

"THEY ARE SO BEAUTIFUL THAT THEY WOULD BE GOOD AT THE GATES OF PARADISE"
The bronze door of the church of Sant'Anna in Montesano sulla Maricani

by **Giuseppe Aromando** *



Photo 1. Bronze portal of the parish church of Sant'Anna, Montesano sulla Marparmi (SA)

The eclectic Italian architecture, which has characterized the whole second half 800, overcoming the parenthesis of *Liberty* and imperialist style e monumental of the *twenty years*, has arrived until the postwar period (50s of the twentieth century), albeit in the poor consideration by part of the insiders.

In this regard, interestingly, in samples of architectural artefacts, it is the parish church of Montesano on the Marcelain (Sa), also known as "Cathedral" (ft.3) although not, Montesano bishopric.

The cult building is one of the most important buildings surprising among all the architectures of so-called eclectic period, which is fine

beyond the philanthropic and devotional traits, which led to its construction by Philip Gagliardi, a well-known character in the national and international chronicles of the time, thanks to his munificent action. For what interests us, here, the singularity of the defined architectural and decorative choices are particularly fascinating for the realization of the decoration of the sacred temple, in relation to the reference period (1954-1959). The church of Sant'Anna, while recovering the Gothic aestheticism, does not yield to "new" stylistic interpretations and the decorative apparatus is concentrated more on the facade. Plasticity and elegance are the salient features that Sebastiano Paradiso¹ wanted to impress to the decoration by making a series of changes, to the planned decorative system.

¹ Originally from Accettura (MT), son of a skilled bricklayer and skilled stonemason, who transmitted to him the love for shapes and proportions. He attended the school of *Arts and Crafts* and at the age of 18, he painted the fresco of the parish church of San Mauro Forte. Thus began his life as a wandering artist. In fact, there are many religious works that Paradiso has created for the churches of Tursi, Latronico, San Chirico

Even if the architecture and decoration of the town parish are of great interest I do not dwell on them, because it is my primary task to present and to describe the monumental double door, centrally placed on the facade principal. Six panels and twenty biblical characters narrate the life of the great mother of Mary, Sant'Anna and, consequently, narrate the childhood and adolescence of the same young girl of Nazareth.

The compositional scheme ranges from the relief from top to bottom, up to the flattened, embodying so the stylistic and technical dictates to develop an extraordinary skill and experience artistic.

The figures and objects decrease progressively creating a perspective effect, without neglect the refinement of details, worthy of a work of great importance. Each of the great square panels groups a story that is never isolated but closely linked to the next. And thanks to this expedient the represented scenes are to be read starting from the top, from left to right.

The first two panels, in fact, focus on the theme of grace and motherhood while, from the third one begins to highlight the salvific role of God and the prefiguration of Incarnation of the Word of God. Reiterating how human salvation depends exclusively by divine intervention.

The two doors of the door, in the words of Lorenzo Ghiberti, are worked with "(...) art, measure and ingenuity (...) " 2.

The six panels are the work of Ettore Marinelli³ (**ft.2**), who together with his brother Pasquale is was the continuer of the ancient art of bell casting handed down from generation to generation

Raparo, Sant'Arcangelo, Castronuovo di Sant'Andrea, Sarconi and Montesano sulla Marparmi. Delicate in colors, lover of light and perspective, faithful observer of reality, with a style that recalls neoclassical painters, he created many portraits and scenes of simple life (See V. LARDO, in *the historical calendar of Corleto Perticara*, June 2004, Metaponto, Grafiche Salluce, 2004)

² See *The Commentaries*

³ Already in the Middle Ages, the "bell founders" were highly appreciated for their unparalleled technical competence. It seems that Donatello trusted them exclusively for the casting of his own bronzes. But the paradoxical thing, which makes the figure of Ettore Marinelli even more fascinating is that he, the voice of his own creatures could not hear it, he was deaf. A figure therefore of a very pure artist, because he is imperturbable, absolutely concentrated on his elegant and refined creations, technically perfect. With a shy and introverted impact, he became incredibly affable and generous to anyone who showed interest in his work and that of his ancestors. Kind and good-looking, much loved by friends and acquaintances, highly esteemed in the work and artistic fields, Ettore Marinelli, alongside his brother Pasquale, made a decisive contribution to increasing the fame of the Pontifical Bell Foundry, as well as Agnone and of Molise. Heir to a memorable family because he has held the ancient art of foundry since the Middle Ages, and without interruption, Ettore Marinelli was born on January 20, 1924, taking his first steps in the foundry life. Ettore Marinelli was a sensitive and complete artist, master of the most elaborate of sculptural techniques, that of fusion. The technology applied to metals is considered the most complex and advanced in which man has ventured since prehistoric times to

in generation and, known as the "Marinelli brothers". Historic brand of an ancient foundry of Agnone (IS) 4 and, today, highly active.

The wide range of six panels offers the opportunity to get to know Ettore fully Marinelli, who in addition to being a talented artist, was a prodigious caster and chiseller: nothing was impossible to turn into bronze for those who knew the magic of making metal sing up to shape it in the form of a bell. Like few other sculptors he had the privilege to see each of his works made in bronze, ensuring an almost immortal life and visibility to all his creatures. In 45 years of activity, Marinelli has shaped and melted countless works of all kinds and sizes, placed in the most diverse places and for each type of client, as told by the bronze portal of the church of Montesano sulla Mar Porcelain.

aim to produce tools and idols that were as resistant and durable over time. Nothing happens by chance or improvisation, everything is discipline. Everything is the result of an accurate project that provides for a deep knowledge of materials, means and compliance with very long technical times. In addition to being a talented artist, Ettore Marinelli was a prodigious caster and chiseller: nothing was impossible to turn into bronze for those who knew the magic of making metal sing by shaping it in the form of a bell. Like few other sculptors, he had the privilege of seeing all his works made in bronze, ensuring almost immortal life and visibility for all his creatures. In 45 years of activity, Marinelli has shaped and cast countless works of all kinds and sizes, placed in the most diverse places and for every type of client.

4 It is difficult to find the inventor of the bells and the people who used them first. The oriental peoples soon knew the use of the bell, in China it is among the most ancient bronzes. In India, philosophers used to gather to eat and pray to the sound of bells. Even in the ancient West, among the Etruscans, the use of bells was widespread. The bells, however, also had a more prosaic meaning, as in Greece where they were used to signal the opening of the market and the sale of fish. When we passed from bells to bells it was believed that the bronze of Campania was the best and hence the name of Campana, from "vasa campana" that is Campania vases due to their vase or inverted cup shape. It seems that the first bell made its tolling sound in the city of Nola and that its brilliant inventor was San Paolino, Bishop of the City. Over time, the Bell has been increasingly seen as a symbol that brings us together, becoming more and more a religious and social emblem. Some historical figures such as Saladin, Mohammed, Calvin were instead enemies of the bells and banned them by eliminating them from the bell towers and making them melt. This invincible fear was due to the fact that extraordinary powers were attributed to them. This strength had been increased by the fact that the Church had considered them "res sacrae", blessing them and giving us inscriptions that spoke of communion between earth and heaven. The founding artisans were initially both laymen and monks and built wrought iron bells. Only later, by mixing copper and tin, and they obtained bronze bells. In Italy there are few foundries left and among these the oldest is precisely that of the Marinelli Brothers. In the heart of Italy in Molise there is a town where the voice of the Angels is born: it is Agnone delle Campane, where the art of casting sacred bronzes has persisted for a thousand years.

"Often we went to church for it and every time he said something to us. We have it in truth perceived?"⁵ To solicit an answer, on the meaning and meaning of the door, it is Romano Guardini, who with his question, addressed to the interlocutor of all times, intends to ask us grasp a story, which comes from afar and enclosed in it. Indeed, it is firm belief that the portal speaks to us. In fact, the portal is a place of passage from one reality to another. It is a border place, which establishes acceptance or exclusion. An open door is an invitation to go beyond it, while, a closed door is a insurmountable limit.

Given its function, the portal is taken as a sign relevant and element structural from primary importance in the ethnic context sacral, such as to transform it into eloquent manifest declarative of the purpose same building.



Photo 2. Ettore Marinelli. Execution of sketches for the panels of the church of Sant'Anna in Montesano sulla Marparmi. Marinelli Archive, Agnone (IS)

As a polysemic sign with strong symbolic connotations, the portal of sacred buildings has its own relevance. For the theological and liturgical tradition the portal is an icon of Christ, having proclaimed himself the door of the sheepfold (Jn. 10,9) while, however, the portal also assumes a sign-symbolic value, as a concrete expression of the words of Jesus. In the light of these few biblical-liturgical and theological considerations, the portal does not it can be considered only in functionality. In fact, if materials and shapes can change, how? over time they have changed, the emergence of the sign must continue to offer its native meaning to be a significant element and in conformity with the evangelical dictates. Even in the case of the door bronze of the church of Sant'Anna di Montesano, the art is inspired and guided by the Word albeit apocryphal, but always and in any case aimed at revealing and elaborating drawings referable to events human-divine. The iconic language is still legible in its charm today. The use of the porta bronzea is a happy intuition, which anticipates the provisions of the Second Vatican Council (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, VII / 128).

The church of Sant'Anna, with the dizzying heights of the two bell towers, soaring to the sky, is clearly visible from both lanes of the A / 2 Mediterranean motorway (formerly Salerno-

⁵ R. GUARDINI, *The spirit of the liturgy. The holy signs*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1997, p. 147.



**Photo 3. Church of Sant'Anna facade.
Montesano sulla Maricani (SA). 1960. AP**

Reggio Calabria) while, the facade of the
itself, together with the spiers, niches and
to the statues, after the alteration of time e
the neglect of men, finally, yes
it will regain the vitality of its colors thanks to the
artistic recovery project e
architectural co-financed from 8 ‰ to
Catholic Church / Diocese of Teggiano Policastro.
This planning will restore tone and vitality to both
the colors and the profile
architectural and decorative apparatus.

The rebirth of one of the most famous monuments
whimsical and particular of the territory of the Vallo di
Diano can finally be fully enjoyed, as he wanted it,
sixty years ago on
its financier and inspirer.

The conclusion of my intervention takes up the title, and I imagine Michelangelo's
in front of the portal of Montesano sulla Maripendenza, intent on saying: "They are so beautiful that
feel good at the gates of Heaven "6.

* *Director of the Ethno-Anthropological Civic Museum, Montesano sulla Marparmi (Sa)*