

From bewilderment to adventure

by Giovanni Salmeri *

I believe that the problem of increasingly empty churches is serious for Christianity (to denote it as a simple "sign of the times" or to interpret it as the fall of the deplorable barrier between "those outside" and "those inside" sincerely seems to me a quite obvious case of sour grapes). But luckily for me this problem has nothing to do with my work. However, I agree with those who argued that, from the point of view of the Christian faith, the hearts should be filled before (and perhaps more than) filling the churches: after all, the celebration and the rite are always nourished, more or less directly, by matters of life and death, that is by matters of love and passion. Even when the practice appears to be simply habitual, behind it there is at least a collective experience in which that practice is perceived as connected to life: and therefore it is a matter of the heart. But wisely the great John Duns Scotus noted, rejecting negative theology or a caricature of it, "negationes non amamus": it is impossible to love a pure negation, something completely unknown. We can only love what we know to some extent. And thus, between the great problem of how to fill the churches and the greatest undertaking of filling the hearts, perhaps a small, temporary, but important space, also exists for the task of filling the heads.

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