

An aerial view of the Atibainha dam during the drought (São Paulo, Brazil).



THE CRY OF CREATION

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis invites everyone to convert to an “integral ecology”: living the relationship with God and becoming protectors of His handiwork.

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ENCYCLICAL

LAUDATO SI'

In his encyclical Pope Francis calls us to a new gaze at the gift of creation. We offer two interviews to go deeper into the main themes of the papal document.

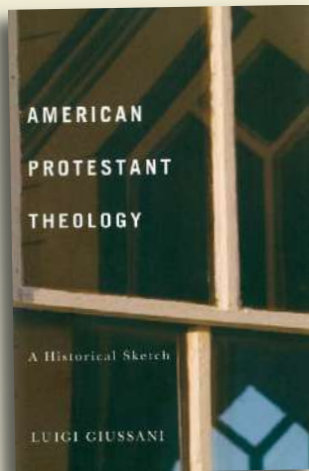
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LUIGI GIUSSANI

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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

THE DEEPER QUESTION

At the heart of *Laudato Si'*, amidst the many important questions that Pope Francis raises, we find one at the foundation of all else: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” It’s not a question that “only concerns the environment,” as the Holy Father goes on to explain, “the issue cannot be approached piecemeal. When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results.”

If these issues “are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? [...] We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.”

We’ve been through an intense series of weeks, and those ahead will be equally challenging. A somber cloud hangs over us, made up of problems that no one can ignore—acts of jihadist terrorism, the persecution of Christians, the Greek crisis—and that are rife with confusion concerning the very foundations of society. We see this in debates concerning the family, Europe, and the so-called “new rights.” A short time ago, these things were held to be evident, agreed upon even by those who ascribe to different worldviews. Now, however, they are increasingly being put into question. And yet, if we look carefully, there’s not a single question that doesn’t send us back to the drama Pope Francis summarized in that paragraph: “What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? How can we be a help to the world, to ourselves, to our children?”


This opens up the defining question, because, inevitably, our first reaction is to think that the answer is all a matter of what we can do: our analyses, initiatives or mobilization. Of course, all these things are needed, but they’re not enough. We need to be careful, because what we need is not just an alternative response, but rather a deeper and truer perspective. We see it well when something happens that shifts our gaze towards this new perspective.

For example, over the last few weeks, many of us have watched a striking video: the interview with a 10-year-old girl who fled from Qaraqoush, Iraq, after the arrival of ISIS. Her name is Myriam, and she lives in a refugee camp. She’s lost everything: her home, school, her friends—everything. And there’s nothing she can do about it. Still, there is something in her life that changes everything. What does she say about the terrorists? “I will only ask God to forgive them.” About going home? “If God so wants, not what we want, but God, because He knows.” And suffering? “Even if we’re suffering here, [God] provides for us.” And she says it with a smile—even with a song!

Perhaps, watching this young girl (the video is on YouTube), we can begin to respond to the Pope’s questions. We can ask ourselves where faith like that comes from, what generates an “I” that is so convicted (at age 10!) that she can live, smiling, and not give up hope, even when all she had was taken violently from her. Perhaps this can help us to understand the task of Christians in the world.

In this issue of *Traces*, you will find further examples that begin to reveal an answer. Whether they take place in Aleppo, or in a hospital, doesn’t matter so much. What matters is this: in their simplicity, each of these facts reveals the nature of Christianity and what it brings to a world that’s falling apart. In short, they show us “what need the earth has of us”: it needs us always to begin again; to be able to live. **T**

FROM WHERE DOES MY SALVATION COME?

 Here in Dublin, the referendum for gay marriage has unleashed a heated debate that has given me cause for reflection. First of all, it often seems that neither side has taken to heart the totality of the matter: the desire of homosexual persons for love, and the total confusion that lodges in everyone's mind. This matter has challenged me personally because it has caused me to reflect on my marriage and on my being in the world and in society. It has been a precious opportunity to return to the root of who I am as a mother, a wife, a Christian. Rereading "In the collapse of evidences, the generation of a subject," the document suggested by our community, was helpful because it provoked me to look at what was happening without lazily retreating into a prepackaged idea ("I am for the 'No' because I am Catholic"). Through discussions with my husband and our friends I tried to understand, and I found myself buried in a great confusion. In the meantime, I found myself suffocated by the circumstances of every day life. One evening, I left my husband and small children to get out of the house and breathe some fresh air. In that moment I asked myself: But if, in this world that is collapsing, I am the first to run away, how can I save myself? If I do not know how to stay with gladness in front of the small daily trials that are asked of me, what contribution can I give to the world that is falling apart? One can make




just and proper proclamations in defense of the family, one can fight against the collapse of evidences, but... if *I* collapse? The phrase I had heard distractedly at a School of Community, and which, until that moment, had seemed abstract to me, came to mind: "In order to solve problems, we need to examine more deeply the nature of the subject who faces them!" How much I need to be seized and saved every moment, and how much I need to see that everything that appears sliding toward corruption and ruin has already been saved. We need always to begin again in search of that which does not collapse when everything else does. Certainly this is not us with our activities. I have heard so many Christians discouraged after the victory of the "Yes," as if all were lost. Many things need to be revisited, of course, but from where does our salvation come? In the days that seem to me so burdensome and empty, from where does my salvation come? I believe that I need always to deepen my faith in order to be a convincing sign for others. Only in

this way can I positively contribute to the education of my children and to the people here. It is not a matter of analyses or of finding new strategies to reach young people, but to recognize our fragility and our need only for Christ Risen and present: to propose Him again, as Fr. Giussani did in Italy when young people were leaving the Church.

Agata, Dublin (Ireland)

FOR THE FIRST TIME ON A CL VACATION

 Dear friends: I was introduced to CL just a few months ago. This was my first CL vacation, and I volunteered to be part of the planning team not only out of curiosity, but also out of a desire to experience something beautiful by being more than a participant. Fortunately I also had the time to help, which is a blessing in and of itself. The best way I can think of to describe my overall impression of the vacation is that it was something like an extension of the Mass. Whether conscious of it or not, I believe that there were many occasions during the weekend where somebody was a living sacrament to another. Similarly there were many occasions where individuals took the time and effort to genuinely discover the sacrament of the person in others. My observation was that all who attended strived to be alive and present, living the theme of doing everything for the glory of God. Have you ever been with people who are concerned primarily about themselves? Nobody like that showed up at this vacation; in fact it was quite the opposite. The whole week-



GOODBYE PARTY AT WORK

MAY OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN

Dear Fr. Carrón: In February I changed jobs, and my thought was to do, in the best possible way, the tasks that were assigned to me as a secretary. This attention to my job prompted amazement in the teachers, in my colleagues at the office, and in the custodians, to the point that one day a colleague asked, “Who are you?” On March 7th we had the meeting with the Pope, and I was struck by what he said. At work I never revealed that I’m from CL, but it was understood nonetheless. It was not a struggle for me; I simply lived those months by being myself, sharing sincerely who I am, my family, my friends, and listening to everyone. On my last day of work, they gave me an unforgettable goodbye party. My colleague from Sicily asked her husband to make cannoli, and he even took an hour off from work to bring them and to meet me. The custodians prepared the reception and each one brought something. A colleague gave me flowers with this note: “In this place in need of ‘exorcists,’ when we lost all hope, you came, the angel of God, who in such a short time brought us back to normalcy and helped us to recapture the grandeur of life. Thanks with all my heart. You have been a very special person, to say the least. We will miss you. I would really like to meet you again; I hope that our paths cross. Thanks my friend, my companion, and dear colleague.”



Cristina, Crema (Italy)

end seemed like a group participation towards a common good, and on numerous occasions people were aware of and attentive to the needs of others. On the hikes, children of temporarily overburdened parents were readily cared for by other hikers without hesitation and without being asked. Different hazards and obstacles provided many individuals the opportunity to serendipitously volunteer their previously unknown talents as expert insect swatters and exterminators,

horse dung and fire ant hill sentries, slippery mud stabilizers, rugged terrain crossing guards, and de-fusers of crying frustrated children who, understandably, just wanted to stop and play in the mud or throw rocks. At the first planning meeting, I asked Paolo and Lisi if I could provide a video memory of the vacation. I just wanted to contribute something. By the time it was completed, it had become a way for me to be able to express my love for this community

who welcomed, accepted and nurtured me, and in whom I had fallen in love with in such a short time. Then, when the video was shown Sunday morning, nothing could have prepared me for the overwhelming response. The outpouring of gratitude and appreciation from the community left me utterly speechless, and still brings tears to my eyes even today. Who knew that such a thing was possible by just following?

Bernie Jacoby, Texas (USA)

A mosaic depicting a bearded man with a halo, wearing a blue and gold robe, with his right arm raised. The background is a textured gold mosaic. To the right, a portion of a peacock is visible.

JENCYCICAL

OUR COMMON HOME



God's action and the work of human hands. Recovering wonder at "the gift of creation": the only way to recover our sense of personal responsibility. Amidst the pages of *Laudato Si'*, FR. **PAOLO MARTINELLI**, Capuchin and Auxiliary Bishop of Milan, finds a call to holiness.

BY FR. PAOLO MARTINELLI

Genesis. Beginning of Creation: God divides the land from the water and creates rivers, seas, flowers, and plants. *The Third Day*, Byzantine mosaic (12th century–1143). Palatine Chapel, Norman Palace, Palermo, Italy.

The Pontiff who, for the first time in the history of the Church, took the name of the patron of Assisi, took for the title of his second encyclical the words *Laudato Si'*, a reference to the *Canticle of Brother Sun* written by Saint Francis. The Holy Father offers specific points to summarize the dramatic situation of the environment (“What is happening in our common home,” 17-61), which calls for a renewed responsibility among men and women (“Lines of approach and action,” 163-201); he goes into detail regarding the situation on a global level, and delves into issues of economics and finance; he notes the heavy influence of a globalized technocracy; and he denounces the severe and widespread inequality in the access to natural resources, especially with regards to the poor. Through all these factors he demonstrates the “human roots of the ecological crisis” (101-136). We should all be grateful to him for his evangelical frankness.

AT THE SOURCE OF THE DISORDER. It’s important that we recognize that the heart of his invitation is to a conversion with the goal of an integral ecology (137-162), which requires a genuine ecology of humanity—as Benedict XVI has already described—and of daily life (147-155). It is in these pages that Francis invites us to action: to make courageous decisions and to find new lifestyles characterized by sobriety, solidarity, and sharing resources.

The source of his proposal lies in the Gospel of Creation (62-100), through which the light of faith offers “ample motivation to care for nature and for the most



Fra' Paolo Martinelli.

vulnerable of their brothers and sisters” (64). He encourages an education to a deeper ecological spirituality (203-246), since “the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling, and living” (216).

Through the explicit references to his life, Francis of Assisi becomes an archetype and constant reminder throughout the encyclical. The saint shows us “that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart

of what it is to be human” (11). Francis of Assisi, as a witness and promoter of fraternity with all creation, is presented as the antithesis of contemporary man’s extreme individualism.

In giving this perspective, the Holy Father responds to the unfounded accusations, made in many cultural realms, that Judeo-Christian tradition is the at the root of unbridled exploitation of nature, inasmuch as it gives humankind “dominion” over creation. In reality, the Biblical narrative reminds us that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with

“What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity.”

(Laudato Si', n.160)

GAZE OF A SAINT Giotto, *Scenes from the life of Saint Francis, Sermon to the Birds*, (1295-1299). Upper Basilica of Saint Francis, Assisi, Italy.

the earth itself” (66). God entrusts creation to the care and custody of mankind. Scripture describes “a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (67). Therefore, it becomes clear that our disordered ecology is in fact the result of the *loss* of a genuinely Biblical view of creation.

The Pope reminds us that reality is not simply “nature,” but is created: this means that nothing on earth is mere material to be manipulated.

The nature of reality is always gift. At the same time, the concept of creation demystifies nature to a certain extent. On this point, Francis reminds us that life becomes disordered when we lose our own sense of being created. Even the compulsive consumption of created things brought about by man seems to “demand of them something which they, in their smallness, cannot give us” (88). The creations of the Infinite Mystery are signs. Saint Francis’s genius is precisely in how he saw every creature within the relationship with God: “Whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures

into his praise” (11). Equally thought-provoking is the Pope’s reflection on the sacramental dimension of ecology; the connections between creation, the work of human hands, and God’s action in time and space. In the Sacraments, elements of creation become expressions of divinity: “The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life” (235). This happens in a unique way in the mystery of the Eucharist.

HEALING THE RUPTURE. It’s in the Blessed Sacrament that we see the “fruit of the earth and the work of human hands,” and the action of God who turns bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This helps us to glimpse the sacramental dimension of the entire Christian life and its anthropological implications: reality is the place where the work of human hands meets the action of God, both ordered to the recapitulation of all things in Christ. This section lays the groundwork for the strikingly beautiful pages of the encyclical that explain the Trinitarian structure of all creatures. All creation bears the mark of the Most Holy Trinity. The Franciscan theologian Bonaventure, cited by Pope Francis, affirms that, before the rupture of sin, man was able to contemplate the mark of the Trinity in every creature. This is the gaze recovered in the eyes of a saint.

As the Holy Father reminds us, “It’s significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture” (66). Those who have, by grace, recovered the relationship with Christ, also recover the awe at the gift of creation and a sense of personal responsibility.

Ultimately, what this encyclical calls us to is holiness: the true ideal of humanity and society. **T**

JENCYCLICAL



**THE “SCIENTIST”
POPE WHO CHALLENGES
EVERYBODY**

An American Jesuit and journalist, Fr. **THOMAS REESE**, reacts to *Laudato Si'*, commenting on Francis's method: "Instead of principles and philosophy, he starts with the facts. He questions us 'on the kind of earth we want to leave our children.'"

BY LUCA FIORE

The thing that struck me the most is how strongly he makes the case that responding to an environmental issue like climate change is a moral issue. It's not just about economics and politics; this is truly a moral issue. These environmental issues have an impact on people's lives; millions of people will be affected by climate change." Reading *Laudato Si'* left Fr. Thomas Reese overcome with surprise. The Jesuit journalist for *National Catholic Reporter*, who was previously an editor for *America* magazine, is among the better-known Catholic commentators in the U.S. "The second thing that struck me is his methodology," Fr. Reese says. "Instead of just talking about principles and philosophy and theology, he starts with the facts. He starts with what we know about the impact we've been having on the earth, and he accepts the scientific consensus that climate change is happening. That's where he then responds, 'what kind of earth do we want to leave our children and our grandchildren?'"

Francis is not the first Pope to speak on these issues. What's new in Francis's approach?

Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI: all of them spoke about environmental topics, but they tended

to be short talks or statements, or a paragraph in some larger document. What's different here is that the Pope is writing at length on this issue in an authoritative document, in an encyclical. Therefore, he's looking at it in a much more complex way, with much more detail, looking at all the economic, political, ethical, moral consequences. It's the difference between writing a short letter to the editor and writing a book.



Fr. Thomas Reese.

It seems that in the past, the Church was more cautious in supporting particular scientific theories. What's changed?

Well, I think a couple of things have changed: first of all, this Pope has a scientific background himself. He was trained as a chemist before he went into the seminary, and actually worked as a chemist before he went into seminary, so he's comfortable with scientific methodology and work. The second thing that I think has occurred is there's a much greater consensus now about climate change in the scientific community than there was in the past. It's becoming clearer and clearer that this may be the most important moral issue facing the 21st century... I think the Pope felt obliged to speak out. I would say the third thing is that he's from the Global South. He's already seen the impact of climate change in parts of the world. He's seen the environmental degradation that's occurred >>

» in the Global South. We in the North tend to live in what Americans would call “gated communities.” We export our pollution; a lot of the pollution in Asia and Latin America is being done to create products for the First World. We have much better environmental laws, and we live in a much cleaner environment, because our corporations and businesses tend to do their polluting abroad and then bring us the products.

Of course, the encyclical is not just about global warming...

I would emphasize that this encyclical is not just about global warming. It touches on all sorts of other environmental issues like biodiversity, clean water, various forms of pollution and desertification... His encyclical is a real challenge; he’s saying “we have to act now.” At one point he says that the “doomsayers” cannot simply be ignored anymore.

Still, it seems strange that he goes into such detail on certain issues.

He does get into some specific recommendations. I think it’s important to acknowledge—and he would acknowledge this—that he doesn’t have all the answers, and the more specific he gets, the less authoritative he is. For example, he talks about the use of carbon credits, and I actually agree with what he says, but if somebody could figure out a good way of using credits, I think he would say “fine” and change his mind. These are the issues that we have to look at, have a conversation about, and consult with experts on, to find the best solutions.

Pope Francis also offers a theological approach. What is at the heart of his teaching?

The core of his teaching starts with Genesis; our core belief that God created the universe, God created the earth, and it’s God’s gift that we share



as the people of planet Earth. Also, we have a responsibility to cherish the world. He’s critical of the theological interpretation that man is like God and has dominion over the earth, in the sense that he can do whatever he pleases. We have to be good stewards of the earth rather than dominate it. The second point is a little more sophisticated: the earth is one of the ways that God reveals himself to us. As His creation, the universe is revelatory; it speaks to us of God. This is a traditional part of Catholic teaching: we learn about God both through revelation and through creation. Creation has an intrinsic worth, even independently of humankind. It’s like an icon of God, and when we desecrate it, it’s like a sacrilege. God has a purpose for creation, and if we’re not on board with this, then we’re working against God’s plan.

The Pope quotes many documents

from bishops’ conferences all over the world. I don’t think that’s ever happened before, has it?

That’s a fascinating development. In the past, Popes tended just to quote themselves or earlier Popes. I really think this Pope takes collegiality very seriously. He also understands that he can learn from other people, from bishops’ conferences who have already looked at these issues. This Pope doesn’t present himself as the “answer man.” He’s inviting everyone into a dialogue: bishops, scientists, politicians, environmentalists, inventors. He sees that all of the good ideas don’t have to come from Rome.

What effect will this document have in the environmental debate?

I think it’s going to be extremely important. People are not going to change their lifestyles because of the polar bears, but if there’s thing we know through history, it’s that religion can

“We know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes His loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.”

(Laudato Si’, n.13)

motivate people to do extraordinary things. If the environmental movement is going to succeed, it’s going to require people to make great sacrifices, and not only individuals, but also communities through our political systems. Our economic paradigm has to change, according to the Pope. The environmental movement needs believers who will act because of their religious beliefs—their belief that the world is God’s gift, that has to be preserved for future generations. The encyclical is an invitation to all religious leaders. We’ve already seen that with the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Dalai Lama; they are talking about environmental issues. In the United States, we had 300 rabbis issue a letter before the Pope did, saying they were inspired by the Pope to speak out on environmental issues.

It’s strange, because the Church and the environmental movement have

never had a good relationship. They still tend to disagree on many issues. Today, the environmentalists are jumping for joy and delighted that the Pope is getting involved. I think you’re right; in the past environmentalists have often been in conflict with the Church because they tended to stress that overpopulation was the cause of environmental degradation. I think they recognized that that’s not a real problem, and that that’s simply a way to blame the poor, the Global South for the environmental issues that are being caused by the most developed and the richest countries in the world. I think they’re still going to disagree with the Church; I think they’re still going to be strongly supportive of birth control, but they don’t want to fight over this anymore with the Catholic Church. They see now that religion can be an important ally in this fight. I think they’ll take the position, “Okay, we disagree about these

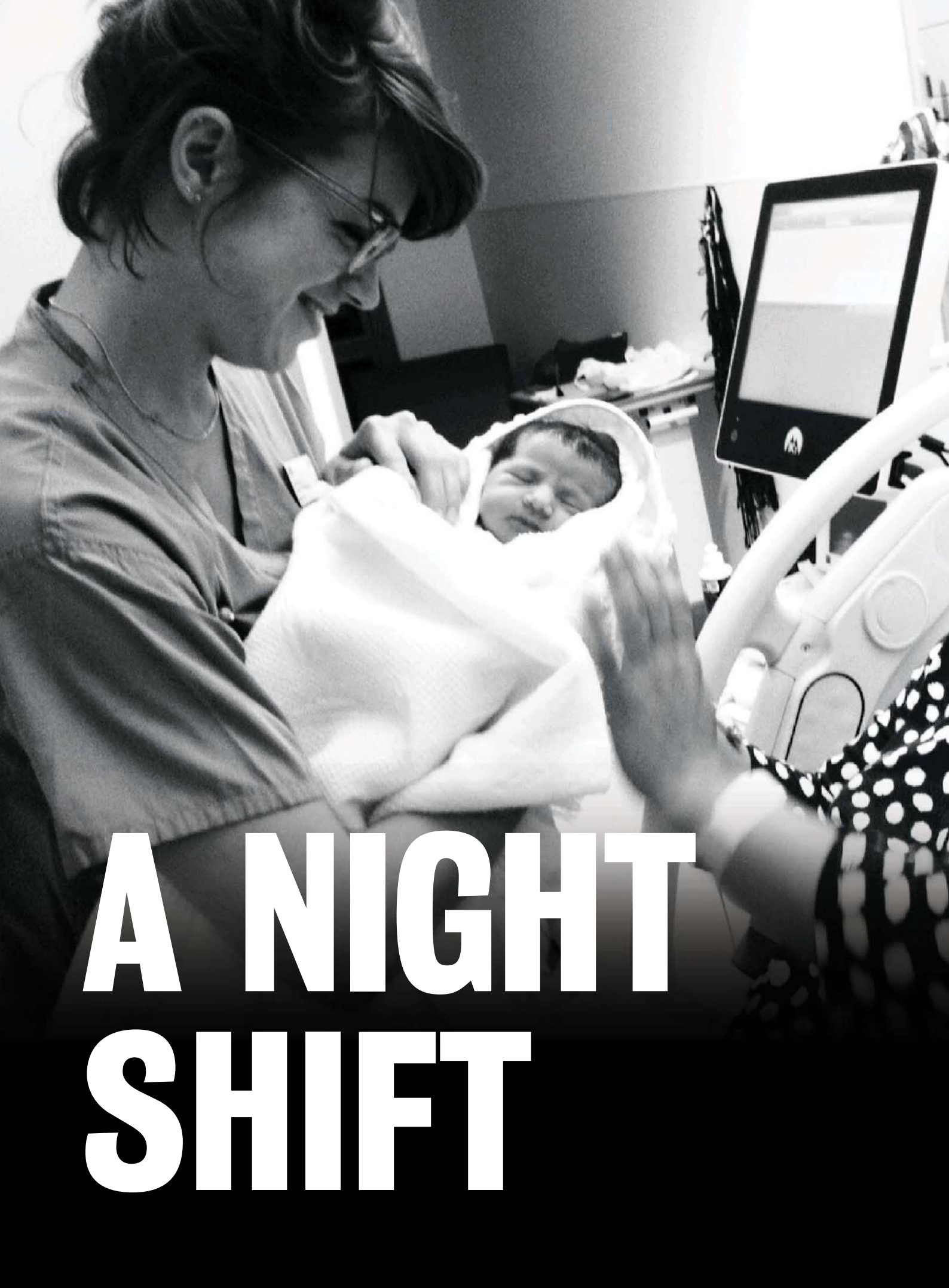
issues, but that’s not going to keep us from working together to respond to these [environmental] issues.”

Some would accuse the Pope of being a “liberal”...

I think there’s a mythology out there that conservatives tend to support the Catholic Church, because they have supported the Church on issues of abortion, gay marriage, freedom of religion, especially here in the United States. On the other hand, they have never embraced the Church’s Catholic Social Teaching: the teaching about justice, about concern for the poor, about the rights of workers, about issues of peace—about which the Church has been very vocal ever since the end of the 19th century, with Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. I think these conservatives either ignore the Popes or never bothered to listen. For example: Pope Benedict, who was labeled a “conservative,” spoke very strongly about the role of government in the regulation of the economy. He also even spoke about the role of government and the redistribution of wealth. Now, in the United States, not even liberal Democrats would ever even talk about the government and the redistribution of wealth.

So what will happen?

It’s going to be fascinating to watch him when he comes to the United States in September and speaks to Congress. When he speaks about the importance of taking care of the poor, of welcoming immigrants, of protecting the environment, the Republicans aren’t going to know what to do. On the other hand, if he says we must protect life from its very beginning, and every child deserves a mother and a father, the Democrats aren’t going to know what to do. He’s not taking sides in partisan debates. He is simply challenging everybody with his teachings. **T**



A NIGHT SHIFT

Lucia is a young Italian midwife who works in England. Here is the journal of one of the many days she spent at the Queen's Hospital, where amid labor, sorrows, and "second order desires" she discovers an embrace that sustains life.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

A little twin, weighing less than a pound. It had died in its mother's womb, and she had delivered it. This was the first time that Lucia had had to handle a case of endouterine death. The twenty-six-year-old from Trento, Italy, had trained to be a midwife in Brescia, Italy, and was now working at Queen's Hospital in Romford, on the periphery of London. This night it fell to her to send the placenta to the laboratory and the little one to the morgue. She had never done this before, so she asked the help of a nurse. "We went together to the operating room. He was there, so tiny and perfect." The nurse put the baby in a small bag and closed it in a box. "I just felt like crying." Then Lucia remained there alone, because she had to call the staff member responsible for removing the box, as required by hospital procedure. A big black man arrived, looked at her a moment, and asked, "Have you prepared it well?" She was grateful for his question, because she did not know what it meant to prepare it, but certainly a bag in box could not be enough. "No, no, now I'll prepare it." She found some little sheets, fashioned a sort of cradle with them, and took the tiny body in her hands, with trembling care, attentive to every inch of its body. "I gave all the love I had in my body, because God would not have treated that little one any differently. I know this because it's how I feel treated by Him now."

Two years ago, Lucia would not have talked this way. From one moment to the next, she felt she had lost everything. "I saw the two pillars of my life collapse. I was engaged to be married, but my fiancé left, and I also lost my job at the hospital where I was working." But she did not take it sitting down, and left for Brazil to work for a time with adolescent mothers in the *favelas*. "The experience really changed me, like the time I spent in Africa working on my thesis. They rekindled my desire to be well-trained, to grow professionally." She asked herself where she should go, and had no doubts that the United Kingdom was the place. "All the guidelines for maternity care come from here: they experiment a lot, and even though there are many limits and excessive medicalization, there is a lot I can learn."

BY MY SIDE. Thus Lucia is part of the Italian brain drain, but hers is not a form of flight. You can see this in the way she does her work, far from home and without any job security. When she arrived at the hospital, she did not know anyone. In the house she shares with three other young women, life is hard: more often than not, when she gets home from work she finds the doors to their rooms closed. Her friends in the Movement live some distance away. "When I can, I go see them, because it is a great help. But I want to be present all the time, in the wards of Queen's Hospital, and >>>

Lucia Pederiva at the Queen's Hospital in London.

» in the place I share with my housemates. And, in the apparent solitude, I am never alone. When I forget, out of fear or distraction, God puts someone by my side to remind me.” Something happens that changes her and the others, day after day. It has been this way since the very beginning, a year ago, when Lucia first arrived at the ward for her orientation shift. She was welcomed by Maria, the head nurse, who was hanging up the phone, which had been ringing incessantly all day. “God is good!” she said. The bed chart made clear the intense situation: 16 beds, 3 available, 11 women on the way. “There was a great hustle and bustle. My colleagues and I were running off our feet, back and forth. In that total chaos, I heard Maria’s voice like a refrain, ‘God is good,’ and my heart, assailed by the fear of not being up to the challenge, suddenly began to be serene.” At the end of her shift, as she was straightening up some files, she thought about how Maria had managed the chaos of that day. “Thank you, Maria.” “Who’s thanking me?” she bobbed up, lifting her head from her deskwork: “Me,” Lucia answered, and hugged her. “That hug was more a need of mine than a gift to her.” “God is good,” Maria responded. “You and I will be great friends.” From that day on, whenever Maria called her in the hallway, everyone would hear “Love!” and Lucia answering, “Here I am, Maria!”

BABUM, BABUM, BABUM. Aziza was in her 24th week, and her child was in difficulty. She had been awake all night, repeatedly calling the midwife, who, before leaving, told Lucia, “I didn’t listen to the heartbeat, because the mother had fallen asleep. I’ll leave it to you to see whether the baby is still alive.” Lucia entered the room fearfully. “Why doesn’t the doctor do a caesarean and save my baby?” Aziza asked. Lucia sat on her bed and calmly explained



the situation, the risks, the reasons for certain choices, for the antibiotic, for the monitoring. “Did you feel the baby move last night?” “No.” With her heart in her mouth, Lucia put her hands on Aziza’s abdomen and turned on the sonicaid. As soon as she set it on the woman’s abdomen, they heard *babum, babum, babum!* “The heartbeat of that child filled the room, and Aziza’s heart and mine, as if the child wanted to cry out: ‘I’m here!’ That woman’s face was totally transformed: her child was there.”

“I am continually accompanied this way,” recounts Lucia, by a face that changes, by an encounter, by a word, by simply taking a night shift, by anyone. Zarah was a Muslim woman in labor with her fourth child, the first three of whom were already teenagers. “Joking, I asked her, ‘Was it a surprise?’ But in my mind I was thinking the word ‘mistake.’ Her husband, with a big beard and a long tunic, intervened: ‘It was a gift,’ he said, nodding toward heaven. His correction changed my heart.” Hour after hour, Zarah’s labor became more complicated, and the child’s heartbeat gave signs of stress. Lucia did everything she could, and in the meantime prayed, “*Angel of God...*” As she was tending to the IV and the monitoring, she realized that Zarah,

with her eyes closed, bent over with the contractions, was also praying. “I was moved by that incredible unity, by that prayer, so united and unique.” In the meantime, in the next room, Kate was exhausted. In the past three weeks she had been hospitalized seven times because of hemorrhaging. As the child grew, the placenta stretched and bled. When Lucia arrived to check on her, she asked, “Kate, I don’t remember: Is it a boy or a girl?” “I only know that it’s a problem. From the beginning of the pregnancy, it has been my problem.” “No!” Lucia countered. “This is your miracle. It causes you worry, granted, but first of all it is a miracle.” Kate’s expression changed and from then on she said “my baby” and no longer “my trouble.”

At the first light of dawn, Lucia ran into Room 32. Ivanhi had arrived fully dilated and everything was moving so quickly that there had been no time to call her husband. “When I put her son in her arms, she smiled at me: ‘Now you are my family.’” An hour later, her husband arrived breathlessly, and Ivanhi continued repeating to him, “She is my Lucy.” “I was part of that family,” says Lucia. “There was an incredible unity...” When there was half an hour remaining on her shift, Youshra, a Muslim colleague, with her veil rolled under

Lucia during a stage in Africa where she worked on her thesis.



her operating room cap, ran after her. “Lucy, you lost your cross!” Lucia checked, but her cross was on its chain, as usual. “Excuse me, I saw that lost cross and thought of you.” “When she said that to me,” Lucia recounts, “I saw with tenderness just how much that cross was me, and how it is the origin of the incredible unity with these women.”

When she was being interviewed for this position, she had been asked, “Who are you?” “When they do this, they do not go by selective tests, or even by resume,” she recounts. “When they asked me ‘Who are you?’ I jumped in and told them, because my passion and my being a midwife cannot be separated from all that has happened to me in my life.” She will never forget her flight home after the interview, with her contract in hand. “I was convinced that in my life there were ‘first order’ and ‘second order’ desires, and my boyfriend and job belonged to the first order. At that moment of my life, one of the two was satisfied, and yet my heart was so restless. So I said to myself, ‘It is something else! Something that goes beyond how I imagine happiness for me.’ That was the beautiful discovery. The blinders fell from my eyes: up to that moment, all the other things were second order, did not exist; I did not

look at them.” The labors, the delivery room, and her colleagues were the terrain for this openness. “Every day on the ward I deal with the emptiness and the infinite entreaty I have within. When my fiancé left me, I was full of desire to be a wife and mother, and I still am, but in that pain I found within myself a love that I cannot keep for myself, nor for some Mr. X in the future. I need to give it now.” When she began giving it to the women entrusted to her care, everything changed. “I used to think that my desires were not listened to. But at the end of this year—or rather, as the fruit of the journey of this year—I know that my desire is looked at seriously every day, and answered.” Down to the smallest detail. “In my work, God comes to me, enabling me to learn the things that are most difficult for me, like patience and waiting. Labor. He makes me work, and trains me for life.”

Delivery rooms 10 and 11 are where abortions are performed. Lucia is a conscientious objector, but it can happen that she is assigned to care for those who have had an abortion. One night

it happened that in one room there was a woman whose child had died, and in the next room, one who had chosen her child’s death, because it had a lung abnormality. “I looked after both of them, but I looked at them differently. I couldn’t help it.” The more she struggled, the more she became aware of the African couple whose child had died. “They were so united. They supported each other, loved each other. The husband of the other woman was sleeping and she continued to come out into the corridor to talk with me. She couldn’t stand to be alone. She was broken in half. That night I understood her dramatic situation.”

A CARESS IN A FIST. In the history of most of the patients she meets, there is an abortion. “It is tragic, but it is an objective fact, because it is the only option given; no other proposal is offered. Many times there is simply no desire to engage oneself, to get involved, to explain, to accompany. I do it because I gain everything. The familiar relationship I have with them reflects the way God treats me, and amazes me.” This was so even when, for the first time, a patient refused her. “She didn’t want me. She didn’t let herself be touched. It was very difficult, because in making me understand that I wasn’t right for

her as a midwife, she made it clear that I wasn’t right for her as a person. This hurt. But I received a caress in a fist,” in the true embrace of her colleagues as they saw her sadness, and in that question that invaded her heart: Who are you? “Am I defined by my performance? I am a relationship with an Other who treats me with love, even if I fail.”

“In my work, God comes to me, enabling me to learn the things like patience and waiting.”



SYRIA

THE OTHER FACE OF ALEPPO

Bombs fall and Christians flee, but the city that symbolizes the Syrian drama is not struck by missiles alone. Fr. **IBRAHIM ALSABAGH**, parish priest of the Latin Rite Catholic community, recounts the challenges of those who remain, and explains why he keeps the books by Fr. Giussani on his nightstand.

BY LUCA FIORE



Syrian refugees at the Turkish frontier.

Fr. Ibrahim Alsabagh is the parish priest of the Latin Rite Catholic community of Aleppo. Originally from Damascus, the 43-year-old has worn the Franciscan habit for the last 10 years, serving the Church through his work in vocations, as the vice-principal of a Catholic school in Jordan, and as a parish priest in Jericho. Last year he earned his degree in Dogmatic Theology in Rome. Since November he has been living in the city that symbolizes the Syrian Calvary. In these months living alongside his faithful, sharing the cold, the fear, and the bereavements, “Every day has its story. Every morning we get up and we don’t know whether we will be bombed or not. The situation of electricity has improved: on average we have it three hours a day.” He talks about the anger of those who leave, but also of those who stay and want to raise their children as Christians in Syria. Fr. Ibrahim thinks about the future, and about his most recent journey to Italy. He brought back some of Fr. Giussani’s books translated into Arabic, for the future, certainly, but also for the present.



Ibrahim Alsabagh was born in Damascus in 1971. Since November he has been the parish priest of the Latin Rite Catholic Church of Saint Francis in Aleppo.

How do the Christians in the city live?

Today the great drama is emigration. There are groups that are organizing this flight without dialoguing with the leaders of the community. The exodus of the Christians makes the situation of those who remain even graver, because our presence bears even less weight. What saddens me even more is that those who leave do so without telling anyone. Once they get their visa, they leave, and only later advise their family >>



SUMMER ACTIVITY CENTER. In Aleppo more than 120 kids are involved in Parish activities.

» and friends. Once a man told me, “Father, the missile attacks come and go, but another type of bombardment has begun: one that causes the division within our families.”

What does that mean?

Families become divided between those who want to go and those who want to stay. The arguments add tension to an already tense situation. The other day I heard from a sick woman who is not self-sufficient, whose children have abandoned her to the care of strangers. A parishioner asked me, “Will we be abandoned, too?” The people are tired; they are forced to stay in their houses all day. They have no kind of distraction. They tell me, “The only time we can take a walk is when we go to Mass. The only diversion is to say the Rosary.” Many people are angry and this tension influences their relationships.

What helps you to carry on?

We believe in the power of the Eucharist, which has become our only nourishment, and also our great repose. It is the moment of great consolation. Communion with the Lord “brings in fresh air,” and enables us to breathe more easily. Then, as a parish priest, I try to create opportunities to get the people involved, in things from humanitarian help to courses for engaged couples. A few days ago we opened a summer activity center at the parish for elementary school children.

How many do you have?

There were only about 50 registrations,

because people were afraid to send their children. Then the parents saw that it was possible and were persuaded to sign them up. Today there are 120 kids and we continue to receive requests: we keep having to extend the registration deadline because more want to sign up. In the meantime the younger siblings have begun crying out of jealousy, so we have also had to open to 25 nursery school age children. We help them have fun, and we give them milk and chocolates. If we see some are poorly dressed, we try to find new clothes for them. I am finding that this initiative is not only good for the children, but that this climate of joy also helps the adults. Seeing their own children play cheers them up.

Does faith help you resist the new “bombardment” of which you spoke?

Yes, it helps to think in a different way, to look in a new way. With the eyes of faith you see that reality is positive for us, too. It is a realistic attitude, which enables us to continue living.

Where do you see this new gaze?

In many young families, fathers and mothers with small children, who have seen their own houses bombed, and have lost many family members. They tell me, “We are staying here. We want to continue this journey.” Even seven of the eight couples who are preparing for marriage want to stay. Many friends who love us ask us why we are still here, why we have not left yet. It is not because of a particular ideology, some political idea or misguided attachment

to the land. We do not feel we have the right to uproot the tree that the Lord planted here two thousand years ago and that has been watered for centuries with the blood of the martyrs. We do not want to think of a future for Syria without Christians. This is why I am interested in what Fr. Giussani says.

In what sense?

Here we have a third type of bombardment: that of the mentality. There is also a cultural offensive underway, which is the same which, for better or worse, you in the West are subject to as well. As a priest, as a sentinel, I feel the need to strengthen the roots of our faith within today’s culture. This is as much a part of my responsibility as is humanitarian aid. In Italy I met some members of Communion and Liberation and I began to desire that some of your ideas could find space among us, too, because this thought helps young people become true witnesses in the world.

What would you like your young people to read by the priest from Brianza?

Well, I would begin with the three books of the *PerCorso*, which are the foundations of his thought. Then all the rest. But not just the books: we need true witnesses, to know those who nourish their own lives with those words. I would like some people to come, but the time is not yet ripe. In the work with the Custodian of the Holy Land I have met several members of the *Memores Domini* and families of the Movement. I am certain that their presence here could contribute to the faith in our young people. It could strengthen a simple, beautiful, and deep reality that at the same time is active in reality. The alternative is for life to be emptied of everything. We need to fill it with the signs of the Lord. So then, we must find all the means possible for beginning. Today. We cannot wait until tomorrow. **T**



SEVEN DAYS OF SURPRISES

This year's edition comes to terms with the challenging theme of "lack." It is something present in everyone's life and often becomes the opportunity for the experience of fullness. Here we offer the **PROGRAM** for the Rimini gathering with old friends and new faces.

BY STEFANO FILIPPI

This year's Meeting (August 20th - 26th) will be full of surprises, including the dates, with the choice to open in the middle of the week, as well as the addition of a big closing celebration, and a new design for the spaces. The theme is also surprising and it is inspired from a verse of a poem by Mario Luzi: "What is this lack a lack of, oh heart, of which all of a sudden you are full?" With that strange word, "lack," it is a courageous challenge: is lack a problem or a resource? Can the reduction of the "I," the collapse of evidences, and the changes in society generate new figures of consequence? Do subjects like this already exist?

There will be surprising presences at this Meeting of lack: the philosopher **Noam Chomsky**, **Cardinal Pell** and **Bishop Galantino**, **Abbot Lepori** (who on August 21st will speak on the theme of the Meeting) and the astronaut **Roberto Vittori**, Fr. **Julián Carrón** and Professor **Joseph H. H. Weiler**, protagonists of a dialogue not to be missed. In many fields of life, the Meeting will document how that irreducible quest, that desire for fulfilment, sparks newness.

A year ago, the Meeting opened with Fr. **Pierbattista Pizzaballa**, Custodian of the Holy Land, who invited listeners to use "the power of the heart" to support Christians in the face of fanaticism. Today there are

even greater tensions. The inaugural encounter ("Religions are part of the solution, not the problem") will feature a dialogue between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, with **Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran**, **Imam Azzedine Gaci** and the great rabbi from Paris, **Haïm Korsia**, three Frenchmen from the country wounded by the massacres of January and June.

Fr. **Douglas Bazi**, a parish priest in Erbil, will testify to the tragedy of the new Christian martyrs, but at the Meeting there will also be a clear indication of a road for overcoming religious fundamentalism: economic development. This will be documented by the Lebanese entrepreneur **Fouad Makhzoumi**, President of >>

IRIMINI MEETING

» the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, **Brian J. Grim**, the Vice President of the European Community Parliament, **Antonio Tajani**, and **Michele Valensise**, the Secretary General of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A lack of freedom: Venezuelan banker **German García Velutini** will talk about his 11 months of imprisonment as a kidnapping victim and his forgiveness of the kidnappers, such a starkly different position from what is normally found in one of the most violent countries in the world.

Lack of health: illness is not the final word. It is also the sphere of research, a terrain where relationships grow and rebirth is possible. We will hear about new life after drugs—and other addictions—from the founder of the PARS community, **José Berdini**, and sociologist **Salvatore Abbruzzese**. Speaking about care for the infirm from the first to the last moment of life will be **Elvira Parravicini**, a neonatologist from Columbia University, and Professor **Brad Stuart**, director of the Sutter Care hospice in California for the terminally ill. **Grégoire Ahongbonon** and Sister **Simona Villa** will share their stories about mental illness; meanwhile, the missionary **Maria Angela Bertelli** and **Tim Shriver**, President of Special Olympics, will speak about disabilities. How we can accompany people in their illnesses will be addressed by, among others, **Mario Melazzini** and **Silvia Spagnoli**, whose husband, **Ugo Rossi**, suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease. All of these people offer examples of how the limitation we bear is not a limit for the heart. Finally, in one of the most eagerly awaited encounters, **Nunzio Galantino**, Secretary General of the Italian Episcopal Conference, will speak about "the person and the meaning of limitation."

THE CHURCH AND MONEY. Greece, the Eurozone, and the Mediterranean:



the challenges of the economic crisis in Europe and the new forms of poverty will be among the themes of the Meeting. Among the speakers are the Frenchman **Edmond Alphandéry** and the German **Hans-Werner Sinn**, who lead two think tanks for political analysis in their countries; others include the economist **Domenico Lombardi**, the former commissioner of the Italian Spending Review, **Carlo Cottarelli**, who has now resumed working for the International Monetary Fund, Italian Minister of Economy and Finances **Padoan**, and **Cardinal George Pell**, prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, who will speak about the Church and money.

A reflection on economics will be accompanied by an experience from the world of business offered by **Roberto Snaidero** (Federlegnoarredo), **Nerio Alessandri** (Technogym), **Andrea Zappia** (Sky Italia), **Mauro Moretti** (Finmeccanica), and many others, as well as a significant group of Chinese businesspeople.

They represent the winning bet of those who wager on the talents of human capital as the engine for growth. There will also be contributions about food, sustainable development, biodiversity, and the world of not-for-profits.

We will gain insight on the chessboard of crisis situations in the world and the role of international organizations through the participation of the Foreign Ministers of Italy, Tunisia and Egypt, **Paolo Gentiloni**, **Taieb Baccouche** and **Sameh Shoukry**, as well as Nunzio **Silvano Maria Tomasi**, Acting Head of the United Nations Office in Geneva, **Michael Möller**, and Professor **Paolo Carozza**.

The expert in Constitutional Law, Tania Groppi, together with Middle Eastern judges and professors, will explore the theme of democracy in Islamic countries. Returning from the *villas miseria* of Buenos Aires, Fr. **Charly Olivero** will be accompanied by a group of young people brought up under the pa-

THE METHOD OF GOD, THE AUDACITY OF TODAY

The exhibits of this year's Meeting range from the nostalgia of Abraham to the "fire" of contemporary art, the mystery of water and that "sign" of Florence.

Abraham, the Birth of the "I" is one of the exhibits of this year's Meeting. The figure of the patriarch stands out in history as the first sign that God has not left the human person alone. Abraham "understands for whom this longing of his is," says Ignacio Carbajosa, curator of the exhibit, drawing upon the title of the Meeting. We will be able to see Abraham in a journey that starts out from Mesopotamia in the second millennium before Christ, and follows the Bible story, showing how pertinent God's method is for the challenges of our time.



the exhibit *Water is Mysterious*, seeks to respond to this question in terms of science and history, but not only. It does so by following the steps that great civilizations have taken in order to meet this permanent need, and it asks about the origins of water on earth, but above all enquires into the experience of thirst as the emblem of the expectation and the urgent need for what is essential for the life of the human person, a boundless and endless desire that awaits Someone who can say: "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never thirst again."



"The Cathedral Square in Florence is the sign of what fulfills the lack of which the heart is full,"

says Mariella Carlotti, curator of the exhibit *Opus Florentinum. The Cathedral Square of Florence: Faith, History and Art*. This is how poet Mario Luzi described it in 2000, in a poem that provides a unifying theme for the Meeting:

"Here we are in the great embrace / of our Mother Church, / one and universal. / All our quarrels and differences / are erased here, / the doubts and uncertainties of our solitude dissolve." How can so much beauty be contained in an exhibit? "It's impossible," says Carlotti. "We will try to introduce the public to an overall reading of the Square through the meaning of the three buildings - the baptistery, Cathedral, and bell tower—and the reading of the sculpture cycles. Then there will be a virtual visit in 3D of the new museum of the Work of the Cathedral that will re-open this fall, on the occasion of the Ecclesial Convention that will be held in Florence."



ternal gaze of Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio.

Education has been another lack in these years. We will have contributions from **Eddo Rigotti** and **Carlo Wolfsgruber**, **Luigi Berlinguer** and **Susanna Mantovani**, the neuro-lingual scientist **Andrea Moro** and **Noam Chomsky**, at 86 years old, one of the "great old men" of world culture. Philosophers **Eugenio Mazarella**, **Carlo Sini** and **Costantino Esposito** will reflect on the human person as a "being of lack." Astrophysicist **Marco Bersanelli** will lead us to discover the stars with astronaut **Roberto Vittori** (the only Italian astronaut to fly on both the American shuttle and the Russian Soyuz) and **Duccio Macchetto**, emeritus astronomer at the Space Telescope Science Institute.

The final roundtable discussion of the Meeting will focus on the family, with **Anna Garriga**, **Chiara Giaccardi** and **Orlando Carter Snead**, in preparation for the Synod this October. **T**



Of our time, too, is the art that we will discover in *Keep the Flame Alive*, a journey that presents the experiences of world-famous artists living today. Often, contemporary art is an exercise in nihilism, and yet this is not always the case: "There are veins of gold that are worth following. They express an unforeseen and fierce move of emotion for the human that can blow you away, with forms that are very different from those to which tradition has accustomed us," says Giuseppe Frangi, one of the curators. This is not an exhibit that looks for "consensus," but one that "arouses curiosity, putting viewers in front of an audacity of languages and approaches that it is fascinating to deal with."

Its molecule is one of the simplest possible atomic combinations, but in how many and what kind of ways does our life physically depend on water? The Euresis Association, with

Paola Ronconi

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