

Magnus Lorenzi inherits 70 year old manuscripts with a religious content from his long gone grandfather: messages from the apostles of Christ transmitted from the afterlife which he committed to paper night after night. The written heritage of his grandfather contains the truth about Jesus Christ, his life and work and the Original Revelation, which Christ had allowed John the Seer to witness on Patmos. Yet the members of the community following the Sign of the Owl want to stage the end of the world as it is written in the Apocalypse. They make it their aim to destroy everything that crosses their plans. Paintings by Hieronymus Bosch are defaced and the person possessing the Original Revelation of John the Seer is persecuted. Plans to assassinate the pope are entering the rumour mill. In the end, the conspirators even go as far as to hatch a plan to have Jesus Christ himself appear on Earth.

Siegbert Lattacher, an Austrian author, has so far published four non-fiction books and two crime novels. The crime novel set in Kärnten "Vishnupurans Rache" has also been published by *Tredition*.

*Man is a confused creature;
he knows not whence he comes or whither he goes,
he knows little of the world, and above all,
he knows little of himself.
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)*

Siegbert Lattacher

The Owl Sign Conspiracy

A Crime Novel

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First published in German as "Verschwörung im Zeichen der Eule"
on May 13th, 2013.

cover design, illustration: Siegbert Lattacher
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translation: Rosie Pinhorn
cover photograph: Fotolia

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg
ISBN: 978-3-8495-8017-9
Printed in Germany

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Bibliographical information of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographical data can be found on <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

Prologue

Thanks to a leaf on a withered branch, truth will be freed from its slumber, extend its tendrils to the light above from the root in the desert at the eternal sources.

Ephesus, 103 AD

How are you John? You don't look well. Your days are numbered, the Lord is soon going to call you to his side", said John the Presbyter standing by the side of the bed of the almost 100-year-old apostle of Christ.

John Theologos the Presbyter, Grand Bishop and delegate of Bishop Clemens Flavius Romanus in the Orient had taken Christ's last living apostle into his house to ensure nobody could question the very last authority alive and in possession of the truth about what had come to pass in the eternity before the beginning, in the beginning and after the beginning of the creation.

John the Apostle marked by the weakness that comes with age mumbled a few words and fell asleep.

The Presbyter smiled superciliously. Soon you will close your eyes forever; he thought and left the room. He was experienced in ridding himself of undesired rivals; just like Asser ben Kipas, who had arrived as the bishop of Rome Clemens Flavius Romanus' envoy in Thapsacus at the Euphrates in 78 AD. Grand Bishop John had staged a feast for him at which the false prophet succumbed to a severe sickness and died the very same night.

John the Evangelist could feel the poison coursing through his body; he could feel his end drawing near. Yet before he passed away in the arms of Marcion, son of Bishop of Sinop, who had rushed to his bedside, he managed to secretly slip him twelve manuscript rolls and the copy of a letter, which John had written to Bishop Clemens Flavius Romanus in Rome after his release from Patmos, the place to which he had been banished.

Marcion had discovered the apostles' manuscripts regarding Christ at his father's place at the port of Sinop on the Black Sea coast and recognised that they were closer to the truth than the knowledge spread by his father, a Jewish-Christian bishop. The son of the bishop had learned that John, the last of the true apostles of Christ, resided in Ephesus and was desperate to meet him before he died. He arrived just in time. The earth-shattering encounter with the dying, most revered visionary of all times in the dungeons of Ephesus made a lasting impression on him. The manuscripts given to him by John assembled to a whole with the others that had been found previously. Especially, John's letters to Clemens Flavius Romanus had opened Marcion's eyes in regards to the kind of Christianity represented by his father.

Sadly, he was not able to help the true teachings of Christ to fruition anymore. The manuscripts were declared Satan's work directed against the God of the Bible by the fathers of the Ecumenical Council at the Synod of 302 held in Elvira and delivered to the flames.

London, City

The 25 men had arrived in a hurry from all over the world. They met in a back room of the OWL-Club, a secretive circle in London's city centre. The windowless room was exclusively set aside for these meetings. Nobody was allowed to enter the room without prior permission by The First, not even the cleaning lady. A novice did the cleaning. An odour of wax and expensive aftershave lingered in the gloomy room, dimly lit by the flickering light of black candles. The darkness was meant to underscore the secrecy of its visitors who all wore black suits edged with ermine furs around their shoulders dyed black for their ceremony.

Twelve men sat in a semi circle, in the middle of the room, the thirteenth; he was The First. His face was covered by a black mask. Twelve novices of medium age stood behind the twelve seated men whose combined age added up to around 900 years. They had been deemed worthy of entering the circle of those possessing the knowledge and were eventually meant to replace the members taken from their midst through death.

The murmur stopped immediately when The First raised his voice and greeted those present. He spoke the greeting formula, which they all repeated.

"Dear confidants, I have called this meeting because more activities have occurred that we have to stop. I have heard about the case in Vienna. It has been a good and right decision. Is somebody seeing to the woman?" The First asked.

"Yes, First, we are keeping tabs on her", a voice rang out from the circle of the twelve.

"Her work is doomed to sit on the shelf, as I have heard. Very few people are going to read it; they will not present any danger. In case something is going to change in this respect, I ask for the relevant discrete measures. News has reached our ears about an Austrian telling of things that do not please me. Obviously, he

seems to want to spread the news amongst the people. Whatever we have missed in regards to the woman, we have to make sure to amend regarding this man. Are there any questions?"

The men replied with a sign of negation.

"Good. Question to science: What news concerning our project?"

One of the twelve cleared his throat and said, "It is progressing."

"There is not much time left, don't forget that", said the First closing the meeting.

The men rose, rhythmically mumbling some unintelligible words and left the room. They dispersed into the four winds.

One of them wore a cross on the lapel of his blazer. He flagged down a taxi and removed a mobile phone from his pocket. The taxi stopped, the man boarded the back of it and told the driver his destination. Then, he dialled the number.

The man in a room of Hotel Wandl in Vienna's city centre had just put his head down when the telephone rang. He answered the call and repeated a few times: "Yes mister, yes mister, I understand." Then he hurled the phone against the wall and uttered an expletive in a Slavic language.

The man in the taxi smiled contentedly and slipped his phone into a black leather bag. The taxi stopped in front of the departure lounge of Stansted airport.

Vienna, a few months earlier

Gusts of wind amassed gruesome grey clouds in the sky. Jolting streaks of light ripped through the leaden pewter sky. Rain metamorphosing into hail battered the town accompanied by claps of thunder. The frozen water marbles pummelled the tin roof of the attic flat.

Magnus Lorenzi stood observing nature's show through the dormer window sipping lapacho tea. A bright lightning bolt blinded his eyes as if he were a welder working without protection. The glaring flash was followed by a dull vibration, which Lorenzi sensed as a light tingling on his skin. Every time, he was fascinated afresh when the tension-laden composite of water, warmth and air

found release in an explosive manner. Again, he thought of his dream. The sky went dark, a mass of water broke the banks and surged the land. Ice flows and tree trunks floated in the gushing brown torrent. He could see neither man nor animal.

More and more, he dreamed of catastrophes. Before the civil war in Europe, he had woken up with pictures in his head getting ready for what they had been trained to do. For several days now, dark thoughts were whizzing through his head. He kept shtum about them, since he was having his doubts whether people were willing to believe him. Who am I really, he thought. A has-been actor - no scientist, a character actor - no professor, a hobby painter - no prophet. He opened the window, stuck his head out into the air washed clean, which he voraciously drew in through his nose. His gaze came to a rest on the tin covering the dormer. It looked as if it had been worked with a ball pein hammer the kind used by copper smiths for adorning the metal with artistic shapes. He closed the window, lay down on his chaise longue and picked up the document he had put down there. At the time of the storm breaking, he had been reading about a galactic event, which would draw everybody in.

For nearly 40 years, Magnus Lorenzi had been playing the rich and poor, the stupid, the greedy and the cold hearted in front of people sitting in row upon row of chairs, clapping whenever he held up the mirror of societal discrepancy to them. He was fond of pursuing this art but in time, other people came to take over the theatre business giving a preference to modern pieces. It had not been easy for him to take his hat and leave. To top it all, his father had died six months ago, the man he had not seen in years and completely banned from his memory. Only at the deathbed had the long needed exchange taken place, as the long lost son rushed to the bedside of the dying father and tears rolled down both their faces.

Magnus Lorenzi did not reproach himself, he had lived the life he wanted for himself. He had chosen to take up the breadless art acting against his father's wishes followed by the hardly less breadless art of painting. His father had given him an envelope

before finally closing his eyes. It was only after the funeral that Magnus opened the envelope and, much to his surprise, pulled out a letter from his grandfather. It was his grandfather's bequest.

He had felt a slight excitement as he extracted the document from the envelope. At the time of his grandfather's death, he had been five years old. He remembered his kind eyes looking at his grandson through his round wire glasses. He remembered the grandfather's strange pronunciation, he böhmakelte, as the Viennese called somebody talking German with a bohemian accent. He knew little about his grandfather. His father had always cut the conversation short when it turned to his grandfather. In addition, he had taken on the name of his wife. This is why they called themselves Lorenzi and not Karnos, after his grandfather. Magnus Lorenzi could not help feeling that his father had been ashamed of grandfather. Yet his father had never said why. Then, there was this letter, the bequest.

Lorenzi picked up the letter and started to read. It was dated 19th April 1944. Firstly, grandfather wrote that he had left the apartment to his son together with some savings amounting to 5,000 Reichsmark. Then, the second paragraph said that his intellectual property was to go to his grandson, Magnus. His father was to look after it until Magnus reached maturity and then hand it over. Magnus was perplexed; his father had never mentioned that his grandfather had left him something. It amounted to a heap of documents stored in several boxes.

On the first sight of the boxes filled with paper, he was disappointed. He planned to dispose of them unread in the paper collection. Yet, as he was about to tip the content of the first box into the container, individual pages fluttered to the ground. He picked them up and glanced them with a brief glance. Everything had been written neatly by hand. He picked up a second sheet and started to read. A man passed and cleared his throat. Lorenzi was squatting on the ground, page in hand and looked up as if startled. He apologised and put the pages back into the box.

Ever since that moment, Lorenzi read like a person deprived of nourishment for the soul who had finally encountered the fount of

all knowledge. Thousands upon thousands of pages had been penned by the man who had been his grandfather. He read about historical events he had never even heard of and people whose names did not appear in any history book. Moreover, he began to feel a rage against his late father, who had kept this treasure from him all these years. Since he had started to immerse himself into his grandfather's manuscripts, he had emerged as a changed man. He recognised correlations, incidents, meetings and occurrences of his life that had never made any sense before - like his journey to India with all its consequences. The reading brought it all back to him. He saw people in turmoil, saw religious leaders taking their lives.

Lorenzi felt a tremor at the thought of holding evidence for the greatest betrayal ever done to man in his hand, having lain in the loft of his parents' house for almost 70 years. He would have liked to learn more about his grandfather, who had lived in times of great change and possessed the gift of communicating with the hereafter. The manuscripts made him out to have been the last real prophet after John the Baptist.

Vienna 1923

Karel Karnos watched his colleagues' activities with suspicion. This is complete and utter twaddle, he thought, getting into contact with ghosts using an apparatus like that. Karel's colleagues used a mechanised Ouija board to obtain answers from the deceased. It was an apparatus with mechanically moving hands, the point of which coming to rest on individual letters of the alphabet. Talented mediums were able to receive words and sentences by noting down letters in sequence. Karel's colleagues were not the only people engaged in spiritual sessions. Spiritualism was fashionable at the time. Even rationally thinking people did not shy away from giving it a try. Karel did not pay much attention at first to his colleagues' conduct, only after hearing an expression commonly used on a sailing ship, of which he had once been a crewmember, was his interest awoken.

When young, Karel had travelled the seas as a deckhand with the Austrian-Hungarian Marine. The perils of these journeys have endangered his life many a times. In the Black Sea, he clung to a ship's plank for almost two days until a by chance passing boat picked him up. On an approach to Japan, he and the crew of his wooden sailing ship were saved from a Typhoon just in time. In the Indian Ocean, he jumped in after a Hindu who had fallen into the sea from the rigging to save him from a shark. On a South Sea island he helped a young girl to flee as she was about to be sacrificed. He would offer up his last shirt to help a person in need.

His bravery and willingness to help eventually earned Karel Karnos a service on the ship Empress Elizabeth. Yet after a few years of service on the high seas, he left the marines and started as a security guard with the police in Vienna. After having trodden the asphalt for a few years, he took on the post of a police photographer and was from then on a member of the film and photography office at Marokkanerkaserne in the third Viennese district.

When Karel once stepped up to the mechanised Ouija board for a joke, he managed to establish contact with a dead mate from his seafaring days. It surprised him and kindled his curiosity. He participated in the mechanical Ouija board sessions more frequently now and his skills as a medium became more pronounced. He saw images from the past and heard voices that were not from this world. The images and scenes, very confusing to begin with, gained more clarity and he recognised them as scenes from the bible. Karel was not a religious man and never partook in mass. Yet now, at the age of 50 he felt drawn to step into a church once and a while, especially the church of the Franciscans in Vienna' city centre worked like a magnet on him.

It happened in May 1923; Karel had had an appointment in the city after work leaving his office, crossing Heumarkt and the ring road and walking along Weihburggasse. Said Franciscan church was along the way. At first, he wanted to pass when he sensed this irresistible urge to enter. He gave in to the impulse, opened the great wooden door and walked in the direction of the main altar. No one else was in the church. He stopped near a side altar dedicated to the mother of God. Karel fell to his knees in front of the altar as if led by magic. All of a sudden, an enormous energy took possession of him and immersed his whole body. He sensed his consciousness slowly leaving his body.

Then he heard a voice rising from nowhere: "Look!"

A room materialised before his eyes filled with people praying fervently. They called themselves the "Ashai". He gleaned from their conversation that a being from the after world had commanded them to come to the house of Nikodemus in Nazareth at this particular time. Suddenly, the room was filled with a magical light, a light that had the power to reveal human-like creatures. One of them stepped forward sank to its knees in front of a young woman. It greeted her with the deepest respect - "Ave Maria" - and told her what was about to happen. An even more beautiful light filled the room once more. It made visible a sublime presence, itself pure light, which levitated towards Mary. The

young woman was awestruck and lost herself in the presence of light.

Then he saw Herod in the sulphur pools of Jericho surrounded by his counsellors. He heard the counsellors say to Herod, "You, Master, are doomed to fall and it is the deed of those who are in league with the dead. They have put this spell on you causing this illness. They have driven out by the Romans from Italy and banished to the island of Pandeteria. They have released the pestilence from the tombs. The Romans have ousted from there to Galilee. Moreover, be assured, it was this brood that has landed this disease on you. Furthermore, your house as well will not be able to hold onto power much longer; it is from them the king is born now, the master of the world. And as he is going to be the master of the world, king of kings, he will also be the king of the Jews and your house will fall into ruin."

He saw and listened as Herod ordered his men to exterminate all Ashai in his realm, as he strictly commanded them not let anyone get away across the border. A grand escape resulted. Jasen Alphaeus, the foster father of the Virgin Mary took a donkey and crossed Galilee with Mary, as well as Samaria and Judea.

He saw Mary give birth to a child in a partly ruined rock stable. Seven young shepherds asleep in the field were awoken by the singing from above. Angels became visible in a pure clear, light telling them about the wondrous birth of God's child and led them - levitating high up bathed in light - to the stable. They found Mary in the stable, the old father Jasen and the newborn child of God lying on the straw in a glorifying light. The child spread out its arms and said: "My peace be with you!"

The he saw three men enter the rocky stable. One of them said, his name was Kaspion and he came from the Caspian Sea, the other called himself Melchior from Arjavartha. The third was dark skinned; he introduced himself as Baljesar from Ethiopia. The three men brought small presents for the newborn - Kaspion brought a few nuggets of gold, Melchior a few morsels of frankincense, Baljesar a little myrrh. They said they brought the presents as a statement for people to abandon hungering for these material

things any longer and to look for self-awareness in Jesus Christ from this day forth.

The images dissolved and Karel came back to his senses. To him it all seemed just a dream. He rubbed his eyes and left the church.

Karel would have more vision from that moment on. He was often overcome by a strange feeling at night. It seemed to him as if somebody stood next to his bed. Those entities would come more frequently, would take shape more strongly. He asked himself whether he was hallucinating. One evening he, again, saw a shape standing next to him. His wife was in a deep sleep; he, though, was wide awake and had regained his full senses. In effect, he was close to questioning his state of mind when the entity suddenly started to talk.

"Fear not, my brother, I will not harm you".

"Who are you?"

"I am Paul, the apostle of Christ."

"It can't be; you are an illusion." What did this strange phantasm want that claimed to be the Apostle Paul?

"We have been with you and near you for a while. We have also accompanied you on your long travels at sea."

"Who is 'we'?"

"We are the brothers and sisters of the light, the eternal truth."

"But ... you are nothing more than ghosts? I have learned from the Yogis in India of the existence of entities that make contact to humans."

"Yes, it is true, we are not from this world but from the spheres of eternity, truth and the one true God, who became human on earth in Christ. You have seen much already in the faces, the real events. We have waited for this opportunity for almost 2000 years."

Karel Karnos had changed after this incident. Nearly every evening he sat down at his desk after dinner and served his spiritual leaders as a scribe until the early morning hours. He had placed a large sheet of paper underneath the glass top of his desk depicting the alphabet. Next to it, he kept a pile of paper and several pencils, sharpened at both ends. Ten or more pencils were often used until blunt each night. The process was always the

same: He placed his left hand on the glass pane. Touching the glass was meant to ease the contact with the other world. Then he started to pray. His hand recoiled as if hit by lightning. Finally and with gusto, he noted down whatever was dictated to him. Often he did not absorb what he had written until the end of the session. It was hard for him to write by hand for hours on end but he did not mind because those who used him as a medium had been eyewitnesses to the events about which they talked.

A few thousand pages had accumulated this way. Amongst them, the truth about Christ, the after world, the apostles, their lives and deeds, descriptions of the geological composition of Earth, reports of archaeological excavations, recounts of the texts like the original gospel, the original Revelation of St. John the Seer and Evangelists and other, until to now unknown historical and humanistic writings, as for instance, the history of India in the 20th BC. Although he was most adapt in Czech and spoke German only poorly, his texts were written in excellent German.

Karel Karnos did not doubt the truth of the knowledge that was given to him in the slightest since his leaders explained to him that his gift of the prophecy as a spiritually cognitive characteristic that occurred only once in a thousand years in a human and was alien to science. It was comparable to the spirited power of creation in the mind of a genius. The spiritual body of a prophet surpassed the terrestrial physical one and was half of this world and half of the next. This was why they were able to find a mouthpiece in him. A prophet was marked out by transmitting true knowledge to humanity and up to this point unknown connections and revelations. The prophet of truth had to entrust his free will to the pure entities, allow them to use his soul, his spirit and his body. As a prophet of the 20th century, Karel fitted all these necessities, they said. The 28 apostles that had walked with God Christ on earth found a voice through him, pure beings from the realm of God and souls from the other world arrived to show the people in what spiritual condition and insight the souls lived in the multiple worlds of the hereafter.

Even during the day, Karel was caught up in the spell of his work. His band of followers amongst his colleagues grew. They suggested publishing the scriptures in the association they founded. He did not like this idea. However, he knew he had to spread the knowledge amongst the people according to the word of Christ: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations as I have made disciples of you". He had committed a lot of the knowledge to paper already and with every session revealed more to him about the life and work of God Christ on earth. Only with the knowledge of the truth did he become aware of the craftiness used by the forgers in their re-workings of the holy gospel.

21 years passed. He had spent almost every night writing, followed by a whole day's work; it left its mark. Then, there followed a very cold winter in 1944. The people had nothing to heat their places with and were cold; everything was given to the war, although it seemed lost already. The nightly toil had weakened Karel. He came down with pneumonia. He rejected all medical help because he sensed his time had come and he would return to the one true, eternal realm.

Vienna, our time

Hundreds of people thronged into the Museum Art History on this sweltering day in May. Visitors from all over the world swarmed into Austria's largest museum every day to see some of the most valuable art treasures in the world or maybe just because the organisers of their trip had scheduled this visit. Endlessly, people filed past the works of the old masters without becoming aware of their beauty, perfection and expressiveness. The art treasures were consumed by most people as if they were burgers in a fast food restaurant.

Magnus Lorenzi mounted the steps to the main entrance. Guests of honour, journalists and camera teams pushed past him into the museum. Lorenzi thought of turning back and returning at another time when the hype was over and normality had set in again. He pulled out the invitation of honour and read the note written by hand: I am looking forward to seeing you.

"Making museum treasures available for people to see is like throwing pearls in front of a bunch of pigs", Ehrenfried Grabherr once told Lorenzi. He was curator of the apocalypse exhibition, a special exhibition at the museum, whose official opening was today. People were allowed to marvel at the most important items concerning the apocalypse for the first time at the KHM, as the Museum Art History was called for short. 115 exhibits illustrated the artistic take on the "Revelation" from the 4th to the 20th centuries. The exhibition showed exhibits from international museums like the National Gallery in Berlin, the Louvre in Paris, the Centre Pompidou the Museo del Prado and the Thyssen-Bornemisza-Museum in Madrid, which had amongst others supplied works by Bosch, Dürer, El-Greco, Matisse, Dali and Reni. To some extent, it was curiosity, which caused Lorenzi to stay. He was especially interested in hearing the representative of the Vatican, who attended especially to open the exhibition.

Lorenzi showed the attendant at the door his invitation and entered the building. The overdressed guests drank sparkling wine and waited impatiently for the official ceremony to begin. Lorenzi took a glass of orange juice from the tray that the waiter dangled underneath his nose and positioned himself near the exit. Gatherings like these always made him feel afraid that people would be panicking and everybody would try to rush out of the building at once. The murmur of the people subsided when the director of the museum and the representative of the Vatican plus the whole entourage entered the lobby accompanied by the flashlights of the cameras.

When the spotlight hit the head of the first speaker, silence fell over the room. Director Gustav von Schönau greeted the guests of honour. Lorenzi did not really pay much attention because he was not exactly interested in the fulsome praise of director. The latter stressed repeatedly how important the exhibition was for this museum, which united the art works depicting the apocalypse for the first time.

Lorenzi was surprised by the director's bold statement. He has obviously forgotten that the exhibition had been on show in a village of 400 souls in Friaul in Northern Italy, he thought. Von Schönau now gave the word to the guest of honour. The guests applauded as the Cardinal Secretary of State Philippe Bortanio stepped up to the lectern. The grey haired man gave the impression of a simple priest with his thick glasses and black suit. Yet director von Schönau had described the honourable status in the Vatican hierarchy so elaborately that everybody was aware of the importance of his office.

The cardinal greeted those present in German. He spoke of his love for Vienna as well as Austria and how he had enjoyed his time as Nuncio in this country. He emphasized the uniqueness of this show and underscored the significance of the Book of the Apocalypse.

"You are going to see more than 100 master pieces from some of the most important museums in the world. The masterpieces will stimulate the visitor to reread the last book of the Gospel and re-

evaluate it. In this book, the Seer St John turns to the communities in Asia - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia as well as Laodicea - and in his mind to the whole Church. He calls onto the apostles of Jesus to stay true to the faith and to neither be swayed nor be frightened by the evil powers of this world that seem to be superior but are, in fact, doomed to fail", said the representative of the pope.

The cardinal adjusted his glasses, some people coughed. Then he continued with the reading of his script.

"The Apocalypse is not, as is often assumed, the alarming announcement of the catastrophic end of humanity but the explanation of the fall of the powers of hell and the marvellous revelation of the mysteries of Christ, who died for saving history and the cosmos and has risen again. This text and the art works do not startle us when they display scenes of eternity in front of our eyes. At the most, they want to remind us that life on Earth is transient and that we shape it every day through the quality of our actions. To read about the Revelation of the Resurrection on Judgement Day is, in reality, comforting and, to some extent, just. One should never forget that only one world can be just, i.e. that in which the departed rise again and any injury is healed, the tear is dried, all unfinished conversations are taken up again and all yearning for the good is met. God is Alpha and Omega, he encompasses the present and the future of the world, he is the master of creation, he guides his followers through history and prevents them from meeting catastrophe through all the horror they encounter. The Apocalypse by St. John is thus the literature of hope. The vision of the heavenly Jerusalem does in this respect not just fill the last part of the Apocalypse and the exhibition; it is rather a logical necessity, a moral duty and a sine qua non for giving reason to the talk of justice. The topic of the Book of the Apocalypse is in the words of the Holy Father truly the disclosure of the meaning of human history starting from death and the resurrection of Christ. More than anything, the Revelation of St. John represents the expectation of the final victory of God for the pope; the God that will come and change the world."