

# The cross that went to the Moon

by Claudio Celani

Last month in Rome, we met Father Giovanni Garbolino, a Roman Catholic missionary who has lived for many years in the United States. Father Garbolino came, among other religious representatives, to a conference sponsored by *EIR* on the theme of stopping the U.N.'s depopulation conference in Cairo in September. He gave us original documentation of a very special event, which we thought useful to offer to *EIR* readers on the anniversary of the first Moon landing.

It is the story of a little cross that went to the Moon, came back, and was given to a cardinal who later became pope. "Honest to God, I do not believe in sorcery, nor in witches, talismans, or mascots," says Father Garbolino, "but I do have regard and even reverence for signs and symbols." And what more powerful symbol than "a cross reminding many people of a God who chose to die on a cross with arms outstretched to signify His lasting embrace of mankind, whom He so strongly wanted to be close to the love of the one Father in heaven?"

Originally, the cross was supposed to be left on the Moon, and it was a big one. It was given to Father Garbolino by a Russian student whom he met during his missionary travels in 1959, in exchange for one of the many little crosses "blessed by the pope of Rome," which Father Garbolino carried with him. The time came, Garbolino says, when he decided to give up that precious object. It was when the Apollo 11 mission was ready to start and bring the first man to the Moon. The idea was "first, to enhance the technical prospect of success of this enterprise (in view of the beneficial impact it has on the human mind); second, because of the very connotation of a 'plus' that the cross has in the area of mathematics, as well as scientific thought."

Garbolino sent the package containing the Russian crucifix to Col. Edwin E. Aldrin, accompanied by a letter and followed by a telegram: "Do not forget the meaningful little cross." Aldrin not only carried that cross with him, but also another little cross, which he sent Garbolino on Oct. 1, 1969, a few weeks after his return to the Earth. Accompanying the little cross, which had the words "Apollo 11" and "Edwin Aldrin, Jr." impressed upon it, was a short message: "This crucifix was flown on board the Apollo 11 spacecraft 'Eagle' which landed on the Moon July 20, 1969." In another letter, sent two days earlier, Aldrin had written: "I am returning you the Russian crucifix . . . which was flown to the lunar surface on July 20, 1969. Regretfully, we were only able

to leave on the Moon a limited number of specifically authorized items."

## To Cardinal Wojtyla

Now starts the second and most extraordinary part of the story. The big Russian cross went to a very special person who had converted to Catholicism, the first to do so from the communist world: Joseph Stalin's daughter Svetlana. As for the little cross received from Aldrin, Father Garbolino decided to give it to a person and a nation whom he viewed as having a special mission in Christianity: Karol Wojtyla, then archbishop of Cracow, and Poland. During his missionary work, first in Brazil, then in the United States, and finally in Poland, Garbolino developed a special love for Poland and "the very singular veneration, both private and public, of the Polish people for the Holy Cross," as he explained in a letter on Sept. 15, 1974, after he heard a homily by Wojtyla and decided to donate the little *reliquia* to him.

Four years later, in October 1978, dramatic events led to two conclaves in one year, after the death of Pope Paul VI and of his successor, John Paul I, only 33 days after his election. On Oct. 12, before the opening of the second conclave, in which Karol Wojtyla was to be elected pope, Father Garbolino wrote the following letter to *Avvenire*, the daily of the Italian Bishops Conference: "Why not a Polish Pope? . . . The Polish nation, the Polish people demonstrate today a compactness, a vitality . . . which is extraordinary, considering the difficulties created by the materialist regime. . . . Polish culture has been, and is still now, an excellent 'model' of cross-breeding between Latin and Slavic civilization (language, costumes, traditions, etc.). That such a model of ethnic-spiritual conjugation could extend and multiply itself . . . is this not the maximum imperative that the dying millennium leaves to Humanity, so that she does not die with it, but could finally live in peace for the centuries to come?"

Garbolino's letter was published only on Oct. 18, after the election of John Paul II, when the newspaper editors recognized its "singularity."

It remains as a prophetic crowning of Garbolino's missionary enthusiasm, closing a voyage which connects faith and science, not only symbolically. The little cross that went to the Moon is today kept, at the desire of Karol Wojtyla, in the diocesan museum of Cracow.

Today, 25 years later, Father Garbolino expresses the wish that *EIR* and the LaRouche movement be privileged to publish his story. We feel authorized also to report that Father Garbolino holds the ideas he heard in a speech by Helga Zepp-LaRouche at the Rome *EIR* conference (see *EIR*, July 15, 1994, p. 53), as meriting the broadest support among the population and in the Italian Parliament. We hope that his wishes will be as prophetic as they have been in the past.