying the fresco's cartoons; a teenager, sitting at the foot of the colossal figure, thinking; an adult woman, looking towards the background; a mature woman, lying down and a man pointing towards the upper part of the fresco.

The boy, who is playing with the water, alludes to his innocent state. In a much earlier sketch (Fig. 41), the boy has been drawn on the left, intent on climbing a massive rock. In another sketch (Fig. 42), the rock has become a tree branch. As Tessari explains: the initial idea was to have the boy metaphorically maturing through climbing towards Christ. The artist eventually discarded this as being an act of arrogance, and has decided instead to have the child naively playing with water:

"I intended to put this boy, who was climbing the tree of life in the left below the zone of the fresco, to show the rise of some people, with difficulty and danger, towards knowledge and truth, then choosing to follow Christ. Initially, I wanted the tree branches to rise until they would reach the knees of the humanity symbol, up to meet Christ Then I changed my mind, because no human can achieve this. It is a human limitation: God allows many people to become Saints, but never will the human being take His place, never will man arrive to perform His supreme sacrifice, because He

wanted so. In the Holy Scriptures, Jesus said to the Apostles not to worry of what they will say or do, because He will be there with them (“Go then, and instruct all the peoples (...), by teaching them to obey to all I have ordered you. And I will be there with you every day, until the end of the world (Mattheus 28, verses 19-20)). He is a God who asks the human collaboration to achieve His goal. For this reason, I have literally interpreted these words: with all our good intentions, we cannot get close to His sanctity, to His intents, because we can be only His disciples, nothing more. Therefore, the little we can do is already a good achievement: it is that “yes”, we say everyday, which counts the most for Him (Tessari 2007).

The central foreground region illustrates a progression of the main phases of a woman’s growth, from girl, to teenager, to young woman to finally mature and fertile, reclining woman.

The specific and fundamental role of the little girl has been explained by Tessari in these terms:

“The youngest is my daughter, who holds the preparatory cartoons for the fresco. My intention was not to give her custody of the cartoons for this fresco, but to metaphorically give her custody of some truths that are drawn inside those cartoons, which from the past will come to the future with new solutions. I wanted to warn that there is something that does not necessarily have to be mine, but it has already been deposited with the new generations as solutions” (Tessari 2007).

The insertion of the teenaged girl, who is meditating on her future,⁸ has been described by Tessari in these terms:

“The feminine figures, in the various stages of the woman’s growth, express the cycle of human life and its intents. Why did I draw the baby girl, then the seated girl and then the mature woman? In the first phase our future is already deposited. In the phase of adolescence there is a consciousness and maturation, and there is also a choice (our children make those choices for their future already in that phase, as I did). That phase is so difficult not only from the hormonal viewpoint, but also because, also if unconsciously, it is in that phase that one makes choices for his/her own future. Then the events could take people into another direction, but the choices have already been made” (Tessari 2007).

⁸ This observation, made in 2008, appear in www.mariotessari.it/blog/

A young, upright woman is superimposed on the reclining female figure, the upright female has her back to the audience and is looking at the reclining figure. In the preparatory sketches (Figs. 39 & 40) this young woman was initially much more plump, but in the fresco she has been stiffened like a statue, which reinterprets the figure so much admired by Giorgio de Chirico *L'Enigma dell'Oracolo* [*The Enigma of the Oracle*, 1910], inspired by Arnold Böcklin's *Odysseus and Calypso*, 1883.

"The woman at the bottom, seen from the back, is meditating while being conscious of her procreant role in its becoming. She is a mature woman who is looking at the landscape that is her future, and that the audience can only partially see, since the viewpoint is different. The woman sees her wedding, her children, and the story of which she will be a part. She is concentrated in this meditation, as the Oracle in De Chirico that you mentioned, whose figure is significantly illuminated, so that I see her as looking at her future. I have inserted my figure in this perspective (Tessari 2007).

As a mature artist, Tessari has abandoned his juvenile stylistic appropriation of Futurism, which has efficiently contributed to the emotional intensification of images such as *Il Dolore* [*The Pain*, 1984] (Fig. 8), for a more suspended and meditative metaphysical atmosphere, where a new necessity arises, to suspend time in order to give mankind another possibility for salvation.⁹ The fleshy reclining figure that is looking towards the audience (Fig. 38) expresses Tessari's admiration for Michelangelo as a sculptor, in the almost literary translation, from sculpture to drawing, of *Aurora* [*Dawn*, 1524-27] made by the famous Renaissance artist for the funerary monument of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1524-27. Umberto Baldini has

⁹ The difference, between the two different sensibilities in Futurism and Metaphysical painting has been efficiently described by Daniela Fonti in these terms: "Se quest'ultimo (*Il Futurismo*, *nda*), nel desiderio di cogliere l'essenza dell'elemento drammatico moderno è costretto a inseguire la realtà e a perdersi nel flusso del suo incessante divenire, la metafisica trasferisce la coscienza dell'incessante metamorfosi del mondo dalla sostanza fisica a quella spirituale delle cose. Attraverso l'intuizione divinatrice del genio, l'artista riscopre nel disordine fenomenico delle cose quei legami indissolubili che, sottratti al flusso incessante del tempo e della storia, garantiscono nell'arte l'epifania di quella eternità terrena che compone i conflitti e finalmente dà una parvenza di olimpica serenità" (If the latter (*Futurism*, *nda*), in the necessity of catching the essence of the modern drama, has to lose itself in the fluxus of constant becoming of reality, metaphysical painting transfers the conscience of constant metamorphoses of the world from the physical substance to the spiritual substance of things. Through the intuitive divination of the genius, the artist discovers, in the phenomenological disorder of things, those unbreakable links that, subtracted from the constant fluxus of time and history, guarantee in art the epiphany of the terrestrial eternity that reconciles the conflicts and finally gives an appearance of Olympic serenity"). These observations, made in 2002, appear in Fonti 199.

given several symbolic meanings that could be associated to Michelangelo's statue: *"Nelle varie interpretazioni e letture della Sacrestia Nuova la si è presa come emblema e motivo dell'amaritudine', ora del dolore del mondo mediato dal 'temperamento malinconico'; ora è stata vista come simbolo della luce divina che fuga le tenebre, o è stata posta in relazione coll'elemento aria e col temperamento sanguigno, oppure coll'elemento terra."* (103). *("In the numerous readings and interpretations of the Sacrestia Nuova, it is interpreted either as the emblem of the 'bitterness', the pain of the world mediated by the 'melancholic temperament', or as the symbol of the divine light that expels the darkness, or it has been put in relationship with the element air and with bloody temperament, or with the element earth").*¹⁰ In his figure, which refers to Michelangelo's sculpture, Tessari has synthesized many of these meanings, from the sorrow in observing the self-destructive path undertaken by mankind, to the emblem of nature itself, thus creating a complex tangle of meanings and echoes inside his fresco. In Tessari's words:

"The figure of the mature woman, inspired by Michelangelo, nude, who in perspective is as big as the humankind, symbolized by the rocky seated man, should become rock and mountain herself. I wanted to insert also the woman, who is looking at the other scene, and therefore is waiting: the woman, nude and fertile, is nature itself, who is looking at humankind's destruction, and is ready to react to it. Humankind looks like a male figure, because he is generally given the burden of decisions that affect the species' progress, while the woman becomes a symbol of eternal continuity of the human species. The woman is muse of creation (since she brings in herself the way for continuation of the species) and at the same time, a muse of creativity (since she is the nature that inspires mankind to this new evolution in its different forms). Nature, with her secrets, will also give us the means to adjust what we humans have been capable to destroy" (Tessari 2007).

In the bottom right, the fallen Adam has been raised again, in the outfit of a man condemned to work. Tessari has explained that this is a self-portrait. The artist who has conceived the idea for this fresco, has painted himself pointing in the direction for the audience to visually follow, in order to understand the whole idea, thus becoming the guide of the painting.

"The standing man, who points with his finger to Christ, is actually a self-portrait, where I show the way the eye has to follow

¹⁰ Baldini 103.

to understand the meaning of all, to those looking at the fresco. I tell you: 'start from there, and then follow the fresco scene in rotation'. The fresco has been made according to a certain order: it is not an executive order (since I had to technically execute the fresco from the top down, without retouching what has been already made), but rather a psychological order. The man wears a beret, as a factory worker. But I also wear it during the winter, I have been doing it for over forty years" (Tessari 2007).

Stylistically, there are some suggestions of the monumental painting dedicated by Mario Sironi to *Architettura* [Architecture, 1933], where a worker at the top points out an arcade above him. In works such as *Architettura* [Architecture, 1933] and *Il Lavoro* [Work, 1933] dedicated to the Ceremonies Salon of the V Triennial (now destroyed, and only surviving in rare photographs), there is a man in the bottom center, whose arm points above himself. In a recent essay, Emily Braun has described the spatial organization in Sironi's *Il Lavoro* [Work, 1933] as similar to Tessari's fresco, also citing De Chirico, who has been a common source of inspiration: "*Sironi evitò una recessione prospettica profonda accatastando la composizione in senso verticale e isolandone i motivi in registri orizzontali che sottolineavano la dimensione piana della parete: l'atmosfera sospesa e i campi spaziali fluttuanti richiamavano le composizioni di De Chirico e insieme l'antica pittura murale romana*" ("*Sironi avoided a deep perspectival recession by vertically piling up the various elements of the composition, and by isolating those elements in horizontal registers that emphasize the flat dimensions of the wall: the suspended atmosphere and the fluctuant spatial fields recall the compositions of De Chirico and the ancient Roman mural painting*".¹¹

Another interesting point in common, between Sironi's *Il Lavoro* [Work, 1933] and Tessari's fresco, is their eclectic reference to both paganism and Christianity in the same work. In case of Sironi, "*l'affresco rappresentava la civiltà pagana e quella cristiana, simboleggiate rispettivamente dal centauro raffigurato in basso al centro della composizione e dalla coppia posta all'estrema sinistra, la cui fuga ricorda vagamente la Cacciata dal Paradiso Terrestre dipinta da Masaccio nella Cappella Brancacci*" ("*the fresco represents the pagan and Christian civilizations, symbolized respectively by the centaur in the center below and by the couple in the left, whose escape vaguely reminds the Expulsion from the Paradise painted by Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel*")¹². In case of Tessari, the reference to paganism and Christianity is inserted respectively through the figures of Icarus and Christ.

Behind the legs of the giant figure in the fresco (Fig. 38), the head of a dog has been drawn. The dog is an animal commonly known for its loyalty and obedience. In the Bible, there is mention of the tree of life,

¹¹ Braun 226.

¹² Ivi, 227.

whose apples would give to the person, eating them, the knowledge of good and evil: the snake is associated with this tree, since he appears to Adam and Eve, and convinces them to eat the apple, which has been prohibited to them by God. Therefore, the common iconography associates the symbols of the tree of life and the snake. In the fresco (Fig. 27), the tree of life is visible, but the snake is absent.

Once more, an interesting iconographic variation has been inserted by Tessari: the substitution of the snake, symbol of disobedience, for a dog, symbol of obedience. The reason for this substitution has to be found in Tessari's wish to remind humans of their own responsibility for their actions: past and future, instead of attributing the fault for the original sin to external causes (the snake), and the consequent fall of humanity, the artist wants to address humans to those virtues of loyalty and obedience, that humans could use themselves towards God, being familiar with them in their everyday lives.

Tessari has made an artwork of monumental scale, not just in its dimensions, but also in his own effort of contributing to the expansion of consciousness and maturation of our civilization. This is clear in this comments by the artist, that summarizes the whole concept originating in *// Dono di Dio [The Gift of God, 2004]*, and the overall message that he was trying to convey:

"In the lower zone of this fresco (Fig. 38) under the legs of the petrified mankind, an overturned jug is spilling water, as a symbol of life. The child plays with water. My idea was to show a child growing, becoming a teenager and then an adult man. However, after his maturation, the cycle of life would reverse, and the person would start his decadence. I wanted to put, in the same fresco, the wheel of life in a symbolic way: the children play; the girl seated at the mankind's feet is thinking at her future and is not yet active, she is waiting: then there would be a mature woman, in fertile age, who is looking at the landscape and therefore, being in a different phase of life, she is thinking as the figure in De Chirico's painting: she looks at the perspective of her life, and therefore lives, procreates, raises her children, works, feels, as her own purposes in life; she is symbolic of saying "yes", to be able to see who you are or what you have to do in your life, and if at the end of your life you have been able to accomplish it. The meaning of this process of our growth, from our birth to our maturation and decadence, is to be able to see, at the end, if in all of these building phases we have been able to give our own contribution, be it small or big; this "yes", the fact that you have accepted and have put yourself into play is the final result of the realization of your life, whatever direction you take. I believe this is the karma in each of us, the oriental spiritual concept that I think could be applied to Westerners as well. Each of

us has his or her own talents. We live in a certain era, and we are given the tools necessary to accomplish what we have to in that specific time. Then, in this fresco, I have also inserted the phase of the human's fall. On one side, there is the man that assumed, as Icarus, to be able to fly high, to be master of the situation, to be able to become superior to nature, when instead nature itself makes him fall. It is not just a physical nature, but a spiritual one.

On the other side, there is the opposite: a Christ shown in the opposite way to which we are accustomed. I always thought that we all have to be turned towards God, priests included. God has come towards mankind, and through Christ God is turned towards mankind, not the individual viewer of the painting. This petrified man is a man that for centuries has been an egoist, who did not want to change, instead of giving his life, as Christ, to obtain something better, a fulfilled happiness. Happiness does not consist in having lots of things, rather it is found in reaching an interior peace, in becoming one with the Universe: this is said by oriental philosophies. With this fresco, I wanted to say this, from my Christian perspective" (Tessari 2007).

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