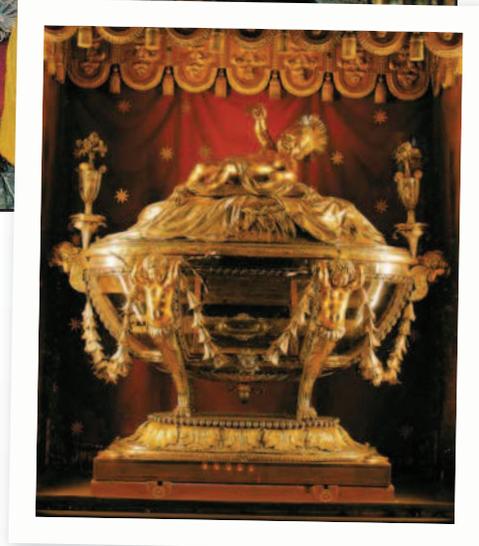


All photos in this article by K. Dreier



# Gathered 'Round the Manger

BY PLINIO CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA

Lord, once again Christmas approaches. Christianity has-tens anew to adore Thee in the manger at Bethlehem, where Thou can be seen by the light of the twinkling star of Bethlehem or under the brighter and more splendid light of Mary's maternal and sweet gaze. Saint Joseph stands nearby, so captivated by Thee that he seems to take notice neither of the animals that surround Thee nor of the angels who have opened the heavens and can be heard and seen singing in the highest. In a short while, the Magi will arrive with their entourage, laden with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Through the centuries, others will also come to venerate Thy crib: from India,



Ancient Nubia, Macedonia, Rome, Carthage, and Spain; Gauls, Franks, Germans, Angles, Saxons, and Normans. Both pilgrims and crusaders will come from the West to kiss the ground of the cave where Thou were born. Thy manger will be venerated all over the earth. In the great Gothic or Romanesque cathedrals, multitudes will gather around Thee, offering Thee presents of gold, silver, incense, and above all the piety and sincerity of their hearts.

Then will come the period of the Western discoveries in which the benefits of Thy Redemption will reach new lands. Incas, Aztecs, natives of various tribes, blacks from African shores or further inland, bronze-skinned Indians,

**Top:** Nativity scene in the Church of Santa Maria in Via, Rome. **Above:** Reliquary containing the Holy Crib at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome.

slender and pensive Chinese, short and agile Japanese all will gather around Thy crib and adore Thee. The star of Bethlehem now shines over the whole world. All peoples have heard the angelic promise, and all across the earth hearts of goodwill have found the inestimable treasure of Thy peace. Overcoming all obstacles, the Gospel has finally spread to people all over the world. In the midst of contemporary desolation, this great gathering of people from all nations and races around

Thee is our only consolation and our only hope.

Kneeling before Thee, we count ourselves among them. Look kindly on us, Lord, and have pity on us. There is something we would like to say.

Who are we? We are those who will not kneel before the modern Baal. We carry Thy law engraved upon the bronze of our hearts and do not allow the errors of our times to become engraved upon this bronze sanctified by Thy Redemption. We love the immaculate purity of orthodoxy above all else and reject any pact whatsoever with heresy, its wiles and infiltrations. We are merciful to the repentant sinner since, owing to our unworthiness and infidelity, we count ourselves among that number and we implore Thy mercy. We spare no criticism, either, of insolent and conceited impiety or of strutting vice that scorns virtue. We pity all men, particularly the blessed who suffer persecution for love of the Church, who are oppressed everywhere because they hunger and thirst for virtue; who are abandoned, ridiculed, betrayed, and disdained because they remain faithful to Thy Commandments. Many are those whose suffering is not celebrated in contemporary literature: the Christian mother who will pray alone before Thy crib because her children no longer practice the Faith; the strong yet austere husband who is misunderstood or even loathed by his own because of his fidelity to Thy teachings; the faithful wife who bears the solitude of heart and soul because her husband's frivolous habits have led to adultery, he who should be her support, her "other half"; the pious son or daughter who, while Christian homes are celebrating, sense how in their own home and family life, religion has been stifled by egotism, hedonism and secularism; the student who is shunned and mocked by his classmates because of his fidelity to Thee; the professor who is eschewed by colleagues because he will not condone their errors; the parish priest or



bishop around whom a menacing wall of misunderstanding or indifference has been raised because he refuses to compromise the integrity of the doctrine entrusted to his care; the honest man made penniless for refusing to swindle.

All of these isolated people, scattered across the globe, ignorant of each other,

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now gather around Thee to offer Thee a gift and a prayer.

Their gift exceeds the sun and the stars, the oceans with all its riches, and the earth in all its splendor: they give themselves entirely and faithfully. By preferring complete orthodoxy over approval, purity over popularity among the impure, honesty over gold; by remaining faithful to Thy law even when this entails

sacrificing career and fame, they attain perfection in their spiritual life by practicing love of God above all things, which is a sincere and lasting love. Such love differs greatly from love as it is understood nowadays, which predominantly consists of gushy and illogical feelings, senseless and blurry affections, obscure self-condescension and trite justifications to appease one's conscience. Instead theirs is true love, enlightened by Faith, justified by reason, seriousness, chastity and perseverance. In a word, theirs is love of God.

They also offer a prayer for Thy holy and immaculate Church whom they love above all else in this world:

for the pastors and the flock; foremost, for the pastor of pastors of the flock, that is for Peter, whom today we call Benedict. May the Church, which now moans as a captive in the dungeons of this anti-Christian "civilization," finally triumph over this era of sin and implant a new civilization for Thy greater glory. May the saintly become ever holier, may the good be sanctified, may sinners become good, and may the impious convert. May the impenitent who have rejected grace and are jeopardizing souls be dispersed, humbled, and their efforts frustrated. May the souls in Purgatory rise to Heaven straight away.

They also pray for themselves: may their orthodoxy be ever purer, their purity ever more rigorous. May they be more faithful amidst adversity, stand ever taller amidst humiliations, be more energetic in their struggles. May they be more terrible to the impious, yet more compassionate toward those who, ashamed of their sins, strive seriously to overcome them and acclaim virtue publicly.

Finally, they pray for Thy Grace, without which no will can durably persevere in good, and no soul can be saved; may it be more abundant in proportion to the number of their miseries and infidelities. ■

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