

TRACES

US É DEUS
 ESPÍRITO SANTO
 NOS DA PAZ
 E O PODER
 VENCER E
 SEM ELE
 PODEMOS
 FAZER.

QUER TER
 PAZ QUER
 SER FELIZ
 VEM PRA
 JESUS

SE VOCÊ QUER
 SAIR DESSA VIDA NO SENHO
 DE SOFRIMENTO
 QUER TER PAZ
 QUER SER FELIZ
 A SOLUÇÃO É
 JESUS

SÓ COM FÉ
 JESUS, VOCÊ
 TEM A SUA
 VIDA SEGURA E
 COM A GARANTIA
 DA SUA REAL
 SALVAÇÃO

MAS SEM ELE
 O SEU SOFRIMENTO
 É ETERNO.

IS QUER TE ABENÇOAR E TAMBÉM TE DAR
 DA ETERNA. MAS VOCÊ PRECISA FAZER AS
 E QUE É RECEBER ELE COMO O SEU SENHOR E SALVADOR.



**DESTINY
 HAS NOT LEFT
 MAN ALONE**

A journey toward the “outskirts of the world and of existence” to see how the upcoming Rimini Meeting can help us discover something essential.

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July 2014
Vol. 16 - No. 7

TOWARD THE RIMINI MEETING

WHERE ONE AWAITS

The Church must go out, toward the “outskirts of existence.” This is Pope Francis’ constant call. But what is there to discover in these places without geographic boundaries? What does it mean that Destiny becomes man’s companion?

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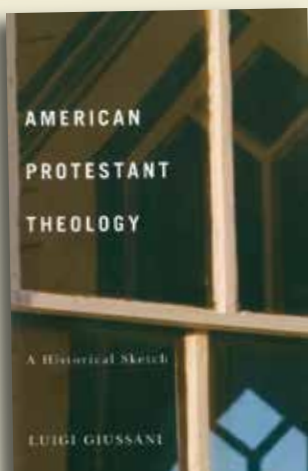
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LUIGI GIUSSANI



276 pages - format 6 x 9 inches
ISBN-10: 0773541977

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

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

It can be a strange period, this time between June and August. These are weeks when, in one way or another, the usual rhythms and habits of life are left behind and everything emerges in an atypical way, different from how we see them the rest of the year. It is not just a matter of a more relaxed schedule and lighter commitments: the circumstances themselves are different. There are other encounters, other places where things happen. This alone could afford us a great opportunity if we took it seriously. Vacation is “the time of freedom,” as Fr. Giusani always reminded us. Freedom to do what?

This question is intertwined with another, offered to us by the Movement of CL as the theme for our work during this year’s vacations; “What are you looking for?” It is not a small question, and not only because these are the first words Jesus addresses to his first disciples, John and Andrew, who left John the Baptist on the Jordan River to follow Him. The whole Gospel can be read with this question in mind, as a continual repetition in a multitude of examples, gestures, and words, the same question asked to the heart of whoever encountered Him. From Zacchaeus to the Samaritan woman, from the leper to the rich young man, to the apostles, to His enemies... What are you looking for? What do you truly desire?

Summer can be a privileged moment to stay in front of these questions, using them as a key for interpreting the facts which happen before our eyes, and which do not stop just because it’s summer. After all, what are the millions of refugees leaving Iraq or the thousands of women and children leaving Central America and arriving at the U.S. looking for? But above all, this is a special time to keep asking this question to ourselves and to those near us during the many occasions that reality provides us: in our vacations, in our work, in our friendships, or at the Meeting of Rimini whose theme this year speaks of the companionship that Destiny offers us everywhere, in every corner “of the outskirts of the world and of existence.” What are we looking for? What fulfills the heart?

It will be beautiful to discover the answer to this question in our lives. Not to begin by knowing it and reciting it like a theory, but to really discover it through what happens. After all, this is the first companionship that Destiny gives us: reality. It is here “that the Mystery reawakens us, calls us, comes toward us to keep us from declining into nothingness,” as Julián Carrón reminded a group of friends some time ago. It is “through this absolutely humdrum thing, at times dark, at times opaque, through circumstances: life, life calls us, calls each one of us to live it.” We’ll be back in touch in September, to tell each other about what happens when you decide to respond to this call. Enjoy your summer!



I LOST MY JOB, BUT DISCOVERED HOPE

I had worked for multinational corporations for 23 years. Two years ago, I lost my job and my world changed. I had been accustomed to eating in the best restaurants and staying in the best hotels. I had a large, beautiful sports car. I judged myself solely on my capacity to achieve my revenue goals. I had never used public transportation, relying only on my fancy car and taxis. How pathetic I had become. I had forgotten how much I had loved to take the train because it gave me the opportunity to see my friends with whom I went to the university; it got to the point where, when I met a new person, my first instinct was to try and figure out how much money he or she made. When I lost my job, I went into total crisis, completely unable to do anything. Even going to the post office to pay bills caused me anxiety. I became depressed and needed medication and I felt I was no longer capable of taking care of my three children. Not having a job had robbed me of all of my self-confidence. Without my job, many people in my life soon disappeared. However, I came into contact with Alberto from Rete Manager [a non-profit agency that helps the unemployed find new jobs] who introduced me to Giovanni and then to Massimo. I had almost hit rock bottom but these friends gave me the best help that anyone could receive: they called to ask me, "How are you?" and to keep me company. I remember when Massimo invited me for a pizza. At that time, this simple companionship was more important to me than any kind of job offer. This period of unemployment helped me to come to see my circle of friends in

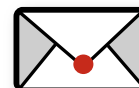


a new light. I have been so fortunate to receive help from so many people, like Nicola. One day I said to him, "I lost such a wonderful job!" He responded with, "I lost a son," but at that moment I was too focused on my work to think of anything else. It might seem crazy, but I am thankful for what has happened to me. In spite of all of the economic advantages I have had in the year before losing my job, I woke up every morning thinking, "How pathetic!" I had become completely arid, interested only in status, money, and benefits, but I had reached the end of my rope. Now, I have a job that pays one third of what I used to make but I am happy. I give less importance to money now. I have again begun to appreciate the simple things in life that are truly the most beautiful. I don't know how long any of this will continue, because I have a temporary contract, but I want to enjoy everything that happens during this period and I hope for the best. I have again started to truly appreciate hope.

Angelo, Seregno (Italy)

BEFORE REALITY, A CATCH-PHRASE IS NOT ENOUGH

A month ago, my wife was diagnosed with a benign brain tumor that needed to be removed. This is the kind of news that "cuts you at the knees." My thoughts immediately went to the difficulties that lie ahead, to our three small children, to what could happen, as if in the end, everything depended on me. At the same time, I felt a desire to share everything that was happening with my dearest friends. That same evening while speaking with my wife, I found her to be incredibly serene, especially when she said, "there is nothing that says that what is happening to us is not for our growth." I shot back, "let's get rid of the 'there is nothing that says!' God has never let us down. We can say this in light of the similar experiences of our friends." Upon further reflection, I realized that on paper, what I had said to her was "ok," but that reality might very well cause us to reduce this phrase to just a beautiful "CL catchphrase." I need to ver-



TIME OF FREEDOM

THE VACATION THAT I CANNOT ATTEND

I have a heart problem and I was invited to go to Pontresina (Switzerland) for a week vacation with my University friends. However, I will not be able to go on the vacation because of my condition. I am not destroyed by this; I want to give someone else the possibility of living the same experience that I had three years ago, the one that seized me in a university classroom and that even today sustains me in my present circumstances. I can do this by providing financial support. There are thousands of things I cannot do: I cannot play sports. I cannot breathe well. I used to be able to study for many more hours but now I have to do less. Even if I can only study for four hours, I'll do that and then Another will take



care of the rest. What surprises me during all of this is that everyone always tries to find a solution to my problem. We are great activists; we try to do everything ourselves. Then, one comes to the realization that life is in His hands: it is He who keeps me on my feet and who has a project, a path that is only made for me and that passes through the people who have been placed beside me. We can find Him anywhere: in Pontresina, at the Rimini Meeting, at the University, in every instant, even in a hospital bed! Certainly it is up to us to answer, "yes" or "no". A "yes" launches us forward. A "no" closes us up.

Giulia, Italy

ify this, to discover this. Facing our challenging circumstances, I was immediately struck by so many things, especially the caring friends who were moved to offer their physical and spiritual support through prayer. Through the help of a few friends we were able to have a medical examination at a clinic in Milan where they could schedule the surgery and where we met a neurosurgeon who impressed us with his deep humanity. On a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Sacro Monte in Varese, we entrusted ourselves to Mary. In this gesture I experienced dependence, a dependence that I desperately needed. On June 6th, the tumor was removed. During the hospital stay,



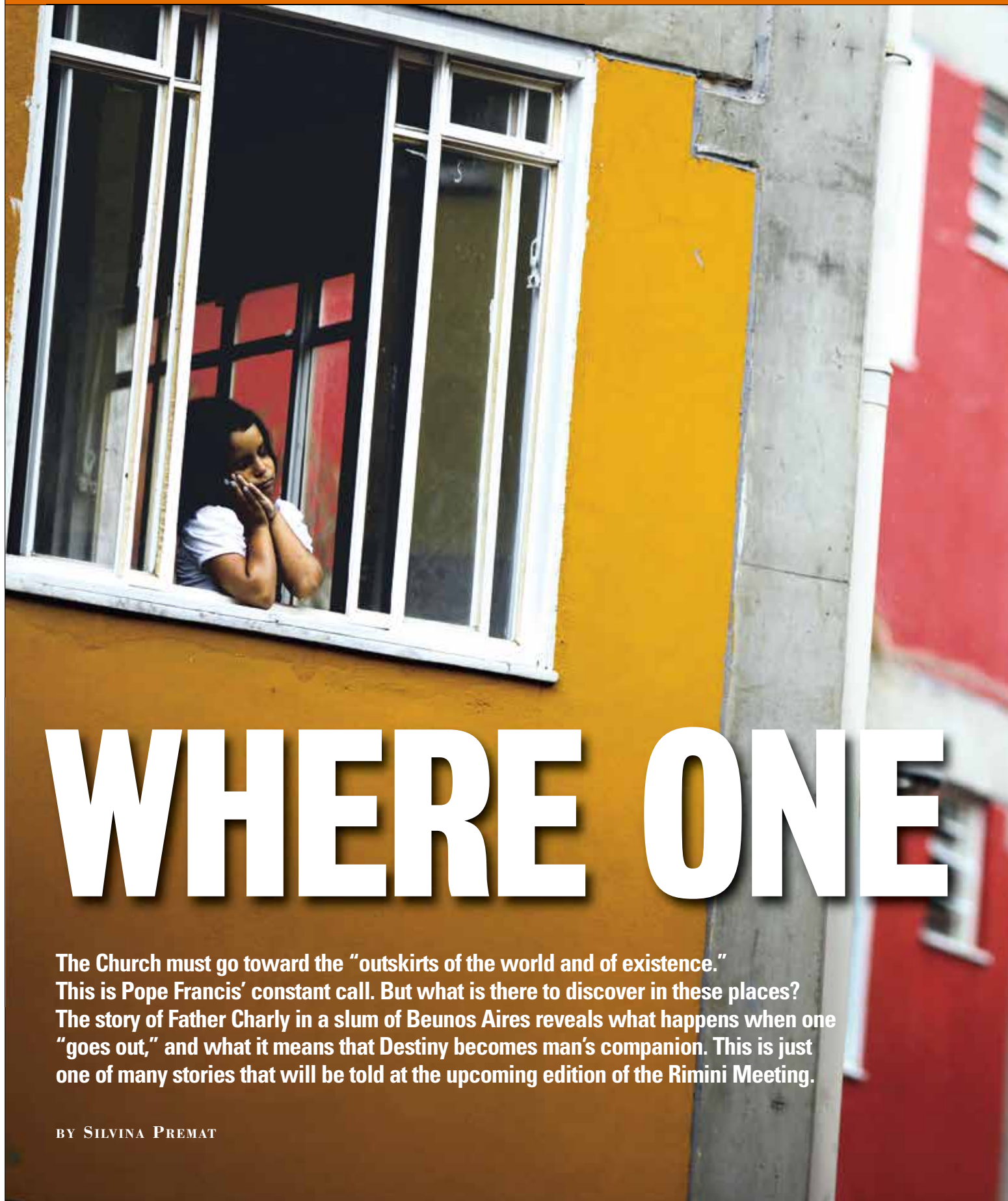
so many things happened through encounters with unexpected people with whom we shared our pain and a small part of the journey. We chatted with nurses who came to us to tell us of their pain and problems, though it was clear that we could not resolve them. There is a need to

share life with someone who gazes at you as Christ has gazed upon us, with love. I constantly ask myself why this is, and I leave it as an open question. This gratitude, which grows everyday, for having been preferred by God, is changing us, making us attach ourselves more and more to Him, always wanting an original and truly free position before everything we face. This is not a sentimental attachment, but the recognition of Him at work. This changes you and redeems everything, because the point is not only my wife's healing, it is also our conversion and the desire to bring Him to the world with a radiant face.

Gabriele, Busto Arsizio (Italy)

CLOSE UP
RIMINI MEETING

 **August 24th-30th**



WHERE ONE

The Church must go toward the "outskirts of the world and of existence."
This is Pope Francis' constant call. But what is there to discover in these places?
The story of Father Charly in a slum of Buenos Aires reveals what happens when one
"goes out," and what it means that Destiny becomes man's companion. This is just
one of many stories that will be told at the upcoming edition of the Rimini Meeting.

BY SILVINA PREMAT

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

This year Rimini Meeting will be about the periphery; not only physical peripheries where endemic poverty, wars, and a multitude of crises continuously shake up the world forcing billions of people into a life of perpetual precariousness, but also of the existential peripheries, equally dear to Pope Francis, though less evident and more difficult to investigate. These existential peripheries are wherever the human heart is far away from what it longs for.

These will be the topics of conversation in Rimini between August 24th and the 30th; what allows human beings to live anywhere and to look for happiness and fulfillment in everything? What sustains them? How is it possible that the primary and greatest help in living these questions could, paradoxically, be exactly those very conditions, situations, and circumstances that they live in? In those circumstances, on the periphery, what happens when Christianity, that most unforeseeable event by which Destiny has chosen to accompany us, occurs?

We shall see it at the Meeting. We can also begin to see it in these stories from the periphery. All of them can help us to understand why, as Father Giusani wrote: "Destiny has not left man alone."

AWAITS



They live on the outskirts of the city, on the banks of a filthy stream, above a landfill, a swampy area that has been converted into a miserable slum, in areas of Buenos Aires that no one noticed until a few homeless families settled there. They chose to make their home in a place where the homeless people go. Not one of them was born or raised there. They stand out among the alleyways because of the rigid collars they wear, and because wherever they go everyone greets them as “Padre.”

They are the *curas villeros*, a group of priests supported and accompanied more closely than any other pastoral reality in Buenos Aires by the then archbishop, Jorge Bergoglio. One of these priests, Carlos Oliviero, will be at the 2014 Meeting. He will speak of how he experiences that “Destiny has not left man alone,” not even in the most miserable material and existential poverty.

A DISCONNECT. “The actions, the way of thinking, and the spirituality of this group of priests is characterized by the acknowledgment of the presence and guidance of God through the people, the poorest of the poor, in the most marginalized situations,” says “Fr. Charly,” as everyone calls him. He is 38 years old, and for more than 10 years he has lived among the more than 50 thousand residents of Villa 21-24 in the neighborhood of Barracas. Fr. José María “Pepe” Di Paola, who was a guest at the 2013 Meeting, developed a large religious and social project in this same area, but had to escape due to pressure from drug traffickers.

From the very beginning, Fr. Pepe got help from Fr. Charly, who at the time was a restless seminarian. “While in seminary, in 2001, I felt a disconnect between the vocation to totality and



Fr. Charly.



The chapel of the Virgin of Caacupé, in the villa 21-24 in Buenos Aires.

the ecclesiastic reality of the seminary, which was rather closed,” recalls Fr. Charly. “I wanted to go and live in Fr. Pepe’s parish. With Archbishop Bergoglio’s authorization, I was able to live in Fr. Pepe’s parish and to attend classes at the seminary. I went, and once you go to the Villa, you could never leave”.

Charly has watched many of the teenagers who are now drug addicts grow up. Some of them were in his catechism classes. He suffers the same pain that any father suffers when he sees one of his children give in to the temptation of easy money, and even more acutely, when one of them decides to end their life because all they can see is an endless road and a life without meaning. He watches with sadness as a grandmother decides to sell drugs in order to support her grandchildren who have been abandoned to her by their parents. At the same time, he is happy when a father calls to tell him that his daughter has found a job or when a young parish

band member asks to make his First Communion.

He appreciates the title of the meeting telling us, “In the places of power, the world is designed to be individualistic and lonely. It is totally different from the world of the common people, where a living faith brings forth values such as hospitality, a sense of celebration, and many other values, Christian values, which are more human than merely economic wellbeing.

To think that Destiny has not left humanity alone means to believe that the poorest of the poor hold a special revelation from God and that the answer is a relationship of communion.”

According to Charly, to recognize the presence of God in the poor is “the starting point of everything.” This is why he often repeats what Pope Francis says, that “the poor need more than to be helped; we learn from and enter into communion with the poor.” Fr.

“The poor hold a special revelation from God and that the answer is a relationship of communion.”

Charley recognizes that he learned this in “the flesh” when in 2009 they opened the first farm where they gathered together a small group of drug addicts to begin a journey of detoxification.

THE CORNERSTONE. He found himself alone with six of them. “There I realized that to be in control was an illusion. They could fool me easily if they wanted. I could not rely on my ability to control, so I relied on the choice they made by accepting to be there. This was the first educative step; choosing to give them credit. It is a slow process, but the steps the kids take are freely chosen and embraced by them. It took me time to understand this; I struggled to be there without trying to impose my own viewpoint on them. It is beautiful to learn to love in a way that does not have the expectation of possessing the other. It is a crucified love, patient, that lasts over time and bears beautiful fruit.”

Among these fruits is the success of the detoxification program, created at the request of Fr. Pepe, and named “*Hogar de Cristo* (the Home of Christ)” after the work of the Chilean saint Fr. Alberto Hurtado. Today this program operates through day centers in four *villas* and on three farms, and has been replicated in other dioceses and by various government agencies. The program is based in a neighborhood community center in which the entire community is involved. Through it they employ those who have already abandoned the use of drugs as agents of recovery for others.

“The matter is simply this: the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” says Fr. Charly. “I do not help anyone. I am the one who needs these kids because they are my family and because I’m fragile. Their fragility and mine are what makes us brothers.”

PROGRAM

THE GUESTS, THEMES, AND MEETINGS OF THE WEEK

How will the Meeting of Rimini embrace the challenge given by the title of the 35th edition? We will leave that to be discovered in August, however we can at least preview the themes and guests:

The Custodian of the Holy Land, **Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa** will give a testimony on “Dialogue: The only way to Peace.” Ukrainian philosopher, **Aleksandr Filonenko**, will speak on the title of this year’s Meeting “Destiny has not left man alone.” Prof. **Joseph H. Weiler** of the United States will discuss Europe and its surroundings, while the Arab world will be present thanks to the young Egyptian women of **SWAP** (ShareWith All People), accompanied by **Wael Farouq**, Professor of Arab Language and Culture in Cairo.

Syria and its ancient past will make an appearance thanks to UCLA archeologist **Giorgio Buccellati**, **Maamoun Abdulkarim** the director of Antiquity of Syria, and **Khalid al-Masri**, director of Antiquity of Aleppo.

Monsignor **Silvano Maria Tomasi**, Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the United Nations, will speak about immigration along with **Giuseppe De Giorgi**, Commander in Chief of the Italian Navy. Religious



freedom will be the topic of debate with Pakistani minister **Paul Jacob Bhatti** and **H.E. Ignatius Kaigama**, Archbishop of Jos in Nigeria.

Guzmán Carriquiry, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, will speak about the challenges facing the South American continent along with **Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti**, Archbishop of Perugia. On rights (old and new) and other related issues: **O. Carter Snead** of the University of

Notre Dame and **Tomaso Emilio Epi-dendio**, Assistant Magistrate of the Constitutional Court of Italy, will be invited into a dialogue by **Andrea Simoncini**, Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Florence, meanwhile **Guido Brambilla**, Magistrate of the Surveillance Court of Milan and Patrizia Colombo from the Homo Faber Cooperative at the District House in Bassone (Como) will speak about liberty “behind bars.” **Luciano Violante** and **Javier Prades López**, President of San Dámaso University in Madrid, will address matters of justice and charity.



Journalist, **Michele Brambilla** and **Egidio Bandini**, president of the “Friends of Giovannino Guareschi,” will tell the story of Don Camillo together with their two children, Carlotta and Alberto. **Laurent Lafforgue**, professor of Institut des Hautes Études Scientifiques, will discuss “the fascination of research” with the French peleo-anthropologist **Yves Coppens**. Alberto Savorana’s, **Life of Father Giussani**, after its months-long tour, will arrive at the Meeting together with the Buddhist monk **Shodo Habukawa**, philosopher **Massimo Borghesi**, and sociologist **Mauro Magatti**.



Basketball coach, **Marco Calamai** and **Massimiliano Rug-giero** from the project “Difficult Youth, Winning Perspectives,” along with **Pedro Samaniego**, from Paraguay, will explore the world of sports as an occasion to help young people.

And this is only the beginning...

Paola Ronconi



There I Discovered Something About Myself

An exhibition displayed at the Meeting in Italy, will tell of the journey in three stops—Kenya, Ecuador, and Brazil—in search of what causes a person to be born again. A special reporter offers us his testimony.

BY JOHN WATERS

What, really, is poverty? We believe we know. We believe it's a simple question. We may not always accept that the solution is straightforward, but still we think we know approximately where it lies. We may differ in the details: some of us talk about redistribution of resources, others about making markets more efficient and responsive. Yet, frequently such prescriptions appear to make things worse when applied. We give of our own wealth, out of sundry motives, and hope that it will be enough. But it is never enough. So we give more, and still it is not sufficient.

Often, the poverty we seek to treat becomes entrenched, soon new symptoms begin to manifest. In the place of outright deprivation, we have engendered a dependency that soon becomes, in its way, just as ominous as the conditions that preceded it. The poor remain “with us”—except, of course, that “we are not with them.” This really is poverty.

For the 2014 Meeting of Rimini, I have been asked to contribute as curator to the creation of an exhibition on the operations of AVSI in three locations: Quito in Ecuador, Nairobi in Kenya and Sao Paulo in Brazil. The exhibition

will look at the educational projects that AVSI has built in these places, rooted in Fr. Giussani's vision of an educative method that places the development of the person—the generation of a new subject—at its center. The title of our exhibition will be: “Generating Beauty: New Beginnings at the Ends of the Earth.”

The title echoes the theme of this year's Meeting. But what we follow is Fr. Giussani's insistent voice that echoes to places where human circumstances are the most challenging imaginable, places that Pope Francis has called “the outskirts of existence.”

That phrase seemed immediately to gesture far beyond geography, or sociology, or ideology, beyond even the idea of allegiance to a faith. It summoned us to a responsibility that resides beyond calls to duty or compassion or even what is conventionally called charity. It struck me forcibly as a call to me in my personhood, as a human being, in my most fundamental essence—beneath everything I have learned, heard or come to believe—to call me to the question of who I am and what my destiny is.

A part of this call is the imposing question concerning what my responsibility might be to others. And then,

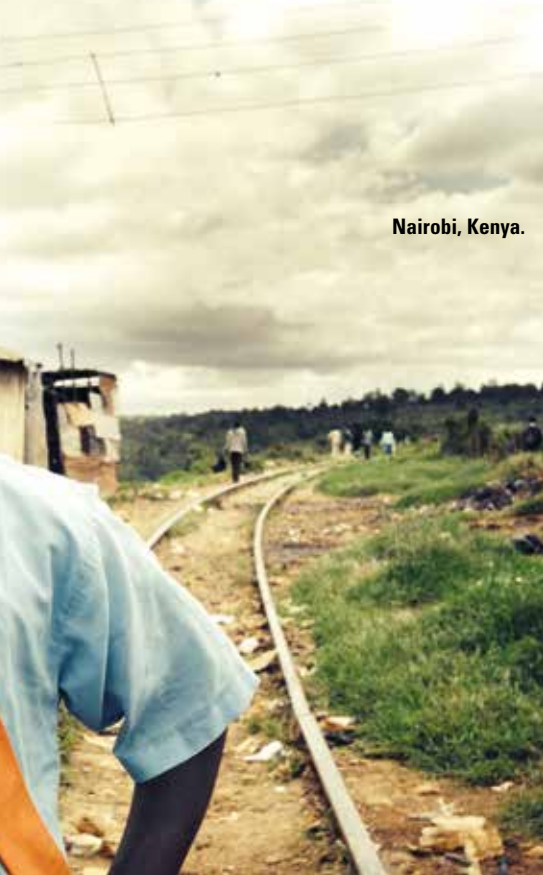
The word “outskirts” summoned us to a responsibility that resides beyond calls to compassion.



immediately: who are these “others” and who am I for them? What does Christ demand of me?

It is not simple. It is not obvious. It is certainly not enough to stick my hand in my pocket and pull out a smattering of coins. This costs me less than nothing, because it quiets my soul's guilt far more than it eases the grief or pain of the recipient, and so it leaves me also... wanting.

THE INVASIONS. What then? Giussani shows us in his educative method, which places the human person at its center and offers not alms or aid or resources, the possibility of a total regeneration of the human person. This is what we were called to follow in our task of preparing this exhibit: how the call of Christ has given new leases on life in a series of human relationships in distant and diverse places, where the needs of man appear in one sense to be at their most basic and in another emerge as no different to the needs of human beings anywhere. In Quito, for example, we visited the “invasions” of Pisulí, one of the areas of the city which sprang up when people simply arrived from elsewhere and insisted upon a place, a home for themselves



Nairobi, Kenya.

and their families, putting down their tents and guarding their space with a gun. In this area, today, two-thirds of the population lives in poverty, and most of these in extreme poverty. Many have been cheated over and over as a result of corruption, losing their properties again and again. And yet something in the spirit of these people has enabled them to survive and remain, to continue building what is a new civilization at the heart of an old one.

Into the lives of these people, through the work of AVSI, we saw the process of education not as a means of training operatives in an economy, but as a method for awakening the entire being. We went, then, to observe the process of faith becoming culture, which is what happens when the student (‘or anyone else for that matter’) meets an “adult” whose very presence is a proposal for an explanatory hypothesis of life in its totality. This, Giussani elaborated in *The Risk of Education*, “becomes a journey of recognition, a path of affection, and a process of appropriating and using reality for one’s own purposes.” Thus, the student too becomes an adult and a true protagonist in reality, capable himself of generating newness in history.

Along the way, we encountered many

challenges to our certainties about what we already “knew,” many startling witnesses who confronted our preconceptions from the truth of their own lives. As to what I would now say that poverty is, I cannot say, not exactly. I see more clearly that the problem has for too long been bedeviled by easy analyses and explanations. But, in Sao Paulo I learned that it has something to do with a form of loneliness that I had not before focused on. The word ‘exclusion’ trips off the lips of politicians and philanthropists but what it conjures up in our culture is something partial and inadequate. It suggests a denial of participation in the economic life of the society but this is only the beginning. It is what flows from this that forges the vicious force that is poverty: the loss of citizenship, the dependency, the indignities, the self-hatred, the degradation of culture, the shame, the death of the person despite a body that continues to live. Poverty is a blow suffered, even though the society may not be aware of delivering it. And the pain and confusion occasioned by that blow can last a lifetime and be handed down from generation to generation.

One of the things I observed in Sao Paulo, through the work of CREN [Center for Rehabilitation, Education and Nutrition], which is supported by AVSI, is that malnutrition is not necessarily as clear-cut a condition as I had come to believe. We discovered that it has to do with the scarcity of good food, yes, or the wrong foods, but much more than that, it has to do with a form of amnesia. Mothers, displaced from their families in the countryside, come to live in the slums, marry, give birth—but then find that they have “forgotten” how to care adequately for their children in what are often desperate circumstances. Nurturing does not come naturally. It is a wisdom carried within a culture, and when cultures

become ruptured by scarcity and displacement the carefully cultivated wisdom of previous generations becomes misplaced in a new place. This is one of the senses in which loneliness manifests itself as a core symptom of true, profound poverty.

VITAL COMPANIONSHIP. In this we can glimpse the importance of a human intervention—the radical act of regeneration that is education in its deepest sense. Such an intervention cannot be paternalistic for the very obvious reason that paternalism has already been seen to fail many times. It can only successfully occur as friendship, as a companionship in which an equality of need is acknowledged and made visible. We are all poor, but in different senses. We are all lonely, though not in ways that are immediately similar. The idea of companionship, then, is vital.

If poverty has an antidote then, it may well be beauty—beauty in its deepest truest sense: the echo of, or residue of, or nostalgia for some greatness in ourselves that we have forgotten. In Nairobi, we saw this most acutely in the stark contrast between the slums of Kibera and the freshness and lightness, of the classrooms at Little Prince and Cardinal Otunga schools. There the children experience the possibility of another life right where they live. To see these children growing before our eyes was moving beyond belief.

But the most amazing aspect is something else. And along the way—in Quito, Nairobi and Sao Paulo—we asked those we met to tell us what it has meant in their own lives to be invited to accompany and to be accompanied. What, really, does it mean to invite another to be himself, to help him to generate in himself a new human being?—“What is the method you apply to changing the lives of others?” Many times the same answer came back: “I myself changed.”

I learned that poverty has something to do with a form of loneliness that I had not before focused on.

CURRENT EVENTS

CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ



“I REMAIN
IN MOSUL”

An exodus from Mosul; the second-largest city in Iraq (population 2 million). It is about 220 miles north of Baghdad.

Thousands of Iraqis are fleeing their homes to escape attacks from jihadist groups. For four years His Excellency AMEL SHAMON NONA, Chaldean Archbishop of Mosul, has shared everything with his community, risking for the sake of hope. “I’ve seen them change, day by day.”

BY LUCA FIORE

The worst moment was at the beginning of the attacks. On the night of June 6th there were around 4,000 families that fled, leaving everything behind them and setting out on foot for nearby villages. At 11 pm the army and the police abandoned the city leaving the way open for the armed group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria) to take control.

Archbishop Amel Shamon Nona, the Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, was in Tal Kayf, three kilometers north, and saw them coming: women and children, Christians and Muslims, entire families. They

were on foot, finding their way for five or six hours through the darkness, terrified. Behind them one could see the lights from the bombs. They were running from something that they didn’t understand seeking refuge and not knowing what they would find.

The advance of the jihadist groups has moved up to the gates of Baghdad. Today, Mosul, Tikrit and Kirkuk are under the control of fundamentalists that are imposing *Sharia*, or Islamic law. Churches have been plundered and threatened that they must pay *Jizya*, the tax for infidels. Archbishop Nona arrived in Mosul in 2010. His



Archbishop Amel Shamon Nona.

predecessor, Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, had been kidnapped and killed two years earlier. Born 47 years ago in Alqosh, a town that is 45 kilometers north of Mosul on the plain of Nineveh, Nona became a priest in 1991. He studied in Rome between 2000 and 2005, and then returned to his hometown to be a pastor. He recounts to us the plight of his people and speaks not only about the uncertainty for the future, but about the past four years of difficulty for his community in Mosul. The word that stands out is an unimaginable hope.

Archbishop Nona, have you been afraid?

Not for my own wellbeing, but for my people. I would never want something bad to happen to one of them. That is why I stayed by my phone that night, asking all the families remaining in Mosul to leave. Many had no idea what was happening. Christian families only leave their homes when they absolutely have to, and many hadn’t

understood the gravity of what was going on.

Did you expect the situation to get this bad so quickly?

No. We all know that the city is very dangerous. Every day there are car bombings, but I never thought that the second largest city in the country would fall so easily. In Mosul, there were many soldiers and weapons. It is unclear why, all of a sudden, the army has withdrawn.

People are filled with fear. Are they also angry?

Right now it is our worry that dominates. It is unthinkable that the situation could stay as it is now. Everyone has left their homes and their jobs. How long will they remain refugees? Then, there is the fear that everything will deteriorate further. We do not know what awaits us.

You arrived in Mosul in 2010. Were you tempted to refuse the appointment, given what happened to Archbishop Rahho?

No, my first thought was about the needs of the faithful of this diocese. They had gone for two years without a shepherd. My sole concern was whether or not it would be possible to complete my role of service as the bishop.

What was your first impression?

I arrived on January 16, 2010. Beginning on January 17th there was a stretch of two weeks in which one or two Christians were killed every day. Many of the faithful fled the city. Yet, over time, many of them have returned.

What have these four years been like?

It was not possible to do many of things that would be normal in a diocese. Getting around the city is not easy. You have to act with great caution. Thanks be to God, all the

churches of the city have remained open with the exception of three parishes that have closed due to a lack of numbers or because they were in the most dangerous areas.

What has the faith meant for you and your faithful living under these circumstances?

Many Christians could not afford to flee, mostly because of economic reasons and because of their work. I have always tried to give them hope, to help them understand that it's possible to live, even here. I've always said that despite the risk of being killed in one hour or in one minute, it is possible to live every moment full of hope and joy.

How did you learn that this is possible?

I myself began to live this way, and then I started to communicate this in my homilies and in meetings. Over time, I noticed that the people changed too; the faithful were in need of this certainty. They needed to learn to live in a situation where you risk your life despite being threatened by a society that does not welcome Christians. Mosul is a city that does not accept the different way that Christians live. Still, in all of this, I saw that I was living with joy.

How have you noticed this change in the Christians?

From the way we live. They were the ones to tell me that they needed to be more attached to our faith. It was they who told me that they began to live again amidst the many difficulties. They told me in words and I, from their eyes, could see that it was true. I could tell by the way they said it. I have seen this change day by day. When I

arrived, it was totally different. After six months, a year, the change in them was palpable.

What has made this possible?

A deeper understanding of the faith has made this possible. This is what gives us a clearer vision of life, regardless of whether this is a time of difficulty. During these years my effort has been to deepen the content of our faith, to communicate it in a simple way that could reach everyone even those who know nothing of theology. I'd like to think I've managed a little bit. I say

that because, when I visit around the diocese, it is the faithful who ask me to keep returning to the contents of the faith. It is faith that gives us strength.

Of these "contents of the faith," what is most precious?

Hope. That is the motto of my episcopate. This is not something that we wait for in the afterlife, but instead it is to know that what you look forward to in heaven is already taking place today, at this moment. This allows you to live each moment for what it is: un-

repeatable. And, if we know that it is unique then we can live it to the fullest. We live the fullness of faith and joy, but also of anger if there is anger. Everything is different within a perspective of hope and it is that same hope that gives me the strength to communicate it to others.

What are you asking for in prayer these days?

I pray that the Lord gives serenity of heart to all of the people of Iraq. Without this serenity there will never be peace. **T**

NUMBERS

32 million
The population of Iraq.

11
Years since U.S. intervention.

1.1 million
Refugees since the beginning of this year.

500.000
Residents of Mosul who have fled (since June 5).

191.000
Casualties since 2003.

Sources: CIA, UNICEF, iraqbodycount.org

CL LIFE
LATIN AMERICA

FOR THE F

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FIRST TIME IN

BATA

¡Bata!

At the Fraternity Exercises on the Caribbean island of Cuba, the lives of Conrado, Orlenis, Alejandro, and Nora cross paths in an exhausted society. The atheist education has not been able to erase the need for meaning. In this encounter, "the simplest thing in the world" happens: a Christian embrace.

BY HORACIO MOREL

Matanzas, Cuba, Friday, May 16, 2014. If the life and destiny of men and women are played out in time and space, then there must be dates and places that also acquire transcendental value. We are here because we accepted a simple invitation: "Come along with me to Cuba." Thirty years in the movement and the intuition of being in front of an historic fact give us the certainty of our answer to this question. However, it is the ever urgent and daily need to see Christ in all things that brings my wife Claudia and me here, in response to the invitation of Julián de la Morena, the responsible for CL in Latin America.

These are the first Fraternity Exercises to be held on the Caribbean island of Cuba, governed by Castro-ism since the revolution of 1959. It is a laboratory of communist collectivism and the cradle and source of inspiration for hundreds of revolutionary movements throughout the world.

Life in Cuba is not easy. There is a shortage of everything. What little there is, is expensive and beyond the economic possibilities of most families, especially those families who try to earn a living with honest work. Jobs do not pay >>



Friends of the CL community in Cuba.

» well; a professional earns no more than 30 dollars a month. Since the so-called “special period,” (a period when Comecon aid to Cuba was ended as a consequence of the Soviet empire’s fall) there are frequent, long periods when basic necessities are scarce. Carlos tells us, for example, that in the 90’s he was reduced to washing himself with only water, as there was no soap to be found.

The state continues to control everything. Private enterprise is only the prerogative of large groups in the tourism sector and of some small, autonomous commercial activities. The latter are bound by precarious legal constraints, since the government can revoke permits and close businesses. It has already happened.

THE MONOLOGUE OF THE REGIME. Most people do not have access to the internet because connections are costly and slow, and most international websites are blocked. There is a very strong political will that works to isolate the population in an age in which living on an island would constitute neither a geographical nor a cultural obstacle. Reality contradicts the “Long live Fidel!” proclaimed on the

There is a strong political will that works to isolate the population. Society lacks true ideals.

murals in the Plaza de la Revolución beneath the image of Camilo Cienfuegos. Cuban society, like so many others, is exhausted. It lacks true common ideals and no longer believes its revolutionary slogans and the “monologue” of the regime. Approaching the city of Matanzas (100 km from the capital, with a population of a little more than 150,000) one catches a glimpse of the port, with its low buildings typical of small, internal cities, and an enormous bay that was the theater for a bloody battle between the Spanish and the local population (hence the city’s name; Matanzas which means “killings”). St. Peter’s

Church on one side and the recently restored Cathedral of St. Charles Borromeo on the other stand out from the other various buildings for their beauty and majesty.

Half way up the bay near the bridge over one of the three rivers that cut through this city, referred to as the “Athens of Cuba” for its cultural richness, a building draws our attention. It appears to be a Catholic school unlike any seen in Havana or in other parts of Cuba: a church, a cloister, a well-tended garden and a statue of

the Sacred Heart dominate the space beyond the wall and gate all the way to the sea. This is the parish of La Milagrosa, the place that will host us for the Fraternity Exercises this weekend.

We make room in our memory for new faces and new names; little by little we exchange our first greetings. The residents of Matanzas go to and from, attentive to each detail, welcoming those who arrive from Havana and from the more distant Guantánamo and us, who have arrived from Argentina with Patrizia.

The Exercises open with the invocation of the Holy Spirit and after the songs Julián delivers the introduction. In the next few days, he will follow the same course as Fr. Carrón, while the more than 20 people who listen attentively fix their gaze upon him, carefully following the expression of his eyes, the passion with which he searches for the precise word that expresses with clarity the concept that he wants to communicate. His eyes make me understand that his dominant thought is not “how many they are” but “who they are.” From the back row, Carras takes notes (at the beginning, he advised us all to do the same). He notes that it is as if it were the first time, as if he had not been in the Movement for almost 40 years,

A moment during the Exercises.



found needs of their hearts that emerge in the pressing circumstances of life that ideology cannot answer. Power, with its arrogance, can declare that God does not exist, but it cannot tear from us the question of the meaning of life, the profound desire for happiness, love, beauty and freedom.

TRADEMARK. “I was looking for a certainty,” says Alejandro, “especially in front of my adverse circumstances. When I met Fr. Giussani, I understood that faith is reasonable because it responds to the fundamental needs of the heart. I was surprised, not only by the experience of a reasonable faith, but also by the freedom and gladness that I am living, that are the fruit of faith.” In his synthesis, Julián decisively affirms that “we have not been together to put a little gasoline in the car to tide us over until the presence of Christ happens to us again: The Church is reborn when one feels looked upon by the Mystery in love with man. We continue along that we may not lose this gaze of the Mystery full of love for us.” The retreat ends, but all of us are sure that it is truly a beginning, a point of departure. Jordania, a survivor of the small community from the

“We continue along that we may not lose this gaze of the Mystery full of love for us.”

Movement that once existed in Havana, tells us so. A few days later, Manuel, a man with a long experience in Cuban social pastoral work, writes to tell me that after the Exercises he began to attend the School of Community in Matanzas and to read Fr. Giussani with passion.

The embrace that welcomed us now sends us off. It is the trademark of a friendship such as ours, one that we would have missed if we had refused this invitation. Alejandro is right: to obey is so simple. **T**

as if he had not spent his whole life helping this story grow, visiting communities all around the world. In the evening, he would witness once again, as he usually does, that life, faith, and friendship should be celebrated. For this reason, he remembered to bring cheese, Serrano ham, and wine for the feast.

A DELAY AT WORK. The moment of the Assembly arrives, with witnesses and questions. Alejandro tells of his faith journey, begun when he met a Catholic family that impressed him and caused him to discover a new way of living, different from his atheist formation, and then later, of the encounter with Conrado, who spoke to him of Fr. Giussani and CL. “The gaze of Christ comes to us through real people,” says Alejandro, underpinning the value of an apparently insignificant daily circumstance. It was a delay at work, “that [he] would have wanted to avoid,”—that forced him to stay a while longer and to listen to the dialogue between the bishop and Conrado, which led to his interest in the Movement.

Alejandro recounts the agitation and stress before Carras’ and Julián’s arrival and of the concerns about the preparations. “Afterward, it was the easiest thing in the world: an em-

brace. It is very simple, it is about obeying the ‘eyes from heaven’ that are watching me. It is the simplicity of the Christian embrace.”

Conrado asks his first question: “How can I transmit to my university students the gaze of Christ that I have encountered?” Carras answers, “the most difficult thing is to have a gaze full of love for the destiny of the other; we cannot have any expectation in their regard, only gratitude.” He tells of when he and Fr. Giussani met with his Spanish anarchist friends. They did not give up proclaiming Christ and his Church facing the human problem, despite knowing that by doing so it could mean finding themselves alone. “It is something that frees us from the results and from useless worries,” he explains.

Orlenis, Nora, Yudailer, and Deyanira recount their stories and experiences. Some have been very difficult, as Alejandro will recount in his witness later that evening. Many have in common the atheist education they received under communism confronted with the pro-



CHURCH
USA
OUR MOTHER?

Latino Jolt

It is a population of 53 million. Today, 40 percent of American Catholics are Hispanic. What does the “Francis factor” mean for this population? It’s more than a linguistic or cultural phenomenon. There are sounds of a renewal with great promise (even beyond America).

BY MATTIA FERRARESI

The history of the Hispanic communities in the U.S. is made up of intertwined stories of immigration and of exodus, in which the hope of a happy future in the land of the free is intermixed with drama and disappointment. It’s the history of a diverse people who have grown familiar with suffering and marginalization,

but also with compassion and solidarity—the priceless fruits of the Catholic tradition that has outlived the plight of the *diaspora* that began generations ago. It is a people who are at once deeply rooted and stranded without roots.

It’s true that Francis is everyman’s Pope—a recent survey from the Pew Research Center reports that 80% of

American Catholics are excited about the Pope—however, it’s also true that he speaks in a language and cadence that is proper to the Latino communities which dot the land first colonized by the English Pilgrims and French Jesuits in the East, and by the Spanish Franciscans in the South and West. His appeal is not a factor that can easily be reduced to a matter of language or geography.

Most Americans would say it’s because of his “empathy,” his capacity to relate to others and put himself in their shoes, and though this is a term that can be easily abused in the political realm, one can see the point. His insistence upon the existential periphery, on compassion for the poor,

¿NO ESTOY YO A

A man prays outside Nuestra Señora Reina de Los Angeles.



and of faith as a personal encounter which transforms daily life or his use of live interviews with his direct, colloquial style; and the humble strength of his gestures: through all of these traits Francis has been like a magical chord which resonates in the hearts of the Hispanic people who have grown to have such a profound influence on the life of the United States and of the Church.

SPACE FOR A DIALOGUE. It follows naturally then that in his first meeting with President Obama in March, the Holy Father spoke of “immigration reform,” a mirage that can be sought across the divisions of the American political spectrum, but which, nonetheless

vanishes whenever the debate threatens to be concretized at the level of legislation. It’s precisely here, in the immigration debate, that the Obama White House and the Vatican could find a space for dialogue which has come to an impossible standstill on other topics, such as right to life issues and religious freedom.

Francis’s position was further reiterated a few weeks after the meeting with Obama through the strong message sent by the ‘transnational’ Mass celebrated by Cardinal Sean O’Malley on the border with Mexico on April, 1st. Holy Communion was distributed through the fence that divides Nogales, Ariz, with its twin city across the border was a living sign of the reconciliation that the Hispanic people long for. There are approximately 53 million Latinos living in the United States, which is second only to Mexico in terms of the size of the population of Hispanic origin. At least one fifth of these are in the country illegally, and 25 percent live below the poverty line. They are still bound by strong family relationships, which is worth noting in a country whose society tends toward autonomy and isolation. As the Hispanic population grows, so does the attention paid to it for its political and cultural sway, as well as their influence on the Church. Thirty-nine percent of American Catholics are Hispanic, and a fourth of the country’s parishes have ministries dedicated to Spanish speakers. But what impact has the first year of Francis’s Pontificate had on these people? What are the aspects that have inspired the lives and imaginations of this community which is simultaneously so tenacious and so fragile?

For Mario Paredes, former Chairman of the Board of the Catholic Association of Latino Leaders (CALL) and White House appointee and spe-

cial envoy to Latin America under the Reagan administration, this year was “important for the entire Hispanic world, and especially for Latin Americans. First and foremost, the arrival of Bergoglio was a way of recognizing that now almost half of the Catholic Church lives in the ‘New World,’ and there is a movement toward the Western Hemisphere.” Next, Paredes explains, Francis “has changed the tone of the discourse. It has gone from an academic and moralistic style to a more conversational, friendly and understandable one. The most striking thing is that the Pope speaks the language of the Gospel, rather than exercising theological or philosophical teachings. People listen and they understand. His simplicity is something that everyone has seen, commented upon, and appreciated.”

CULTURE WARS. America is also the arena of great “culture wars”—including social debates over life issues, fam-

Communion distributed through the fence was a living sign of the reconciliation that the Hispanic people long for.

ily, and education—and the Latino population is historically a strong force of opposition against the secularization of society. The Pope has reiterated doctrine, but he invites us not to transform the Christian position into an obsession. “For some

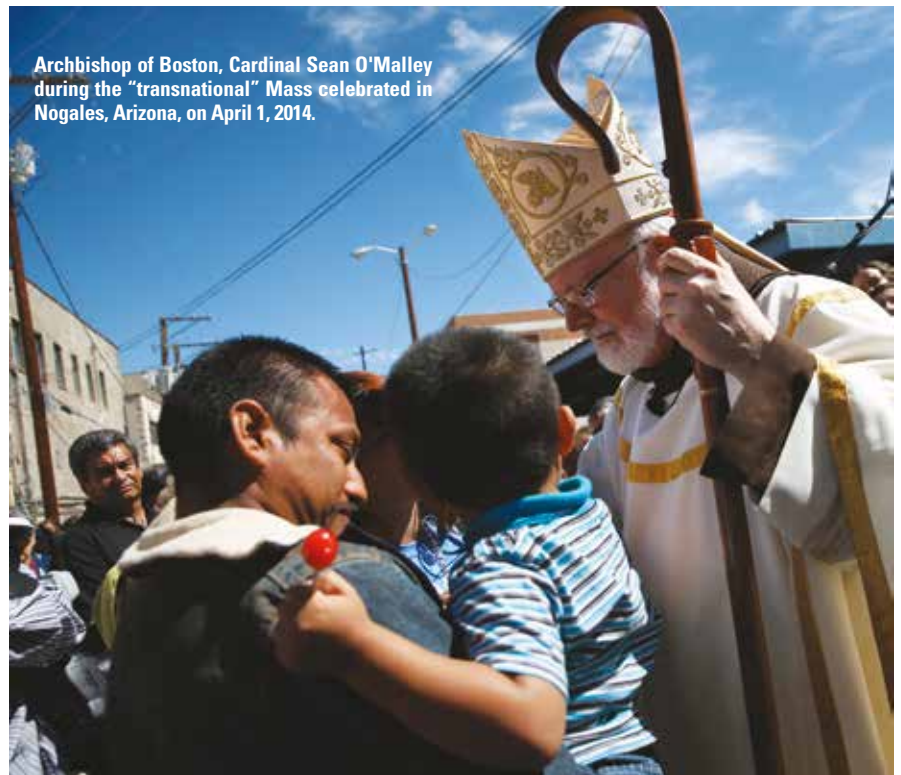
Francis was a shock,” Paredes says, “because they believe that he puts a lot of emphasis on things that aren’t important. But the most important things in society have to do with the fact that God comes first. From there you can begin to build up values. Is he ‘flexible’ about doctrine? Not at all. Sure, if faith is based on ideological values, he who conceives of it this way will be disappointed by the Pope, but we have to fight against hypocrisy and rediscover the faith for what it is.” And inside this rediscovery there is also a message of hope for a country in an endless >>

» dispute over immigration reform. “The Pope calls for a more humane treatment for immigrants, and inspires laws guided by compassion,” says Parades. “From the beach of Lampedusa, he sent a message: humanize situations that are inhuman. Which, in the end, is simply the Gospel.”

Carmen Aguinaco, president of the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry, says that now “Hispanic Catholics in the United States feel understood in their trials and in their outlook on life.” It’s a view made up primarily of realism and compassion, Aguinaco reminds us. And thus “the people feel encouraged: they see their beliefs reflected in those of the Pope. In addition, the way of thinking of Hispanics is very concrete and reality-based, which makes the Pope’s approach more familiar and accessible. In the past, people didn’t read, and sometimes didn’t even hear about the Pope’s writings, but now they are much more approachable.”

WELCOMED OR TURNED AWAY. Latinos are a people who are concrete, tempered by difficulties, but easily inviting a ‘fiesta.’ This is a tendency which fits well into the “Gospel of joy” that Francis announces. And what about the Hispanics who aren’t Catholic? How do they perceive Francis? According to Aguinaco “the tenderness and closeness to the poor and simplicity of this Pope touches everyone. Maybe they are hoping that this will generate reforms, which will probably occur at a slower rate than people think, but there is a sense of enthusiasm surrounding that which many perceive to be a renewal of the Church.”

One defining characteristic that Aguinaco identifies in the Hispanic community can be summed up in the word ‘hospitality.’ “The inclusion and welcome that he shows with his words and gestures is one of his most convincing traits: a Pope who is capable of



Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Sean O'Malley during the “transnational” Mass celebrated in Nogales, Arizona, on April 1, 2014.

accepting others certainly could not turn away a people who know well what it means to be turned away and discriminated against. No, Hispanics feel that they are a part of the Church just as much as those from any other culture.” Latinos will continue to “defend values such as life and will maintain their traditional views on social issues. But this new emphasis will help them to connect their faith, which is sometimes viewed in a private and intimistic way, with their social convictions or with gestures of solidarity. I think that in the minds of many, these two worlds are separate, and the Pope is helping them to reunite these two elements which are essential for the life of faith,” says Aguinaco.

This unity of the faith reawakened by Pope Francis is also a point of emphasis for Reynaldo Montemayor, president of the *Federación de Institutos Pastorales* and director of the Pastoral Institute of the Diocese of Laredo, Texas. Here, the Francis factor is translated as “a new evangelical im-

petus. We Latinos are well aware of our growing presence, and that the Church is becoming more and more Hispanic. To have a Latino Pope who calls us to a new evangelization to those on the margins—that is, among our people—is truly providential; it’s a gift that has been given to us. The non-Catholic Latino community is extremely receptive to the Christian experience,

especially to the way in which Francis is communicating it, and therefore we are entrusted with a two-part mission: to proclaim the Gospel and to re-proclaim it to those who have lost the faith, becoming promoters of Christi-

tianity for the entire United States, not only for Hispanics. I believe that this is the mission that is asked of us in this historic moment, and, who knows, maybe one day, missionaries from the New World will set off to re-evangelize Europe. For sure we can say that much of this ‘leavening’ in our community is due to the presence of Francis.”

“Hispanic Catholics feel understood in their outlook on life.” It’s a view made up of realism and compassion.

ANNIVERSARY FLANNERY O'CONNOR

“I can, with one eye squinted, take it all as a blessing.” *Flannery O’C*



Reality springs forth from God's unpredictable action and human life is a waiting for decisive moments. These are the “invisible structures” of the narrative of the great writer from the Deep South, who died 50 years ago, and changed the American short story. Many have learned her lessons, but they did not grasp her heart. An Italian author reflects on the universal impact of her world.

BY LUCA DONINELLI

Fifty years have passed since her death in 1964, and next year will be the 90th anniversary of her birth. If she were alive today, Flannery O'Connor would be 89 years old. Among us, perhaps, as a dear but severe old woman, with the hope of having another few years of life. We might go and visit her, and likely fall victim to that sharp tongue of hers. I imagine her as lucid, mischievous, and trenchant as ever.

All of this might have been possible if it had not been

for the terrible disease lupus, which took her life at only 39 years old. For almost the entirety of her short life, O'Connor belonged to that region known simply as the “Deep South”—the same place that nurtured its foremost native son, William Faulkner. This setting provided the backdrop for their comedies and tragedies, and allowed the full fascinating display of how man's freedom (and often his folly) is played out.

Clear ties bind the writers of the South. As different as they may be in style and technique, authors from the

» Deep South share the underlying reference point of the world where their stories take place and the distinctive characters that inhabit it. O'Connor, for example, may have had no great love for Truman Capote, but the world they describe is very similar. I am not sure how familiar O'Connor was with Carson McCullers (read *The Ballad of the Sad Café*), but the commonalities abound.

The Deep South can often seem a hard and hostile world, proud, and slow to heed the so-called lessons of the urbanized North and its 'civilization.' Just read O'Connor's first short story "The Geranium." It describes people who, if they're going to be duped by anyone, would prefer it were by soapbox preachers and traveling Bible salesmen rather than the architects of skyscrapers and megacities.

A STRANGE KIND OF FAMILY. Faulkner, McCullers, Eudora Welty and Truman Capote are only some of the names that make up this exclusive literary company; this is a world of irreparable actions, emotions, and incurable ills—a world that seems too extreme to be considered a home by real, organized, and intellectual societies. It's a sort of strange kind of family: nothing too harmonious, just like life. Perhaps it's precisely for this reason that we are drawn to their haunting stories, and even if we are far from the world they describe, we feel that it is somehow close. We are touched by it the same way we are moved by the haunting echoes of the blues songs sung in the Mississippi delta. Shakespeare may have said it earlier: "What's Hecuba to him? Or he to Hecuba?" (*Hamlet*, II, ii, v. 1632) Yet, hearing his cry, we feel the urge to cry with him.



"In every instant, life and death are at stake, and so therefore every moment has a decisive finality."

If it can be said that the seemingly solitary O'Connor is actually accompanied by many storytellers who are kindred spirits, it can perhaps be said that she has even more companions in her chosen literary form, the short story, of which she is the unsurpassable master. Saying this may somewhat overshadow her novels, but it was undoubtedly for the art of the short story that O'Connor's name became well-known.

The American short story is not merely a short tale. The history of literature is full of short tales. In our modern epoch alone, I could cite extraordinary examples from authors that include Poe, Maupassant, Joyce, Chekov, Singer and many others.

The American short story, however, has a nature all its own, one that we could describe—in an oversimplification—as follows: in a short

story, the 'whole tale' and the 'story told' do not always perfectly overlap. A tale must have a beginning, some development, and an end, but the short story can simply 'say' what it has to say even before the "whole tale" is resolved. When the short story has said what it set out to say, the author has the right and responsibility to bring it to a close.

From Ernest Hemingway and John Cheever to Raymond Carver and Alice Munro this particularly difficult-to-compose genre has given the world extraordinary masterpieces. And Flannery O'Connor occupies a central place among their ranks.

It is my impression that O'Connor pioneered a new take on Hemingway's model of the short story, and that her shift in style was taken on by almost all of her most significant successors, including Carver (though he seemed to have no great love for her; but it's hard to love someone we could never surpass!) and Munro.



"Lupus is one of those things in the rheumatic department; it comes and goes, when it comes I retire and when it goes, I venture forth. My father had it some twelve or fifteen years ago but at that time there was nothing for it but the undertaker; now it can be controlled with the ACTH. I have enough energy to write with and as that is all I have any business doing anyhow, I can with one eye squinted take it all as a blessing."

(from a letter to Elizabeth and Robert Lowell, March 17, 1953)

Flannery O'Connor

Above, Flannery O'Connor at the age of three. Left, in 1947, with her friends Arthur Koestler, Mamaine Paget, and Robert Macauley.

the school of Flannery O'Connor, but in my opinion they have mostly taken on the technical aspects (Munro especially) turning the story into a kind of tightrope, which mainly serves to measure the ability of the author to walk it. The basic, invisible structure—which O'Connor presents as if it were arbitrary, though it is really the foundation of everything—is missing.

Despite the many papers written, conferences given, and lectures dedicated to O'Connor, and despite the many talented writers all over the world that openly cite her influence, it is worth mentioning that there has been no "normalization" of Flannery O'Connor. Her work retains its scandalizing shock value for believers and non-believers alike. Her work resists being catalogued into the mausoleum of so-called classics, which in any case, includes many writers who can't hold a candle to O'Connor.

O'Connor wrote five or six stories which could each easily vie for the title in a contest for the most beautiful story ever written. Among my favorites are: "The Geranium," "Good Country People," "A Good Man is Hard to Find," "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead," "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," and lastly, "The Artificial Nigger," which reaches the height of Flannery's innovative artistry. It is a tale in which the author herself seems to know nothing, and where the writing—just like the jazz improvisations of Miles Davis—relies on an endless series of thrills, surprises, and small seemingly random events through which the story, that at first appears trivial, takes on a definitive power.

ALL OF EXISTENCE. In every instant, life and death are at stake, and so therefore every moment has a decisive finality. For us these are merely expressions, but for O'Connor it is reality, the only true reality. All hu-

man action is essentially a suspended waiting, stretched out over the course of tiny, decisive moments.

Flannery O'Connor unknowingly created a literary revolution that fed on her formidable philosophical and theological knowledge. Her Catholicism was in no way strictly ethical or sentimental, and she instead deals with the very foundations of reality. And, if the world she describes to us seems strange, it is only because we have become strangers to those foundations. All of existence is a product of God's continuous and unpredictable creation and because of this, O'Connor felt the urgency to plunge deeply into reality, deep enough to feel it vibrate in her bones.

But to write as she did requires a perceptive capacity that is hard to find, just as hard as—O'Connor writes—a good man is hard to find (what is a good man, after all, if not the surprising answer to a seemingly impossible hope?).

Many writers have learned from

A RADICAL IMPACT. The reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, O'Connor had such a radical impact on the way of writing fiction that the world of literature could not help but be affected, and on the other hand, this revolution (even in its technical aspects) originates from an understanding of history and of the world that is totally and incarnately Catholic.

For O'Connor, Milledgeville, where she lived and died, stands alongside Rome and Jerusalem: it was there that the Passion, Death, and Resurrection were lived out; just as it was for the Crusaders or pilgrims returning from the Holy Land, who re-created the holy sites they visited in their own homelands. By recreating the places they encountered, they made it possible for others to share in their pilgrimage, so that the scandal of the events that took place in the Holy Land could more forcefully challenge every person's freedom. **T**

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