

He remembers Wednesday passing, the 22nd. And that evening he returned with the family to Mantua, there to enjoy some much needed food and rest. But dinner had been an unhappy affair, very somber and quiet. There had been little conversation. Thereafter, Carlo had poured large brass mugs of Lacrima Cristi for everyone, along with smaller glasses of aged red Vermouth.

Luigi had thanked his father and immediately fell to drinking. "Tonight is the right night to get drunk," he had said angrily.

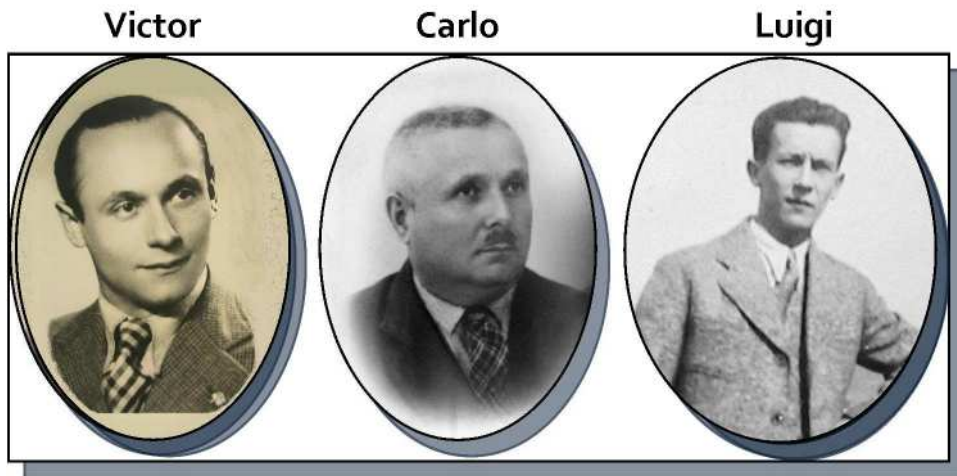
But Victor remembers being at disagreement with his brother. "No," he had countered. "That would be of no use at all. Besides, all the wine in the cellar could never wash the taste of Volargne's dust of death from my palate." And then he remembers that he too proceeded to get blessedly drunk.

In Orlando, twilight was darkening an already overcast sky. Triggering the remote control, he turned off the television. Then rising, he went to the kitchen, poured a large glass of Cabernet, and looked at the clock: almost five. The family would be home soon.

It was Thursday morning in Mantua. The wine still sat on the table. On the label: *Lacrima Cristi*, the "Tears of Christ." Painfully fresh in the minds of all were the events of the last two days.

*How ill named.* The thought had come briefly to Victor's mind as he read the bottle's label through the spread fingers of both hands. As he held his bowed and aching head he reflected: *Maestro Jesus would never have done this to us.* And he was right, of course.

With Gina still sleeping, the three men had gathered themselves at the breakfast table, there to share, as it were, a debilitating communal hangover. Their stomachs too were still in a state of riot, and again conversation had been minimal. Even soto voice, the sounds of words seemed to batter the air like the ringing blows of a blacksmith's hammer. Rather, they quietly and cautiously nibbled at some home-cured Valpolicella raisins, and some of Carlo's special sun-dried peaches and figs.



From demitasse cups they sipped dark Italian coffee; rich, potent and mildly sweet. Across the room and sitting on the counter, the espresso machine hissed and bubbled away. One after another they consumed cups of the placating brew. For obvious reason, the wine was left untouched.

Finally breaking a silence that had prevailed for several minutes and pointing, Victor said softly, "Dad, why did you ... why did you serve us from *that* bottle last night?"

Though not seen, his head being bowed, there was a quiet smile that warmed Carlo's face. For Luigi, such a question would have been fully in character; he having always been more spiritually inclined. But Victor was one who virtually never spoke of

religion, and this kind of question from him was unexpected. Even so, Carlo knew exactly, that about which his son was hinting.

Lifting his aching head now and looking across the table, Carlo avoided a conversational response. “Why you ask me ... why? Because its *vino delizioso*, that's why. And you always said so yourself, son.”

Victor shook his head and immediately wished he had not; the pain ratcheted up. But he was nowhere near satisfied with his father's response. So he now picked up the bottle and tapped the label.

“Isn't there a story,” he said, “about this wine; about Christ crying over Lucifer's fall from heaven; and that when he saw the Devil plunge into Vesuvius, his tears fell on the land, fertilizing the lava flows and inspiring the vines that grow there?”

It was a clumsy way to introduce what he wanted to talk about, but it was Victor's way. And Carlo understood what his son was driving at. Moreover, he was pleased to hear Victor make an effort to discuss a subject not among his favorites.

Carlo stood now, rubbing his forehead. Walking to the coffee maker and pouring a fourth cup he said, “Yes, that's the story. At least it's one of two or three; but all of them are obviously myths. So how about the truth?”

And now Victor pressed the point. Obviously confused he said, “Well isn't it the same thing you tried to explain to us at the Winiarnia, back when Mussolini had visited us fifteen years ago?”

Addressing his sons with a look, Carlo said, “No, it's not at all the same thing. Myths are legends, and if they're written, they're not worth the paper they're written on. Just think about it for a minute.

“First of all, spirit creatures in Heaven don’t cry; they have no need for tears. Furthermore, why would Christ have cried if he was the one who threw Satan out of Heaven in the first place, and for what purpose? Go, please; go get those Bibles I gave you fifteen years ago, and let’s read the truth about the Devil’s fall from Heaven.”

It was the beginning of a lengthy discussion, several hours in fact. With chapter 12 of the Bible’s Revelation as their focus, in particular verses 7 through 9, Carlo began by explaining that Michael was Christ’s angelic name; that it meant – in the nature of a challenge – “Who is like God?” and that the war in Heaven, therein described, was the direct outworking of the first regal action taken by Christ following his enthronement as king in 1914.

“Note to where Satan was cast,” Carlo said. “To the earth; and note too that this would mean woe for earth’s people, as it’s foretold here in verse twelve. Now this was precisely what brother Russell was talking about way back in nineteen ten, when I met him in Warsaw. And now you tell me, please: was there woe for the earth in nineteen fourteen?”

He paused now, letting the question linger unanswered. Then he said, “You know the answer. And there are many people – many intelligent people, insightful people – who feel it beyond doubt that the global events – unspeakable events in some cases – which have taken place since that time can only be the result of malicious demon influence.”

Angrily now, he went on. “Because never before has mankind carried out, or seen, such insanely concentrated and coordinated evil. And *you’ve* seen it!” Again he paused. Then pressing the point he added quietly, “Like never before, my sons; like never before!”

The sun was setting now, the passing hours having constituted an unusual day. For as those hours had passed, and with their headaches gradually subsiding, the men had spent the entirety of the day in periodic discussions together. Gina had been there, of course, and listening. But it had been the men, recuperating from the events surrounding Volargne's destruction, who had spent those several hours reflecting on the far too numerous tragedies they had witnessed or been part of over the last five years – ever since the Nazi's invasion of Poland.

And from the vantage of his experience, Carlo had used the opportunity to expand his sons' limited understanding of world affairs. With additional facts and with supporting figures when necessary, he undertook to explain the deeper meaning of the things which had happened since that infamous day, the day when a young Serb, 19 year-old Gavrilo Princip, had assassinated Austria's Archduke and his wife on the 28th of June in 1914. And there was much to explain as to how and why one event had segued to another.

“It was like ... well, it was like a bad lasagna,” Carlo said, illustrating his point. “It was as if each of the ingredients were okay, but when they were put together it was ... it was a disaster; it was not done well. Not everybody can make really good lasagna.”

He told them, for example, how Austria-Hungary, dissatisfied with Serbia's response to their inevitable ultimatum – one which called for the assassins to be brought to justice and in so doing nullified for all practical purposes Serbia's sovereignty – had declared war on Serbia on that very day. That Russia, bound by a treaty to Serbia, had then announced that she was mobilizing her vast army in defense, a sluggish process that would take them well over a month to complete.

“And then Germany,” he went on, “allied with Austria-Hungary by a treaty, was swift to assume that Russia's mobilization was a belligerent act against Austria-Hungary. So, after giving no more than a scant warning, it too declared war on Russia. That was on August the first.

“Then there was France. Now, I guess a body might even pity France in a way. 'Cause there she was, bound by treaty to Russia, and she suddenly found herself, and not by choice, in a war with Germany; and by extension, in a war also against Austria-Hungary. Well, the result of that was that Germany hotfooted it to invade Belgium, which at this point was still neutral. But believe me when I say that Kaiser Wilhelm didn't care a rat's patooti about that. Because going through Belgium would be his quickest way to Paris.

“So now what? Enter Great Britain, allied to France by what was called the *Entente Cordiale*. It was not really a treaty; what it basically said was that they'd be nice to each other, whatever that meant. So while they may have felt a moral obligation to defend France, Britain's real reason for joining the pending fray lay also in another direction. Because by the terms of yet another treaty, a *real* treaty, some seventy-five years old, she was obliged to defend Belgium as well. So then, on August fourth, with Germany having invaded, the Belgian King appealed to Britain for help. And later that same day, and like it was with France, Britain too found herself at war with Austria-Hungary.

“And you know what? So cocksure these British were; so elated with their imagined Anglo superiority ... off they went; off with the bands a-playin'; the flags a-

wavin'; and people singin: 'When Johnnie comes marchin' home again' blah, blah, blah. And everyone was saying it would all be over by Christmas. *HAH!* In a pig's eye.



"But ... the United States was different; they wanted no part of any war in Europe. So they declared themselves absolutely neutral, an official position that would last until nineteen seventeen. That's when Germany allowed herself the liberty of unrestricted submarine warfare. Then came the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and it turns out that – besides the ammo they were illicitly carrying – there were a lot of Americans aboard. Well! The U.S. didn't take kindly to that! And besides, since America's commercial shipping was now being threatened, and since that was almost entirely related to the Allies led by Britain and France, America finally felt itself sucked into the war. That was in nineteen seventeen, on April sixth.

"But before that came what you could call the domino effect. Because Britain's colonies and dominions, feeling a kind of companionship with England – places like Australia and Canada; like New Zealand, the Union of South Africa and India, all responded rather naturally by offering military and financial assistance.

“And over in the Pacific at the same time, and recognizing the need to honor their military agreement with Britain, Japan now got into the brouhaha. That was also in August of nineteen fourteen, on the twenty-third. And two days later this was followed – it could have been predicted – by Austria-Hungary declaring war on Japan.”

And now Carlo brought the matter close to home. “And what about us Italians, you’re asking? Well, by making use of a clause in an alliance Italy had with both Germany and Austria-Hungary, a clause that committed us to defend both countries in the event of a *defensive* war; we insisted that their actions had actually been *offensive*. So Italy also declared herself a neutral. And we stayed that way until May of the next year, when we finally sided with the Allies against our two former partners.

“So you can easily see how all of this ... this political *spaghetti* brought virtually the whole world of mankind into the war that everyone believed could never happen. Matter of fact, I once read about a Danish fellow, name was Peter Munch. Seemed like an unusual name; maybe that's why I remember him. Anyway, back before the war, around the late eighteen hundreds, he'd said that all the evidence was against the probability of a European war. He even went so far as to say that the danger of war would disappear in the future; said it had happened time after time.”

Quietly Luigi said, “But he was wrong, wasn't he, Dad.”

“Oh, yes he was, Luigi! Like so many others of the time he was wrong, dead wrong. He realized it later on, but he was wrong. Actually, he even wrote in his memoirs, and retracting his previous prophecy, that the war of nineteen fourteen was the great turning point in the history of humanity. He said that we had gone from what he called a bright period of progress to an age of disaster, horror, and hatred, with insecurity



everywhere. He even speculated that the darkness, as he called it, which came upon us at that time, might even mean the permanent destruction of mankind's entire cultural structure.”

And now it was Victor who said, “It seems to me, Dad, that all the agreements, all of these treaties between the nations, were actually the problem. Suppose they had all disregarded the treaties and everybody had stayed home?”

“Well now,” and Carlo grinned. “What an interesting speculation; it would have been different, I suppose. Personally, as I look back at it, I too feel that all of these alliances were themselves the cause, at least the human cause, a contributing cause in escalating the enormity of that conflict. But . . . the interesting thing is that the Bible had said that it would be the way it was; and so it was.”

All of this he was able to explain to Victor and Luigi; and how that war, resulting from that assassination, the Great War, had never really ended in 1918; that it was continuing even at that very moment, in what had been Volargne and elsewhere around the world. Together they had looked closely at the major societal and political events occurring from 1914 to the present day. As a result, Victor and Luigi began to see clearly the subtle yet obvious connections between the Archduke's assassination and the destruction of Volargne.

Of particular interest had been certain other prophecies from the Bible. And Victor was finally beginning to understand what his father had been trying to tell him 15 years ago.

Then Carlo said, “Victor, go get your stamp collection; the part you brought with you from Lwów.”

“My collection? Why?”

“I want to show you something. Just get it, please ... and bring your Bible.”

With the collection then on the table, Carlo turned his Bible to the 146th Psalm, suggesting that Victor do the same. Then he said, “Now look here.” And they read verse three. “*Put not your trust in princes nor in the son of man in whom there is no help.*”

“Now then, Victor. Choose a volume from your collection, any one of them, and open it to any page.” That done, he said, “What do you see?”



And there they were: the “*princes*,” the ‘*sons of men*,’ the uniformed and medal-bedecked nobles of nations around the world. Carlo then spoke softly.

“These are the noblemen, the leaders, the strong and powerful. Some were sons of monarchs, while some came from simple ordinary families, like Hitler and Mussolini. But all of them have one thing in common; each is a son of man, in whom the Bible says *‘there is no help.’*

“Now then, my son, and you, Luigi, if you think about these so-called *noblemen*, I believe you will agree that not a single one of them may be credited with having given their people *anything* genuinely useful; nothing beyond what God himself had already given them. No, what these men and others like them have given the world is a plutocratic struggle for superiority. And blinded by nationalistic rhetoric, by patriotism, the people are even inclined to call them benefactors.” He shook his head now. “Such a delusion!”

While Victor and his brother nodded in agreement, Carlo turned a few more pages in his Bible. “And now read this,” he said, as though crowning his argument.

And there, in verse 9 of Ecclesiastes chapter 8, inspired by God and written by Solomon, they read: “*All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.*”.

With the haunting vision of Volargne’s recent destruction emblazoned vividly in their minds, and giving consideration to Lwów’s disastrous plight over the past five years, the men each looked from one to the other. The unspoken consensus could be seen in their faces; it was inescapable. Without exception, each of those nobles there portrayed had been guilty of *‘ruling over another to his own hurt.’*



## Ancient Nobles depicted on Postage Stamps





# Nobles on Italian Stamps and Postcards





# Nobles depicted on Europe's Stamps

