

Thoughts on Luca Signorelli's *Guidizio Universale* and 9/11

By Andrew Frisardi



Six days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, I went to the Chapel of San Brizio in the Duomo in Orvieto to look more closely at the celebrated Luca Signorelli frescoes. I'd already seen them several times with guidebooks and other information in hand, but now I wanted simply to look at them without mental clutter and hurry, reflecting on what I saw. I thought I might find some images there for the tragic events that had just taken place, some context that was no less relevant for being old—indeed, for having stood the test of time, perhaps more profoundly relevant than what the *New York Times* was saying about the attacks.

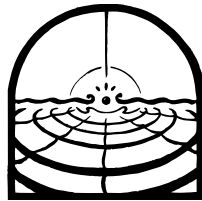
The subject of Luca's masterpiece is the Universal or Last Judgment at the end of the world, in the symbolic terms of Christian eschatology. Christianity, like Islam, teaches that the Day of Judgment at the end of the world is the day of reckoning for how we have lived our lives, the moment of our inevitable meeting with God in the naked truth of our vulnerable being. Although in many ways it *felt* like the end of *a* world that week, with the events that had transpired and the war-talk they incited, of course almost no one believed it really was the end of *the* world per se. Yet there is a reason that apocalyptic happenings evoke our dread of the End: a veil has been rent between the apparently unshakable chugging along of ordinary life and the ever-present abyss of superabundant Reality, in all its shock and awe. This, the implicit subject of Luca's cycle of paintings, is what drew me there that day. I am not an art historian, so what follows are some of my informal reflections on what I saw and felt.



[Resurrection of the Flesh]

When I entered the chapel, first I refreshed my memory about the general layout of the frescoes: Christ the Judge, painted by Fra Angelico (Luca's mentor-master), is in the center, above, at the back of the chapel, faced by the End of the World, *Il Finimondo*, around and above the entrance. You enter *through* the cataclysmic scene, face-to-face with the implacable Eternal. Once inside the chapel, you see the *Predica e fatti dell'Anticristo* (Teachings and Deeds of the Antichrist) on the left-hand wall, with the *Resurrezione della carne* (Resurrection of the Flesh) on the right; and further on, Luca's painting of the Elect is on the left wall

To read the balance of this article, please subscribe to this volume.



SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

www.sacredweb.com