

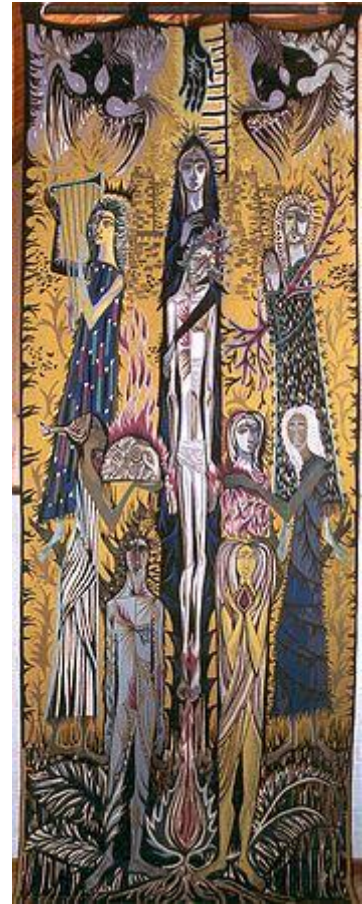


The Tapestry in St. Anthony's church

By Fr. Vincent Gallogley

Kraainem (04 September 2002).- When the Belgian Government decided to hold a World Fair in Heysel, Brussels in 1958, it also decided to build two churches on the grounds of the Fair, one for the Protestant communities (that little church is now in Den Haag, the Netherlands) and one for the Catholic community (that church was transferred in April, 1959 to Kraainem). Art works were commissioned from Belgian artists to adorn the churches and one of these works of art is the tapestry that adorns the wall behind the Baptistry in our St. Anthony's Parish church. The tapestry was executed in the Royal Tapestry Workshops in Mechelen by two artists, Georges Chauchoir and Mary Dambiermont.

The tapestry graphically depicts the whole history of Salvation, gleaned from the Bible, beginning with the Book of Genesis. In the middle, at the bottom, we see the Garden of Eden with the Tree of Life. On either side of the Tree are Adam (on the left) and Eve (on the right). Original Sin enters the Human Race from our progenitors, symbolised by the giving and eating of the Forbidden Fruit. Calamity falls on the human race which is "infected" with the permanent Seven Deadly Weaknesses: Pride, Greed (Covetousness), Lust, Gluttony, Envy, Anger and Sloth (both physical and spiritual). (These become the Seven Deadly Sins when we give in to the weaknesses!). However, God, in His infinite love and mercy, promised from the beginning (after the Fall) to make all things right for the human race in the long run and in the End.



At the top of the tapestry we see the Hand of God surrounded by the winged beings on either side (the Cherubim and Seraphim, Thrones and Dominations, Angels and Archangels etc.) and in the background we see a LADDER, Jacob's Ladder, symbolising commerce between Heaven and Earth. In the lower background we see a Walled City with towers etc., symbolising the Heavenly Jerusalem to which all human beings are called by God. The old earthly Jerusalem symbolises the human race subject to the Seven Deadly Weaknesses and Sins. The possibility of overcoming the effects of the Fall of the human race is given by The New Adam (Jesus, the Christ/Messiah) given to the human race by God with the co-operation of the New Eve (Mary, the Mother of Jesus). The New Adam is placed in the middle of the entire tapestry (crowned with thorns), with the New Eve behind Him, her left arm draped over His left shoulder and chest like the Pietà of later religious art. The New Adam is from the Root of Jesse, descended from Jesse (the man with joined hands), with the sapling through his body in the centre-right of the tapestry. On the centre-left is another ancestor of the Messiah, King David with the crown on his head and holding a harp (symbolising his authorship of the 150



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Psalms which he prayed by singing with the harp). This also alludes to the Messiah re-establishing the New Kingdom of Israel, the Kingdom of God.

Underneath the figure of Jesse and above Eve is Abraham, our Father in Faith (with the long white hair). He is embracing his only son, Isaac, whom he was willing to sacrifice to prove his submission to God. But God stays his hand and saves Isaac and provides a ram for sacrifice (cf. Genesis 22:1-14). This passage is a prefiguration of the definitive, perfect sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. On the other side (left) under King David and above Adam is Miriam, the sister of Moses with the Paschal Lamb (flaming) on a dish, alluding to the Passover of the Jews from the slavery of Egypt (symbolising human slavery to (the Seven Deadly) Sin(s)) to the freedom of the Promised Land (ultimately, God's dwelling-place, heaven, the New Jerusalem). All of this, of course, prefigures the Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, the definitive liberation from the slavery to sin and disobedience. Back to the Tree of Life in the middle of the Garden of Eden, which becomes the Tree of Death. This continues up in the middle of the tapestry to become the Cross, the Tree of Death for Jesus, the New Adam, the Messiah, but ultimately to become the instrument of the Salvation won for us by Jesus and so to become for us the new Tree of Life.

In summary, the message of the tapestry, the whole history of salvation, is that the human race could never overcome the Seven Deadly Weaknesses (Sins) by ourselves. All our human misery, individual, personal and social, ultimately derives from those seven deadly weaknesses. If we as a race could overcome those seven deadly weaknesses, then there would never have been any reason for a Saviour to be born into our world. There would have been no reason for God to become one of ourselves in Jesus. If human ingenuity could solve all the problems resulting from Original Sin then there would be no need for a Messiah. But that is absurd. Only Jesus, by his power as God Made Man, could and did overcome those seven deadly weaknesses in his own human nature. Hence, we have no hope of ever controlling them except in and through Him and the power he shares with us through our Baptismal union with Him. It is only by relying on His power within us that we have a hope of conquering our weaknesses as individuals and collectively as a race. Faith in Jesus and the response of Faith by Baptism is the only hope the human race has of trying to bring about a better world and ultimately of entering into full union with God in the New Jerusalem of Heaven.