

Barluzzi and *In the Steps of the Master*

I first heard (or rather, read) of Antonio Barluzzi many years before I had the privilege to see any of his pilgrimage churches. I read a tribute to him in the classic travel book about the Holy Land called *In the Steps of the Master* by the early to mid-twentieth century doyen of travel writers H.V. Morton.

In the Introduction to his book, Morton explains the ‘genius’ of Barluzzi’s churches:

They [the churches] are remarkable for their originality and the variety of their design, which owe less to any architectural style or tradition than to the piety of their creator. All Barluzzi’s shrines attempt to express an emotional response to the Gospel story.

For example, one could compare the majestic gloom of his basilica in the Garden of Gethsemane with the joyful little Christmas carol of a church in the Shepherd’s Fields, at Bethlehem. The same contrast may be seen in his Church of the Visitation at Ain Karem and his basilica on Mount Tabor; and again, between those two churches and the Church of the Beatitudes in Galilee.

I believe that Barluzzi will be recognized as a genius in years to come, though, strangely enough, little has been written about his work or his life. His story is a remarkable one . . . Already a practised architect when the first world war ended, he felt a call to the priesthood, but his confessor in Rome told him to go to Palestine and rebuild the shrines. While he was doing so, he lived as a Franciscan with the Franciscans, and subjected himself to the discipline of the order. He was not interested in fame or fortune, and immediately money came to him, he gave it away.

I wanted to know more about Antonio Barluzzi and to see his churches. I was fortunate to see some of them on pilgrimage in February 2018. I am excited to see more in February 2020. In particular, I want to visit the basilica on Mount Tabor and look in some of his smaller shrines situated along the Via Dolorosa. You will find more information about the Bishop’s Institute February 2020 pilgrimage to the Holy Land further below in this Newsletter.

