



# A CHURCH OF MARTYRS

**“There is a strong bond that already unites us, which goes beyond all divisions: it is the testimony of Christians, victims of persecution and violence simply because of the faith they profess.” (Pope Francis)**

# A REDEEMED GAZE

**T**hose words made a lasting impression on us. Months later, they are still fresh in our minds and our hearts. It was last summer, shortly after the invasion of Mosul and the expulsion of Christians, with ISIS on the march all over the area. The opening talk of the Meeting was dedicated to the Middle East, and the guest of honor was Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Custodian of the Holy Land. With just a few sentences, he had opened up a new perspective. To understand what's been happening, he said, what we need is not political analysis but "a religious gaze: broad, raised to the heavens, free from fear and other complexes," the gaze of someone who "doesn't just trust in his own forces, but who entrusts himself, who puts his life in the hands of Another." In a word, "a redeemed gaze."

Nine months later, the situation is even more dire: in the Middle East seized by jihadis; in Nigeria wounded by Boko Haram; in Kenya plagued by Somali al Shabaab; in Pakistan tormented by blasphemy laws; and in many other places around the world, persecution of Christians is on the rise. The Church, as Pope Francis often reminds us, is increasingly a "Church of martyrs," of men and women who are "victims of violence and persecution for the sole reason of being Christians."

Together with and within the initiatives being undertaken at all levels to stem the tide of suffering and to defend the fundamental rights of Christians and other minorities who are being persecuted, Fr. Pizzaballa's judgment on the situation is even more striking; it becomes even more urgent. A redeemed gaze is needed, but what can generate it? Where does it come from?

**At the end of April**, the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation were held in Italy, with other European countries connected by video. They will soon take place in the U.S. and other countries around the world. The Exercises opened with this reminder: "We are still immersed in the light of the night of Easter," that "light that the risen Jesus definitively brought into history. This is the light with which the Church looks at everything, because it's only with the definitive appearance of the light of Jesus's Resurrection that we can comprehend that which we would not understand without it: the ultimate meaning of life. [...] In the light of the Resurrection, we can face humanity's most pressing question: Is life really worth being born?"

This is how we can judge history in all of its twists and turns, even the most painful ones. It is the light of the Resurrection, the presence of Christ now and in every moment in history that redeems one's gaze. It frees our vision so that we can see everything with a perspective and a depth that, on our own, we as humans do not have. In the Christians being persecuted, we find it again and again. Just read the witnesses of Fr. Douglas, of the refugees in Erbil, and the students in Kenya. All of which you will find in the following pages. Or the thousands of others expressed from the hearts of the "Church of martyrs." There's pain, blood, and suffering, but death is not victorious.

**This is the gaze that we want to learn** and these are the men and women that we want to defend, in every way possible. We ask the world not to be indifferent to them, as the Pope has said. Let's get involved, to the extent that we are able, in helping them. Let's pray for them, as we will do at the Vigil of the Feast of Pentecost throughout the world. The statement from the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) announcing the vigil described it as "an important gesture of prayer to God and of closeness with our brothers and sisters." Brothers and sisters who, because of this redeemed gaze, can "witness love at the cost of their lives." They are witnesses whose sacrifice "cannot continue shrouded in silence, because it is a source of encouragement for all of us to pursue good and resist evil." Their witness brings a light into the world: the light of the Resurrection. **T**

## CLOSE UP

# THEY ARE OUR MARTYRS

Pope Francis is asking the world not to turn a blind eye to persecuted Christians. We present the stories of this tragedy that touches everyone.



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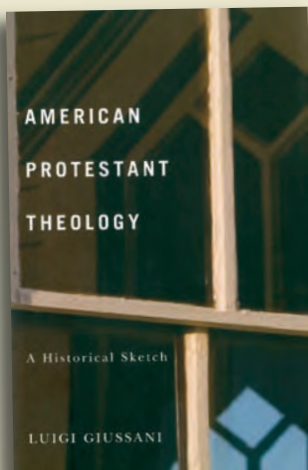
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## LUIGI GIUSSANI

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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.

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# LETTERS

**PIETRO IS NOT HIS ILLNESS, BUT A GIFT**


 Dear Fr. Julián: I return from these Exercises grateful for having been brought once again to Christ. In a few days, we will have the monthly check-up for Pietro, my four-year-old son. Since October and his battle with lymphoma, we have the monthly check-up. This monthly moment tends constantly to reduce reality to the desperation of worrying that the illness has returned. But regularly, and even more so in the Exercises, the inexorable and tangible presence of Christ, here and now, reawakens me and offers me the keystone. Pietro is here. He is not his illness. Pietro is a gift, himself a tangible sign of this Presence and I can only be grateful. Christ is the center: I am certain. In all of the drama, I ask that my faith become more mature, living reality ever more intensely in complete gratitude. I pray for Pietro's health, but in the faith that, if God's plan for us is not the constant reassurance of Pietro's healing,



then nonetheless whatever happens is for us. Thanks to the Presence of the risen Christ, this also has meaning and we do not face it alone.

**Laura, Magdeburg (Germany)**

**THIS IS WHAT A TOTALLY HUMAN JOURNEY IS**

 My son, Pedro, is a young boy with an extra chromosome: he has Down's Syndrome. One day, someone provoked me by pointing out that Pedro was always quiet at

our meetings. I answered that he didn't know any other life because I had brought him to our meetings ever since he was little. Still, I began to worry about not giving him a real life, of forcing him to live in the Movement. I worried that he came only because I didn't give him any other choices. In December we had our Christmas retreat. On that day, my nephews were going to the Ibirapuera Park to have some fun skateboarding. André, my oldest, wanted to go to the retreat, so I tried to insist that Pedro go with his cousins. After all, skateboarding should be more fun than attending the retreat. But Pedro resisted, so we went to bed on Saturday with no decision. Sunday morning, I woke up early and again proposed that Pedro go the skate park and that I would pick him up after the retreat. Staying all day and listening in silence to Fr. Vando, eating only a snack and participating in the assembly, would be quite boring for someone who did not understand. But Pedro was determined: he wanted to come. I couldn't understand, but I brought him. He sat, listened, par-

**ABOUT THE COMMON FUND**

**"MY TEARS IN FRONT OF THE PRESENTATION SLIDE"**

**D**ear Fr. Julián: The Exercises of these days have really shaken me. I am living a very painful period in my life. When you showed the slide of the 4,000 who do not contribute to the Common Fund, I began to cry, and I was as moved as I was in certain moments of the lessons: there was no difference. I haven't contributed in quite some time, perhaps out of laziness or perhaps because it didn't seem to matter. But something happened in these days so that, from now on, nothing can be left to chance.

**Signed letter**



## AT STUDENT YOUTH RETREAT

### THE LAST THOUGHT WAS FOR MY CLASSMATES

This year, I left for the GS Easter retreat rather sad and presumptuous. The last few months have been difficult, starting with school, for it requires a great commitment without commensurate results, and ends with struggles with my classmates. The audience with the Pope was a further shock: the speech he gave was so beautiful, but at the same time so far from me, that when he reminded us that Christ is our “only center,” all I could do was cry. I couldn’t wait to leave for the Triduum to find once again that Beauty with a capital B. Thursday evening I understood why I was there: because each time I have a problem, I need to see those faces that are dear to me and that accompany me in my life. They are for me, as Fr. Giussani said, “the clearest sign that Christ is; they are the face of Christ.” “Everything begins with an encounter,” an encounter that I relive at each School of Community, at each vacation, at each song or prayer said together; but the struggle and disillusion with school have prevented me from reliving this encounter. Then Fr. José Medina began the lesson: “Christ interests me because with Him I can live fully the now.” This is what I want: to live with Him. This was another, even more corresponding pushback: “We must let ourselves be touched by the impact of reality, to feel the drama of being human. We must shout in front of the experience of every day. We must shout, but not surrender. I want to live as a man, I want to live as a beggar.” I found myself even more in love with, and grateful for, that encounter I had three years ago and continue to have, for this fellowship that accompanies me. As Pope Francis said, “Christian morality is not a never falling down, but an always getting up, thanks to His hand which catches us.” Back at the hotel that evening, I felt the need to be closer to Him, so my roommates and I began to recite the Compline. I was so moved by what I was living and for the fortune of having encountered “the love of my soul,” that my last thought of the day was for my classmates: I was overcome by great tenderness for them because they are still searching for what I have already found.

**Anna, Arezzo (Italy)**



ticipated in the Mass, and then we left. That day, I also told some friends that Pedro would be making his First Communion. During the week, at home, all of a sudden, I began to hear words and songs from the retreat. At first I thought it was my imagination, since I have known the songs for many years; but when I went into Pedro’s room, he was listening to the songs and passages from Fr. Vando

that I had recorded. I was astonished. I wanted to cry because suddenly I realized what “a totally human journey” is, a phrase I had heard for years but had never understood so clearly. In that moment, I understood that a person does not have to understand everything, because even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table, as the Gospel teaches us. There is no dichotomy,

there is only a journey that is offered to all. My son made his First Communion and it was marvelous; he was truly happy. And I notice that when we go to Mass, he is the happiest of all because he knows that he will receive Communion. I am ever more grateful to Fr. Julián, to Fr. Vando, and to all of our friends who welcome my son in this company.

**Cida, São Paulo (Brazil)**

A young child with dark hair and eyes is looking through a jagged hole in a weathered, grey concrete wall. The child's hand is visible, resting on the edge of the hole. The background behind the child is dark, suggesting they are inside a building. The overall mood is one of longing or seeking freedom.

**5 CLOSE UP**

# THEY ARE **OUR** MARTYRS

**“They suffer, they give us their lives, and we receive God’s blessing through their testimony.” Pope Francis is asking the world not to turn a blind eye to persecuted Christians. We present the stories of this tragedy that touches everyone, and asks of us everything.**

BY DAVIDE PERILLO



**W**e think of the “map” that we’ve heard about for so long: Mosul, Aleppo, the Copts in Egypt—all the limbs of the beautiful and ancient Middle East being dismembered by the self-named caliphate. But that’s not all. There’s also Nigeria devastated by Boko Haram, and Kenya wounded by Somali al Shabaab; there’s Central Africa, Pakistan, Odisha State in India; there’s China; and there are those refugees thrown overboard by their peers (who were as desperate as their victims) because on that ship from Africa to Europe “you only pray to Allah.” Killed because they were Christian. It’s a phenomenon that’s growing in frequency and scale.

The “Church of martyrs” that Pope Francis is always talking about is expanding every day. “They are more numerous than in the first centuries,” he told us at Easter. Then in his homily on April 21<sup>st</sup>, “They suffer, they give their lives, and we receive God’s blessing through their testimony.” And again, on Easter, his strong reprimand and challenge to the whole world: “I hope that the international community will not remain mute and inert before such an unacceptable crime, which is a worrying deviation from the most basic human rights.”

**A SUI GENERIS ETHNIC ENTITY.** In this “piecemeal World War III,” in which hatred for humanity itself—for others simply because they are “other”—so often turns into violence against minorities and against religious liberty, the persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters is increasingly severe. What does this tell us? And what does it ask of us?

In this month’s Close Up section, you will read witnesses from various Christians who are being persecuted. Certainly, the horrifying pain that they

have to endure strikes us, but we are even more surprised by the peace communicated in their words. Hardly any of them expresses even a trace of the desire for revenge. To be defended, yes. To go back to the homes that they have fled, to regain the right to a normal life, yes. But hate, desire for revenge, or retaliation, no. They only express forgiveness and the need to live the faith even more deeply. They help us to understand the message that Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Custodian of the Holy Land, pressed as most urgent when he spoke at the Meeting of Rimini, and summed up in that phrase that made a lasting impression: “A redeemed gaze.”

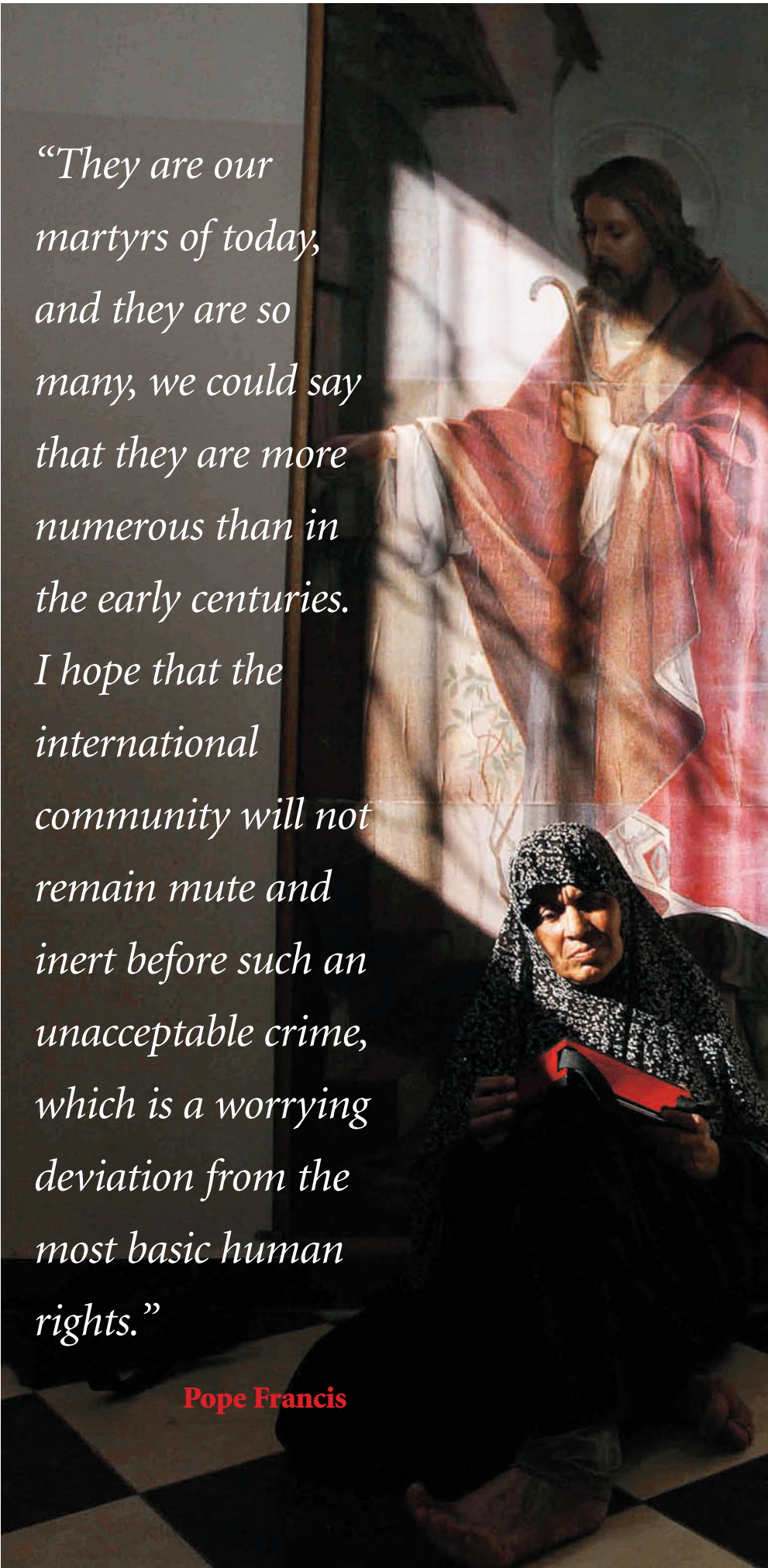
That gaze brings good to the whole world. In this “*sui generis* ethnic entity,” as Pope Paul VI called it—in this minority persecuted not because of geographical or biological ties, but by virtue of their love for Christ, and along with Christ their human brothers and sisters—lies something universal. In that gaze lies something that is constructive, no matter where it is, and is capable of always beginning again. In saving Christians, we defend the world.

**STEPS FORWARD.** The Church is taking action, as she can, through increasingly firm diplomatic initiatives that are finally gaining support. In March, at the United Nations Council on Human Rights in Geneva, a joint declaration “supporting the Human Rights of Christians and other Communities” was passed. As noted by Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi, the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the UN in Geneva, it is the first time that the issue has been addressed so explicitly in such a forum. Christians are still mentioned along with “other communities,” but they are no longer speaking in terms of generic “minorities.” A few days later, the same topic was addressed at the UN Security >>

» Council in New York, where the Frenchman who was taking his turn as President of the Council accepted an appeal from Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako of Baghdad and invited him to give a testimony. In April, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the UN in New York, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, cited the "earth in Asia soaked in blood," and noted that "thousands across the world are being persecuted, deprived of their fundamental human rights, discriminated against and killed simply because they are believers." On April 25<sup>th</sup>, it was Lebanese Patriarch Bechara Rai's turn, at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Support sprung up from unexpected places: from secular France, Russia, and others. Slowly, things are moving. It's a good sign, but in the meantime what can we do here and now?

To this question, Archbishop Amel Nona, the displaced Chaldean Archbishop of Mosul, gave a response a while back that shocked everyone. "Live your faith with joy. We need to see your happiness." This is what we mean by a redeemed gaze: filled with Jesus and nothing else, capable of refocusing all our energy to what is essential, and when united, capable of moving anything. For example, Erbil pastor Fr. Douglas al Bazi's simple but radical admonition at the end of the witness you'll read below: "Welcome them." What a change in us when we have them in our thoughts and hearts, when we remember them and, continually, remind the world of them.

This is all part of what moves us to participate in the important gesture that will take place on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Pentecost Vigil. The Italian Episcopal Conference and the Church throughout the world is getting involved: parishes, movements, and Catholic associations. It will be only the beginning of a road that requires, in many different forms, only one thing: our conversion. **T**



*"They are our martyrs of today, and they are so many, we could say that they are more numerous than in the early centuries. I hope that the international community will not remain mute and inert before such an unacceptable crime, which is a worrying deviation from the most basic human rights."*

**Pope Francis**



MAY 23<sup>RD</sup>  
#free2pray

The vigil of prayer will be held in many dioceses throughout the world on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. Also **Communion and Liberation** accepts the invitation by the Italian Episcopal Conference to dedicate the **Pentecost Prayer Vigil** to today's martyrs. "Taking part in the initiative of the Italian Church," said Fr. **Julián Carrón**, President of the Fraternity of CL, "we want to unite with all those who feel the wounds of today's martyrs as if they were their own, to show how close we feel to these brothers and sisters who are suffering. As part of the body that is the Church, we would like to shoulder some of the burden of incomprehension, intolerance and violence that the world that rejects Christ pours out upon the new martyrs of the twenty-first century. But precisely from these persecuted Christians we are receiving continual testimonies of people who find in their faith the adequate reason for living or dying. May their testimony awaken our faith from its torpor and indifference. Thus I invite all the CL communities in Italy and the world to the great gesture of prayer on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Vigil of Pentecost, in unity with the entire Church, by participating in the gestures organized by the dioceses."



STORIES

# "WE BELONG ONLY TO JESUS"

**Attacks, kidnappings, and forgiveness. A parish priest who serves refugees, FR. DOUGLAS DOUGLAS BAZI, recounts why there is no hatred in his flock.**

BY LUCA FIORE

Father Douglas Gazi does not tell his story easily, partly because dwelling on those moments still pains him, and partly because he has no desire to add hatred to hatred in an Iraq that needs everything but new doses of poison. In 2006, he was still serving in a Chaldean parish in Baghdad. They took him, bound and blindfolded him, broke his nose and used a hammer to break his teeth. His first sip of water came on the fifth day. They pointed a pistol at his temple and asked, "Aren't you afraid to die? The others begged for their lives, why not you?" He answered, "The others do not know what life and death are." In July 2013, he was transferred to the Church of Mar Elia in Erbil, in Iraqi Kurdistan. Today his parishioners are above all refugees from Mosul and Qaraqoosh, 150 families who have fled the horrors of ISIS. In their midst there is a strange gladness that hides unspeakable wounds, like his.

**What did you think when you heard the Pope's words about persecuted Christians?**

I quoted his words in my Easter homily. I said that this is the time for the world to understand that peace is the only option, the only one for saving humanity. The Pope cares about us and thinks about us profoundly. The truth is that we are not so much

worried about being killed as about being forgotten. The Christian refugees from Mosul are not angry at God. When I ask them what they think about what has happened, they answer: we have to pray for our enemies, as Jesus told us. We have to forgive them, because they know not what they do.

**But these people have lost everything.** Yes, at times they say, "On July 6<sup>th</sup> [the day in 2014 when ISIS entered Mosul], we lost everything." But I answer, "Don't say that. Say, 'On July 6<sup>th</sup>, God saved our lives.'" Maybe the flight from Mosul was not their tragedy, but their salvation.

**Aren't you all afraid of dying?**

If you watch the videos of the people killed by ISIS, the victims are very calm before the execution. I know what that means: sometimes, being dead is the better scenario; because when you die you are in the hands of God. It is better to be in the hands of God than in those of certain people. I think of myself: they shot me, they blew up my church, I have survived several death attempts, and I have been kidnapped. And yet I desire a future without hatred.

**How is it possible that you all are without hatred?**

The one answer that makes sense is that we are Christians. Who am I >>>

» to complain? Who am I to ask God: Why are you doing this to us? One is a Christian not just when things go well. I would like to thank Pope Francis for his thoughts and prayers. But I would also like to tell him that we Christians in Iraq will never surrender. I am a Chaldean priest. I know that I carry out my mission at the risk of my life. But I am called to take care of my people. I will be where my people will be.

**What have you learned in these difficult years?**

After my kidnapping five years ago, I can't remember sleeping more than two hours a night without nightmares. Even today I don't go to bed without a bottle of water by my bedside, because they deprived me of water for four days. And yet I believe that the Grace of God does not flow from person to person or from generation to generation without forgiveness. Otherwise we will transmit hatred and our desire for revenge.

**It seems almost impossible to hear this from someone who has suffered so much.**

I am not a hero. I am simply a Christian. My task is to take care of the community, of our Church. And then, if you think about it, in the history of the Church, the golden ages were those during the persecutions. In those moments, in particular, Christians showed the world the face of Jesus.

**Is there an episode that has struck you particularly in these months?**

A man from Mosul told me that when ISIS arrived in the city, his Muslim neighbor knocked on his door and told him, "You have to leave, and I will take your house. If I don't do it, someone else will. If I see you again tomorrow, I'll kill you." The man prepared to leave, packed his bags, and loaded his family in the car. But before



**On March 9<sup>th</sup>, a mob of 3,000 Muslims sets fire to dozens of homes in Badami Bagh, a Christian neighborhood in Lahore, on a charge of presumed blasphemy.**

leaving he knocked on his neighbor's door. "Didn't I tell you that I would kill you if I saw you again?" And the Christian answered, "We have been neighbors for thirty years. I didn't want to leave without saying goodbye." The Muslim broke into tears. "No, stay. I'll protect you myself." And the other: "No, we *were* neighbors. We are no longer so. The trust has been broken."

**Today there is alarm that Christians may disappear from the Middle East.**

To those who complain about this, I say: we do not belong to this land. We belong to Jesus. Only if we are aware of this belonging can we testify something and be useful to our country. But today we face a dilemma.

**What's that?**

People's lives are at risk, and if they

want to save themselves they have to flee, but in doing so, the Christian community disappears. On the other hand, if you want the community to remain, you risk having the people disappear, because they have been massacred. I say: why leave the sheep among the wolves? Some say they will remain until the last drop of blood. But come on, the future is built by transmitting love, grace, and forgiveness to our children. Not with this kind of talk.

**And therefore?**

As I said, I will stay with the people. Here or elsewhere. In the meantime, I take care of the littlest ones. They are the future. Our "revenge" will be to raise these children in an honest way, educating them to the faith, to an open mentality. Otherwise, the next ISIS will be created by us Christians...



## KURDISTAN

### The Eyes of Erbil

“They are facing great misery, and an even greater decision.” It’s the decision in front of the ultimatum: convert or lose everything. “It was only in going there that I understood what that really meant. Fr. Bernard Cervellera, editor of AsiaNews, which launched an “Adopt a Christian in Mosul” initiative a year ago, decided to go to Erbil for 10 days to spend time with his Christian brothers and sisters, so “not to forget them,” as they ask. The PIME (Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missionaries) priest found himself surrounded by teachers, architects, businessmen, and professionals of all disciplines who, when ISIS invaded the Nineveh plains, left behind all comforts. They did it for the sake of the faith. “It’s the most important thing in their lives, more important than the plans they had for their lives.” Even in their extreme poverty, they do all they can to live their religious celebrations with beauty: “They prepare for the Mass, prayer gatherings, weddings and funerals with choirs and decorations... all with marvelous care.” Fr. Bernardo concelebrated in the ordination of an Orthodox priest of the Syriac rite at the Chaldean Catholic cathedral. “Those same people that I saw in tents, impoverished, with the bare necessities that they had; that day, they arrived for Mass as finely-dressed as they could.”

The young man who became a priest has neither a parish nor a house; he lives out his priestly ministry among the refugees. He himself is a refugee. All refugees just like the group of women who, to be able to stay in Mosul, pretended to convert to Islam and accepted to live under the sharia law imposed by ISIS. “After a few weeks, they ran away. They traveled

50 miles across the desert, and as soon as they arrived, they didn’t ask to rest, they asked to meet with the bishop. To ask for forgiveness.”

The clearest sign of the people’s faith is “the fact that they don’t despair.” Fr. Bernardo met many young people. “They have hope, true hope. Even with no political support, they want to be constructive, to return home and, above all, to witness Christianity among Shiites, Sunnis, and Yazidis. Rami Sadik, a Christian student and a refugee at age 22, takes care of the young children in the Ayun Erbil camp (translated “The Eyes of Erbil”). He was studying physical education in Karamles, the hometown that he fled with his family last summer. He can’t continue his studies here. The classes don’t match up, and it’s another language. “But we cannot abandon Iraq,” he told Fr. Bernard. “Our roots are here. Our life and our future are here.”

**In the refugee camps,** they don’t ask for money, food, or handouts. “It’s impressive,” Cervellera continues, “they just ask you to pray for them. If I fell into destitution like this, I’d have my breath knocked out of me. Instead, in them I saw faith that gives meaning to life, all of life, even to tragedies. It changed me. It cast a new light on the problems that I have to face, I no longer overdramatize them.” These are hearts that reveal the hearts of all, that reveal the “self-contentment with which we live: anytime something bad happens, we think God has it in for us. For them, God is the font that keeps them alive.”

How is faith like this possible? He cherishes Fr. Joseph’s response to the question. The head of the monastery in Qaraqosh said, “Dear Father, our Church is born from the blood of martyrs shed on this soil. For us, the New Evangelization means being ready for martyrdom.” “Martyr- ➤➤

#### How has your relationship with Jesus changed in these years?

I am not an angel. I have made many mistakes in my life and I am still very sorry about them. And yet, if I look at myself, I see that I am still alive. And I tell myself that I can still be useful, I can still do good. The messenger is not important. What counts is the message. If Jesus continues to use me to spread the Gospel, I too can benefit.

#### What can Europe do today for you?

We are not dying for lack of food or medicine. We are worried about our future. We are not concerned about the land or a presence in the Middle East. I think of the people, the Iraqis who are suffering in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Open your doors to them. Let them arrive safely. And welcome them. **T**

dom,” Cervellera says, “is not something of the past, or something far off. It’s a continual dimension of their faith. Not only the martyrdom of blood shed once and for all, but a daily martyrdom. The desire that they have to “stay” and live in the midst of other faiths, “inspires in me the desire to build Christian communities that are open to all. I saw funerals for Muslims crowded with Christians. A lived martyrdom helps you to see even more clearly that faith makes it possible to encounter every human being.”

The Chaldean Church in Kurdistan, made up of 60,000 or 70,000, has found itself caring for at least 130,000 refugees. “There are over 550,000 displaced people in the area. In Lebanon, it’s a third of the total population. This is a wakeup call to us with the anxiety and lack of openness in us when we see the boats [of migrants] crossing the sea. The world is a field hospital, and we just hope that ‘they don’t make it here.’ We want to defend the lifestyle that we have.” He saw priests, nuns, and laypeople offering precisely this, offering their whole lives. “Strengthened by a simple, firm, and decisive faith, they opened their homes.”

When fall arrives, he’s organizing a work camp to bring over young people from Italy to help. Through AsiaNews, he sent a reminder about Jesus and the persecuted Christians of Asia and around the world using the words of the prophet Isaiah: “A sheep silent before shearers.” The “silence,” “opening not [their] mouths,” while enduring the wickedness of men and women. “In the silence, in the death accepted out of love or inflicted by power, God is working. An unconquerable hope arises the morning of Easter. The tiniest opening in one’s heart is enough to take over one’s entire life in a single moment.”

**(A. Stoppa)**

## KENYA

### “We Want to Be Ready”

On Easter Monday, four days after the terrorist attacks at the University College of Garissa (situated in eastern Kenya on the border with Somalia), a small group of CL students from various universities in Nairobi gathered for lunch and talked about the 148 students killed by the Al Shabab Islamic fundamentalists. They talked about their bewilderment and fear, but also about the great newness they had encountered in their lives.

Daisy and Iunice, engineering students at the Jomo Kenyatta University in the capital, told us about their conversation. “Lessons were suspended after Easter because it was exam period, and those who do not live in the city returned home.” During their lunch, they shared their reflections about the attack. “Twenty-two of the young people of Garissa were Protestant Christians who were killed while they were praying. They had heard the shooting, but did not stop,” said Daisy. “We were all struck. It could have been us.”

This is not fatalism. “It is clear that life here is already more precarious in and of itself. Some time ago, I went through a place where a few minutes before a bus had been blown up,” explained Fr. Gabriele, a missionary of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Charles Borromeo in Kenya, who follows the students. In addition, there is increasing fear of attacks against Christians. A short time ago, a student wearing a hoodie, his head covered, entered a library... and the kids escaped through the windows. Another time, an electrical transformer exploded at the university and some students jumped from the sixth floor to their death. “It’s daily. What happened in Garissa could happen to me,” explained



Daisy. “Maybe the first reaction is to think about how to be safe. But you understand that is not the point. In the days after the massacre, there was a lot of discussion on WhatsApp with my companions. Someone talked about strategies, how to limit the number of deaths in the case of an attack. ‘We all go against them together and only the ones in the front die,’ one Muslim boy had written. I wrote what is important for me, that I do not give myself my life, and because of this, because someone gives me my life in every instant, it is precious. A lot of things can happen, even dying in an attack on a shopping mall or the university. The risk is real. But because of this I live more intensely. This is what came out at the lunch: we want to be ready.” Everyone has the problem of living. “But not everyone,” said Daisy, “thinks about the value of life itself. Only a few, the next day, wrote me privately to thank me.”

Everybody is afraid; it is evident. And yet Daisy’s words contain no



**Nairobi. A prayer vigil in memory of the 148 victims of the attack at the University College of Garissa, which took place on April 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

anger or ill will, nor do those of Iunice. “After the events of Paris, a friend reminded us about the Pope’s appeal, with the invitation to pray for the conversion of the terrorists. Well, today I desire that these terrorists can encounter what I have encountered. But how is it possible to show them that Christ is the answer? Only by living.” Living is the only road. This judgement emerged at that lunch, too, re-reading Julián Carrón’s article on Paris, when he spoke about a disarming beauty that overcomes violence. You can think about strategies or learn the Koran in Arabic, so as to save yourself if they test to see if you are Christian or not. “But that does not interest me,” Iunice continued. “If it happened to me, I would want to present myself before God as a Christian, faithful to the end, faithful to the experience I am living. I ask Christ to truly have the power to enable me to face all the circumstances of life, to convert me. Otherwise, if it isn’t true for me, what could I com-

municate? I don’t think it’s my job to yell ‘Christ’ for all to hear, giving sermons full of words. My task is to live my life seriously, every day with gladness, because of the fact that Christ is with me. You can’t give what you don’t have.”

## **PAKISTAN**

### **Gill, Attorney for Christians**

**I**n February, three armed men had stopped him. “You need to quit,” they warned, “or there will be consequences...” In November, he barely escaped an attack. Months before, his house had been targeted and his brother was wounded by a gunshot. Now, he has decided to move his family from Bhai Pehru to close-by Lahore, and to ask the authorities for official protection. Thirty-four-year-old Sardar Musghag Mesih Hill, who goes by “Gill,” is the director of a group of attorneys for the Legal Evangelical Association Development (LEAD), and is one of the most exposed figures in the legal battles of Christians facing blasphemy charges. “So far, I have taken on four blasphemy trials and, with God’s help, I’ve managed to get them all off on bail. I’ve helped three others to avoid getting arrested.” Gill calls himself an “activist lawyer,” and this, he thinks, is what allows him to defend very delicate cases. “For many of my colleagues, the pay is not worth risking your life.”

His vocation began a long time ago when, in elementary school, he understood that he was a “second class citizen.” “There was a water fountain and they told us that it was only for Muslims. A Christian friend of mine drank from it and the teacher met with us and said, “I respect you, and for myself, you and the others are equal, but some of your classmates

come from families that think differently.”

He had finished his degree in electrical engineering when, for three jobs in a row, he was turned down because he had a Christian name. “Mesih” means “Christ” in Urdu. He went back to school to become a lawyer. “Our Constitution, in Article 19, says that there is freedom of expression for all citizens, but it’s a right that is subject to ‘reasonable restrictions imposed by the law for the glory of Islam.’”

He went to the funeral of the 14 victims killed in the March 15<sup>th</sup> attacks on two churches in Lahore. He tells us that, just after the bombing, the police arrested two of the suspects and locked them in a police truck. The crowd attacked the vehicle, beat the two Muslim men to death and burned their bodies. “The Parliament said that the reaction of the Christians was an act of terrorism worse than the crime that provoked it. That’s mistaken. If those responsible were Christian, it’s atrocious, but it’s retaliation, not terrorism. That is what they should be tried for, nothing else.”

Gill doesn’t make excuses. “I’m ashamed of what happened, because we Christians have to be for peace, and not for violence. We stand for love. Only Jesus is capable of loving us and our neighbors, so we have to try to follow Him. Faith is what gives me the confidence and courage to continue to live in this country. Jesus Himself warned us that we will be hated because of His name and our faith in Him.”

Gill is a Protestant, but when he read the words of the Holy Father at Easter, he was comforted, “It’s good to see that he is on our side; he makes us feel like there is someone who cares about us. He gives us courage.”

**(L. Fiore) ■**

# A CRY RISING FROM ALEPPO

The words are of the Apostolic Nuncio to Syria, Archbishop **MARIO ZENARI**: “Don’t let this land become the graveyard of all differences.”

BY GIORGIO PAOLUCCI

From the numbers, we can begin to understand the dimensions of the tragedy that has been consuming Syria for over four years: 220,000 have died, including 11,000 children; 4 million (out of a population of 22 million) have fled the country, and another 7 million are “internally displaced”; 10 million are in need of humanitarian aid; four out of 5 Syrians are living below the poverty level; 58% are without work; 1,65 million children are out of school.

There is more: 20,000 people have gone missing, including two Orthodox bishops and a Jesuit from Italy, Paolo Dall’Oglio. Still, the numbers don’t tell the whole story. The images and stories that come from Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and dozens of other villages depict neighborhoods reduced to rubble, faces marked by fear and suffering and a pained humanity that has been victim to blind violence.

“The people are the sacrificial victims of this conflict. An entire people is paying the price of a war ‘by proxy,’ escalated by foreign powers who are playing a horrifying, large-scale ‘game’ for the region. One team wears Sunnite colors, and the other Shiite, with another player, Israel, who is apparently

along the sidelines.” Bishop Mario Zenari, who has been the Apostolic Nuncio to Syria for six years, speaks to us on the phone from Damascus. His outlook is that of a realist who shares in the sufferings of Christians, and of one who knows well the political and diplomatic dynamics that entangle the country, and the entire Middle East.



Monsignor Mario Zenari.

Is there a way out of the bloodbath that is destroying Syria? “By now, it is evident that the solution cannot be a military one. The only way out is the road of diplomacy. We need to bring all the actors around a negotiating table: the government, the opposing forces, civil society (including religious leaders), and regional and international actors (and Iran can’t be left out, as it was previously). The major flaw of the two conferences previously held in Geneva was the fact that those at the table had as their goal victory over their adversary, rather than arriving at a peace agreement. If there is no openness to compromise for the sake of a stable and lasting resolution, no one gets anywhere. The order of the day must be ‘dialogue.’ And we must immediately put a stop to the deplorable practice of governments with an interest in destabilizing Syria supplying arms to the various factions.



What’s happening here is a chapter in the piecemeal World War III that Pope Francis has been speaking about for a long time.”

“**WE ARE TIRED.**” Syria is one of the cradles of Christianity. It was in Antioch (which only as of 1939 became part of Turkey) that the followers of Jesus were called “Christians.” Over the centuries, the mosaic of inhabitants attested to the possibility that people of different cultures and creeds could live together. Here, diversity is native. Aleppo, the city which has, more than others, lived this calling, has been a battlefield of vying forces for months, between the al-Nusra Front (a branch of al Qaeda) and the militia of the Islamic State (ISIS). It was precisely here that a unified cry arose in April, on the occasion of the Orthodox Easter, in the form of a document signed by Chris-



**Coptic Christians during a funeral ceremony.**

others inasmuch as they are “other.” Still, the Christians are paying a steep price in the devastation: they’ve lost churches, ancient monasteries, and sacred art and vessels, crosses torn down from steeples, consecrated religious kidnapped, and processions and church bells have been banned in a forceful elimination of all the meaningful signs of their diversity. Persecuted because they are Christians, as Pope Francis has often reminded us.

**ERADICATING THE VIRUS.** Will it be Muslims themselves who eradicate the virus that has overtaken Syria? “It’s a game that can’t remain at the military level, but will require change at the fundamental level, with decisive contributions from religious leaders,” the Nuncio responds. “We need efforts at the level of education and establishing a culture, for an interpretation of the Qur’an that deprives those who use religion to justify their evil acts of any alibi. At the same time, we need to develop a new concept of citizenship untethered from one’s religious affiliation and founded on an equality of rights and responsibilities, to ensure that those who do not belong to the majority religion are not treated like second class citizens.”

This is what the new Syria needs, as well as the entire Middle East. “Most Christians who emigrate plan never to return, because they don’t feel protected enough. This land is the cradle of cultures and rites that are over a thousand years old: Syriac, Armenian, Chaldean, Melkite, Coptic, and Maronite. Every Christian

who leaves takes away a bit of the richness that has been built up over the centuries. God does not want the Middle East to become the burial ground for differences.” **T**

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**“It’s not only Christians who are under fire. Still, the Christians are paying a steep price.”**  
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tians of various confessions, evocatively titled “Resurrection of the Savior or Funeral for His Disciples?”

“We saw and we cried: bodies pulled out from the rubble, shreds attached to the walls and blood mixed with the soil of homeland! Dozens of martyrs of every religion and confession, wounded and maimed. [...] We are tired! Close the doors to the sale of arms and stop the instruments of death and the supply of ammunition. Do you want us to be wounded and humiliated, maimed and deprived of all human dignity? Or that we be driven out by force and publically destroyed?” The appeal ends with the cry that the city remain the same Aleppo it has always been, “the precious jewel on the crown of our country, Syria, with all its components and its cultural, religious, and sectarian diversity.”

Eliminating diversity: this is ISIS’s objective, and it’s precisely from Syria that it began its deadly advance in the Middle East and into North Africa. Raqqa, Syria, is where the self-declared caliphate, which now occupies over a third of the country, has established its capital. “The people see the caliphate as a kind of abscess, a foreign entity in terms of the nation’s history,” Zenari says. “Here the mistakes began with the invasions of fighters financed by foreign countries, which destroyed the cultural and religious fabric that made up the Syrian tapestry.” It’s not only Christians who are under fire, but all minorities: Alawites, Shiites, and others. It’s hate toward

# THE HUNDREDFOLD IS ALWAYS MORE

From his questions as a boy to his intuition seeing the video of “Recognizing Christ,” all the way to the “call” received today. The witness of **DAVIDE PROSPERI**, Vice President of the Fraternity of CL, at the GS Easter Triduum.

**I** participated in your... in *our* Way of the Cross, now twenty-five years after I was in GS, and I was moved—just as I think most of you, and I hope all of you, were moved—by the beauty of the gesture. Precisely because of this a pressing question came to me: What is this beauty, in front of all the contradictions in the world? [...] Christ continues to be crucified today, in me and in the world. I thought of the martyrs in Kenya, those Christians who just a few days ago were brutally killed for their faith. So, what does this beauty have to say to us, how can this beauty

carry with it all the contradiction of incomprehensible evil? I have to say that this gesture has really helped us. Those who really lived it intensely were able to enter into the events of 2000 years ago. “Enter into” means to feel what was felt by those who lived it, starting with Jesus. At a certain point I asked myself: Why did Jesus, a man who could restore vision to the blind, make a lame man walk, and resurrect a man who’d been dead for four days—why did He accept to die?

There is nothing more incomprehensible to us than this, given the narrowness of our usual reasoning.

For us, who find the greatest satisfaction in seeing our destiny fulfilled, who find pleasure in having our expectations met, none of this makes sense. But the Son of God lived precisely this—He obeyed, He participated in the only way that He and we can to fulfill our destiny,

just as He fulfilled His. If He had chosen a path unavailable to us today, then how could we enter into it here



**Davide Prospero.**





On these pages, some moments from the GS Easter Spiritual Exercises held in Rimini (Italy).

and now? He accepted what we consider weakness, because in this world of which we are sons and daughters, in our mentality, weakness is synonymous with barrenness, or the incapacity to generate something good, feeling incapable in front of things. What we lived yesterday was the opposite of this: we saw that weakness can become the origin, the genesis of a new fruitfulness. [...] At Way of the Cross we listened to the *Stabat Mater*, which describes what Mary did when faced with her Son on the cross. We listened to it because, if we want to understand, or at least try to understand, what was happening that day, we have to look to that woman, that Mother, who was the only one who understood. Mary stayed, “the mournful Mother her station keeping.” She

participated with and accompanied her Son. What else could she have done? Why didn't Mary climb up on the cross to pull Him down? Why didn't she shout in protest and rail against the Roman executioners? Because she was the only one who understood that this was the way her Son's destiny was being fulfilled, and through Him, that of the whole world.

This is the way I would like to learn to look at things. I want to learn to see things as she did, those things that we struggle to see because, so often, “reality” is reduced to appearances. This is why we are often plagued by doubt, as was said earlier. Because I'd like to tell you a story from my childhood. I was, if not full of doubts, then at the very least full of insecurities, because I lost my father when I was six years old,

and without a father you feel the absence of the presence that introduces you into reality. [...] First, though, I have to tell you what happened before my father's death.

My grandfather had had another son, who had died of meningitis as a child. His wife couldn't have any other children, but seeing her husband suffering so much, she made a vow: she would be willing to give her life to have another son. After a few years she became pregnant again, but the doctors immediately told her to end the pregnancy right away because the baby wouldn't survive long enough to be born, and that her life was also at risk. She said she was ready to give her life, because she was certain that God gave this pregnancy to her. She carried the pregnancy to term, and my father was born. My grandmother died during childbirth, and my father later died in an accident when he was thirty-three years old.

I remember how, when we were little, my brother and I would go to our grandparents' house for holidays, and at eight or ten years of age—with the understanding a boy of that age could have—I looked at our grandfather and wondered: For a man who has lost everything, what is it that makes him remain certain that life is not a cruel joke? Because that is what we had before our eyes: a man, who was, yes, tired and tried by life, but not defeated; he was a man of faith.

**This question**, which on the one hand seemed so contradictory (considering the insecurities in my life), always kept me unsettled: Is it possible to live this way in the face of everything, and never find it was an illusion, never find out you were deceived? Skipping over everything that has happened since then, I'd like to speak to you about where I found the true answer to this drama that I lived for many years, and that I still live, because >>

» life, even if it's not doubt, is at least a question. As we read in *School of Community*: the alternative to doubt isn't certainty, it's a "problem." This means that life poses problems, because everything is not already resolved, and this kicks us into action. We see the greatness of a man or woman in the fact that he doesn't give up, and not that he knows the answer to everything right away. So, skipping over a few years, I arrived at the real encounter that I had, which took place in college during the 1994 Spiritual Exercises. The title—as if tailor-made for me—was "Recognizing Christ." This is what I was interested in: How can I recognize that what my heart is waiting for is Him? Fr. Giussani was there—in fact, it was the first time that I saw him close up—and he began to speak, quoting a line from Kafka: "There is a destination but no way there." The goal exists, but there is no road to get there. This was my problem. I understood that I wanted to live for something great, I didn't want my life to be thrown away, to not be defined by the time that passes and slowly devours your life—but that it be lived for an ideal.

But where can one find that ideal? This, for me, was "the" question.

To respond to this question, you have to begin to experience the fact that this ideal is connected to your life, with the things that you live, that you feel, and with the problems that you have. [...] The ideal has to be connected to this, or else what kind of ideal is it? It would be unattainable, there would be "no way there."

In his response to this question, Fr. Giussani began to tell the story of John and Andrew, the first two to encounter Jesus. I still get goose bumps thinking about it, because as he spoke

I relived that scene as if I were there. You could tell that for him it was as if he had been there, next to those two, and little by little a question arose in me: How does he do it? How can he say these things? He even described what Andrew said when, returning home, he embraced his wife, who saw something was different. How could he say those things? Because, as you could see, it was a present experience for him: he was living now what had happened then. I remember how, as I listened to him speak, the desire to be able to live grew little by little inside of me, that his experience could be mine too, despite my insecurity and incapacity, that it could be possible for me to live—to live what he was living.

**At a certain point he read** a letter that I've carried in my briefcase every day since, even though it was from twenty years ago. You know the things that are important, and this was among the questions you asked: How can you manage to not forget everything when tomorrow comes? Eh, guys, you need to have memory! You shouldn't throw away things like this letter, be-

cause when you forget you can go back and see once again what won you over, and recognize that the thing that won you over is still present. If it won me over, it is always with me. So Fr. Giussani read, among various witnesses, the letter of a boy who had AIDS, who died two days after having written the letter. [...] This boy wrote that after a few years, he had run into a former classmate from high school—who is now in *Memoires Domini*—and had written the letter to Fr. Giussani, whom he had never met.

"Dear Fr. Giussani, I am writing you and calling you 'dear' even though



I've never met you, I've never seen you, or heard you speak. However, to tell the truth I can say that I know you, inasmuch as I've understood something of *The Religious Sense* and of what Ziba [his friend] told me. I know you through faith and, I would add now, by the grace of faith. I am writing just to say thank you: thank you for having given meaning to my arid life. I am a high school classmate of Ziba, with whom I've always remained friends to the extent that, though I didn't agree with him on many points, I've always been struck by his humanity and his unbiased openness. I think I have reached the last station of this troubled life, carried by that train called AIDS, which doesn't let anyone off the hook. Now I can say that without fear. Ziba always told me that what is important in life is to have a true interest and to follow that. I chased after this 'interest' many times, but it was never a true one. Now I have seen the true interest, I see it, I met it and I'm beginning to know it and call it by name: it's Christ. I don't even know what this means, or how I can say these things, but when I see my friend's face and read *The Religious Sense*, which is keeping me company, and I think of you and of the things that Ziba told me about you, it all seems clearer to me, all of it, even the evil in me and my pain. My life that

**This is what I was interested in: How can I recognize that what my heart is waiting for is Him?**



by now is flat and made sterile, flattened like a smooth stone that everything rolls off like water, was injected with purpose and meaning, which sweep away negative thoughts and aches and pains, or even better, which takes them up and makes them true, transforming my wretched and rotting body into a sign of His presence. Thank you, Fr. Giussani; thank you for communicating to me this faith, or, as you call it, this Event. Now I feel at peace, free and at peace. When Ziba recited the *Angelus* in front of me, who blasphemed right in his face, hating him and saying he was a coward because the only thing he knew how to do was to say those stupid prayers to me. Now, as I stumblingly try to say it with him, I realize that I was the coward, because I wouldn't see what was right under my nose, the truth that was in front of me. Thank you Fr. Giussani, it's the only thing that a man like me can say to you. Thank you because, through my tears, I can say that dying like this now has a meaning, not because it is more beautiful—I am very afraid of dying—but because now I know that there is someone who loves me, and that maybe I, too, can be saved, and that I, too, can pray that those in the hospital beds around me can encounter and see just as I have seen and encountered. And so I feel useful. Think of it: by just using my voice, I feel

useful; with the one thing that I can still use well, I can be useful; I, who threw away my life, can do good by just saying the *Angelus*. It's amazing, and even if it were an illusion, this realization is too human and reasonable, as you say in *The Religious Sense*, to not be true. Ziba taped a phrase of St. Thomas to my bed: "Man's life consists in the affection that primarily sustains him, in which he finds his greatest satisfaction." I think that my greatest satisfaction is that of having met you, writing this letter, and even greater still is that through God's Mercy, if it's His will, I will meet you there where everything will be made new, made good and true. New, good, and true—like the friendship that you have brought into the lives of many people, and of which I can say, 'I was there too' [this "I was there too" goes for me as well!]. Even I, in my wretched life, have seen and participated in this new, good, and true event. Pray for me. I will continue to feel useful in praying for you and the Movement for whatever time I have left. A hug, Andrea." [...]

**In that moment I understood**—I understood it instantaneously—that to know Christ, of whom you could speak in that way, of whom Fr. Giussani spoke in that way and that boy in such a circumstance spoke in that

way, I had to try to become attached, to follow and get to know the people who were witnessed that way to me. I understood that I needed to get to know that man. And I did it; I tried until I managed to meet him in person. Then a friendship began, which expanded because I already had my friends, and we were all seized by this newness, so that all of our time, in our days, everything was defined by that experience that was born again every day, that was renewed every day in following what was happening in that man and seeing what was happening in us, in each of us. [...]

**Since that day**, this has become the greatest companionship for my life: friends with whom I can run the race for that which overtook our lives and that day after day interrogates us, provokes us, and calls us, so that we can know it better. It's in your response that you discover what the hundredfold is. [...] The hundredfold is precisely that experience of not having to settle in life, the awareness that our desire can always grow bigger; that the more we find satisfaction in life, the more our desire doesn't run out but actually continues to grow. When do we reach the hundredfold? We never reach it, the hundredfold isn't a finish line to cross. No, the hundredfold isn't simply 100, rather it's a hundredfold: it's a multiplication factor, it's always more. [...] And so we can see that the life we've encountered is a promise. We don't see it in its completion, we don't see it already fulfilled precisely because it is fulfilled inside of time. This is what gives life its "gusto," because it's a promise that I still have to discover, otherwise everything would already be over. [...] It's true that we can understand a lot of things right away, but often that's not the case; there are times we see a contradiction and it seems like we lose that "gusto." But the seeds that are placed in our >>

» lives develop in ways that we can't see right away, because when a seed is planted in the ground, there's a time in which it's growing and you can't see it; you can only see it when it starts to bear fruit. The most important thing for the seed is that it stays there, attached to the ground, and isn't torn away. If there is one thing that gets in our way, it's that we don't understand struggle or difficulty. It's not that you don't understand that something is asked of you, you get that, but you don't accept the struggle that it requires. To accept the difficulty, you need to know the reasons why you do it, and always stay attached to the true reasons. [...]

Personally asking yourself the reasons why is the first companionship that we have; we don't necessarily need someone else to tell them to us. In fact, it's exactly because we usually don't ask why we do things that we feel so alone in doing them. The challenge of the hundredfold is that what we expect is much greater than what we do. This is the challenge: there's more out there than the image we've formed, and so we feel the "vertiginousness" of the fact that there is a presence in reality that makes this promise, the sign of which I see in the desire that I have, which can't be crushed.

**A year ago I found out** that I have a very serious illness. [...] Now I'm okay, I just need to have regular checkups. However, back during the time when it still wasn't clear what I had and what would happen, the question of what was being asked of me began to weigh on me in a very dramatic way, because I have a lot of responsibilities in life: I'm married, I have four young children—one of whom is almost your age by now—to support and to raise; I have a job that asks a lot of me (I lead a fifteen-person research group); and then there are the responsibilities in the Movement [...]. In the face of all of



this, I asked myself: What is really being asked of me? I realized that, in the beginning, I treated this thing that was happening to me, being sick, as if it were an accident, because I thought that my real task in life was made up of all the other things that I do in life, and this unexpected mishap didn't fit. But precisely because we didn't understand right away what was wrong with me, I discovered what is really asked of me. Because often in life we speak of hope when everything is already resolved—but what does it mean to say there is hope when things aren't clear, when we're still in the midst of problems, when we're immersed in a difficulty? Otherwise, we speak about the hundredfold saying something abstract, and thinking that things are only going well when all of life's problems have been resolved. Is it possible to experience the hundredfold, to live hope even in the midst of difficulty? This is the question I had.

In those moments, I understood that I had to finally begin to see that which we always struggle to see, and I began to see it thanks to all that has happened in my life during these years, thanks to the certainty that has continued to grow in me day after day within this friendship, the friendship of the Church. I began to understand that what is asked of me is "vocation," and that vocation is not a form that

you give to your life to dedicate it to God or to yourself, but rather vocation is to respond to the personal relationship that someone asks of your life, to that preference given to you, because that circumstance was given to me alone, specifically to me, so that I could recognize Him in my life. I couldn't go on living all of the other things in life without taking seriously that fact that was happening to me.

As a result, I began to understand that the hundredfold is not 100 times what we desire, it's something completely different, it's a different measure. We are not promised that what we have in mind will be fulfilled; we are promised much more, 100 times more. We are promised something according to a measure that is not ours. Then you begin to understand why sacrifice is needed, what sacrifice is. We are promised the fulfillment of the desire of our heart, so long as we never give up on staying attached to the beloved presence that has entered our lives. The hundredfold begins within what is already asked of you to do, not in you imagining who knows what other kind of thing. And you know, during that time something that Fr. Giussani always said kept coming to mind, and kept me company: that inevitable circumstances, those in which you can't choose what to do—you can pretend



nothing is happening, but you're fate has been decided—are the most simple circumstances, even if not the most desirable; they're not the ones that go as I want them to go. Of course, I would have preferred to be well, to be able to dedicate all my energies to the big, important responsibilities that I have in life, but at a certain point an Other chose something else for me: "This is asked of you now, because it is I who want your life, not you who command it." I remembered that even Jesus decided to accept this relationship as the definition of the fulfillment of His task, of that for which He was sent: the relationship with the Father. [...]

**Last summer**, I spent a lot of time meditating on the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, which we referred to yesterday as well. I'll reread what we read from the Gospel of Matthew. When He is praying alone, at a certain point Jesus says, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Withdrawing again, He prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!" [Pay attention to how the account continues]. Then He returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying

the same thing again. Then He returned to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?" (Cf. Mt 26:41-46). He's at peace. As I was living those months of sickness, I perceived in myself the same torment that Jesus felt. Returning to his disciples and finding them asleep, He says, "How could you? You who are my friends!" He felt alone. This solitude is life's greatest tragedy. It means no longer perceiving the meaning of what you are doing, of what you are living; not perceiving the relationship it has with the totality, with the infinite; it means thinking that what you are doing is useless. Jesus needs His friends; He who never needed anything—it was the others who needed Him, Jesus never needed others to explain things to Him, for them to tell Him something, or help Him to see something, or solve problems for Him—He needed not to be alone, but "they could not keep their eyes open."

This wounded me because, in saying this, the evangelist underlines something I had never thought of until I was living that circumstance: it was almost against their will that they fell asleep, because they couldn't keep their eyes open: as if the Father Himself had allowed it to happen so that Jesus couldn't find an escape in this last resort [to His friends]; so that He would discover that the only true victory over solitude was to affirm the relationship with the Father, abandonment to the Father, even though He seemed so distant in that moment. I realized that I was living the same experience. With this in mind, I began to face everything that life put in front of me, including the trials that I had to undergo. Because of this, I under-

stand that inevitable circumstances are the simplest ones, because we can clearly see what is being asked of us. We're asked to obey—but what does it mean to obey? We really have a moralistic perception of things, and we don't know what obedience is.

Obedience is first and foremost availability; it's availability to the Mystery who wants me now. It's being faithful to what is given to you to affirm the meaning of life. Life has a meaning, and I have to discover it. The only way I have of discovering it is entering ever more deeply into what is given to me. To help, I am given friends, companions on the journey. The Mystery doesn't leave us alone. You are here; we are here together because this continues to happen today.

**In order to beg** that this meaning reveal itself more and more, even though there still are some moments when you don't see it clearly [...], you remain attached to that source of life that you have seen and that changed you in a moment, that you felt as a force that challenged your whole life. You understand that the hundredfold is a different kind of satisfaction: it's not in doing or having more things, but a new satisfaction in living ordinary things which would otherwise just be a burden. You under-

stand that you are doing something that is connected to the world's destiny, and first of all with your destiny, connected to that for which you were chosen. You can also continue to do the same things without this attachment, however, and quit desiring great things. This is the battle, guys: don't ever quit desiring great things! The "gusto" of life lies in this availability. **¶**

**The hundredfold is not in having more things, but a new satisfaction in living ordinary things.**



# THE EXPRESSION OF A PEOPLE

A “first taste” of the week in Rimini (August 20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>). President **EMILIA GUARNIERI** comes to terms with the new challenges and the value of a treasure that has been around for years, but cannot be taken for granted.

BY MAURIZIO VITALI

In the 36<sup>th</sup> year of its shining history, even the Rimini Meeting is touched by the difficult times in which we live. The economic crisis stretches on, the recovery continues to stall, companies are having to make cuts everywhere, including money for sponsorships, and people can't afford much vacation...things have changed. However, an end to the subconscious way that we usually take the August festival for granted is not necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, this could be the chance to

better understand that the Meeting is not built by the organizers alone, but rather is built by every person who takes an interest and participates. This could be a chance to act on that recognition.

Some have already understood the opportunity and have rolled up their sleeves. “It's impressive to see that there's already been a strong grassroots mobilization to support the event,” says Emilia Guarnieri, coordinator of the Meeting from the beginning and now President of the Foundation.

“For example, university students have begun an intense drive to find free places to stay, so the cost isn't a burden to them or the Foundation. This is a beautiful sign of a people who want to see this gesture happen and to participate in it.”

**A PARADOX.** How is the experience of these difficult times for you organizers? “It's like what you see in family life or in daily experience: difficult moments are the ones that make you ask yourself what you re-



ally care about. This thing that we call the Meeting—now that it's not automatic—are we interested?" And how would you respond? "Ah, of course it does. It interests me a lot! I always say: the Meeting isn't strictly necessary. We've always done it out of the impetus that we have within us to facilitate a place of encounter and freedom, a place of truth and freedom for everyone." Do you see this impetus today? "In some ways, it's even more pressing. It was re-energized in a big way at the audience

on March 7<sup>th</sup> with Pope Francis. Inspired by his words, his person, we were extremely moved. 'Centered in Christ and in the Gospel, you can be the arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of a Church.' How do you not take such a mandate seriously? Come on."

That full-blooded "Come on" in *Romagnolo* (the dialect of Emilia Romagna, where she is from) bowls you over. It's like an inarguable grammar of assent, or undeniable evidence. Emilia and company at the Meeting

are "extremely moved" and "mobilized." Big undertakings in reviewing spending and fundraising are underway, to make the costs as reasonable as possible and to pool small contributions. "We're asking everyone who cares about the Meeting to support this impetus and passion."

Briefly put, work is underway, and the result of this work, for now, is a Meeting that changed dates (it will begin on Thursday, August 20<sup>th</sup>, and end on Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>) to make it easier for people to attend, >>

» and that will be “more controlled in its costs, but not lacking in content.” And this, our President adds, “is a fascinating paradox.”

Centered around a theme taken from a verse from the poet Mario Luzi—“What is this lack a lack of, O heart, of which all of a sudden you are full?”—they’ve organized a rich program of talks, performances, and exhibits (there will be about 15 areas for displays). “We’ve encountered great interest in the theme from contacts all over the world,” Guarnieri continues. “A number of high-profile guests have agreed to come, beginning with Mauro Lepori, the Abbot General of the Cistercian Order, who has been entrusted with the talk on the year’s theme. To continue with the ecclesial figures, added to the ranks are: Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva; the Secretary General of Italian Bishops, Bishop Nunzio Galantino; and Cardinal Giuseppe Betori, Archbishop of Florence.

**THE GREAT TRAGEDY.** Then the cultural and political leaders include guests from Italy from half the world: the U.S., the Middle East, Africa, Turkey, Japan, and Argentina—all, it seems, convinced that without asking oneself the question posed by Luzi, you can’t even scratch the surface of the great tragedy of today: the confusion over the nature of the “I.” It’s the reduction of the person and of human desire that keeps anyone from seriously facing contemporary problems and challenges.

At the same time, other “Meetings” are sprouting throughout the world: New York, Madrid, Cairo, Cologne, Lisbon, and London. “Looking at what’s developing, we can’t help but

## PREVIEW

**W**e speak of man as a lack, but a lack of what? We have to ask at the level of the heart, as the poet Mario Luzi does. **Fr. Mauro Lepori**, Abbot General of the Cistercian Order, will present the topic of this year’s Meeting.



**THE SPEAKERS.** Unsurprisingly, the program is still being firmed up, but we can give a few hints. **Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran** will argue for the hypothesis of “Religion: An Integral Part of the Solution, Not the Problem.” **Bishop Nunzio Galantino**, Secretary General of the Italian Bishops Conference, will address the issue of “The Person and Perceiving our Limitedness.” Annamaria Furlan, Secretary of CISL (Italian Confederation of Trade Unions), and economist Giulio Sapelli will discuss the role of intermediate bodies in rethinking labor unions. Experts in the culture and politics of North Africa and the Middle East will take a deeper look at the **new constitutions formulated after the Arab Spring**. Education, as always, will be in the spotlight: professor **Eddo Rigotti** and school administrator **Carlo Wolfsgruber** will speak on the topic of “Education and Realism.” And of course many others will participate, including American linguist **Noam Chomsky**, American physician Dr. **Brad Stewart**, Grégoire Ahongbonon, **Tim Shriver** (Chairman of Special Olympics), Rafea Ben Achour (former legal advisor to the Tunisian president), Constantin Sigov (Ukrainian philosopher), and Fr. “Charly” **Olivero** (a priest ministering in poor neighborhoods in Buenos Aires).

**EXHIBITS.** The theme of man as “lack” breaks open the confusion about the nature of the “I” that characterizes the world today. Hence this year’s exhibits: “**Abram, the birth of the ‘I’**,” organized by Fr. Ignacio Carbajosa with Giorgio Buccellati; plus many others, ranging from science (“**Water is mysterious**,” a rigorous study that delves much deeper than easy slogans such as “Water belongs to everyone”) to contemporary art (a team led by Giuseppe Frangi is curating an exhibit highlighting public spaces and the discovery of efforts to “**keep the fire alive**.”) All not to be missed!

recognize the extraordinary gift that we’ve received having met Fr. Giusani’s charism, with such an unbelievable and universal power to embrace, attract, and encounter others,” says Guarnieri.

Anyone who visits the website ([www.meetingrimini.org](http://www.meetingrimini.org)) can click on the circle with a little heart in the middle and learn about the many ways to make his or her contribution to the endeavor. You can make a one-time or recurring donation, and Italian taxpayers can designate their 0.05% go to the Meeting. Supporters can choose to be enrolled in “Community Meeting,” with an accompanying membership card and special offers, including a discount in renting exhibits after the Meeting. You can also help cover the cost of lodging for 60 international volunteers, who travel a long way for this experience of friendship and generosity, through Banca Carim’s crowdfunding platform, Eticarim. It’s all on the Meeting website.

**SACRIFICE.** Another adjustment is that volunteers will be asked to pay the entire cost of their stay if they are able. It inspires sympathy to think of the heroic young people who will shell out over three hundred dollars for six days in the sun and dust of a parking lot, six nights on a hard bed in a two-star hotel, and twelve meals of a sandwich and a side. Isn’t it a little cruel to ask such an expense of them? “We know well that a lot of them can’t do it, but some of them will be able. Coming to the Meeting may require some sacrifices for everyone who comes to the Meeting; you come if you have a reason to. For me, personally, asking for things for the Meeting is the hardest part. It doesn’t come automatically for me. It’s an act of obedience, of awareness that the Meeting isn’t my project; it belongs to everyone and is for everyone.” **I**



## A CHAT IN THE PARKING LOT

**G**iordana pulls the car to the sidewalk and turns off the motor. This morning, she has to wait. The parking lot is full. “Parking lot” is a generous term to describe the area around Verano, the cemetery of Rome, where the college student parks her car every day to go to class. The only available parking spaces are unauthorized, supervised by similarly illicit parking “attendants.” She knows them all by sight, and she’s a little afraid of some of them, especially in the evening, because that’s often when they might be drunk. At the beginning of the year, a new parking attendant showed up on the scene. Maybe it was his tidy shirt or because he greeted her politely, but he seemed more “normal,” so every morning she looked for a spot in “his” section. They’d also exchange a few words.

**AS SHE WAITS, HE WALKS OVER.** “Hello, I’m sorry, but today you will have to be patient,” he says. “Hi, Joseph. That’s fine; I’m early. How are you?” “Honestly, I’m a little hungry. I was running late and I didn’t have time to eat breakfast.” “Well, then why don’t I go grab you a croissant as long as I’m waiting. What do you think?” “Thank you, you are very kind. Here’s the money.” “Don’t worry about it. I’ll be back in two minutes. You’ll watch my car, after all!” When she gets back, there is still no space available. “Here you go,” Giordana says, “a jelly croissant.”

She continues, “You know, you don’t look like a parking attendant. How does it work here?” The man wants to talk. “Look,” he says, “almost everyone here has a boss. I don’t anymore. I don’t answer to anyone. I’m at the top of the ladder. No one can tell me what to do.” “Do you have a family?” He looks at her and lowers his eyes. “I can’t, I couldn’t support them.” “So why don’t you find another place to work?” “It’s not that easy, though I’ve thought about it so many times. How often I ask myself if...” He pauses for a few seconds. Then he continues, “... if what I do is right.” Giordana looks at him asking, “What do you mean by ‘right’?” “I’m already going against the law, I’m not also going against...God! There, I said it.” Another moment of silence and he speaks again. “Do you believe in God?” This was the last thing Giordana expected. “Yes, I believe, but why do you ask? Why are you interested in God?” Joseph starts to tell his story. “My mom is Catholic; my dad is Muslim. They respect each other. They love each other. When I look at them I see what they always told me: ‘We love the same God.’ I’ll give you an example. This week, seeing the news about the ISIS attack, they prayed together for peace; one in Arabic, the other in Italian. I think what’s happening to the Christians is insane. It’s as if my father killed my mother. It’s an absurd war!” “Joseph, do you consider yourself Muslim or Catholic?” “I believe in God, and that’s it.”

**FROM A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY THEY HEAR YELLING.** A driver is arguing with a parking attendant. A car horn sounds. Joseph begins again. “Well, what do you think about what I said before? Is what I’m doing going against God?” She takes a few seconds to respond. “Do you know what Jesus said when He was asked if it was right to pay taxes to the emperor? ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.’ So the law is important.” Then she added, ‘Give to God what is God’s,’ and your heart is focused on God. They’re two sides of the same coin, because life is one thing.” “No one has ever spoken to me about God like this!,” he exclaims.

A parking space opens up. Giordana gets in and turns on the car. She rolls down the window. “Thank you. I’ll see you tomorrow morning.” The man leans over. “Today, I saw the meaning of what my parents say: that God is love.” She angles the car into the spot and thinks to herself, “The Lord calls us in every circumstance. We just have to remain present.”



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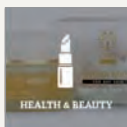
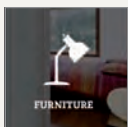
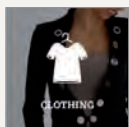
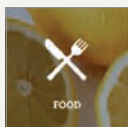
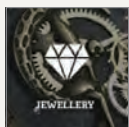
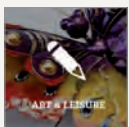
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