

## ZENIT - The World Seen From Rome

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**Gospel Not Just For Priests, Says Biblicist**

**Interview With Author of "A Matter for Priests"**

**MONTEFANO, Italy, SEPT. 9, 2005 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).**- For many, the Gospel is something priests read, but the Gospel was written for everybody, explains Father Alberto Maggi.

In his book, “A Matter for Priests,” (available in Italian and Spanish from Desclée De Brouwer) the priest of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary offers a proposal of faith to atheists, or “those who think they don’t believe.”

Father Maggi, director of the Center of Biblical Studies “G. Vannucci” in Montefano, Italy, explained to ZENIT how he has addressed the main topics of the Christian faith: prayer, eternal life, vocations and the will of God.

**Q: Why is the Christian proposal regarded as a “matter for priests?”**

**Maggi:** When Jesus taught, the crowds would either be enthusiastic or angry, but they never fell asleep. Yet, those very same words, proposed by priests in churches today, often have a narcotic effect. It is imperative to ask oneself why!

The evangelical message is not a doctrine, but a life experience and, as such, must be transmitted: life comes first, then its formulation; the practice of the Gospel first, then the catechesis.

Unfortunately, the Gospel is often reduced to a simple catechetical formula without the example of a life confirming its validity, with the risk that Jesus' own words lose their vitality.

In this way, what should have been the adrenalin that humanity once had was degraded to the opium of the people, and happiness, to which humanity aspires, remains suspended in the heavenly beyond.

**Q: Was there talk of “a matter for priests” in antiquity?**

**Maggi:** The Gospel began to lose its efficacy when Christianity passed from being persecuted to an imposed religion, and religion became a program.

Whole populations became Christian because their monarchs decided to convert to Christianity for political reasons.

What was a proposal of fullness of life became an obligation without an alternative: until Vatican Council II, the teaching was that there is no salvation outside the Church; as a consequence, enormous lines of Sunday Catholics grew without any enthusiasm.

To dominate and control these masses, churches changed from being dynamic communities animated by the Spirit to little more than rigid institutions governed by laws.

Fortunately, in the course of the centuries communities or individual believers have existed that discovered and lived the beauty and the fullness of the evangelical message and transmitted it to us, such as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Teresa of Avila, the Gospel remaining as the Good News for all.

**Q: You make a proposal of faith to those who think that they don't believe. What do you suggest to them?**

**Maggi:** That acceptance of Jesus' message does not take anything away from man, does not diminish him, but enables him to reach in this earthly life a definitive dimension of life and, because of this, divine.

The great majority of nonbelievers reject the God of religion, the fruit of the projection of frustrations, of the media and of men's ambitions.

When the nonbeliever discovers the Father of Jesus, a God who does not ask for offers but offers himself to man to give him the fullness of his life; a Father who does not look at men's merits but at their needs; a God who is not only good, but exclusively good, and wants to communicate all his love to men ... would hardly be rejected.

To all, believers and nonbelievers, the Gospel proposes to orient one's life another way, in the values of life itself, to put first the good of the other.

When this change is experienced, all Jesus' words are authentic and true, and I suggest that when one is concerned about others, one allows the Father to look after his children.

**Q: The Gospel is seen by some as formulas and rules, but not as the Word of Life. How can this be remedied?**

**Maggi:** Gospel means good news, and this good news was for the first time in the history of religions a God presented who does not favor the good and

punish the wicked, but communicates his infinite love to all, indistinctly.

With Jesus, the God with us, man must no longer search for God but receive him. When this occurs, man has the experience of a Father who does not love men because they are good, but because he is good, of a God who does not exclude anyone and does not let his love be conditioned by the responses and behavior of men; a God who does not want obedient subjects to his immutable laws, but children resembling his growing and dynamic love.

If this is kept in mind, the Gospel becomes again the bread for which humanity is hungry, and men pass from believing in God to experiencing him as a solicitous Father attentive to the most trivial details of existence, and life is completely transformed.

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