



WITH DOORS WIDE OPEN

Annals of a Meeting that helped us voyage to the periphery and understand why the Pope invites us to have “an incomplete thought.”

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September 2014
Vol. 16 - No. 8

CL LIFE

ILLOGICAL JOY

The gathering of those responsible for the Movement, from across 71 different countries, focused on the challenges of a world in "rapid transformation" and on the method chosen by God who continuously bets everything on our freedom.

16



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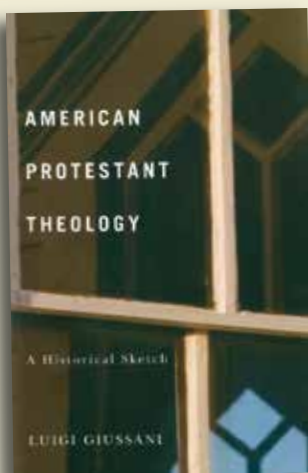
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LUIGI GIUSSANI



276 pages - format 6 x 9 inches
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In *American Protestant Theology*, Luigi Giussani traces the history of the most meaningful theological expressions and the cultural significance of American Protestantism, from its origins in seventeenth-century Puritanism to the 1950s.

Giussani clarifies and assesses elements of Protestantism such as the democratic approach to Church-State relations, "The Great Awakening," Calvinism and Trinitarianism, and liberalism. His rich references and analytical descriptions reconstruct an overview of the development of a religion that has great importance in

the context of spiritual life and American culture. He also displays full respect for the religious depth from which Protestantism was born and where it can reach, and expresses great admiration for its most prominent thinkers and spiritual leaders, including Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich.

Further testament to Giussani's clear-minded and comprehensive knowledge of Christianity, *American Protestant Theology* makes the work of a master theologian available in English for the first time.

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

RECAPTURING WHAT IS HUMAN

Among the many things that blew us away at this last Rimini Meeting, one image has particularly stayed with us. It was offered to us by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, director of the Catholic magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, published by the Society of Jesus in Italy, in a beautiful meeting dedicated to the pontificate of Pope Francis. Fr. Spadaro told us that one can see the Church “as a lighthouse,” a beacon that illumines the way for ships in a storm. “I am here, the harbor is here, safety is here.” And, this is so true. The Church is a rock. It is always indefectible. But there is another way to give light to those who are in darkness: the torch. A torch does not stand still, but “walks among men, illumines humanity where it finds itself. If humanity moves toward the abyss, the torch moves toward the abyss, it accompanies men in their development.” It is in this way that the torch “may be able to draw man away from the abyss and allow him to see it.”

These words set off tremors in the room and many questions followed. If we separate words from experience one could think that “moving towards the abyss” is a sign of a faith in retreat, a compliant faith that follows the flow of the mainstream culture instead of charging against the current. One may think of a weak Christianity, one that settles for “witnessing” and is, at best, a good example, but that nonetheless is incapable of changing the course of history.

Nothing could be more wrong, indeed, more contrary to experience—to what is happening. In this day and age, in order to “accompany” humanity to the “existential periphery,” that wasteland of lost evidences and confused values that is so dear to the Pope, it takes much more than a correct intellectual position: It takes a living certainty. It takes something that happens constantly, something that we can discover and deepen constantly—something that constantly regenerates us.

We need to experience the relationship with Christ. “A Christian is not afraid of being decentralized” because “his center is Jesus,” the Pope reminded us in his message to the Rimini Meeting. This is the only thing that can give us the strength to commit ourselves to the life of another, to accompany another in a more authentic way than just standing at the side of the road and repeating truths. This is what allows us to take joy in discovering what it means to love another’s freedom. It is more than mere respect, it is an authentic love for freedom, because only in freedom can the needs and evidences that constitute our heart reemerge.

The International Assembly of CL Responsibles in La Thuile (Italy) directly followed the Rimini Meeting. Among the enormously rich things that were said and lived, we listened to the witness of a doctor: a gynecologist who is at the forefront of many controversial topics. She spoke about walking with a married couple that had decided to try artificial insemination and had grown increasingly uneasy with this. At a certain point the husband blurted out, “Doctor, what is man? Because I have the impression that in the most sacred act in the relationship with my wife that something foreign has been introduced.” Here we see that accompanying someone in a discovery that arises *from their own firsthand experience* is much more useful than many—even important—ethical arguments. As Fr. Giussani said, “A definition must formulate an achievement that has already come, otherwise it will result in the imposition of a scheme.”

The real battle underway is an attempt to recapture what is human, what is true, what is valuable—even the meaning of certain essential words—from within one’s own experience. This is what is at stake in the challenge that awaits us. We can, for example, begin with the family, on which the Church is about to dedicate two synods precisely in order to shed light amidst an enormous confusion.

It will be a long, adventurous work filled with uncertainty because, as the Pope says, it will force us to “look for new forms and methods” to communicate “the perennial novelty of Christianity.” This is a work that has just begun. It is a work that will be useful for us and for all of our human family. T

“I WANTED TO BE USEFUL AND I FOUND MY FAMILY”

That day, when Joseline found out that I was Haitian and invited me to the Spiritual Exercises as a translator, I only said yes because I wanted to be useful, to help a friend, and I wanted to take advantage of this retreat in order to commune with God, whose presence in my life I greatly doubted at that moment. I decided to not try to predict what it would be and to not have any great expectations, but to simply let go and to fully live this experience in the way it presented itself. By the time Friday was over, I began to realize that I wasn't there only to translate, but also to recognize that God has plan for me, and the best thing that I could do is to allow myself to be led by Him. As Julián Carron explained in the Saturday lesson, “the center of life is not success, but the recognition of a Presence.” What is the use of receiving honor for something we have accomplished, if within us we find emptiness? Another thing that greatly struck me was when Julián explained that through our difficulties, the obstacles become part of the journey and that they are there to help us mature. Instead of saying what we usually say in a difficult situation, “God, why have you abandoned me?” we need to learn to thank Him, because He gives us the opportunity to learn and through this allows our faith to grow. This retreat taught me that faith, although a gift, needs to be educated and cultivated, because if I don't do what is necessary, if I don't seek the word of God, and I do not try to live each day with Him, I will feel this emptiness within myself, that only His presence can fill. And, before long I will complicate my life, like



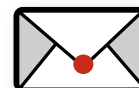
an obstinate blind man who does not want to notice that someone is offering him a hand to help him walk. Seeing the familiarity, the mutual understanding among the people from the two different communities present at the retreat was also very moving. They were like a single family united by faith and by the desire to search for the presence of God in their daily life. What had started out as a small service became the first step toward finding “my family.” My intention was to do a good deed, but God's plan was to bring me to Himself, and I truly believe that I have found what I was looking for.

Fredcarne, Dominican Republic

WE ARE MORE THAN NATURAL SIBLINGS

It has been three years since I met the Movement, and every year something new surprises me. This time it has been the discovery of the “small Fraternity group.” One day Barbara said to me, “Are you coming

to Vivian's on Saturday? She wants to start a Fraternity group and has asked if you would like to participate. Nyemeka and Steve will be there, too.” “Of course I will come,” I answer, even though I don't quite understand what type of group she is talking about. We arrive at Vivian's promptly at 3:00 and take our seats around the table. I immediately realize that this meeting is a very serious thing. Barbara pulls out the Fraternity booklet and starts to read. Vivian explains what moved her to ask us to form this small group. On various occasions, she reminds us, we have all expressed the desire to be more involved in the Movement. We talk about the prior, the rules, and when to meet. I was not expecting something this important, and for a moment I wonder if perhaps I should have taken more time in choosing the people with whom to form this group. But Jesus has drawn me here, I reason, so nothing in the world can make me pull back, not even suddenly remembering my husband, to whom I would have to explain yet another commitment. Vivian is unanimously named the prior. We decide which prayer to say together—the *Angelus*, three times a day—and when to be silent. We live far apart, but we will do it anyway, each one in his or her own home, from 5:30 am to 6 am, before leaving for work. While returning home, I was smiling: “Jesus, you really want to take everything!” Well, the union created among us is truly unbelievable. We are so different, we have such different lives and come from such different backgrounds. Plus, I'm a grandmother, Vivian is a mother, and Nyemeka and Steve could be my children. Yet, none of this is impor-



tant. Now we are more like siblings than if we were natural siblings. We help each other to recognize Christ in the chaotic life of Lagos, and the examples offered by one of us becomes a support for the others; the struggles, once shared, become an occasion for growth; joy becomes more joy. I'm amazed when I wake up at 5:30 a.m. If I did not feel that Christ is with us, why would I do it? I said "Yes" that Saturday, and Jesus has given me a companionship that I could never have imagined.

Paola, Lagos (Nigeria)

A FORK IN THE ROAD DURING THE DIALOGUE WITH A FRIEND

Dear Father Carrón, I spent a week in Belgium for a summer school associated with the university, and had the opportunity to meet young people from all over Europe. The first thing that surprised me was the unexplainable curiosity I had towards them. I'm usually very shy, and always wait for others to come to me; but with them, I was wide open to see what they had to say to my life. This was already a significant change from my usual way of being, and was perhaps the consequence of the steady exhortations of both you and Pope Francis to open ourselves to the world. Another remarkable event was the dialogue I had with a young Spaniard. A couple of days after we met, he came to tell me that he is homosexual. During a conversation a few evenings later, he told me that he would like to have a child with his partner. That was a truly decisive moment for me, a fork in the road: either I don't say anything and let the conversation go on, or take this seriously and offer a response. Ignoring this challenge would have



been too much. How can I see what reality has to offer me if I withdraw from it in front of the first challenge? So I responded: "Listen, I don't think that's right." From there, a beautiful but very difficult dialogue began—difficult, because it is one thing to discuss a topic like this among us, among friends who have only an abstract interest; but it is an entirely

different matter to discuss this with someone who truly feels the urgency of this question. I had to step out of myself and say with clarity who I am, what constitutes me, and what novelty I have encountered. It was unbelievable because he started to challenge me with a series of "What ifs," and I had to say what I would do in various situations (e.g., What if you were pregnant now? What if your child was born with problems?). The more our dialogue continued, the more I realized with unprecedented clarity that the criterion upon which all of my decisions are based is the same: the awareness that I was promised happiness, and that this is true even when reality offers me things I would not have chosen, and prevents me from having what I would have liked. Then, one is curious and free to be in front of everything. None of this would have happened if at the beginning I had chosen to remain silent. It is utterly true, as a friend was saying not too long ago: "The true mission is to be yourself, always."

Veronica, Italy

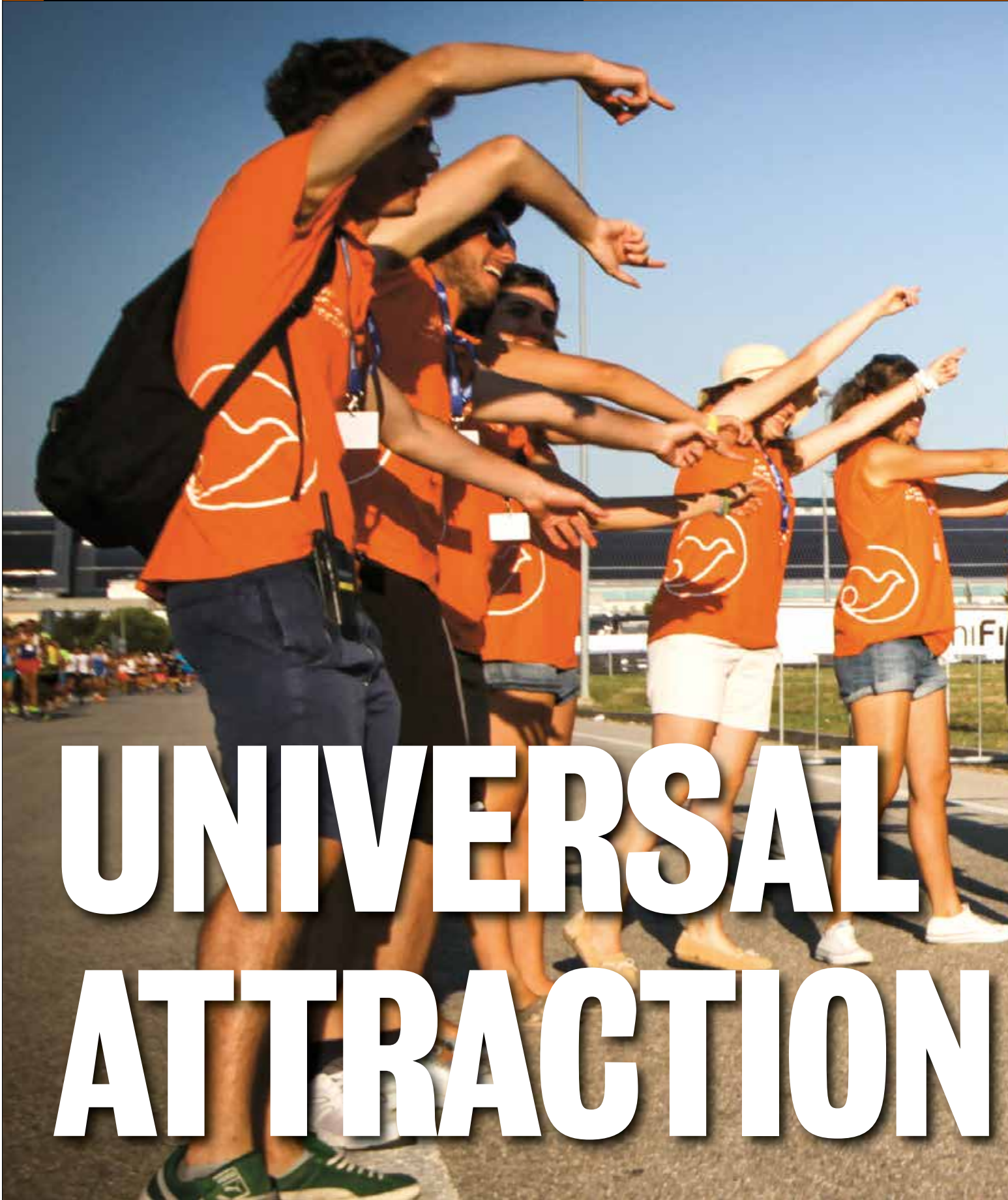
A DAY SELLING TRACES

Dear friends, we spent yesterday selling *Traces* in two parishes in Kampala, covering all the masses from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. The entire community of adults and youth of the Luigi Giussani School offered themselves to this campaign. It was truly a beautiful event. From the phone calls we exchanged during the day, I perceived a sense of joy and gratitude, while discovering even more the unmistakable features of He who fills our life with fascination and sharing Him with those whom we encountered. In just one day we sold 143 copies of *Traces*. It is with immense gratitude for this newfound experience that I wish you well in your work.

Seve, Kampala (Uganda)



CLOSE UP
RIMINI MEETING 2014



UNIVERSAL ATTRACTION

To the Ends of the Earth and of Existence. Destiny Has Not Left Man Alone



Glimpses of a week of encounters (official and unofficial) that opened us onto a broader plane of reality. Current events, history, education, geniuses of literature, and the final frontier of space. We had the opportunity to participate in the "redeemed gaze" that we saw in the Custodian of the Holy Land (and in many others) which is the only way to stay before life and death, and be able to feel how present hope really is.

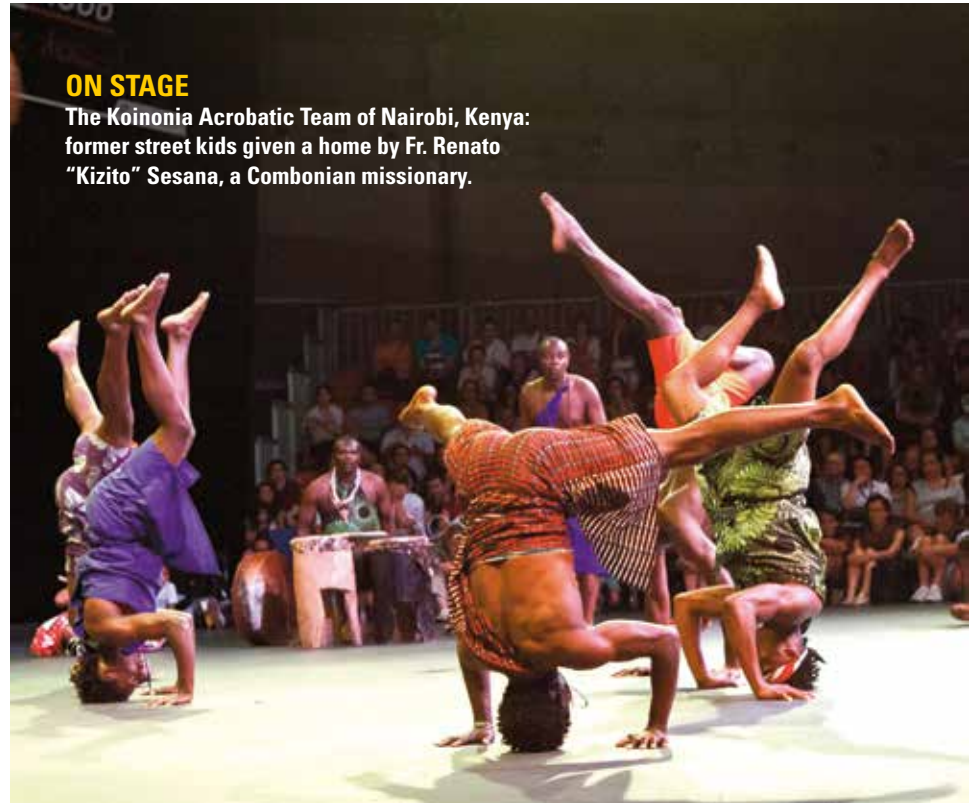
BY ROBERTO FONTOLAN



In the parking lot for police cars, two men happened to meet during their wanderings from one exhibition hall to the next, and greeted each other. They were elderly. One was wearing clerical clothes, a finely decorated bishop's cross tucked under his jacket front, the other in a black robe with a bronze-colored stole, wearing wooden sandals and white socks, with his wife behind him, a petite woman who was always present and always smiling. They did not speak the same language, and struggled in limited English to make themselves understood. They did not know each other, but were at the Meeting for the same reason, and so knew something about each other, something that elicited a gaze of fondness, almost of mutual understanding. One could decipher the intuition: If you are here too, then it means that we are already friends. "Pray for me," blurted-out the bishop, "for in Iraq we are in great need of your prayers."

I know those prayers. I heard them first in 1987 and then again 25 years later in 2012, in a dark chapel illumined by burning sacred wood, where Reverend Shodo Habukawa intoned a series of ritual formulas that brought bystanders to the threshold of the Mystery and perhaps even a bit beyond. From the sounds of a language so incomprehensible that it could be appreciated as a melody of the soul emerged the names of many I knew, those of Fr. Giussani, friends, even their sons and daughters. From the Buddhist monasteries of Mount Koya thei names rose toward heaven, like incense entrusted to the eternal. From this day on, there would also be the name of the bishop who met a friend in front of the police jeeps under Rimini's warm sun, and through him the many names of suffering Iraqis.

"Pray for me,' blurted-out the bishop, 'for in Iraq we are in great need of your prayers.'"



We suffered greatly at the Meeting for the ruined, disfigured, and crushed people of our times. We prayed for and loved their broken stories, listening to the testimonies that were meant to represent all of them, without distinctions. We were struck by the expression Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Custodian of the Holy Land, used in his opening talk: a "redeemed gaze." Without it one cannot accurately "read" the world that is currently in flames. Without it one cannot "see" the death of an innocent accurately or recognize the good that is happening simultaneously, such as the inhabitants of Aleppo who developed a way to provide water for Christians and Muslims, or the 300 volunteers of Homs who helped the Jesuits—or rather, the last Jesuit, Fr. Hilal—to assist 8,000 families. A redeemed gaze is not for the weak of heart. Before it lie pain and blood. It looks the cut-throats of the Caliphate straight in

the eyes, and can bear the geopolitical tangles and intrigues. It is the only gaze that can face the abyss, the only way to stand before life and to stand before death. It is the one only gaze capable of entering into dialogue with the reality of the other.

THE LITTLE ONES OF THE WORLD. A redeemed gaze searches across the Mediterranean furrowed by ships of fugitives, and finds, above all, an opportunity, and only secondarily a motive for politics or protests. We heard this from the feisty Sicilian, Carla Trommino, who has created an association that welcomes refugee minors without families, with the goal of finding a loving guardianship for each young person. We also learned from Admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi that Operation *Mare Nostrum*, with all its challenges, could not be possible without an openness to women and men and their needs. Otherwise, why would one concern themselves with the pitiful flood of migrants? "If it weren't for us, they would think there is no hope left in the world." >>



POPE FRANCIS. "A CHRISTIAN IS NOT AFRAID TO DECENTRALIZE"

Excerpts from the message of the Holy Father for the 35th edition of the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples.

The theme that was chosen for this year's Meeting—*To the Ends of the Earth and of Existence*—echoes the constant concern of the Holy Father.... As he said in his intervention during the pre-Conclave General Congregation meetings of the Cardinals: "The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all forms of misery" (9 March 2013). Thus Pope Francis thanks the leaders of the Meeting for having accepted and taken up his invitation to journey in this perspective. According to the Gospel, an "outgoing" Church is the only way; this is shown by the life of Jesus, who went from village to village proclaiming the Kingdom of God and sent his disciples before Him. This is why the Father sent Him into the world.

The second part of the Meeting's theme—*Destiny Has Not Left Man Alone*—is an expression of the servant of God, Don Luigi Giussani, which reminds us that the Lord has not left us to ourselves, that He has not forgotten us. In ancient times He chose one man, Abraham, and He set him on a journey toward the Promised Land. And in the fullness of time He chose a young woman, the Virgin Mary, in order to take on flesh and come to live among us. Nazareth was truly an insignificant village, a "periphery" with respect to both politics and religion; but that was exactly where God looked... A Christian is not afraid to decentralize, to go toward the ends of the earth, because his center is in Jesus Christ. He frees us from fear; in His company we are able to move forward safely in any place, even through the dark times of life, knowing that, wherever we go, the Lord always goes before us with His grace, and it is our joy to share with others the good news that He is with us. Jesus' disciples, after completing a mission, returned with joy because of their success. But Jesus told them: "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:20-21). It is not we who save the world; it is only God who saves it....

The Holy Father has affirmed: "In some places a spiritual 'desertification' has evidently come about, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 86). But this must not discourage us, as Benedict XVI reminded us when he inaugurated the Year of Faith: "In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive" (*Homily at the Mass for the Opening of the Year of Faith*, 11 October 2012). Pope Francis calls for collaboration, also from the Meeting for Friendship among Peoples, for this return to the essential, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Christians

have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but 'by attraction'" (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 15), that is, "by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation" (*ibid.*, n. 128).

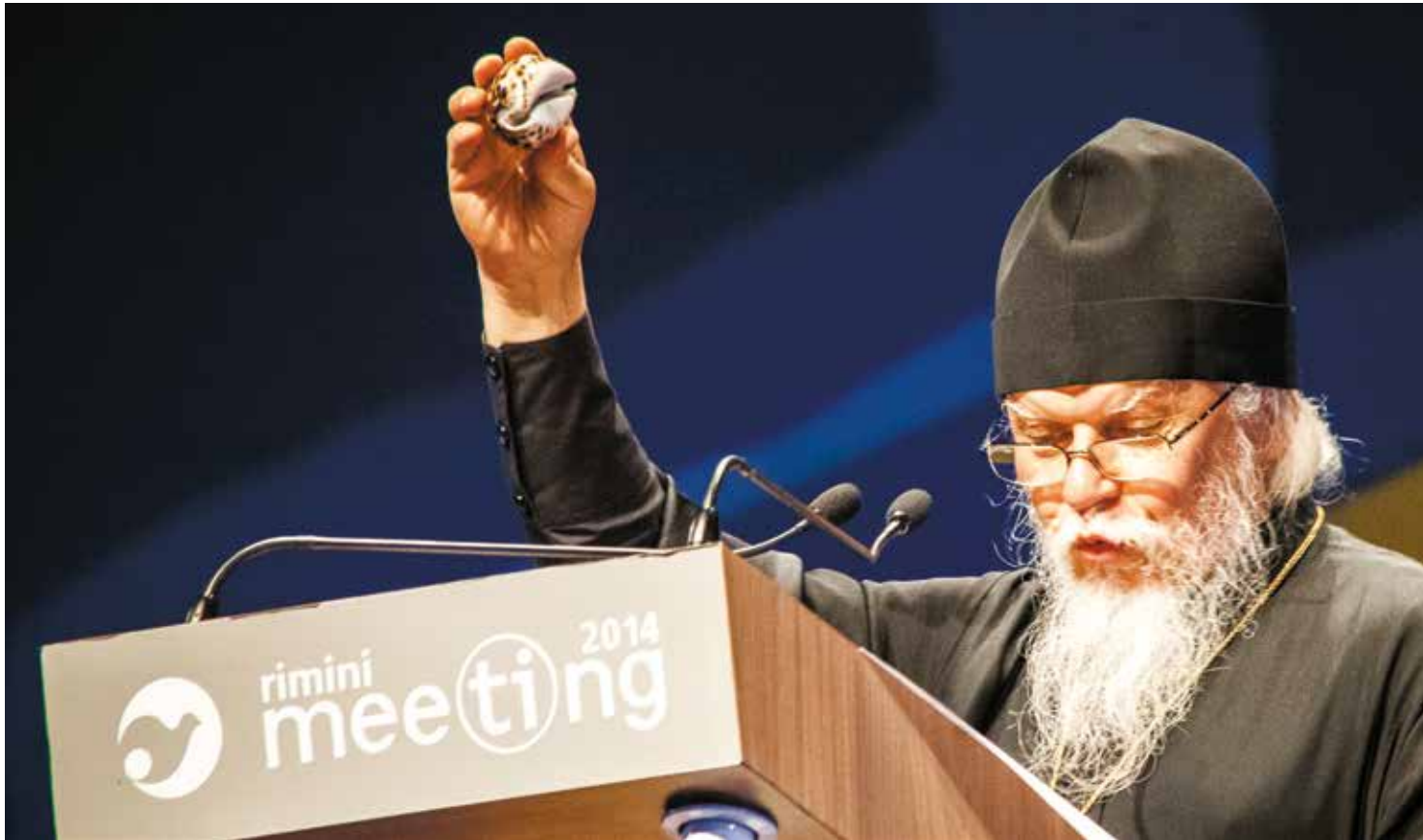
The Holy Father calls the attention of the leaders and participants of the Meeting to two particular points. First and foremost, he asks them never to lose touch with reality, but rather, to love reality. This too is part of the Christian witness: in the presence of a dominant culture which gives top priority to appearances, all that is superficial and temporary, the challenge is to choose and love reality. Don Giussani left this legacy as a plan for life when he said: "The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious, the formula for the journey to the meaning of reality is always to live the real intensely, without preclusion, without negating or forgetting anything. Indeed, it would not be human, that is to say, reasonable, to take our experience at face value, to limit it to just the crest of the wave, without going down to the core of its motion." (*The Religious Sense*, p. 108) Additionally, his invitation is to always keep one's gaze focused on the essential. The most serious problems, in fact, arise when the Christian message is identified with secondary characteristics that do not convey the heart of the message.

The challenge is to choose and love reality.



In a world where, after 2,000 years, Jesus is once again unknown in so many countries—even in the West—"We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background of what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 34) For this, a world in such rapid transformation calls Christians to be available to look for forms or ways to communicate with a language that comprehends the perennial newness of Christianity. In this too it is important to be realistic. "Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way." (*ibid.*, n. 46) His Holiness shares these reflections as his contribution to the week of the Meeting, to all those who will attend it, particularly to the leaders, the organizers and relators who will come from the peripheries of the world and of existence to witness that God the Father does not leave His children alone. The Pope hopes that many will be able to relive the experience of the first disciples of Jesus, those who, encountering Him on the banks of the Jordan, heard Him ask: "What are you looking for?"....

Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State



» The story presented in the documentary *Las Patronas* concerns northern Mexico, where every year about 400,000 immigrants from every corner of Central and Latin America try, by any means possible, to cross the border illegally into the U.S. “They” stow-away on freight trains, spreading out on the roof of the cars, travelling for days and days. “We” are three sisters of a farming family who have given life to an extraordinary work of assistance. They prepare food and water and run alongside the trains, throwing single portion bags to the desperate souls who ride along on them, and praying to God that all goes well for them. It is the little ones who save the world, said Fr. Pizzaballa.

As always, at the Meeting one listens a great deal, but this year there was also a lot of watching—documentaries, for example, and the videos of the

They prepare food and run alongside the trains, throwing single portion bags to immigrants.

Charles Péguy exhibit in which moments from the writer’s life were dramatically presented in short movie clips. There were also videos at the AVSI exhibit curated by John Waters, highlighting the “method of the ‘I’” lived in Kenya, Ecuador and Brazil. And there were brilliant photographic displays as well, as in the magnificent exhibit “Parables of the Orient,” proposed by the Republic of Armenia, and on the Christian minorities from Iraq to Cyprus to Egypt where a series of images hung from the ceiling that made palpable the many testimonies of the our brethren to whom we listened to all week.

THE SWAP. Late in the evening a volunteer driver brought me back to my hotel. He was there with his wife who was volunteering at the restaurants. For him, the week of

the Meeting is too short, “it ends in an instant,” with exhibits left unseen, and people left to meet. This is a recurring problem for the people of the Exhibition Center.

Among them, in Hall C1, were Mina and the young people of the SWAP group [Share With All People], students at the Catholic University of Milan, and the children of immigrants. They brought their own experience in an exhibit of photographs and texts on the revolution in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. Only two years ago young people of their same age and nationality, Christians and Muslims, lived the events and dreams of that brief moment while the seeds of the upheaval were still underway. What has remained for these Italian-Arabic young people? They explained it to about 14,000 (!) visitors that week: the awareness that each of us is a periphery-center, a drop that the whole ocean has to take into account.

It is something mysterious, almost imperceptible, and yet inexorable.



JULIÁN CARRÓN. "GOD NEVER STOPS SEEKING US"

Excerpts from an interview released during the Rimini Meeting (COnline.org).

Fr. Carrón, why are we looking at peripheries? Why do we need to "decentralize," as Pope Francis said, in order to meet Jesus?

Encountering the peripheries is the way we encounter Jesus. I have always been very struck by Fr. Giussani's insistence that we already have everything in the encounter with Jesus, but we discover the meaning of this "everything," of Jesus, in the clash or encounter with circumstances, or in other words, in the peripheries. We think that the peripheries are something added, a distraction. Instead, this is the one way in which, by facing life, circumstances, and challenges that we can understand who Christ is. Without this verification of Christ in every periphery we cannot understand who He is. If this is not the case, we will think we have met Jesus, but we will not have met Him. This is why it is in our best interest to follow the Pope.

In the talk about God and the Ancient History at the Meeting, it emerged how Destiny has never left man alone...Benedict XVI said that God is never defeated. He always starts anew, undertaking new initiatives. All the facts of history are the new initiatives through which God seeks the human person in different ways. And also today, in the present, we see what we saw happen in the past, as was said this morning: the constant initiatives through which the Mystery seeks the human person, no matter what his or her situation is. God never stops: He does not depend on what we would call victories or results. His starting point is different, for He always starts from a boundless love for the human person. Even though people tell Him "no," or do not respond adequately, or forget, God never stops seeking them, just as you would never stop seeking your son, no matter what stupid thing he had done. It is easy. We would be able to understand God if

we thought for a moment what a father would do for his son. God is a Father who never stops seeking His sons.

The Pope invited us on a journey, indicating that the only luggage needed is the "essential" and reality. What are they, for you?

The "essential" for us is like meaning, a presence without which reality would have no meaning. Not all things are equally meaningful for us. The essential is that which is so meaningful you cannot live without it. This is what enables us to enter into any aspect of reality. If we have discovered the essential we can enter into any darkness, into any periphery, into any aspect of reality. What must a nurse live? What

essential thing must have happened to her for her to be able to walk into the room of a terminally ill patient, fully capable to enter into that darkness? Similarly, why do some Christians keep living in Syria? Or, why do some people

care for those considered the least among us? Something must have happened to them that was so meaningful that no aspect of reality is seen as without having value. Often, though, it seems that affirming the essential is in opposition reality, or that affirming reality goes against the essential. Thanks be to God, we who have encountered Christianity—as Fr. Giussani bore witness to it and as it appears in the Gospel—can see that for Jesus affirming the essential, affirming His relationship with the Father, was not something that distracted Him from reality. Rather, this was precisely what made Him interested in each person. For this reason, the "essential" and the relationship with reality go together. Without a presence that is this essential for us, reality doesn't interest us because we are not able to stay in front of it, to face its challenges and those shadows that bewilder us.

(Paolo Perego)

"Without the essential, reality doesn't interest us."



LOVE WITH A SMALL "L"

Bishop Panteleimon of Orokhovo-Zuevo, vicar of the Patriarchate of Moscow and of All of Russia, spoke of human love and the works of charity that have flowered in Moscow under his guidance.

Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi, the permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, busy with the stupendous exhibit of "his" Christian Ethiopia often cited the beginning of the Gospel accounts in which the protagonists are a carpenter, a girl, some fishermen, and old Simeon. It is difficult to imagine people more on the fringe, but is this not the periphery that changed history?

During the coming weekend my volunteer driver would also miss the Kenyan acrobats and the Armenian philharmonic, but not I. I did not want to miss these expressions of genius and art. The performance hall echoed with the explosive vitality of Nairobi's street kids transformed into percussionists and dancers; in the auditorium, the magnificent orchestra of Yerevan engulfed the audience in the staves of Khatchaturian and Rimsky-Korsakov, with an evident and sinuous "Scala effect." At the end of their shifts, many volunteers rushed to attend the event of the exhibit >>>



» “Small World—Minimal Stuff,” on novelist Guareschi and singer-songwriter Jannacci. Few seats were left, and people piled up on benches outside to watch the event unfold on monitors.

TWO POINTS. This universal Meeting, capable of mixing complexity with lightness, mysticism and logic, openness and identity, and attracting the most diverse admirers—from the legal scholar Joseph Weiler (who in order not to miss this Meeting flew round trip from Singapore in 48 hours) to the entrepreneur Roberto Snaidero (who sees it as a “place of enormous freedom and an intelligent comparison of ideas”) to Cardinal George Pell (who found “people not only in search of, but desirous to announce the Gospel of Christ to the world”)—began from a profound provocation and travelled far and wide. At the beginning, Pope Francis called the attention of the leaders and participants of the Meeting to two precise points: “To love

Each of us is a periphery-center, a drop that the whole ocean has to take into account.

reality and to keep one’s gaze fixed on the essential.”

Between these two shores the impetuous river of August 2014 flowed.

On the one side, the “redeemed gaze” that Fr. Pizaballa said was necessary in order to understand and above all to live in the world, and on the other side, the repeated journeys through time guided by Giorgio and Marilyn Buccellati, their archaeologist colleagues and by the theologian Ignacio Carbajosa, helping us to arrive at the origin of Mesopotamian and Jewish social life and anthropology. These journeys crossed paths with those recounted by “Explorers,” the exhibit on space that demonstrated how the further you go to the periphery the more you discover people in all of their smallness, and yet, paradoxically, the more you see their greatness.

On one side, the periphery, according to the Ukrainian philosopher Aleksandr Filonenko is “not a geographical situation but the place

of an encounter in which people discover themselves and are brought to life.”

AND MORE. While on the other side, we heard recounted, in many heart-wrenching ways (for example, by Fr. Jerry Mahon and Marta Scorsetti) the story of illness.

On one side, an exploration of the theme of gratuitousness as the key to true justice, in a dialogue between Luciano Violante and Javier Prades; and the issue of new rights that “are not an enemy to face,” said the jurist Tomaso Emilio Epidendio, but challenges to accept because “we are seeing the corruption of law, the corruption of something that promises an immanent hope, reduced to the here and now, where rights live off of assumptions that they are not able to maintain.” On the other side, the meaning of love (with a small “I” to indicate the human and earthly and everyday reality of love), illustrated by Russian Bishop Panteleimon.

On one side, the extraordinary visit of the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop



FROM THE DEPTHS OF TIME...

The exhibit "At the Origins of Communication and Community in Ancient Syria" curated by archaeologists Marilyn and Giorgio Buccellati.



...AND SPACE

The limitless drive to discover, and the search for one's own "home." The exhibit "Explorers," curated by Euresis, was an interplanetary journey through images and stories of the Voyager spacecraft.

Javier Echevarría, and the wondrous story of a faith that flowered in humbly following the charisma of Saint José Maria Escrivá. On the other side, the exciting stories of education that have emerged in the tutoring work of Portofranco in Italy and in the American stories of Fr. José Medina.

The result was that as you looked around you could understand a bit

better sociologist Mauro Magatti's judgment about Fr. Giussani, who was at the origin of the Meeting: "He was able to grasp the words of day and age, reveal their reduction, and transform their meaning," opening them to be experienced in a new and fascinating way. In one of the talks that drew the biggest attendance, Fr. Antonio Spadaro recounted "the human and spiritual experience" of his meeting

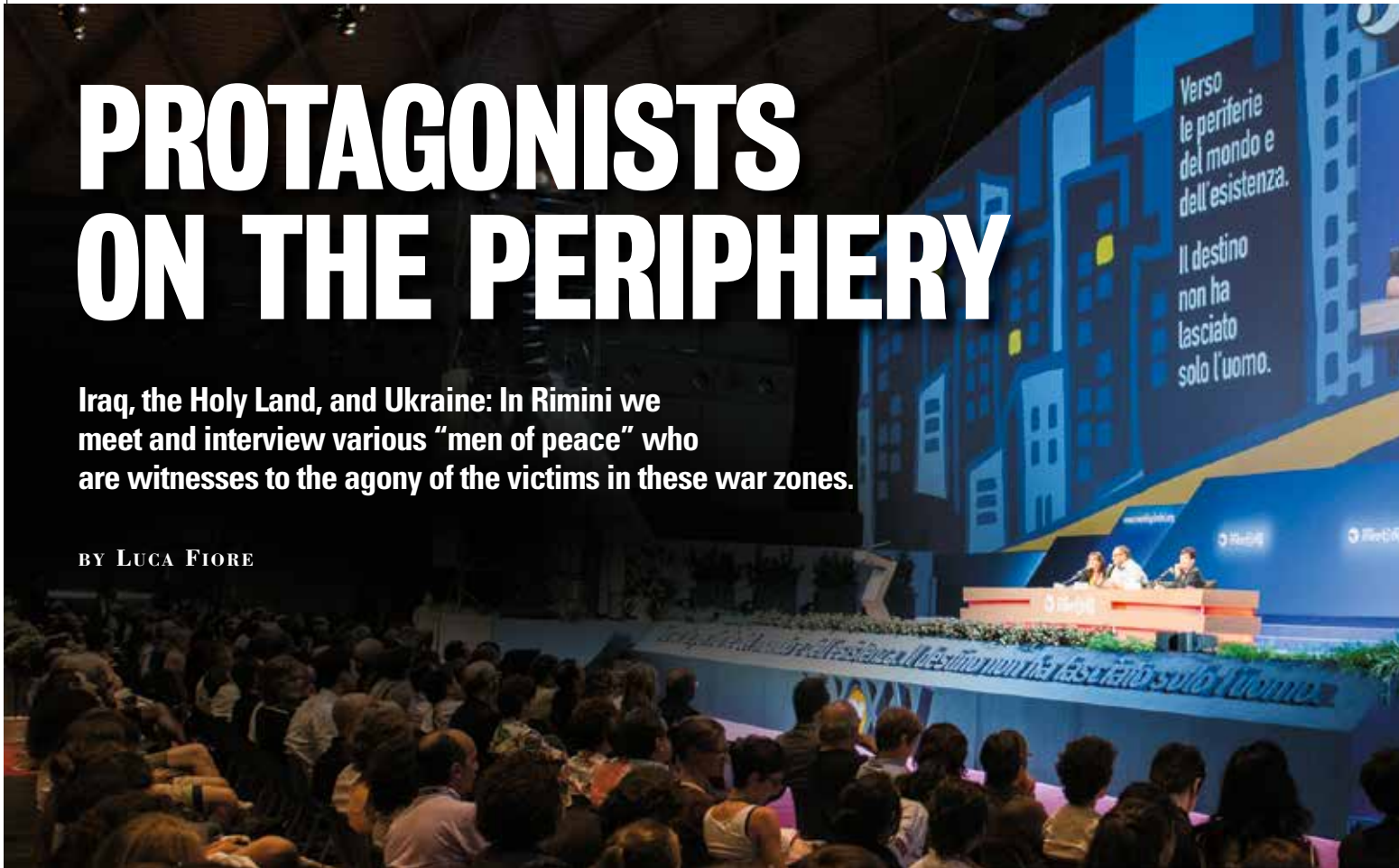
with Pope Francis: "He says that the Jesuit is a person of incomplete thought: I always thought that we had to have clear and distinct ideas, but precisely a Jesuit Pope was the one to say that our thought must be open toward the horizon, keeping Christ at the center." At the conclusion of the week, these words provide a good summary of this Meeting of universal attraction. **T**



PROTAGONISTS ON THE PERIPHERY

Iraq, the Holy Land, and Ukraine: In Rimini we meet and interview various “men of peace” who are witnesses to the agony of the victims in these war zones.

BY LUCA FIORE



IRAQ. “In the last three months, not one Christian prayer has been raised in Mosul”

There have been kidnappings, murders, and beheadings. In Iraq it has been a dreadful summer that will be remembered for the “N” sign posted on Christian homes across Mosul used to identify and stigmatize the “Nazarenes” [Christians]. Other minorities have been suffering also, especially the Yazidi and those Muslims who do not accept the extreme laws of the Caliphate. **Monsignor Shlemon Warduni**, the Auxiliary Bishop of Baghdad, a witness to all of this violence against his people amidst the indifference of the international community, made a plea at the Rimini Meeting that we not forget Iraq.

What’s the situation in Iraq like today?

It gets worse as the days go by. I met a woman who gave birth out in the open street and there was a two year old girl—only two years old!—was stripped of her earrings by the terrorists in front of her helpless parents. Christians are being forced from their homes, the Yazidi are killed, some are buried alive, and their children die from hunger and thirst. The most abysmal thing is the trafficking of women; two women took their lives rather than be sold like animals.

Is there a plan to eradicate Christians from the region?

Yes, they threaten to kill people unless they convert. In the last three months, not one Christian prayer has been raised in Mosul. Why? Christians have been living here for two thousand years. Even the Qu’ran mentions Christ and Our Lady is defined as “the most beau-

tiful woman in the world.” Traditionally, Islam does not impose religion, so where is “Allah the Merciful,” as is often quoted in the Qu’ran? Where is that mercy?

What is your plea to the international community?

We ask that our situation be taken seriously. We want these terrorists to be stopped from receiving arms and that those who provide these arms are punished. We ask for protection and a guarantee that human rights are granted to us. We also want protection for other minorities, like the Yazidi.

Many Christians have fled Iraq. Why are others choosing to stay?

Not everyone can afford to leave. Some don’t want to abandon their homes and these are the ones that haven’t already been chased away



MAN AND DESTINY

The keynote address on the theme of the Meeting, led by Eastern Orthodox philosopher Aleksandr Filonenko. For the first time in thirty-five years, the keynote address was given by a non-Catholic.

by ISIS. Those who flee say they want to come back when all of this is over, however, I doubt that will happen, given the circumstances. People are losing confidence. Those that have taken over the homes of the Christians are merciless riffraff who have no regard for human beings, not even for their own kin.

Is there anything that sustains your spirit under these challenging circumstances?

I would say my mission, my vocation. I am called to follow my Lord, Jesus Christ. I must be firm as He was, ready to shed my blood, as He did. Christ died for us, we must be ready to do the same for Him, if necessary. We must look to Him for consolation. I hope He gives my poor brothers the strength to do what it takes, until the end.

THE HOLY LAND
“Evil cannot have the final word”

At the Meeting, **Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa**, the Custodian of The Holy Land, spoke about what he defines as the “redeemed outlook” of the tragedy of the Middle East. He revealed a viewpoint that allows us to interpret the events “without being overwhelmed by them.” The entire region is up in flames. In spite of this, evil is not the final word on man’s destiny—not even here. A gaze toward man’s destiny, not at the negotiations taking place in the chanceries, is what spurs hope for the future.

It seems as if we’ve been here before, in Gaza and Iraq. Is history repeating itself?

It’s a spiral. There are old ideologies coming back and new facts. We are very familiar with the violence that takes place in Gaza and the fundamentalism in the Middle East, but now there is a new brand of cruelty and forms of abuse that we have not witnessed in a long time.

What worries you the most in this context?

Traditionally, patterns of coexistence in the Middle East between religious communities and ethnic groups have collapsed. Today, fundamentalists want to cleanse the area of anyone that is not exactly like them, this is the appalling novelty. The future of the Middle East cannot lie in this kind of change.

What about the Pope’s prayer with the presidents of Israel and Palestine?

Prayer is not some sort of magic trick with immediate effects. Prayer is a frame of mind; it is the opening of a

door. That prayer was intended as a new perspective and as such it is still valid.

Do you already see the outcome of such a gesture?

On a personal level, I can, but on an institutional level, unfortunately, not yet.

Do you know of anyone touched by this gesture?

I can’t say their names but I know that there are some very influential people who are aware that this confrontation is leading nowhere. Things must change.

What is the meaning of your presence and of the Franciscans in the Holy Land at a time like this?

Our mission hasn’t changed. We’re not there to accomplish great things. We see people, assist pilgrims, and we work. We don’t presume we can save the world, but we simply don’t allow such negative circumstances to crush our lives.

How do these circumstances affect your personal vocation?

When I am confronted with evil I don’t find the solution in turning my

back, but in elaborating on the reasons for my faith, of my life with God. Evil cannot have the final word.

What brings you back to basics?

Prayer is essential, as well as contact with children, with simple people, with those who lead sober lives and abide by the Gospel. How? It happens in lending a helping hand, offering oneself for nothing, and if necessary, even allowing oneself to get a little worn out. >>>



Shlemon Warduni.



Pierbattista Pizzaballa.



Constantin Sigov.



DESTINIES THAT CROSS PATHS

Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, with Irish journalist John Waters, curator of the AVSI exhibit. Right, Fr. Carlos Olivero, one of the curas vileros of Buenos Aires. Below, the final address at the Meeting was dedicated to religious freedom. From left: the journalist Domenico Quirico, Shlemon Warduni, Monica Maggioni, Ignatius Kaigamam, and Paul Jacob Bhatti.



UKRAINE. “How wonderful it would be if the Pope came to Kiev”

The event in Rimini kicked off on the day of Ukraine’s independence and that same day, during the Angelus address, Pope Francis made a plea to pray for peace in that country. In the days that followed, tension was building up on the Russian border and there were headlines that said “Russian tanks are invading Ukraine.” Meanwhile, from the podium in Rimini, **Constantin Sigov**, an Eastern Orthodox philosopher and editor from Kiev—an important intellectual voice in last Winter’s revolution—was telling stories about how the volunteers of Maidan Square are aiding the refugees that are fleeing the eastern part of the country. The experience of those months changed his way of being a Christian, he said.

During the revolution Ukrainian Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox were united in pleading for peace and praying that the violence

would stop. Has that developed or is it just a seed?

Even back in Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s days there was solidarity among Christian denominations. Later, when things got better, each went back to their own business. It’s a bit like that today. Instead, we need Churches to get involved in a coordinated way. For example, by working together in giving shelter to the refugees without discrimination. In fact it’s wrong that each should just aid “their own.” In the present context, we get the Russian propaganda that plays up old grudges between Catholics and Orthodox telling false stories about alleged hard feelings still going on between them.

How has all that has happened this year affected your life?

There was a time when I could not understand the meaning of “love your enemies.” I have seen men die in Kiev. I remember taking a boy with burns on his face to the hospital. You run the risk of reacting violently to violence, of imitating inhuman behavior. So, in a situation like this, we must stay focused on the kind of discernment that only Christ gives us. We need to tap into that same source of humanity so that we don’t rejoice when an enemy dies. We are asked to weep with those who weep, no matter who they are. I have experienced how hard it is to win this inner battle.

THE TITLE OF NEXT YEAR’S RIMINI MEETING WILL BE:

“WHAT COULD BE MISSING, O MY HEART, THAT SO SUDDENLY YOU ARE FILLED BY THIS LACK?”

For more information go to www.meetingrimini.org

I WAS ODDLY ENVIOUS OF PEOPLE AT THE ENDS OF THE WORLD

THE QUESTIONS BROUGHT FORTH DON'T HAVE OBVIOUS ANSWERS, BECAUSE WE CAN BE AT THE PERIPHERY WITHOUT REALIZING IT.

Usually the titles are beautiful and resonant—deep sentences that open into an infinite possibility of meaning. But this year's title took us to concrete places within our narrow sense of infinity. It brought us, as it says, to the limits of the place we normally consider to be everything—everywhere touched by human life at least.

The title invited us to stop and think: What is the periphery? Where are "the Ends of the Earth?" At what point does human existence find its end, and where am I right now along that axis? These questions direct us back to ourselves, to the puzzle of where we presently stand. The idea of "the periphery" itself implies the idea of a center, and comes accompanied by a question: Am I at the center or at the periphery or somewhere in between? Which would be better?

These questions make us dizzy. We may decide that the answers—on the surface at least—are obvious: we think ourselves poor or relatively wealthy; our voices are small or somewhat strong; our future seems shaky or fairly solid. And yet, the Meeting opened us up to other possibilities: that our certainty in some respects is based on fragility; that our sense of being "at the center" is based on errors of perception; that we may be at a periphery that we have not recognized.

For me, it was an unusual and, in a sense, frustrating Meeting, in that I got to see and attend even fewer events than usual. Much of my time was taken up with tours of our exhibition, "Generating Beauty: New Beginnings at the Ends of the Earth," or with meeting people. This is, of course, an intrinsic element of the Meeting. Indeed its the very essence,

as the name implies. But, the frustration arises nonetheless after re-reading the program and realizing all the riches that were lost to me.

Still, I was moved beyond words by the exhibition curated by Wael Farouq and the Egyptian student association about the heroes and martyrs of Egypt's Arab Spring of 2011. Aleksandr Filonenko took us to the heart of the center/periphery paradoxes in his keynote speech, assuring us that each of us has "his own Ukraine." When we hear of these people whose grief and drama intrudes on our complacency,

then our sense of being at our self-defined "center" becomes unsettled and we realize that, in ways we had not contemplated, we are at a periphery of our own. It was breathtaking to hear Filonenko tell us how, in the past year, Ukrainians, just like those in Egypt, came to discover in themselves the possibility of a new humanity by virtue of reaching a point where their humanity

could no longer bear to not take itself into account. This made me oddly envious, despite my recognition of the great pains these people have endured, for they have experienced an awakening that I sometimes dream of for my own people.

Those who stand at the presumed "center" have the same qualities and experiences that we crave in our hearts, just as we, in our own moments and places of marginalization, can offer to others the very characteristics we rarely recognize in ourselves. Filonenko described in detail the development of a new protagonist at the periphery of existence: a man whose strength of character (judgment, joy, vulnerability, and compassion) renders it inevitable that he will one day walk up a hill called Calvary.

The Meeting brought us to the limits of the place we normally consider to be everything.

The thing that helps us most is taking part in the Eucharistic life. Being in communion makes us brave and enables us to open our lives to people.

What has your participation in the Rimini Meeting meant for you?

I understand that a place like this, and the people that make it possible, are important for us Ukrainians. An experience like this proves the preconceptions we have of the Western world wrong, because it is thanks to you that we now know that the real voice of Christians is that of Pope Francis. It is important that the accusations of febleness and inaction of the West not be associated with the position of Catholics. I hope that the relationship we have built during these months through mutual recognition will leave a mark. We all share the same desire for unity and that is the starting point and the purpose of our encounter. That is why it would be wonderful to prepare Pope Francis' trip to Kiev together. **T**





LA THUILE

INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF RESPONSIBLES

ILLOGICAL JOY

**“I am nothing when you are not present.” Of whom can we say this?
Here we highlight the questions that were asked and the experiences that were
recounted at the gathering of Responsibles of the Movement from 71 countries
focusing on the challenges of a world in rapid transformation,
and on the method chosen by God who continues to bet everything on our freedom.**

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

“**P**aola?” I turned around. Batistine held in her hand a colored wallet. “*Pour vous. Merci, pour tout.*” I was dumbstruck. It was September 2, the last evening of the International Assembly at La Thuile. Batistine, from Madagascar, looked very elegant in her golden yellow silk suit—unlikely clothing for a week the mountains. My friend Guenda had introduced me to Batistine on the first day. “She is a physician in Fr. Stefano’s hospital. She only speaks French.” No problem. I can’t speak any foreign language decently and I always have to go around begging for translators among my friends. It is always a good exercise in humility.

This was one of many different encounters during the Assembly of Responsibles. I also met Pierre, a young Parisian architect who was also there for the first time. I ran into them over and over: in the hall, at the bar, at lunch. For both of them, every experience was entirely new. Without intending it, they became my companions on the journey, a simple presence that wakes us up and keeps us from putting on the usual masks we use to face daily life. They were akin to a beautiful day that you were not expecting and yet clarifies everything, every relationship, even those we had already known and planned. Every year this Assembly is a surprise, and in the end we can say: “It was worth it.” In these pages I want to offer just a glimpse of this Presence that inclines itself to us and “makes everything new,” even these unexpected travel companions.

SHALL WE KEEP LOOKING? Fr. Carrón began the Friday night session with a line from a song by Guccini: “I am nothing when you are not present.” Only a Presence that makes me can be essential for my life. We must fix our gaze on this Presence (as the Pope reminded us in his message to the Rimini Meeting) on this attractive Presence that we experience: our fellow Christians that are being persecuted in these times bear witness to this. It is attractive because it gives us hope, that is, it gives us the possibility of living every instant as something unrepeatable, and thus allows us to live with fullness. The line from Saint Gregory of Nyssa, so dear to Fr. Giussani, comes to mind: “If I weren’t yours, O Christ,

I would feel a finished creature.” But if you do not experience it, it remains only at the level of an intention, a nice idea. Instead, life catches us off-guard and in that moment we can glimpse the essential, as happened to Zacchaeus, and to John and Andrew. The clear sign of this essential Presence, continued Carrón, is the fact that we seek it, always. In fact, the true question is: “Do we still seek Him, now, in these days?” This question roots out a formalistic way of belonging. In order to be able to seek, one needs to follow. Here our freedom enters into play, allowing ourselves to be attracted so as to fully live, and not, as Eliot wrote, to remain only “living and partly living.”

“What are you looking for?” was written over the stage, next to the list of the 71 countries that the participants represented. Batistine told me at the bar: “I am happy. The title is beautiful. I seek Jesus in La Thuile because He called me. He is here.” I, instead, had almost taken that question for granted.

Saturday morning at the assembly, Carrón challenged everyone with these words of Giussani: “In a society like this, nothing new can be created, if not with a life: no structure, organization, or initiative will suffice. And life is mine, irreducibly mine.” Only an experience that is happening can change us. We bear witness to this: Christ is the essential thing because He generates in us a *heightened* humanity that everyone desires—and not because we are better people, but because we have encountered a Presence that accompanies us.

“WHERE ARE YOU?” Nacho spoke about an assembly with the Spanish community where there was a woman who was very sceptical and closed-in on her own problems. This woman had met Rose from Africa earlier that day and at a certain point during the assembly when Rose was speaking she wanted to address this woman and called for her because she couldn’t find her face among the crowd. “Where are you?” she asked. That woman would not have been moved one millimeter by some sort of analysis, no matter how good it was, but the fact that Rose called her... Carrón interrupted Nacho, and asked, “Rose, where are >>>

**“Life catches us
off-guard and
in that moment
we can glimpse
the essential.”**

» you? What did you say in that Spanish assembly?” Rose might not have had any intention to speak, but she came to the microphone. “I told her what Fr. Giussani told me when I was 17 years old, that even if I were the last woman on earth, Christ would have come to seek me out. In that moment, my life gained value, despite my nothingness. It was the same for that woman.”

This is the treasure of the Christian encounter: Someone calls you by name and you feel like you are everything. It is for this that our companionship exists. One after another people got up to share their stories. Carrón always brought the focus back to experience, to something that happens because, as Costantino said, in experience there is no division between our “I” and reality, as it was for Zacchaeus. As Pope Francis says, “Truth is an encounter.”

Giorgio blew everyone away when he talked about the sadness that overcame him as he listened to some of those speaking and thought about all of the time he had wasted. Instead, it was entirely another thing to give himself over to what was happening in front of his eyes. We are tempted to fix our gaze on our own problems, but Christ takes the initiative to intervene, even at the very last moment, as He did for the Good Thief.

Returning to the hotel, I found myself next to Pierre. “How’s it going?” he asked in Italian with his French accent. “Happy?” “*Oh là là, très bien. Very happy.*” He began to talk about his life, about his sea journey with some friends in search of something he did not know how to name. They saw beautiful places, but then? He wasn’t unhappy, but something was missing. Later he met Sara at the university in Paris and she invited him on a CL vacation. “It was beautiful. It sparked many questions, but I was convinced that I could do without the religious dimension in my life, but then... I’ll



tell you about it another time.” I had lunch with Vanessa and Silvia, and I again found myself next to Batistine.

The testimony of Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the United Nations in Geneva (see *Traces* n. 3/2012), illuminated the patient work of the Church for the good of the human family. On stage, in a conversation with Roberto Fontolan, the Scalabrinian priest talked about his work. The Holy See is recognized as a moral authority and as subject to international law. Pope Francis is seen as the trustworthy symbol of religion in the world. The common ground for building relationships and cordial friendships is the fact that we are all human persons. This is not a simple job, however, above all when issues of ethics and economics are involved. We often hold contrary positions in a place where

absolute individualism reigns. The Church does not limit individual freedoms but rather tries to insert them into the context of the good for all, constituted by relationships among people. Christians bear witness to this, sometimes to the point of martyrdom. In fact, Christians are the most persecuted group in the world, but this is not an excuse to withdraw from dialogue. The guarantee of religious freedom—the opportunity for each person to profess her or his own creed alone and in a communal context—is the only road that can safeguard respect for all of the other rights.

A FINAL SURPRISE. Lucia, a young teacher who shared a room with me at La Thuile, commented before falling asleep, “That testimony was really striking! If I think how little patience I have when I meet someone who



On these pages, some moments during the International Assembly of Responsibles in La Thuile, Italy.

doesn't think the way I do... And I almost always try to impose my own thoughts with my own definitions... the Church's method is really something different."

Alberto Savorana, author of *The Life of Fr. Giussani*, talked about his eight months travelling throughout Italy to present his book and told us some of what happened during these presentations. The lights were lowered and on the screen were projected some brief pieces from the presentations, in which the former President of the Italian Senate Luciano Violante, *La Repubblica* editor Ezio Mauro, and Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet (among others) spoke about Fr. Giussani in the present tense, because his life is not relegated to the past, but something alive and contemporaneous. At the end, we received an unexpected gift: a video of a 2005 presentation of Fr. Giussani's

book, *Why the Church?*, by none other than Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio. The next day, a friend told me, "Yesterday evening was really beautiful, especially the last surprise, but what most struck me was Savorana. We have been friends for a long time, but now, after this work, it seems that he has been given the freshness of the encounter that he had when he was young. It's a new beginning for him, too."

On Monday morning, Carrón spoke on the theme of the "new rights," starting from the document on Europe, "Is a New Beginning Possible?" (Page One, *Traces*, n. 5/2014). Speaking with him were Valentina Doria, a gynecologist, and Marta Cartabia, a Constitutional Court judge. "A world in such rapid transformation calls Christians to be available to look for forms or ways to communicate with a language that comprehends the perennial newness of Christianity," wrote the Pope. This holds true in all fields and in all spheres of life. It is necessary for us to understand these transformations and live life. It is always a new beginning, and the truth can never be imposed. "Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way." This is the true challenge, more than a thousand speeches or ideological positions.

The stakes were high. At lunch after the session, Marta, a young lawyer, said she often runs up against these "new rights" at work. Speaking with Massimo and Chiara, two university professors, they began to develop this conversation more deeply. We all got involved in the discussion. At the end, Marta gave Massimo a DVD of the

musical put on by the kids who are cared for by the Sisters of the Assumption, with whom she does charitable work. He said, "What a gift! Let's talk again."

PREFERENCE. In the afternoon, Carrón spoke about this world in rapid transformation, asking: deep down, who are we in the midst of this immensity? From the very beginning, God's method has been to wager on the "I" of a single person in order to change history. It was this way for Abraham, for Mary, and for Christ. It is through a preference upon which the Mystery has acted, risking on the

freedom of the "I," a choice that culminates in Christ, in His mission to make visible God's mysterious design for all things. Christ entered into history and through His Church He transforms it, changing reality. And we are the Church, a people called to a stature worthy of the truest desires of the heart, we are those who bear witness to it. It is a human preference that embraces

the world, today. It is a heightened humanity that makes us "live reality intensely." As Fr. Giussani said, it is "the only condition for being truly religious." That evening, we had a screening of the video on the 60th Anniversary of the Movement, produced by Mon-

ica Maggioni, Dario Curatolo and Roberto Fontolan. It was a flow of images from this history, so normal and so fascinating, showing Rose in Uganda, Cleuza and Marcos in Brazil, but also the vacations in Siberia, *Alecrim* sung in Chinese, then the Spiritual Exercises, and the voice of Fr. Giussani. At the end, >>>

The guarantee of religious freedom is the only road that can safeguard respect for all of the other rights.

God's method has been to wager on the "I" of a single person in order to change history.



» Carrón thanked everyone for their hard work, telling Monica and Dario in particular, “More valuable than anything is the friendship born with you.”

On Tuesday, we went for a hike in the mountains. Before departing, Pierre told me that he could not go because of physical problems, but he was not sad. “I’ll go to Mass here in the hotel, and then we’ll see each other later.” Batistine was wearing a sturdy down jacket but a delicate pair of cloth ballerina-style shoes. I tried to explain to her that these were not suitable for hiking the gravelly trails here. Guenda told me she had a pair of sneakers in her backpack. “I told her they were for her. She will decide what to do.” In a friendship you can’t force anything, you can only offer. When we reached the peak, the view of Mont Blanc was stunning. The crisp September air sharpened every vista. We ate and sang, as always, and I was tempted to think that it was the same old thing, but no. When the choir began to sing that tender line from the Italian Alpine soldiers’ song—“I look at you and my heart

is content”—I thought about how life is always a beginning again, a renewed sense of wonder.

LIVING THE REAL. During the afternoon assembly the problem of judgment and unity emerged. Carrón said that it was primarily a problem of the “I,” adding that in a discussion it is necessary to risk, without expecting to conform the other person to our position. The point is whether or not you have the other person’s destiny at heart. The human person’s freedom is engaged here, and it is a gift that we cannot give back, as Professor Eugenio Mazarella said, adding that at La Thuile he saw in the eyes of many people, in their words, and in their songs, the signs of God’s preference, of His choice, and that “certainly, one hopes to be chosen, but who can say whether they have been? As for myself, I don’t know if He has chosen me, but even if He has not, I will stick around. This way, maybe He’ll throw a glance my way, call me by name and say: ‘Wait for

me, I’m here. There are a lot of people, but eventually I’ll come to you. Wait for me.’ Well, here I am, waiting.”

“What gives us existence?” This is the question Carrón asked at the beginning of the summary. All that we need is a flash, a little bit of something, in order to experience a good. It is what the Giorgio Gaber called in one of his songs, “illogical joy,” something that enters into life and makes me

present to the present. Who would not want that flash in every instant? This is why a road is needed in order to not become stiff in our daily life. Carrón returned to the question: “What are you looking for?” It is not enough to affirm a formal belonging,

you have to follow, that is, relive the experience of the person who provoked you and provokes you with her or his presence in the life of the community. You have to live reality intensely, as Fr. Giussani did. God made Himself our companion within circumstances. He chose you, preferred you. This is the only thing to which we can bear witness. **I**

This is why a road is needed in order to not become stiff in our daily life.



THE STORY

THE FAILURE

Anna, standing outside the teachers' lounge, sees her at the end of the hall. She immediately recognizes her as the mother of Filippo, a student in his second year of high school who has been held back. The students' grades have only been posted for a few days. What should she do? Should she go back into the room and wait for a few minutes and try to avoid her? It's too late. They make eye contact.

She approaches her to say hi and to ask how Filippo is doing, but before she can say anything Filippo's mother cuts her off, "Good morning. Professor, you and I need to talk." Her tone of voice is not very encouraging and Anna swallows nervously. "All right. But it will have to be after the exams because before that does not work for me." "Of course," she responds, "I have your phone number. I will contact you."

DAYS GO BY and Anna hopes she will not receive that phone call, which of course arrives precisely at the end of the exam period. She invites Filippo's mother to her house for coffee. She prepares herself by trying to remember all of his grades, the teachers' notes, the discussion they had when making the final decision... after all, it is always difficult to decide whether or not to hold a student back. She had tried everything with Filippo, the typical "teenage boy who is smart but does not apply himself." She had invited him to GS [Student Youth] to no avail; he never came. She had also talked to his mom when he had gotten into some trouble and was too afraid to tell his family about it.

The doorbell rings. Anna is nervous. They greet each other and as soon as Anna pours the coffee, Filippo's mother bursts out, "Listen professor, I am losing the battle with my son; I waste my time recommending that he do the right things and I waste my money sending him to tutoring. There is one thing though that is very clear for me: I don't want to lose you. I want you to look at me with the same gaze that you have for my son."

ANNA IS SHOCKED, she did not expect that the conversation would begin like this. Is it possible that "failure" not be the final word in this story? All the walls between them are broken down. An hour flies by as they talk about their children, about motherhood, about life. When they are done talking, they hug each other, and as she is leaving, Filippo's mother asks, "When can we see each other again?" Anna suggests, "Can we meet for a drink in the next few days?" "Perfect! See you soon. I'm not letting go of you."

When they meet a few days later, Anna brings two friends. Sitting around that table they talk about everything, until someone asks, "Why did you seek out Anna?" "Because she is the only one who has loved me and my son. When I would go to parent-teacher conferences and talk to professors who told me that they wanted to hold Filippo back, I always left feeling empty and exhausted. Then I would go talk to her and it was different. She lifted my spirits. She even gave me her cell phone number. She never let go of me. I saw something that I couldn't fully understand or explain, but that I had never seen before." She pauses and then continues, "I know it sounds ridiculous, but I'm almost thankful that Filippo was held back, otherwise we never would have met each other."

Over the summer they text each other and talk to each other. Anna invites her to the Meeting of Rimini. Her answer is immediate, "I would love to. I live in Rimini and I've never been." They plan to meet at four o'clock and spend the afternoon seeing exhibits and meeting Anna's friends. Towards evening they sit at a bar and Anna asks, "Tired?" Filippo's mother smiles, "What I want to tell you is that I don't want this to end." "Listen," says Anna, "There is a place where I have the most real conversations with my friends, the kind that you need in order to live. It's called School of Community. Do you want to come? Think about it."



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