



*From the desk of Pierre Beaudry*



# **PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA: THE RESURRECTION**

by Irene and Pierre Beaudry, for Lyndon LaRouche's birthday 2001



The feature of “inbetweenness” that Lyndon LaRouche refers to with respect to a Classical artistic composition and the “inbetweenness” that the physical experimentation of a scientific discovery of principle makes you apprehend, as if through a glass darkly, are both of the same cognitive nature. Both of them intend to produce an axiomatic change by means of which the purpose of the visible form is only to elevate the human soul to the reality of the non-visible domain of principles, that is, to act on the soul by the organ of vision in order to generate ideas by means of the senses. Among all of the Classical forms of plastic art generally, the Resurrection by Piero della Francesca is one of the best-designed exemplar for such an artistic/scientific function.

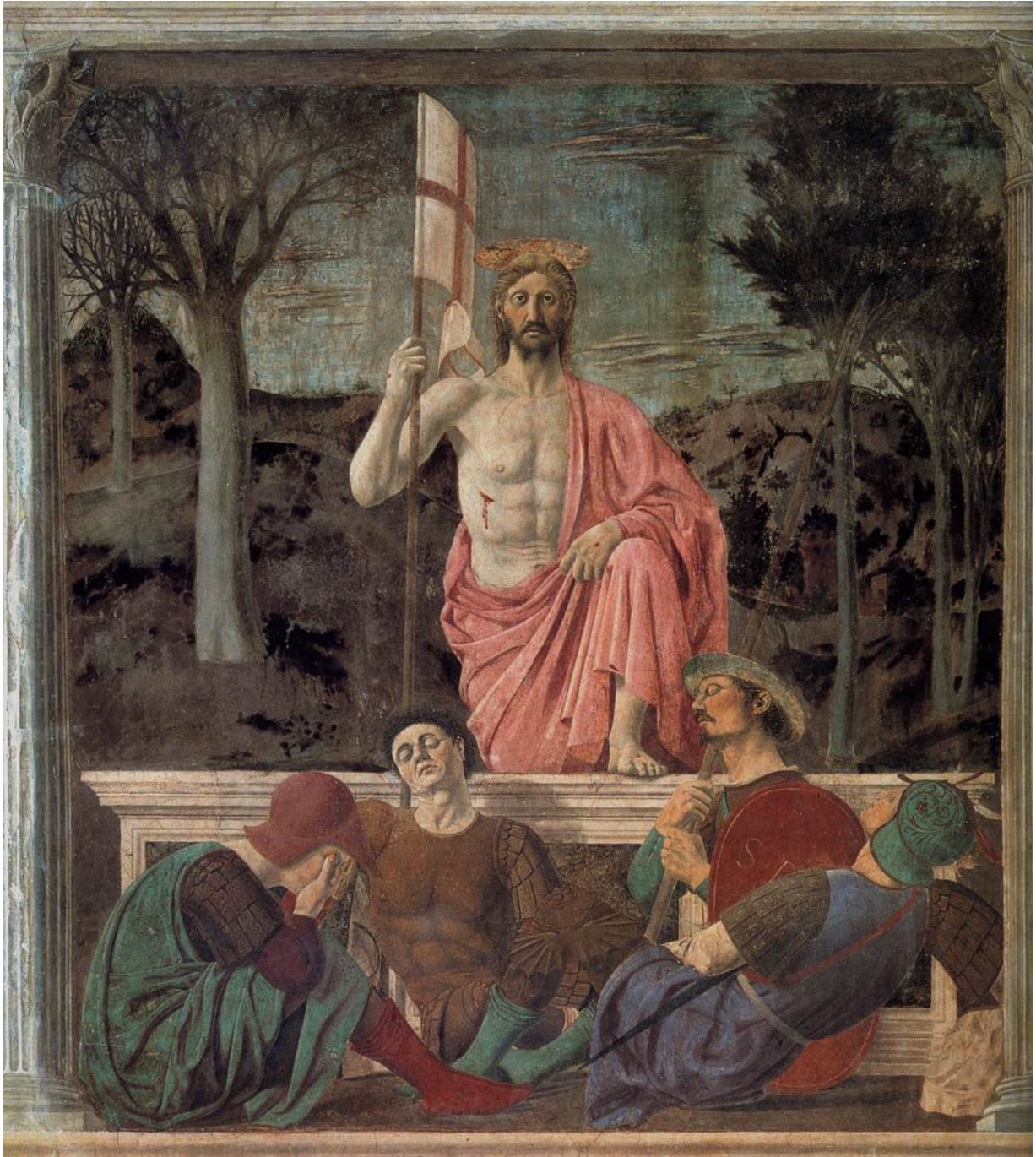


Figure 1. Piero della Francesca, *The Resurrection*. 1463-65.

This fresco was composed sometimes between 1460 and 1463 in the small town of Piero's birth, Borgo San Sepolcro, today called Sansepolcro, near Arezzo, and was painted on the wall of the city hall, the Pinacoteca Comunale. Its size is 225 x 200 cm. It is a commanding and almost overwhelming presence when you first walk into the main

room, where the fresco oversees what must have been the meeting room of the city councilmen, one of whom was Piero himself.

Christ's eyes seize upon you and draw you into the room. There, you imagine, sitting at the long rectangular table, are the city councilmen deliberating on the universal role of this small village and its inhabitants. Christ's eyes are unceasingly upon you. Can you look up and meet them with a clear conscience? Have you acted as made in His image? Or, do you seek to avoid their piercing look, settling, at the most, to the level of the Roman soldiers, not daring to venture higher into the rarified atmosphere of those seemingly infinite eyes? In that room, there is no escaping those all-seeing and all-knowing eyes that follow your every move, the infinite descending upon the finite.

But it is not only the eyes; Christ's majestically voluntarist's foot conclusively shuts the Holy Sepulcher. His foot confidently straddles the top of the entire sepulcher, such that his toes all but hang over its outside edge, while his arm casually drapes over his knee. He is as solid as rock, as unambiguous in demeanor and action as the soldiers below are ambiguous: are they waking or are they sleeping? Are they rising or falling? Are their eyes opening or shutting? The contrast between the still, solid, steady, passionately determined, voluntarist Christ seem like a counterpoint to the restless temporal movements of the soldiers below. Their agitation is in marked contrast to the firm, yet gentle calmness of Christ.

Yet, the image of Christ, the true soldier, who has planted the standard so firmly that even the sleeping or (fainted) Roman soldier is able to lean on it without it budging, is, nevertheless, invitingly human. His are the eyes of a compassionate, but unflinching warrior whose mission of passion is for all that is good and true. His stance is that of a seasoned fighter accustomed to instant and unceasing battles. He is the portrait of the Sublime.

In gazing at him, in locking eyes with him, one is able to find within one's soul those necessary powers to, indeed, be made in his image: "And human hands first mimicked and then mocked". This Christ causes one to discover that to be truly made in His image, means not to be an underling asleep at the feet of power, but rather, to be aroused by reason to act decisively in and on the world.

Piero's fresco magnificently expresses the powers of the Promethean Man as described by Percy Bysshe Shelley in his lyrical drama, "Prometheus Unbound":

"And Science struck the thrones of earth and heaven,  
Which shook, but fell not; and the harmonious mind  
Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song;  
And music lifted up the listening spirit  
Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,  
Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound;  
And human hands first mimicked and then mocked,  
With moulded limbs more lovely than its own,

The human form, till marble grew divine;  
And mothers, gazing, drank the love men see  
Reflected in their race, behold, and perish."

II, iv, 74-84.

Renaissance man, Piero della Francesca, was a geometer, mathematician, architect, painter, and statesman. Reportedly, he wrote many mathematical treatises. Of these three are known to survive: Abacus treatise {*Trattato d'abaco*}, Short book on the five regular solids {*Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus*}, and on perspective for painting {*De Prospectiva Pingendi*}. Piero's student, Luca Pacioli, recorded Piero's works on algebra and the Platonic solids in his Summa (1494), and {*De Divina Proportione*} (1509). Pacioli's student, Leonardo da Vinci, illustrated Pacioli's works, presumably relying on Piero's drawings of the five Platonic Solids. Piero was the re-discoverer of the Platonic Solids.

### THE AMBIGUITY OF PERSPECTIVE.

How does a classical painting lead you to discover profound ideas regarding God, man, and nature? One of the Italian Renaissance means of expressing such ideas has been, among other artifacts, through the ambiguous use of perspective, or through the introduction of anomalies suggesting the existence of a higher dimension, which contradicts the usual so-called three-dimensional setting of the painting. The error, however, which is generally found in academic iconography, with respect to such paintings, is to interpret those anomalies as symbolic rather than metaphorical devices. The difference is crucial because the result will either be a mystifying interpretation of the work, or a cognitive experiment, and appreciation of the principle of discovery. We shall demonstrate this point with the astonishing case of the Resurrection of Piero Della Francesca (1420-1492).

What I will show briefly is how Piero used the powerful device of perspective to express the central idea of the Renaissance: The idea that man is created in the image of God. This masterpiece of perspective, and of political irony, is one of the most exquisite metaphors of the Platonic-Christian Idea of the new man as represented by the role of the artist himself as a political leader, and city counselor of his home town of Borgo Sansepolcro. Of course, the subject of the Resurrection is not only a most appropriate subject reflecting the namesake of the city of Borgo Sansepolcro itself, but also represents the most appropriate choice of the means to express the very idea of a rebirth, or the idea of the Renaissance, in Italy at that time.

## THE METAPHOR OF THE MIND'S EYE.

The most appropriate way to appreciate the artistic and scientific function of this painting is to actually relive, step by step, the discovery that Piero's friends made when they first entered the room of their City Hall, where the life-size painting was executed, and where it can still be seen, in vivo, to this day. There is no doubt that the very first impression which strikes the spectator, upon entering the premises, is the majestic presence of Christ standing straight up, way over your head, his left foot sitting flat on the edge of the large sarcophagus, and his right hand holding the staff of victory which he planted firmly on the ground. This first impression is awesome, but also very disturbing.

Although one cannot but be riveted on the dark eyes of this Christ staring straight into your eyes, one immediately discovers that, as soon as you move, his eyes follow you wherever you go around the room. This is an experiment which Piero's intellectual master, Nicholas of Cusa, referred to as the metaphor of a "vision of God", with respect to another portrait of Christ painted by Roger Van Der Weyden. This experiment uniquely shows how a subtle artist is able to paint a human face whose eyes appear to be directed everywhere, all around himself, as if from the center of a spheroid. There is no doubt that, in such a case, one is overpowered by the all-embracing look of Christ, and is fascinated by the fact that the piercing eyes of Christ create a paradox: that is, they are moving everywhere you go inside of the room, and yet they are motionless at the same time, they see you, but they also see everyone else at the same time. As Cusa puts it, all "marvel at the motion of its immovable gaze." Thus the piercing look of Christ moves everywhere and is everywhere still, like the unchanging law of change.

"Thine eye, lord, reaches to all things without turning. When our eye turns itself toward an object, it is because our sight sees but through a finite angle. But, the angle of Thine eye, O God, is not limited, but infinite, being the angle of a circle, nay, of an infinite sphere also, since Thy sight is an eye of sphericity and of infinite perfection. Wherefore, it sees at one and the same time all things around and above and below." (Cusa, The Vision of God.)

This experiment of the "infinite spherical vision", that we can conceive with Cusa, and experiment with Piero as a return to the Greek Sphaerics of Pythagoras, cannot be reduced to any physical eyesight phenomenon. Look at the perspective of this infinite sphere as a metaphor of your inner eye; that is, the idea of an absolute divine sight, which is made intelligible as a contracted infinite, as a transfinite, or more simply, as your mind's eye; that is, the idea of seeing everything at once, and for all time, each thing and all things simultaneously, as if in the simultaneity of eternity. This is the crucial discovery showing how Piero uses a non-linear perspective from above, for the purpose of creating an idea of the Renaissance man, the idea of man attempting to see himself in the Image of God, in a Classical painting setting.

## THE ANOMALY

A second major discovery of Piero's Resurrection lies in the ambiguity of his self-portrait, or in Piero's ambiguous use of a linear perspective from below. The reader should note that the sleeping soldier in front of Christ's victory staff is a portrait of Piero Della Francesca himself. This self-portrait represents also a major anomaly, a major paradox that any attentive observer cannot but fail to become disturbed by it. I must emphasize, however, that it is not necessary to know that this is a self-portrait of Piero in order to make the next astonishing discovery. Nonetheless, everyone in Piero's time did recognize him, and therefore were, by this stratagem, oriented most directly toward a very ambiguous state of in-betweenness that the artist wanted them to experiment consciously. Indeed, the presence of Piero's portrait is a very big distraction. People who knew Piero kept going back and forth between the head of the open eyed Christ, and the head of the closed eyed Piero. Why would Piero provoke this? What is the significance of that choice? What is the subject of the painting: Christ or Piero? Before showing you why Piero created this stratagem, and how he provided the solution to the paradox, let me first situate the significance of a second level of perspective, the linear perspective from below.

Notice the position of the left foot of Christ. What peculiarity do you find? The foot is not only flat on the edge of the sarcophagus, but it is also exactly aligned horizontally with the line of sight of the spectator in the room of the Pinacoteca. That is a second form of perspective: the perspective of your physical sight, as opposed to the perspective of your mind's eye which we discovered above at the level of the eyes of Christ. Now then, move your eyes slowly along the horizontal line of the sarcophagus, toward the left side, until you reach the point exactly behind the head of the sleeping Piero. What do you see along that horizon? Do you recognize anything that is at odds with the fact that Piero appears to be fast asleep? Do you see anything shocking here, which disturbs the contented quietude of the sleeping Piero? Observe closely. Unless you are mentally blind, you must be able to see that he is not sleeping.

Don't look for a small opening of his eyes. There are none. Think this through: Piero has his eyes perfectly closed, and yet he is not sleeping. How can we know that for sure? That is the crucial question: how can anyone know, with absolute certainty, that Piero is perfectly awake, and that he is merely pretending to be sleeping? This is a very important point because, this is the way Piero makes you discover the level of the ideal by means of the sensual, the cognitive by means of the visual.

Indeed, here, Piero makes a brilliant use of perspective to make you discover that he cannot be sleeping, even though his eyes are perfectly closed! Look at his leaning position. What is wrong with it? The problem is that the sleeping Piero is not leaning at all against the sarcophagus, but in fact, he is leaning against the staff of Christ! He is not leaning against the failures of the past, but against the hopes of the future. That is the crisis, the opportunity: the ambiguity of the anomaly. No matter how profoundly he may appear to be sleeping, the fact that he is leaning against that staff makes it a physical

impossibility for him not to be awake. The only conclusion to draw from this is that Piero created a deliberate paradox for the spectator to resolve. The question is why? What is the purpose of such a provocation? Why did Piero go to all this trouble to create such an anomaly? What is the cognitive function of such a paradox?

## **RESOLVING THE PARADOX**

Piero is having a good time at the expense of his friends and collaborators of the Renaissance, but also at the expense of the spectators of a future Renaissance; because he has created an ambiguity between the use of two different perspectives, and he is forcing you to solve that paradox, and discover the curvature of a still higher perspective. The problem is as follows. There cannot be two laws of the universe, two different and conflicting ways of measuring, 1] the linear perspective from below, which measures the limited sensuous world of flatland “sleepy heads”, and 2] a separate non-linear perspective from above, which measures the absolute according to the spherical law of the divine. If the new man of the Renaissance is to be created in the Image of God, then a single perspective must be reestablished in the painting, and this must be done according to a higher ideal. But, how can this be done?

Note that when you are looking at the head of Christ, it is situated in a separate frontal perspective. Its position is not drawn from the linear perspective from below, otherwise the frontal position of the spectator would require to see the Christ Head in a receding view, and would see his under-chin, from his lower position of observation. Compare the two chins, that of Christ, and that of Piero. They are different, incompatible. Then compare the two necks. They are the same. What does that suggest? Again, how can we acquire knowledge of the invisible by means of the visible?

Following the principle of education by the imitation of Christ, according to the school of the Brotherhood of the Common Life, with which Cusa and Piero were familiar, if man becomes Christ-like, and Christ becomes-man like, the evangelical role and function that they both play makes both of them interchangeable. The very function of the Renaissance makes this elevation of man in the Image of God a practical necessity. That is why, in the elevated state of the ideal new man, Piero does not hesitate to convert his own sleepiness into the passionate awaken position of Christ of the Resurrection. It is therefore not only legitimate to conceive of a mental interchange between the face of Piero and the face of Christ, but it is a required necessity. Thus, only in the ideal state of the new man is the unity of the Piero Resurrection reestablished, that is the higher curvature, the perspective of simultaneity of eternity.

In other words, one can ask: Is it such a surprise that Piero Della Francesca, the artist, the geometer, the Christian, and the city councilman, created such a beautiful renaissance by means of such pictorial metaphors as political tools to elevate and change the minds of citizens who visited his city? Similarly today, with the LaRouche LYM encircling the globe, is it so surprising that, from a perspective of simultaneity of eternity,

Piero's Resurrection should become a crucial pedagogical instrument for the education of today's citizens who would wish to embrace the purpose of a new renaissance?

Were citizens to respond to the same calling, as they did at the time of Piero, 600 years ago, then, the peoples of today would find through the instrument of such a unique classical painting the way to become infinitely closer in similarity with God, but without ever reaching Him who releases this power in them. Then, they would no longer see with fleshy eyes, but with the eyes of their minds, as if through a glass darkly; and they would understand the Resurrection, like Cusa did, as the inbetweenness of "the invisible truth of Thy face, which therein is signified, under a shadow and limitation."

**FIN**