



TALLERES de ARTE .S.A.
director

Helio Grande
Bryllay



TALLERES de ARTE and the RENOVATION of LITURGICAL ART

Rev. Demetrio Zurbitu, S.J.
Director of *Razón y Fe*
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[Rev. Demetrio Zurbitu, S.J. was martyred in Barcelona on 20 October 1936.]

If the works of religious art made in our century, most of them so ephemeral and trivial, attain something of the of permanence that the works of previous ages have attained, and enter the domain of history - so that in later times men will investigate them for traces of their inspiration - those future men would form a very sad opinion of the religiosity of our contemporaries.

It would be said that the artists had ceded their posts to the merchants; it would seem that the sculptor and the goldsmith had no concern for making a beautiful object to inspire piety, but rather for making an industrial model able to be multiplied by the dozen. The noble carving of marble and wood had been laid aside before the invasion of common plaster. Lamps and candlesticks, and (infinitely sadder) chalices and ciboria, were many times considered as mere hardware. And in this inundation of so many profane and vulgar objects, as wretched in form as in material, it would be useless to look for any sign of religious inspiration or even a recollection of the respect deserved by the noble destiny for which they were forged: honor to the House of God and participation in the most august sacrifice.

When a certain man - especially if he be a convert - enters into one of the churches furnished in this commercial style, it is impossible for him not to feel the shame of such

incongruity, and not to protest the contempt it implies for the sanctity of the place and the dignity of the sacred mysteries. One must repeat for emphasis the example of Huysmans in *La Cathedrale*. Even without the exaggerations of Huysmans's aesthetic purism, everyone who desires to find in the temple surroundings conducive to the elevation of the spirit must condemn repeatedly the profanity of modern religious art.

And let it be known that this is not merely a platonic protest on behalf of art. Higher interests are at stake. The beauty or the vulgarity of the liturgical object has a direct relation to religion, and in this sense the good judgments and the errors of the religious artist have a gravity that affects the conscience. Other forms of art, as much as they may elevate the spirit, never transcend the limits of humanity. But religious art penetrates in a certain way the realm of divinity, since its mission is to translate into sensible forms the most sublime spiritual realities: the dogmas, the virtues, the ideal types of the saintly heroes - and even of the Divine Persons. When reflecting on the matter, this entire spiritual world, the ignorant or frivolous artist adopts inadequate (perhaps even irreverent) forms. Is not only aestheticism that must protest; with greater right and greater energy must religion protest.

And it has protested, in effect; and what is more interesting still, for its part it has made every possible effort to seek the remedy. This remedy is not simply the reproduction of old things (which inevitably would become affected and cold) but rather the formation of a new art, whose forms palpitate with the the same spiritual restlessness that resonates in the modern soul. Its beginnings did not advance past being hesitant attempts, but fortunately several different endeavors have emerged, whose renovating impulse has delivered an almost equal amount of success as failure.

In some artists, however, the era of trial has assuredly passed, and the dignification of liturgical art is already, for them, a definite achievement. It was my visit to the workshop of one of these artists that inspired this essay. When we see the sculptures and altars, the bronze work and earthenware, the silver and gold pieces and the general religious decoration in *Talleres de Arte*, everything appears to be designed not only with an elevated sense of art, but also with a profound respect for the temple and its liturgy.

Providence appears to have been pleased to unite in the person of its director, the priest Felix Granda, the qualities most adequate to prepare him for this undertaking: on one hand artistic ability, inspiration and loving enthusiasm for the beautiful form; on the other a deep priestly piety that makes him imagine his work as a sublime ministry fully consecrated to the glory of God and the edification of souls. If this seems a peculiar vocation, one should remember those words of the Psalmist King that Father Granda has taken as the motto of his workshop, which perfectly explain his intention: *Domine, dilexi decorum domus tuae* - I HAVE LOVED, O LORD, THE BEAUTY OF THY HOUSE; AND THE PLACE WHERE THY GLORY DWELLETH (Psalm 25.8); "I am moved by the ideal of employing all my strength to make beautiful Thy temples and Thine altars."

[...]

The important rôle played by priests in the renewal and dignification of liturgical art has caught my attention more than once: the monks of Beuron in Germany, Abbot Fabre in France, Msgr. Polvara in Italy, Abbot Crooy in Belgium, and, in Spain, at the head of *Talleres de Arte*, Father Granda. This is very understandable. The renewal of liturgical

art cannot be channeled properly but by those who know the Christian tradition and liturgy, and who also feel the zealous impulse to work selflessly for an undertaking of spiritual transcendence, but, after all, little material benefit.

This is the case with *Talleres de Arte*.

I do not know its history. Surely, like all great things, it began small, but today the company has a surprising vastness. When a visitor passes through the gate of the garden - an unkempt and sylvan garden - he is surprised of course by the beauty of the place.



Continuing on, he passes an arch, upon which an untended grapevine shows off the pomp of its fronds; on the other side the emerging workshops are seen. Here, everything breathes intense work. The lathes buzz, the saws grind, the carvers' hammers beat, the metalsmiths' chisels crackle. There is no form of decorative art that does not have here its artificers. Iron is forged and copper is beaten with repoussage; gemstones are mounted and gold is engraved; enamels are melted and porcelain is baked; mosaics are made and bronzes are cast; ivory and wood are carved, and marble and stone are sculpted; the smoke from the lost wax casting of tiny figures drifts where large pieces destined for works of great importance harden in their moulds.

It would be impossible to mastermind all of this tumult of artistry maintained in *Talleres de Arte*, a fevered activity were its director not illuminated by the grand ideal that has inspired his work from the beginning: honor to the House of God. Thanks to this enthusiasm, which we reasonably can call apostolic, this vast initiative of Father Granda - the school of artists forming around his forceful personality and the immense quantity of works leaving the workshops and winning the admiration of all those who

know them - gives reason to hope that so much effort and sacrifice will not be lost to the future of liturgical art.



Although the works themselves may be dispersed and may even disappear, the principles that governed their production will persevere. And because these principles (though evident in the finished artwork) are not written with words anywhere, I want to write them down here, for the benefit of those who aspire to follow the same course. At the same time, this will be a more discreet criticism of the work of the artist-priest.

It appears to me that his whole philosophy of religious art could be condensed into four words: DIGNITY, RELIGIOSITY, POPULARITY AND SYMBOLISM. It will not be difficult to understand the significance of each of these.

I. First of all, the objects destined for the cult must have the DIGNITY demanded by such a destiny. They may not always be rich, but they should always be beautiful.

A kind of instinct has at all times led the faithful of all religions to employ the richest materials in the objects destined for the ministry of worship. The gift was most fitting to the majesty of God. In the Catholic religion particularly, there will never be pure enough gold or rich enough gems to adorn the sacred vessels containing the Body of the Lord.

Talleres de Arte has been fortunate in this matter. Thanks to the liberality of generous donors (a liberality of pure intent), in these workshops have been built the richest pieces of religious metalwork. They are the richest fabricated in Spain in recent years -

which is to say the richest in the world, for in this matter we Spaniards concede the advantage to none.

But this largess cannot be the general rule. In the little village church lost in an impoverished mountain crevice, in the rural Franciscan or Carmelite monastery, they are not permitted to dream of expensive jewelry. But why? Must they resign themselves to sacred objects that are coarse, deformed and vulgar?

Not at all. The ideal of Father Granda is that these humble objects, although lacking the splendor of richness, must never lack the dignity of beauty. He has written that "it has more value that a man venerate a statue of Tanagra clay than a shapeless gold sculpture of decadent art".

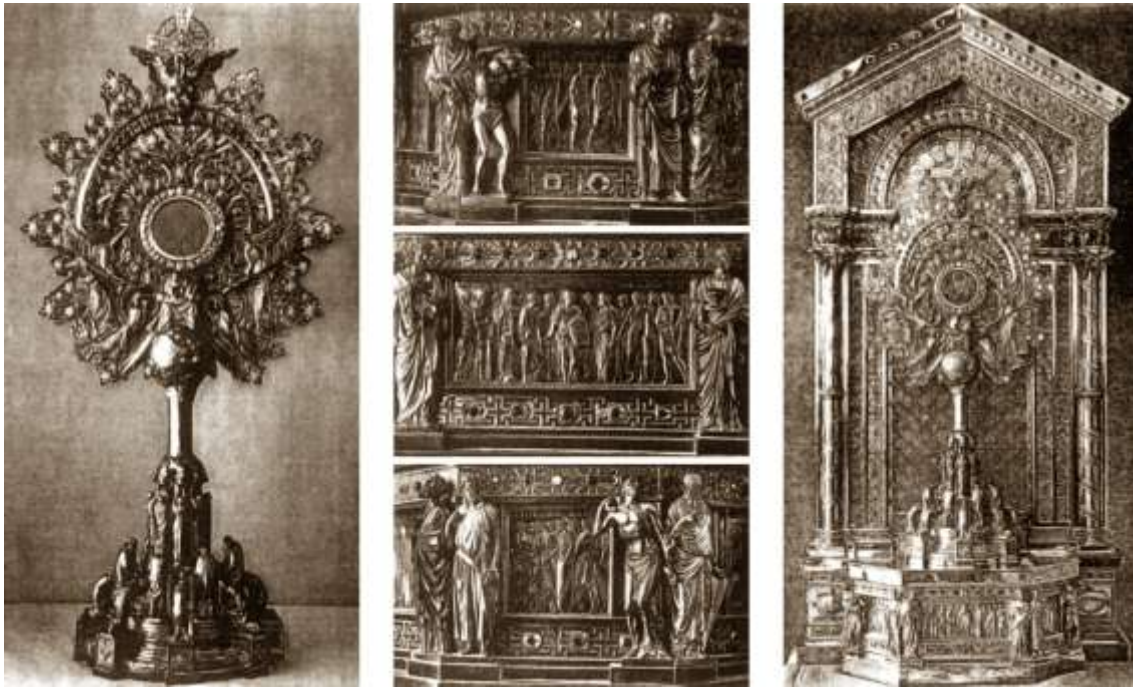
II. In the second place, the director of *Talleres de Arte* desires that that objects produced in his workshops breathe RELIGIOSITY. In a document published in 1910 to make known his artworks and projects, the chapter entitled MY PURPOSE begins by stating the following program: "To make an art impregnated with the scent of Christ, saturated with memories of the past, where the biblical spirit beats; and that this art be alive, united to the trunk of the traditions; and because it is of the past, that it correspond to the needs of the present: such is my desire. "

Nineteen years have passed since these lines were written. If Father Granda has ever looked back to retrace his path from then to the present, the hindsight must be a great comfort to the soul of a priest and an artist. Indeed, his art has spoken of Christ, not with words that sound in the ears, but with forms that act directly on the soul. Indeed, the biblical spirit beats in all his works; one feels breathing in them the soul of the Christian tradition.

If we wish to recount the principal ornamental motifs in his most determined works, we will see that most of these works have been turned into treasuries of Holy Scripture. We may take as an example the throne and monstrance for Nocturnal Adoration in Madrid. Only a priestly spirit saturated by reading the Holy Books could hit upon so inspired a conception.

The idea in its totality recalls the worship of the Lamb, as related by St. John in the visions of the Apocalypse. The Four and Twenty Elders, those mysterious worshippers, form the base. Divided into three groups of eight and arranged in concentric circles, the figures are gathered together in increasingly close rings, according to the form imposed by the conical structure of the base; this distribution expresses wonderfully the ascent of those souls desirous of the perfection of the Holy Mountain, whose summit is the Lord. The eight elders of the lower group, kneeling on as many pedestals, present their crowns to the Lamb. They are those who begin the ascent to the Mountain of God, renouncing before all the riches and pomps and vanities of the world; for this reason their pedestals are marked with the cross. In a higher tier, eight other elders, deeply bowing, offer to the Lord their citharas and harps. They are those who, illuminated by the knowledge of God, renounce the folly of the human arts and sciences; for this reason, the Beatitudes are written at their feet, because this is the moral code of Christ, which must be the science of Christian life. Finally, higher and closely grouped around the stem of the

monstrance, eight elders lift up as many incense burners, which give off smoke in waving and wandering coils, which rise toward the viril *in odorem suavitatis* - in the odor of sweetness. They are those who have already reached the heights of perfection and are constantly burning in the fire of divine love. And because they live with the angels more than with men, and because their life is more of the sky than the earth, at their feet is an inscription repeating the words of the Seraphic Hymn: *Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus*. Could more eloquent symbols be found for those who have made their own office the worship of the Sacrament?



On top of the column formed by the gathering coils of incense is the sphere of worlds surrounded by clouds and encircled by cherubim; and among them, inside rings of nebulae and stars, rests the viril, where, under the form of bread, rests He who has placed his throne in the heavenly clouds, with the feathers of angels flying overhead.

In order that the richness and beauty of this monstrance properly show forth from a fitting base, the artist conceived a throne ordinarily used during exposition. We are not interested at the moment in its form or its richness; but if the reader will permit, let us stop for a moment to describe the pedestal.

It is an hexagonal plan, and in the four free corners eight paired figures support (in the manner of caryatids) the plinth on which the monstrance rests. All of the figures are related with the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ. Abraham with his knife and Isaac carrying a bundle of firewood on the path to Mount Moriah recall the sacrifice of Calvary. At another corner, Moses and a snakebitten Israelite represent, in allegory, salvation through the Holy Cross. Behind, Melchizedek, accompanied by a warrior, presents an offering of bread and wine - an image of Christ, Eternal King and Priest. Finally, the prophets Isaiah and David are those who more explicitly announced the sacrifice of the Messiah and the glory of the Eucharistic banquet, where the poor will eat to fulfillment.

Behind these figures, in a continuous frieze running around the pedestal, a composition is developed whose meaning could not be more clear. It is a long line of warriors who, resting on their shields with unsheathed swords, appear to keep a mysterious watch. The motto on their shields already indicates their office: *vigilate et orate*, watch and pray; but the inscription that runs above all the figures declares it more clearly: *En lectulum Salomonis sexaginta fortes ambiunt ex fortissimis Israël, omnes tenentes gladios, et ad bella doctissimi: unius cujusque ensis super femur suum propter timores nocturnos* - BEHOLD THREESCORE VALIANT ONES OF THE MOST VALIANT OF ISRAEL SURROUNDED THE BED OF SOLOMON. ALL HOLDING SWORDS, AND MOST EXPERT IN WAR: EVERY MAN'S SWORD UPON HIS THIGH, BECAUSE OF FEARS IN THE NIGHT (Song of Songs 3.7). It is a beautiful allegory for Nocturnal Adoration. Here, around the monstrosity where lies the Divine Solomon, watch by night the chosen men of Israel, the Christian people; and armed with the sword of the spirit, which is prayer and mortification, they make their guard against the fears of the night and against the snares that the Prince of Darkness has prepared in the shadows against the Church Militant.

In like manner scripture, doctrine, liturgy, tradition and Christian sense are the perennial fonts from which spring his artistic ideas; the arsenal of his decorative themes. An altarpiece designed by Father Granda is not just a set of architectural elements assembled to adorn and dignify a statue; it is not only a matter of decorating the niche or the archway, filling up with columns and garlands the place where the eyes of the faithful converge. No, the decoration of an altar should be something totally distinct from the adornment of a window or a doorway. Hence the great altars built in *Talleres de Arte* are truly poetic, each developing an entire cycle of liturgical and theological ideas, full of doctrine and religiosity.

We have seen, for instance, the high altar for the new church of the *Religiosas Reparadoras de Chamartin*. The governing idea of this altarpiece from its conception has been Reparation through Mary. Thus at its center is an image of Our Lady holding in her arms the Divine Child, in the act of crushing the serpent's head. At her feet, Adam and Eve, representing fallen humanity, prostrate in prayer and raise their eyes in supplication to the *Virgen Reparadora*. But because the Redemption was the work of Jesus Christ, at the top of the altar is a large image of the crucified Christ, flanked by two angels that bend toward allegories of the Jews and the Gentiles (*iudaeis primum et gentibus*), inviting them to look at the Holy Cross. Throughout the rest of the altarpiece passages of Holy Scripture that prefigure the saving power of the Cross are distributed (such as the passage about the bronze serpent), recalling the figures of the Old Covenant who spent their lives awaiting Redemption; the Apostles of the New Law, who worked to spread and apply it; and the saints in whom the more bountiful fruits of the Redemption have been borne. Thus the altarpiece becomes an open book in which the lessons of Scripture, dogma and liturgy are explained to the eyes of the people in plastic form, as edifying and instructive as they are clear and perceptible.

Two particular things have caught my attention in this matter. The first is the frequent use made of evangelical scenes to decorate pieces of metalwork. In enamel or relief; in friezes or medallions; in gold, silver, bronze or ivory, the Gospel goes everywhere; were an album collected of all these scattered scenes it would be a most complete visual commentary on the Gospel.

Another thing worthy of consideration is the preference shown for the oldest artistic

formulas, the primitive tradition. It appears to be an aberration, certainly due to an ill-timed enthusiasm for modern devotions (which are very respectable, but not by themselves), that the image of the crucified Jesus has been exiled from our churches, or at least ignored. Not a few sculptors appear to have forgotten that the Holy Virgin is, always and before all else, the Mother of God.

It is necessary to react against this; to work so that great crucifixes stand out anew in the most visible places of our churches; to return to His Mother the precious Son whom an ignorant and frivolous art has taken from her arms. In my judgment, one of the greatest successes of Father Granda has been to give to his Virgins the maternal majesty always shown by the most beloved images of the Christian tradition, without losing any of the virginal grace that has been introduced especially in images of the Immaculate Conception.



As the statue is predominantly important in the temple and its language is clearest to the common soul, the department of sculpture is, among all of *Talleres de Arte*, that which is most immediately subjected to the influence of the director, and that which bears the engraved stamp of his artistic personality most deeply.

Because his sculpture is purely religious, he desires before all else to flee from excessive realism. He has no interest that his figures give the illusion of life. To the contrary, he is persuaded that a religious statue should have primarily the value of a symbol; its principal purpose should be to use its material to suggest spiritual things, to lift souls by means of its beauty. The more idealized and spiritual the statue, the more the souls will be elevated.

From this, his preference has been almost exclusively for the direct carving of wood and stone. To him, first modeling the figures in clay in order to cast them later in bronze and

reproduce them with mechanical exactness, never seemed the right path. The easy technique of transfer from clay brings in a deadly way a certain morbidity and effeminacy to the sculptor; the prolixity of detail translates into a paganized sensuousness of form. Father Granda, to the contrary, desires that the religious sculptor work to bring forth his idea, laboriously scraping the wood or stone, and by gouges extracting the soul that sleeps in the material. The accidental details remain like sketches, simplifying the drapery almost to stylization, because all of the effort has been concentrated on the spiritual expression of the faces. Thus was formed the personal style of his sculpture: noble and sober, full of gravity and purity, without tragic poses or excessive gestures; the most proper to the serene beauty of religious art.



III. Despite the exquisiteness of the artist, the director of *Talleres de Arte* desires that his works be POPULAR. All liturgy goes to the people and speaks to the popular soul, filling it with ideas and sentiments. Therefore Father Granda wants his liturgical art to be for the people, reaching out to the simple and the unschooled. His priestly soul has compassion for the crowds and desires that at the feast of religious art, the naïve souls hungry for truth and beauty have also their portion. The learned archaisms (too learned for the people), the audaciousness and refinement of the vanguard (often controversial) should be left in good time to other spectators and to other environments. The adornment of our temples cannot be an exclusive gift to a few aesthetes; it needs to be understood and savored by the believing masses.

From this it follows that the decorative means of Father Granda are as clear as crystal. They need no translation or commentary; they declare their own meaning with a kind of transparency. He feels a predilection for traditional figures: angels and demons, elves and monsters whose meaning wonderfully translates into popular imagination. He loves the richness of his decorative media - not only metal and stone, but also ivory carved into charming figures, and enamel of intense and mysterious colors that have a power, like that of deep water, to fascinate the eyes. He does not conceal his fondness for rich and vibrant colors - a fondness that has led him to invent a personal method of mosaic work, to use porcelain lavishly as a decorative element, and to work patiently until attaining that charming blue and white Majolica tile in the style of Luca Della Robbia, so fresh and so popular.

This wise eclecticism, this constant weighting of forms and colors, the fruitful imagination of bright and amiable concepts; the vast erudition for historical artwork, and, above all, the determined will to find the mysterious key that will open the souls of the Christian and Spanish people to a sense of beauty; there is the secret of his successes, that from the beginning has consecrated the art of Father Granda.

Perhaps it is in the most ambitious works where the popular tendency has its most brilliant manifestations. Let us recall, to cite one of many, the throne of the Virgin of Covadonga. The work has the fantastic richness of an oriental tale and it is consequently fitting that it is kept closed like a treasure chest; when the doors of the throne are opened wide so that the image may be venerated, it seems like the opening of the pages of a great book written for the people: for Asturias and for Spain. Because the history of Covadonga is before all the memory of a great victory achieved through the protection of Our Lady, the first thing their eyes see is a triumphal arch on eight columns, covering the magnificent throne of a Queen. Then, amidst the gleam of the gold, the sparkling of the stones, and the iridescence of the enamels, are displayed many sculpted figures and minutely detailed repoussage whose meaning is spelled out for the people with great enjoyment.

Because everything here has been done for them, everything is within reach of their intelligence. They know the patriarchs, prophets and kings, grouped in the eight columns of the arch, four for each column, who recall the lineage of the Virgin of Nazareth. They know also the two larger figures at the top of the portals on either side of the throne, who represent the church of Asturias; they are her patrons, St. Matthew and St. Eulalia. They know most of the animals scattered throughout the ornamental borders to be symbols of the land of Asturias, because they live today or lived in past ages in her forests and mountains. And they know, most of all, the four representations of Asturian life - plowing the land, forging iron, fishing and mining - who, hammered in relief on the bottom part of the portals, are like men offering their daily struggles at the foot of the throne of their Queen and Lady.

From the same bowels of her history come the figures that decorate the pedestal. Here is compiled the entire story of Covadonga. Pelayo, on his knees and embracing the cross of victory, is followed by the companions who had been with him in the Holy Cave of Covadonga at the beginning of the epic Reconquest. Higher, at the two upper corners of the throne, filling with their wings the spandrels of the triumphal arch, two angels hold up the same victorious ensign. The people know very well that the Reconquest was nothing other than the triumph of the Cross.



Perhaps even more mysteries are found in the historical reliefs that adorn the seat of honor. But even here, a concept taken from the most sublime Marian theology has, in the hands of Father Granda, achieved an expression that could not be more popular. At all times those words of the eighth chapter of the Book of Proverbs, in which Wisdom proclaims her existence before all created things, have been applied to the Blessed Virgin. *Necdum erant abyssi...* THE DEPTHS WERE NOT AS YET, *adhuc terram non fecerat...* HE HAD NOT YET MADE THE EARTH, *quando praeeparabat caelos...* WHEN HE PREPARED THE HEAVENS, *quando circumdabat mari terminum suum...* WHEN HE COMPASSED THE SEA WITH ITS BOUNDS; in a word, before this visible creation had

entered the confines of being, already the Holy Virgin was present in the divine intelligence and formed part of His eternal designs. And the piety of the Fathers and theologians saw in this an expression of the predilection of God who from eternity chose Our Lady for the glory of her miraculous motherhood. This is a notion of preference, a sovereignty over all creation. How could plastic shape be given to this sublime conception of Marian piety?

The devout artist here has one of those intuitions that go directly to the popular soul. In the bottom part of the chair he has represented the worlds budding from the unformed bosom of a chaotic mass; in another the first rays of light tear the dark clouds. The waters separate; marvelous vegetation blooms; animals fill the land; in the waters and the skies teem with their most colorful inhabitants. And above this work of the six days sits Our Lady in serene beauty, upright and majestic, in a hieratic pose that harmonizes with the Byzantine style of the entire composition. She breathes a loving maternal sweetness, giving her the air of an Empress.

I do not know if all of the profound theology of this composition reaches the people; but surely they understand that she who so sits, like a queen over the works of creation, doubtlessly is before and greater than all creation, because the worlds and the things that fill them deserve to be no more than the throne of her royalty. Father Granda has been able to put this within reach of the popular soul.

IV. But the artist is after all a religious artist, and his art has always given the principal importance to SYMBOLISM. Religious art is always the realization of what is above the senses. This is doubtlessly one of its greatest merits - and also one of its greatest difficulties: to find sensible forms, clear and beautiful, to represent pure ideas, spiritual beings, and lofty abstractions.

To mention every symbol in Father Granda's repertory would be an endless task. The dove, symbol of the soul; the olive tree, symbol of peace; sheaves of wheat recalling the Holy Eucharist; the pious pelican giving blood to its chicks; the peacock, symbol of immortality; the asp and the basilisk, representations of sin; the thirsty deer, souls longing for God; the tree of life; the fountains of the sacraments; flowers symbolic of the virtues: lilies and roses and thistles and passionflowers; the wolf, lamb and shepherd together: in a word, I do not believe that there be any symbol known to the Christian tradition that the art of Father Granda, an art of restless and insatiable curiosity in this matter, has not used many times in its prolificacy.

At times he is not content with these, and the symbolism in his hands takes on a truly dramatic force and profundity. As the light of a burning candle represents Christ, at the foot of one of his candlesticks he has placed three monsters representing the vices, on whose backs sit three hooded men, sleeping deeply. When the flame at the top of the candle quivers, one seems to hear the words of the Apostle: *Surge qui dormis, et illuminabit te Christus* (Ephesians 5.14). A broken scepter in the hands of Adam has a tragic sense when placed as decoration on one arm of a cross. The cup of a chalice is fashioned like a nest, and the image of a bird feeding her chicks is a precious allegory of the love of Christ for souls. A ciborium whose pyx is enclosed in a cylindrical cover with lace and open-work filigree, delicately reminds us of the Spouse of the Song of

Songs, who PEERS THROUGH THE LATTICES: *Respiciens per cancellos* (Song of Songs 2.9).

But especially in certain important works, the symbolism has an uncommonly great scope. A long exposition would barely give an account of the meaning of each of the symbols decorating, for example, that which Father Granda calls the Monstrance of the City. Forming the base are the four elements with words corresponding to the Canticle of the Creatures, *Benedicite*.



On this, the material world renewed by Christ, stands, like a pedestal, the fortified City of God, where God will live with His people for endless centuries. It has twelve gates guarded by twelve angels with the names of the twelve tribes; as a foundation it has the twelve apostles of the New Law. From the middle of the city rises a group of seven pillars: WISDOM HATH BUILT HERSELF A HOUSE, SHE HATH HEWN HER OUT SEVEN PILLARS. (Proverbs 9.1).

A pilgrim to the churches of Rome who visits *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*, cannot but stop for a moment at a modest burial slab that his guide points out under the left nave. There lie the mortal remains of Fra Angelico, Giovanni da Fiesole, the friar and painter; a lamp burns constantly above his gravestone. If this same visitor has ever delighted his eyes with the celestial visions painted by Angelico - above all if he has ever visited the convent of San Marco in Florence - he will understand very well why the gravestone is adorned with flowers and lights, like that of a saint. The artist who works with his hands to lift heavenward the souls of his fellowmen is also chosen by God, and is given a mission and a dignity similar to that of a saint, who raises their spirits by example of his virtue.