

## THE CLOWN EFFECT

Is it possible today to give witness to faith without ending up like the clown described years ago by Joseph Ratzinger? How?

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## Close up

# CLOSE TO THOSE WHO ARE FAR AWAY

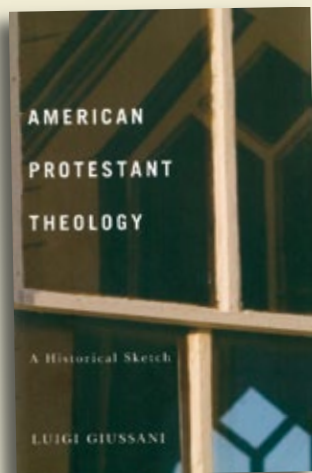
A day in the suburbs of London with Fr. José "Pepe" Clavería to see how in this ultra-secularized society faith can once again be credible (and attractive) even for "pagans."



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## LUIGI GIUSSANI

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

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

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

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

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

# GETTING BACK IN THE GAME

**M**any of our readers will have already guessed the inspiration for this cover. Others may not, because they weren't present and haven't read the text of that meeting last month (CL's Beginning Day in Italy), in which Fr. Julián Carrón surprised those present by reading a page from then-Cardinal Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*. It was the "story of the clown" used by Søren Kierkegaard. A fire suddenly breaks out at a circus. The owner sends the clown, already dressed for the show, to the nearby town to ask for help. The residents think it's a gimmick to draw the people to the show. The more he yells, cries, and begs, the more they laugh. Until the flames reach the town...

This, Ratzinger said, is more or less the same risk that Christians run: the harder we try to speak about faith to men and women today, the more we appear strange, eccentric, and incomprehensible. The words spoken are true, unchallengeable, and even sacred. But they fall on ground that cannot absorb them; they seem otherworldly, unbelievable. Often, it's not because of the world's ill will or prejudice against them. It's because they build on evidences that are no longer perceived as such, as the appeal to reason is undergoing an "odd darkening of the mind," (to use another expression from Benedict XVI). Thus, we are put in front of a crucial question: How can the faith be credible—and interesting—once again today?


**Deep down, it's the same question presented by the Synod on the Family**, which ended recently. Not by chance, the themes of the two rounds of consultations to which Pope Francis called the Church were "pastoral challenges" (in October 2014) and "the vocation and the mission of the family," from last month. It's a recurring theme, dramatically incarnated in one of the most vital and precious realities in the life of men and women (the family): How can we live and propose the beauty of marriage, the captivating challenge of "forever," in a confused and individualistic world, where even the most basic evidences (*man and woman, father and mother*) are no longer universally recognized?

These days, it's very striking to reread a passage from the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus speaks about the indissolubility of marriage, something written in human nature ("for your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but *from the beginning it was not so*"). The response of the disciples is also striking in its blunt spontaneity: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." *Better not to*. Which is to say: what you propose is unthinkable. It's impossible; it's incompatible with the way we're made. It is part of the clown's act, we could say, because it's the same objection we see today. What overpowered their objections? What opened them up to a horizon of possibility where that life—that new morality—was not only possible, but even desirable?

**This *Traces* speaks to that question.** Or better, it seeks to demonstrate the response. To show how it can happen, when it happens; how Christianity can become interesting again, how it can become relevant again for those who thought the game was already over. It happens among the residents of a London suburb and to a physician—who is also an entrepreneur—in the U.S., or wherever men and women are living today. The method that puts us back in the game is always the same: an encounter with a human reality (a person, a companionship) that fascinates and attracts us simply because their way of life (not just their words, but *how they live*) is fuller, more beautiful: more human. And it opens up prospects that we hadn't even imagined were possible.

An encounter and a companionship. Just like the disciples; it's the same thing. It doesn't happen because we speak about Christ or say the right things (which, of course, need to be said). It happens because He is here, now. And because we can live with Him. **T**

**THE PAIN OF THAT GIRL ON THE SUBWAY**

 This summer I had to study for a remedial exam. Obviously, I really did not feel like doing it at all. It was a Friday afternoon and I was returning from a day of studying in the library. I had to wait for the subway for almost fifteen minutes. When it finally arrived, I entered and sat down in a seat at the end of the car. It was one of those days when, if you see someone you know, you don't want to say hello, so you do everything not to look at them so that they don't look at you. That's how I felt about everyone. I had my headphones on and all I could think about was getting home. But all of a sudden, something happened. I turned my head a little and saw a girl crying at the other end of the car. She wasn't crying like when you are held back in school or something not that important happens: she was crying in pain, with so much pain. In that moment I was completely unnerved and I thought about going over to her. But what could a girl like me do, talking with a person who was so sad, a girl who didn't even know her? I turned up the volume on the music and turned my head away. But I could not be so mean and petty to avoid the pain of that girl. Then something moved me to get up, and the closer I got, the more I was afraid and overcome by questions. What would I say to her? What could have happened? In the end, I sat next to her and the only thing that came to me was to introduce myself. I told her my name and that I had seen her from where I was sitting and that something had moved




me. She told me her name, and, looking at me, started to tell me what had happened to her. She said she was very sad because she was on her way to an abortion clinic. I asked her if she wanted to keep the baby. She said yes, but that would cause her many difficulties. I asked her why, if she wanted to have the baby, she was going to the clinic. She looked at me and, without speaking, began to cry. I saw that she was afraid; afraid of being abandoned, of being humiliated, of being mistreated by her boyfriend for wanting to keep the baby, afraid of other things that might happen. When she had finally calmed down, she said she was afraid and did not want to lose her boyfriend. I asked her if she thought that after the abortion she would feel relieved for having a weight lifted from her. Without hesitating, she answered that she would regret it and that she already loved her baby and had begun to understand what the love of a mother is and what sacrifice it requires. If she was so sure, then why was she going

to the clinic? She told me that her boyfriend had called her that morning while he was having a beer with some friends and told her to go to the clinic that afternoon because he did not want the baby. I wondered how it could have been possible to talk about this by phone. I told her it seemed terrible to me and she agreed. I told her about homes that welcome and care for unwed mothers, about people who welcome them in, about the Movement. I saw that the more I spoke, the calmer she became. But I still saw that pain. We arrived at a stop and she got up and ran out. But suddenly, she turned, and got back on. She looked at me, hugged me and said, "I am going home. I know that this child that I am carrying is my boyfriend's, but he is also mine and I love him with all my heart. Thank you." Then she left. I stood there not knowing what to do. What had just happened? Who was that girl? Who am I to change the mind of a stranger? I am sure of one thing: this is truly the Mystery, something that I cannot understand. The happiness I now feel for having accompanied her in those minutes is incredible.

**Signed letter**

**THE REASON WHY I NEED THE CERTAINTY OF FR. IBRAHIM**

 In Lima on Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, we had a public event about the Christians persecuted around the world. I saw the video with the witness of Fr. Ibrahim Alsabagh, and since then I have had this desire for the entire world to see it. What impressed me is the fact that I was not only lis-



## AN "F" IN THE GRADEBOOK

### "I SAW THAT YOU CARE ABOUT US"

**M**y beginning has been quite complicated, since this is the third consecutive year that I have changed schools. I teach in a middle school in a small school district; only one class per grade level and with very few students who are comfortable in their deeply rooted habits. The relationship with colleagues had a rough start. The great majority of the teachers are tired and unmotivated. Concerning the students: I find myself in front of immature classes with serious didactical problems. Everything seemed to work against me, against my idea of school, against my idea of life; I was totally focused on my thoughts, and was thus getting upset with students and colleagues. The Beginning Day came and I was struck by the first point of the lesson, and by the fact that the circumstances determine my witness. The following Monday I entered the classroom asking Christ to give me the grace to change my gaze and to love reality. In this way, little by little, and with effort, I started to see my students and my colleagues as travel companions that the Mystery



had given to me to deepen my relationship with Him. One morning I tested a boy who had not studied. He started arguing, saying that he had worked and that he was used to memorizing and repeating what was written in the textbook. Previously, I would have been upset with him, telling him that all he deserved was a failing grade. This time, instead,

I explained to this boy that he didn't have to just repeat information, but that he had to understand what he was saying. I was not satisfied with this explanation, even if correct, and in the end I decided to challenge him. I told him that if he was up to undertaking a journey and to learn, he had to trust me

by accepting the failing grade, and had to start working. Otherwise, I would give him a passing grade but he would not have learned a thing. After a moment of silence, the boy stood up and told me he accepted the failing grade and was willing to take the path I had indicated because "I have seen that you care about us and about our good."

**Augusto, Cassino (Italy)**

tening to his story, but I was participating in the life of the Church and in what God is asking of us. As soon as the flyers for the event were available, I sent them to all my friends and other people I have met over the years through work, or on other occasions. Everyone responded and thanked me, some saying that they would not be able to attend, and

others telling me they would be there. The day of the presentation, however, no one could make it. Obviously, this made me very sad, but while I was listening I realized that I was there for myself. I needed to see again the certainty of that friar and of the other witnesses. What impressed me about this presentation was how they stated the facts regarding persecuted Chris-

tians, and how they invited us to see them, not as "poor them," but as people responding to the circumstances. I was struck by how those people had a clear and living reason for their existence and the reason why they are present in those places. This is for me the beauty of Christianity. I desire this.

**Daniela, Lima (Peru)**

A man in a black quilted jacket and glasses is shown in profile, looking towards a group of people at an outdoor event. In the background, a woman in a black jacket and glasses is holding a purple water bottle, and a young girl in a black jacket and white scarf is riding a pink scooter. The scene is set outdoors with trees and a building in the background.

**CLOSE TO  
THOSE WHO  
ARE FAR AWAY**



A day in the suburbs of London with Fr. **JOSÉ "PEPE" CLAVERÍA** to see how in this ultra-secularized society faith can once again be credible (and attractive) even for "pagans."

BY LUCA FIORE



**Z**oe says in no uncertain terms, “They think you’re nuts when you say you’re active in a parish, that you believe in God and you’re trying to educate your children in a Christian way.” She is a young mother, seated in the parish office at St. Edmund Campion in Maidenhead, a suburb of one hundred thousand souls in the countryside outside London, near Windsor. The priest, a Spaniard who is a member of the Fraternity of Saint Charles Borromeo, is José Clavería, but everyone calls him “Father Pepe.” Zoe’s mother is Catholic, but Zoe married a non-religious man in the Anglican Church. As a girl she had a negative experience of the Church, but today she has drawn closer again, partly because of her children, who attend the Catholic school across the street from Fr. Pepe’s parish. “The children come home and have to do their religion homework and are starting to ask questions that I don’t know how to answer. So I thought I should know something more.”

In ultra-secularized England, as we could say about all of the West today, there is a thirst for meaning that is directly proportional to the distrust of the Church. “Anyone who tries to preach the faith amid people... can really feel like a clown,” as Ratzinger wrote in 1968, in the passage from *Introduction to Christianity* cited by Julián Carrón at CL’s Beginning Day (see *Traces* 9/2015). The clown in question is the one depicted in Kierkegaard’s famous story: the circus outside a village caught fire and the director sent the clown, in costume and ready for the performance, to run to the village for help. The inhabitants, however, think this to be a publicity stunt and simply laugh and applaud. Fr. Pepe has no intention of putting on a clown’s nose and playing the



part; he knows he may fail to find the way to make himself understood, as “they think you’re nuts.” Yet, he does not give up his attempt to bring people what he holds dearest.

**A CUP OF TEA.** A day in the life of the Maidenhead parish priest begins at 8:00 in the elementary school courtyard. He drives the dark gray Volkswagen past the clusters of little red brick houses. The English autumn colors glisten in the light rain. London is close enough for people to work there, but far away enough for life here to feel on a human scale. The children scurry along in their gray uniforms while parents push strollers, those in a hurry waving hellos, others stopping to chat. Fr. Pepe knows almost half of them. Since his arrival in 2013 he has visited over two hundred parishioners’ homes. In this period, too,

he is getting around quite a bit: “The next free evening I have is in a month.” At 9:30 he celebrates daily Mass, attended by a few mothers and some retirees who meet afterwards for a cup of tea in the parish hall. Some stay on for a game of bridge, but tomorrow there is an excursion along the Thames. At lunch, Fr. Pepe is invited to the home of Daniela, one of the school mothers, along with her two-year-old daughter Pippa, who has Down Syndrome and has spent all her young life in and out of hospitals. “These months have been very hard for them and we have seen a lot of each other in this period.” Daniela seems peaceful, even as she delicately adjusts the small tube positioned in her daughter’s nose.

As chaplain for the diocesan program for New Evangelization, Fr. Pepe spends the afternoon organ-





**IN THE MIDST OF LIFE.** From the left, Sam and her son; Fr. Pepe at the nursery school in front of St. Edmund's parish.

izing the activities entrusted to him by the Bishop of Portsmouth. In the evening Fr. Pepe will meet with a couple of friends from London who will introduce him to a priest who is going through a period of crisis.

**SIMPLICITY.** There is so much work, but what can really open the breach among the people of Maidenhead? What wins them over? A good answer comes from 23-year-old Sam, the mother of a 2-year-old boy. She has a blue butterfly tattoo on her right wrist. She is the babysitter spoken about on the Beginning Day: "I asked to become a member of the parish because some of my clients are members. I'd never seen such openness and warmth and I wanted this for myself and my son. I want him to have someone he can turn to during difficult times, as happened for me, someone he can talk to about himself,



Robert Thompson.

***"I married a Catholic woman and promised to educate our children in the Catholic faith, so I went to Mass with my family; but at a certain point I wondered if it wasn't a bit hypocritical to go to a gesture I didn't believe in. I had to learn more about it."***

someone to whom he can ask his questions." Sam is not baptized. She had her child out of wedlock. She has never been part of a Christian community. And yet, for Fr. Pepe that young woman is marked by her simplicity.

Another story recounted at the Beginning Day comes from this

parish. An unmarried couple asked for Baptism for their child conceived *in vitro*. Fr. Pepe was struck by the woman's tears when, rather than hearing, "You are living in sin," she was told, "God has never lost sight of you." He recounts another episode, from a Sunday Mass. In his homily he said that the human >>



» heart is not moved by rules and ethical regulations, but by an attraction. “After Mass two people came up to me and asked if I had really refused Baptism for moral reasons. They hadn’t understood a word I said! We are so used to reducing everything to ethics that it seems strange when someone doesn’t, so after a minute they stopped listening, thinking that they already understood everything. It is difficult to break through this crust, but I keep trying, never justifying immorality, but emphasizing the exceptional fact of Christ. Without this, of course our witness looks ridiculous.”

**DOES IT WORK OR NOT?** Fr. Pepe observes that it is no coincidence that empiricism was born in England. “The English are this way. They ask, ‘Does it work or not?’” Many become Catholic simply for this reason. They say, “There is a lot I don’t know. I don’t understand everything, but staying with all of you I feel better.” And it seems to be “working” for a little School of Community group of “pagans,” as the Spanish priest jokingly calls them. They have been meeting on Wednesday evenings for almost a year to read the books of Fr. Giussani. There is Rob, co-owner of an imported foods business, who has never had any religious education. He married a woman from the Dominican Republic, and one day Fr. Pepe visited his home and invited him to the School of Community. “I began coming because I wanted to understand more about this Jesus. Am I Catholic? I think I’m becoming Catholic...” There is Andrea, a Slovakian, baptized as a child but raised without an education in the faith. She married a Mexican and, she too began asking herself certain questions because of her children’s school. Then there is Robert, whose wife is



Catholic, and who accepted Fr. Pepe’s invitation after attending an Alpha Course, a course in “Christian literacy” for non-believers. “I have the impression that many Catholics going to Church do not find what we non-Catholics are finding by coming here.” Pete, a store manager, grew closer to the faith after the death of his grandmother, who, when he was young, had insisted that he receive a Catholic education (he was baptized Anglican). “I began to wonder why she cared so much about it. I wanted to rediscover what was so important to her.” Petra, who has always been a Catholic, says that until now she had never realized how Christ could truly be important to her life. Similarly, Anna, not technically a “pagan,” says it is surprising to see that everyone has the same questions. Someone says, “It’s better than going to an

therapist, and what’s more, it’s free.” And another: “Here I’ve found the answer to that emptiness I was trying to fill with homeopathy and psychological techniques.”

**AWESTRUCK BY BEAUTY.** Anna has two children: Maggie, 12, and Martha, 15. The eldest has begun meeting with the Student Youth group that gathers with Fr. Pepe once a month. There are 35 young people, many from London, 5 or 6 from Maidenhead. Martha is enthusiastic. When she returned from the summer vacation she told her mother, “If I were an adult I would join CL. What are you waiting for?” For Anna, it all began when Fr. Pepe asked her to host the group of “pagans” in her home. She accepted, yet during the meeting stayed in the kitchen, pricking up her ears to hear what



**MEETING THE OTHER.** Left, Fr. Pepe with some mothers of the school outside his parish; and the Wednesday evening School of Community with the baptized and unbaptized.

they were talking about. “I was awestruck by the beauty of an evening of singing organized in the parish. It was an atmosphere that I’d never experienced. It made me really curious.” For her, raised in an English Catholic family, faith had always been a private matter. She started attending School of Community. The friendship grew and when she unexpectedly found herself without work, she started lending a hand at the parish. “I never would’ve thought that the one unpaid job I’d ever had would be the one that gave me the greatest professional satisfaction.” In these days, for example, she is helping Fr. Pepe organize a trip to Calais, the port on the French coast of the Channel from where thousands of illegal immigrants are trying to reach Great Britain. Anna doesn’t recognize



Pete Cleeton.

***“I, too, am a ‘pagan,’ even if I was baptized Anglican and attended Catholic schools. After the death of my grandmother, who truly cared that I be educated in the faith, I drew closer. But I am here for myself, not for exterior reasons.”***

herself anymore. “What’s happening contemporaneously to me and my daughter is incredible.”

Asked how it is possible not to end up like Kierkegaard’s clown, Fr. Pepe responds, “I try to take an interest in the people I meet, to understand their lives and their

problems. I go to their homes. If you don’t know who you’re dealing with, it’s impossible to enter into a relationship with them on a deep level. I too have to engage just as I am, without hiding my vulnerability and my questions. If I need help, I ask for it. I think that >>

# “I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE CERTAIN DESIRES”

He already had a negative opinion of the Church: “No liking, no interest.” What enabled him to change his mind? **BRAD STUART**, an American physician, explains the change that set him back on the journey.

by Mattia Ferraresi

**B**rad Stuart grew up in a home in Pennsylvania where “discussing religion was practically prohibited.” On Sunday his mother went to Church but his father did not want her to bring the children. In California, where he moved to study medicine, he found a spiritually fertile environment, steeped in eastern religiosity, and “something opened inside me,” he recounts.

A journey of research, a bridge built toward a horizon of meaning, an inspiration made even more urgent by the harsh encounter with suffering in hospital wards. “Our program of studies does not prepare us to face pain and so we don’t talk about it: we censure it.” Far off on the horizon of his heart a point of arrival stood out vaguely, but there was no way to reach it.

**Point of departure.** His opinion of the Catholic Church was typical of one formed by reading the newspapers. “I had very little liking for the Church. For what I knew of its dogmas and teachings, I didn’t care for it and it didn’t interest me,” he says. So when neonatologist Elvira Parravicini proposed that he speak at the New York Encounter about his program for caring for the elderly at home rather than in the hospital, he refused because that initiative

“sounded decidedly too Catholic for my tastes.” But in the end he accepted.

His reluctance dissolved suddenly when he saw *The Beautiful Road*, the video made for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Movement. Those faces, those stories of people changed by an encounter stirred something in him. He searches at length for synonyms to adequately summarize what happened. “I would say that it

was like an experience of re-awakening, as if at a certain point it became clear for me that what I’d been searching for all my life not only existed, but was attainable.”

He was persuaded by the new humanity of the people he encountered, not by convincing arguments. He was forced to re-examine the prejudices he held about the Church,

which had multiplied over time. “What blew me away about Giussani was that the point of departure of experience is not the definition of God, but of man, his spirit, his soul, as I would call it, even if he would say the heart. On this level I was incredibly fascinated by the Movement and the people I encountered. To be honest, though, if I had to say what could respond to this need we all have, the words elude me...”

Stuart, 66, has a mind with a strik-

“I don’t have to make an effort, I can just bandon myself. American culture teaches us exactly the opposite.”



FROM NEW YORK TO RIMINI. Brad Stuart and Elvira Parravicini at the last Meeting.

ing capacity for synthesis—a rare gift in a world dominated by fragmented analysis—and a brilliant career as a physician, which is far from over. He chose the profession motivated by great ideals. However, in time they crumbled under the pressure of a medical system which reduces everything to diagnosis and treatment, when instead everyone seeks healing—something much deeper and more complicated. In many cases, he said at the Meeting in Rimini, to treat a person “all you need is a very intelligent monkey.” But healing is something altogether different.

In Rimini he took a further step, which he described in many ways from different angles, finally collecting everything into this summary: “I was a seeker, and now I am on the side of those who have found something,” a possible point of departure. “What Giussani taught me is that inside of us there is already a clue of a response to our questions, whether we know it or not. This should be said to everyone.”

**The sacredness of the heart.** His wife, Barbara, returned from the meeting in Rimini a different woman. “Her heart was opened and she was even more changed than I was,” he said. In the attempt to decipher what he experienced he



» the place where an incisive testimony can happen is in the context of a shared life.”

**VISIBLE AND DESIRABLE.** Thus, the first factor is a real involvement in the life of people, but this is not the only one. “People are won over by visible things. By now, the parish is in pretty bad condition in terms of the furnishings and the beauty of the common spaces. I proposed a project to make them a bit more beautiful, but a number of people opposed it. So, I began by spiffing up my own office, cleaning, repainting and hanging nice pictures on the walls. Now when people come in they say, ‘It’s beautiful!’ When they see, they are won over.”

Visibility. When a beautiful thing begins to be seen, it begins to be desirable. Something like this happened when one of the “old guard” parishioners who had been observing the actions of the new parish priest entered the Church on a Saturday morning and saw 35 teens between the ages of 13 and 17 praying the *Psalms* together. The man went to Fr. Pepe and confessed, “I’ve never seen anything like it in 40 years. Maybe you are right.”

Pete, one of the Wednesday evening “pagans,” says that by now their weekly appointment has become his regular evening off. A big fellow whose *physique du rôle* resembles more that of a hooligan than of a sacristan, often turns down invitations for a Wednesday evening at the pub with his colleagues. “Sorry, this evening I have a meeting at the parish.” His colleagues look at him with amazement and respect.

Another striking story is that of the homeless Algerian man Fr. Pepe hosted for a month in his home. “When I heard the Pope’s words encouraging us to offer hospitality, I tried to understand how it could be possible. I looked around and asked parishioners if they would be willing to host someone. The invitation went unanswered. Then I heard about this man who’d been found sleeping under a tree. He stayed with me; he slept in my house. During the day he helped in the parish. I even had him cook for the School of Community. The parishioners saw that it was possible. They loosened up. Now, after me, a family will host him. Who knows, maybe this is a beginning that will

lead to the birth of Caritas in the parish.”

Fr. Pepe has no fear of these “bad times,” which from a certain point of view, he says, is simpler. Those far away are so far away that they are returning. “Certainly, today very sad things happen as the result of deep secularization. And yet paradoxically, people have fewer prejudices

because by now they know nothing about Christianity. And those who come to the Church begin to flourish. It’s very beautiful, above all for me, because in them I see Christ truly at work. Even if they are attempts, very feeble beginnings that could end up in nothing, they aren’t nothing; they’re something. I’m called to look at that something and follow it.” Follow it? Why? “I follow what an Other is doing in them. God gives them to me and their testimony is an opportunity for my conversion. It’s an opportunity for me.”

**“Here I’ve found the answer to that emptiness I was trying to fill with psychological techniques.”**



often uses the adjective “incredible,” not because it is not credible, but “at times,” he continues, “you happen to meet people who desire to live according to a great ideal and to care for their soul, but they seem to lack the strength to do it, and in the end the world crushes them, flattens them. Or rather, at times we ourselves are the ones who reject the sacredness of our heart. Instead, the people I met are ‘strong enough’ to live this way, and what strikes me is that a life of this kind is possible. It is the same thing that I noted observing Pope Francis during his trip to America, even if I am not a believer. And to think that I thought I was the only one to have certain desires!”

To explain what has changed in him in this passage from seeking to finding, Stuart uses the word “trust.” “When I am with the friends of the Movement, I feel that I can abandon myself. I don’t have to make an effort, or be strong, or strive to reach something; I can just abandon myself. American culture teaches us exactly the opposite: everything depends on our effort. It is a great change of attitude that I have noted in myself.” From trust to faith, the existential step cannot be measured or sounded. “I would put it this way: now I trust the heart, and for the rest, I am on a journey.”

# **5 AFTER THE SYNOD**





# BEYOND THE MEDIA BUZZ

The Assembly of Bishops on the Family has concluded. As we await the Pope's decisions, **PAOLO PEZZI**, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of the Mother of God at Moscow tells us about the frank dialogue happened in the Synod Hall.

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

**T**hree hundred and eighty-eight interventions, 54 hours in assembly, and another 36 minor circle meetings. All to come up with the 94 paragraphs of the *Relatio* that, for now, concludes the work of the Synod on the Family (the second in the course

of two years, after the extraordinary Synod in October 2014). “For now” because the next word belongs to Pope Francis.

Francis opened the discussion a year ago, asking the Fathers to engage with “*parrhesia* and humility,” in other words, speaking frankly and >>

▶▶ listening attentively. He followed the matter with care (including the complement of his weekly catechesis dedicated to the family). He closed it, temporarily, with his words on October 24, when he reiterated that the significance of such a gathering was not “about settling all the issues having to do with the family,” but about having attempted to “see them in the light of the Gospel [...], bringing the joy of hope without falling into an easy repetition of what is obvious or has already been said.” And now, almost certainly, he is preparing to write a document based on the suggestions that he will glean from the final report. Included are the paragraphs and thousands of words leaked out by newspapers and online media around the world about Communion for the divorced and civilly remarried. It’s been the topic of debate for months, with references to “conservatives” and “progressives,” the “rigorous” and the “more open,” Bergoglians and anti-Bergoglians. And then there was that paragraph in the *Relatio* that passed by a hair, with just one vote over the two-thirds threshold (178 votes, and the quorum for approval was 177). It points back to a key word already used by St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, one of the foundational texts of pastoral care for families: “discernment.”

Pope John Paul II had written, “Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations.” It’s “the task of priests and bishops to accompany those affected along the path of discernment according to Church teaching,” as the recent Synod highlighted, also focusing on “the person’s well-formed conscience.” No changes to doctrine (which is nevertheless impossible), but a forceful challenge about the role of responsibility: that of pastors and those who follow them. In addition to the realization that reality is increasingly intricate and complex, and

carries in it new challenges even for what has always been the building block of society (and, for many reasons, of the Church).

Archbishop Paolo Pezzi, 55 years old and archbishop of Mother of God at Moscow since 2007, was one of the fathers called by the Pope to participate in both Synods. Are you happy about how it went? “Yes. Personally, I was very struck by the attention the Pope wanted to give to this topic. And I was amazed at the incredible amount of reflection—we could even say of judgment—which took place during this time.”

### **Enough to get to the bottom of the topic?**

In terms of the quantity of work, thought and reflection, I’d say yes. What may have been a little lacking was a more organic synthesis in the final propositions offered to the Holy Father, which *are* articulate and thoughtful. But I don’t think you could demand that, in the final hours of such complex work. We will have a chance to see the fruits of the Synod in the future. First of all in a document that, I hope, the Holy Father will write, along the line of those already published, each to be treasured.

### **Are you thinking of anything in particular?**

I’m thinking of *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he spoke in such a brilliant way about the beauty and “gusto” of mission. Or, of the recent *motu proprio* on marriage in which he demonstrated an objective capacity to simplify a thorny topic. In the coming months, I’m looking forward to a document from the Pope that will follow in that direction; helping us to perceive the fruits of the Synod even more deeply, coming to a synthesis and simplification of what today, using a name kind of meant to be catchy, they’re calling the “Gospel of the family.”

*“The Synod experience also made us better realize that the true defenders of doctrine are not those who uphold its letter, but its spirit; not ideas but people; not formulae but the gratuitousness of God’s love and forgiveness.”*

**Pope Francis**

### **In your opinion, which topics could have been developed further in depth?**

The two primary dimensions of the theme—the vocation and mission of the family—were brought to light. However, in some ways we may have run the risk of taking too much for granted. For example: the question of what makes the family a vocation, and what gives it this foundation, wasn’t discussed much. If we take it seriously, it’s a very powerful expression. When we speak of vocation we’re of course talking about family or about consecrated life. The other aspect is mission: What does it mean that the family is a missionary subject—therefore first and foremost a positive and proactive reality, and only later an entity in crisis or under attack from multiple directions, as the Pope has also insisted more than once? It’s not that it wasn’t discussed at all, but perhaps these two points deserved to be less taken for granted.





because of the solutions suggested, but because unfortunately they didn't manage to render the fullness and complexity of the dialogue.

**What is your take on it?**

A positive one. The Fathers sought to go deeper into a practice that is often already in place; to boost the awareness of pastors—first of all we bishops, as well as priests—of how important it is to care for, welcome, and listen to the people who find themselves in this situation. Also, of working with them through the internal forum—more simply, in Confession—so to evaluate case by case.

**What do you think about this importance given to discernment and the conscience? On the one hand it seems realistic. It asks you to face the challenge of how things are in reality; perhaps different than we would like: imperfect and without everything perfectly in order, but taken for what it is in all its complexity. On the other hand, though, some people fear that everything will become arbitrary.**

Again, this discernment is often already there in practice; the facts have already called for it. It wasn't that something particularly new was said. How to promote it and what direction to take is another question. This is another area that could now use an intervention from the Holy Father, to help clarify. The Synod doesn't make doctrinal decisions, nor does it give life to new pastoral practices on its own; it gives suggestions, offering the Pope some recommendations on what seem like the direction to take. Then, there's another factor that we spoke about a great deal inside, but little was said externally.

**Which was?**

The irreplaceable role of community. In the Synod Hall I felt a strong call to pay attention to this factor. It's ▶▶

**And which issues do you think were covered well?**

Two stand out. The first was formation, though I prefer to speak about education. It was discussed at length. And I thought that was an encouraging consequence of a step in the awareness that the family is a vocation. If it is, then just as someone who is consecrated goes through a period of verification of their vocation to virginity, of discernment and a deeper understanding—a time when they can prepare to take on the promises, responsibilities, and “gusto” that vocation brings to your life—those who are about to start a family could use a time to prepare themselves. When I celebrate a wedding, I always tell the couple: look, this isn't the point of arrival; it's the starting point... There were many people who tried to go deeper into the content and the method of formation for marriage: how to structure it, what topics to cover, etc.

**What is the second?**

The difficulties of families who do not fully enjoy the sacramentality of marriage. Those who, for various reasons, have difficulties living this vocation, and are in a way crippled because of it. They struggle to radiate, to demonstrate the entire missionary force of the vocation. We talked about that a lot. It's a broad question, which is not just about those divorced and civilly remarried. It's possible that the final result didn't totally live up to all the effort put forth to move in this direction, but the work done was very positive.

**What do you mean “didn't live up” to it?**

Those paragraphs may not have managed to fully capture, in a clear way, all the richness of the discussion. It's understandable because it was one of the most contentious issues addressed. Maybe this was the reason that a group of the Fathers voted “no”; not so much

## ▶AFTER THE SYNOD

» a critical element of the Christian life. And it's even more important to be able to truly bring to life this oft-cited value of welcome, to be able to accompany. Welcoming is not an abstract concept; you participate in Christian life only by belonging to the life of a community. A person finds companionship for his or her own life within a companionship guided toward destiny.

**Another objection that has been made, at times even in an explosive way: Wouldn't moving away from the codification of rules toward evaluating "case by case" run the risk of confusing the faithful?**

Undoubtedly, that is a possibility. I hope that it won't happen, but it will greatly depend on the seriousness and charity of we bishops and priests. Look, after the Council certain practices took a strange turn, but it was because of a number of forced interpretations. This Synod will have the same challenge: the result is very much in the hands and the care of the Church's shepherds.

**The Pope had asked the Fathers to "speak honestly," and they did. At times to the point of voting differently on various issues. Why did this cause a stir, almost fear, for so many people? As if the very act of confronting some new challenges that reality has brought us put the truth of the faith into question...**

I see two risks, diametrically opposed but maybe two faces of the same coin. The first is the exasperated retreat to a truth that becomes an abstract rule. The other is the opposite position: avoiding getting ones hands dirty, not really looking at the question, and in a way "anesthetizing" it with a new norm that, deep down, doesn't involve me; it's no longer a problem for me. It seems to me they have the same origin, a kind of timidity in



**IN THE HALL.** Right, Archbishop Paolo Pezzi during a session of the Synod.

facing reality as it comes to meet me. And the reason, deep down, is the ultimate weakness of our identity. What Fr. Giussani said in his last interview comes to mind: the Church has abandoned the world, and vice versa, because we were ashamed of Christ. We are lacking the certainty in our identity.

**Don't you think that by continuing to just look at the negative side of things, of "what's missing," as the Pope said, you end up missing an opportunity? Sometimes, for today's men and women, it's precisely the realization that something's "not quite right" and that you can't fix it with just new rules, that re-opens the door to really becoming interested in Christ...**

It's what amazes me every time I enter the confessional. What's missing, the realization that something's not right, coming to see, in one way or another, one's sins are truly the road that makes a person more aware of the gift of mercy that we receive, and by which we are embraced. It's a little like the Pope said to CL on March 7<sup>th</sup>: often sin becomes the place of our greatest experience of mercy. What we need is not to be afraid of it, and instead learn to see the positive side. It's not the lack itself that is positive, but the fact that this "hole" can make you pay more attention to the mercy that comes to meet you.

**Does that apply to those farthest from the Church?**

Of course. In fact, paradoxically, those who are farthest away have a chance to appreciate this mercy even more.

**Which were the interventions that struck you the most?**

There were two, though I can't say whose they were. They started from concrete situations, without generalizing, rather perceiving the infinite love for men and women in concrete examples. I can't get into the details, but those who spoke in this way were open to give their lives not to resolve a problem, but to embrace the man or woman who posed the question.

**This also indicates a certain method for a pastor...**

Definitely. Beginning with experience is always entirely different than arguing theology in an abstract way.

**All things considered, what did you learn from the Synod?**

Not to be in a rush to form an idea about something. Especially in the work in groups. After many interventions I started to think: maybe I don't agree, but it's helping me to understand with a particular problem that there is another element to keep in mind... Life is a little bigger than our definitions. I'm happy to have been opened again to this newness.

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**JCL LIFE**

# “WHETHER I LAUGH OR CRY, I WANT TO BE HERE”

“I am Fr. Giussani,” says Arnold, a boy from Kampala. Why? We report here the first stop on a journey among the communities of Africa, on the eve of Pope Francis’ visit, to recount the experience of the Movement in one of the youngest countries in the world, where, between slums and schools, a people is re-awakening.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

One of the countries Pope Francis will visit on his upcoming journey is Uganda, which along with Niger can claim the title for the youngest population in the world: 78% of Ugandans are under the age of 30, and the average age is 15.5 years (in Italy it is 44.5 years). On average, each woman gives birth to six children. But being born is not enough for living, says Michelle, more with her eyes than with her words. She lives near the slum of mud walls and sheet metal roofs of Kireka, an area of the capital city. Twenty-two years old, with delicate features, she is seated proudly at her desk on the ground floor of the Luigi Giussani Primary School, where she works as the secretary. “This is where I want to be, whether I laugh or cry, I want to be here.” “Here” is the journey of the Movement. This article describes a bit of the three days spent visiting the CL community of Kampala, a small group of people who are like water boiling in a pot where, if it is not one person it is another who awakens and reawakens the person close by.

One morning Michelle was sitting where she is now, demoralized and bored, thinking she was incapable of truly living. A teacher entered the building and Michelle automatically pulled out the classroom key and held it out for her, as was the routine every day. “No, I don’t want the keys.” “Ah, what do you want?” “I want to be like you. Bring me with you.” The teacher was asking about “that meeting” Michelle attended every week, the School of Community. At that moment, Michelle understood: “Jesus was choosing me, and He found no obstacle in my boredom and my wretchedness.” This was like her own first encounter with CL: “It was the biggest surprise



of my life: there was someone who was describing my heart, so that I could be happy. Since then, I have been truly living; another life entered into mine.”

**MOTHER BECAUSE DAUGHTER.** Rose is right. Listening to the words of Michelle and the other kids who have begun the experience of the Movement, one wonders who whispers certain things in their ears. “I listen to them and I know that Christ is there.” Rose Busingye is the mother of everyone here, young and old, because she lives as a daughter: “I follow the Mystery of God who happens.” In 1992, this 47-year-old member of the *Memores Domini* and nurse started the International Meeting Point, dedicated to women suffering from AIDS, the poor, and orphaned children and youth.

It all started with a seed planted in the early ‘70s in Kitgum, in northern Uganda, when some doctors in CL met the Colombian Fr. Pietro Tiboni.

When Rose met Fr. Tiboni she asked him, “If God became flesh, does that also have to do with my flesh?” It seemed to her like the most revolutionary thing in the world. Today, many years later, she still feels the same wonder. “I want to participate in the reawakening of the women of the Meeting Point and of these kids: they have discovered that they have something of value, that this value has a name, Jesus, and that He always looks upon them. I also want to live under this gaze.”

There is no set framework in this community, not because of disorder or nonconformity, but because it is a life and it is unity: from the gratitude of the women, who dance on their past of pain, to the freshness of their children, for whom the Luigi Giussani Primary School and High School were created. Here it is evident that the Movement is one thing only: Christ who embraces you. And the embrace is a circle: from the children it spreads



**MOTHERS AND CHILDREN.** Clockwise, the kids of the Luigi Giussani High School with Matteo Severgnini; a moment during a Community hike; the Frigerio family in Paimol; Arnold and Marvine at the guitar; Rose Busingye; the women of the International Meeting Point.

to the mothers who take care of these kids, kids who fall in love with life and Jesus, who study, who are passionate, who read *Traces* to them (many of the women are illiterate), who participate in the Movement, and transmit everything they learn.

Françoise, Michelle's mother, was a member of a cult. She watched what was happening with her daughter and today she is "the newest born of the International Meeting Point." She had grave health problems and never left the house, but now, elegant and shy, she lets herself be drawn by the rhythm of the drums and ankle bells. "I even began playing soccer," she laughs, "because I've met the goodness and beauty of God."

**THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER.** There are no labels here. Nobody has said, "Now we'll go do charitable work." The women already do it. They welcome into their homes (and their homes are shacks) the children sent by the

police when there is no room at Rose's Welcoming House, a home for abandoned and HIV-positive children. They already have many children and many problems, but "if there is room for 5, there is room for 6," they say. They laugh, and when they laugh they end up singing, and singing and dancing are one and the same. One day a woman arrived whose chin was burned from huffing gasoline. "I was worried," says Rose, but they had already prepared a place for her and were taking turns caring for her." This is charitable work in its origin, gratitude that becomes gratuitousness.

"Every day I am outdone by everyone." Alberto Repposi has been in Kampala for a year, working for AVSI at the Meeting Point. Before coming here he had somewhat underestimated "Rose's women," thinking, "They're sick but happy, they live the

charism, how good they are." Period. "But Carrón kept pointing to them; maybe there was something to be learned from them. Now I see: they are so moved that they carry me along with them." Rose holds in her hand a sheet of paper with the names of the women, a sum in shillings written next to each name, and in the heading the words "Contribution for *prastanity*." "*Prastanity*?" she had asked Ketty as she handed her the list. But they understood each other right away: it was the common fund for the Fraternity. The women heard the announcement at the Spiritual Exercises about donating to the Common Fund, and right away gathered the money. That day Rose stood watching them as they set off for home. None of them took a *boda boda*, the motorcycle-taxi which four can squeeze into; none took a *matatu*, the small busses where passengers are packed in like sardines: they headed home on foot, because they'd given their shillings to the Common Fund.

"You don't give what you don't have," is a common expression here. "If you are not moved, you cannot communicate anything," notes Matteo Severgnini, known to everyone as Seve, didactics coordinator for the two schools, who has been here in mission for three years. "In the beginning I passed from illusion to anger," from his initial enthusiasm to solve the problems, to his disappointment when nothing changed. "One day Rose told me, 'There's no need for someone to manage the school; what's needed is someone who lives their vocation.' For three months I didn't say another word." Instead of talking about things, he looked at them. "If you >>>

## THE POPE'S VISIT

Pope Francis' Apostolic journey will take place November 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>. He will visit: Kenya, Uganda, and Central African Republic.

» stay in silence and listen, you understand much more.” Like “that time”: one night when someone marked up the school with the fire extinguisher. Usually an assembly is held to accuse the guilty party, but instead Seve asked the boy why he did it, proposed that they pay for the damage together, and gave the boy the responsibility for the fire extinguishers. “It turned everything upside down, first for me. My colleagues asked me why I had done this, and I asked myself as well. From then on, we began to truly work together, with a real question, not an idea to impose.”



**MICHAEL’S CHALK.** When the new high school was inaugurated, Arnold, 17, speaking in front of the students, parents, representatives of the local authorities, and diplomats, said, “I am Fr. Giussani.” People were stunned. He went on firmly, “Giussani finished his road and tells me, ‘Arnold, if you want to be happy, you have to walk where I walked.’ It’s my turn.” In the CL meeting at school, Arnold and his inseparable buddy Marvine began to be interested in things, to play and sing (the community has a marvelous choir), to write songs (almost all of them love songs), in a place where young people only hear about sex; where true affection is a taboo subject. Today the style is the ‘talking compound,’ so the school walls are plastered with warning posters: “Behave yourself,” “If you get pregnant, you’ll be suspended,” “AIDS kills.”

“The Movement gave me eyes,” continues Arnold: “I looked at things but I didn’t see them, like the beauty of this school, different from all the others. I used to say, yes, it’s beautiful. So? I didn’t think it was for me.” This modern, orange building on the hill along

Kireka Road hosts 560 students, many of whom walk as long as two hours to get there, and remain until the evening to take advantage of the light, because at home there is no electricity. The first thing that all of them tell you is, “The teachers don’t beat us.”

In the wild and dusty traffic of the capital, there are many signs for schools, written in paint, most of them rusted. International policies push for education, and the government highly favors the private sector. There is a saying: spare the rod and spoil the child, but the watchword is “inculcate.” “At the job interview, when they told me there was no beating, I laughed,” recounts Michael Kawuki, who now is the Principal. “For me, the rod was the only way to teach. Here, I am the one who is learning everything from my colleagues and the students.” This is unimaginable in a country where education is anonymous, the distance between students and teacher is an abyss, and not just because of the numbers (there are classes of 150 students), but because the student is considered inferior and asking questions is considered insubordination. Michael

looks at the young people on the big lawn in front of the school, enthusiastically participating in a lesson of cultural dance: “I didn’t know that everything has value, even the smallest thing. A piece of chalk fell on the floor and I walked on it.” When he saw Seve pick it up, a world opened up in front of him. He said very seriously, “I didn’t know I had value.”

Arnold, Marvine, and the other students, meet every Monday for School of Community. There is 20-year-old Grace, who says, “My life has had meaning since 2013.” It is moving to see her sing songs of the Movement that she learned right away, and to see how certain, how transparent she is. “I didn’t care about anything. Then one day someone told me, ‘You have something great in your heart.’” A short time ago her father died. “When it happened, I understood that Christ wanted me to depend on Him. Every morning I wake up to see His gaze.” Manuel is a young man, perfect in his school uniform. He is HIV-positive. During a doctor’s visit at the hospital he stared at the doctor examining him and thought, “You can know everything



**PRESENCE AND CARE.** Above, an excursion to the Nile, and the Antonetti family. Left, the Luigi Giussani Primary School.

about me, but you can never see what it means to be loved.”

The world of international cooperation would have us believe that people essentially need family and empowerment. “Instead, what they need is to be loved. You discover it in your own life, because you want to change the world, and instead, you change,” says Marco Trevisan, who coordinates distance adoptions for AVSI (supporting 4,180 children). A graduate of a technical-industrial high school, he has worked in Africa for 28 years. “It seems like yesterday! Here life is fast, because it always demands your presence. In these years I have discovered that if you say yes, you see things about yourself that you would never have imagined.”

**ON THE NILE.** It is almost evening. Outside the houses there are torn up leather couches, with people sitting on them, who instead of watching TV watch the clogged traffic of cars, animals, and carts. On the corner, in the dark, without streetlamps, a preacher with a Bible in his hand is shouting himself hoarse. Behind their mosquito

screen windows, Francesco and Sara are setting the table. They have been in Uganda for 8 years, and have 2 children. Francesco Frigerio is an engineer and is building a shrine in Paimol, in honor of two martyrs from this small northern town. It was 1918 and Daudi and Gildo were 16 and 14 years old, like the kids in the High School. They had been sent to open a catechism center, and for this they were murdered. “For a builder, doing a shrine is the best,” he recounts, “but even just fixing a bathroom is taking on the same value for me. I don’t take it for granted. I had fallen into the trap of thinking of myself in terms of what I do, but in the companionship of the Movement, I have rediscovered that my value is being the Francesco the Lord wants me to be.” His wife speaks about a journey full of falling and getting up again. “You live in a endless tunnel of days, then something happens that wakes you up.” Like an encounter at school, things you’ve heard over and over again, suddenly “gave me back myself. But you don’t decide it sitting at your desk, you have to get involved in a life.”

Manolita is also at dinner, she, with her husband Stefano Antonetti and their 5 children has lived in Uganda for 15 years. “Before, the community and the initiatives and all the rest were beautiful things, yes, but they didn’t have anything to do with me.” She had always been in the Movement, yet felt as if there was no longer anything new. Then, with the challenge of the work at the Meeting Point and the friendship that was renewed with some people, “It was an encounter within the encounter. The experience of the Lord’s presence and care for me.”

This is the same reason “Rose’s women” deeply enjoy themselves, even when something adverse happens, as it did on the last day of an excursion, when a violent rainstorm kept them cooped up for two hours in a broken down minibus in the middle of the savannah. The endless roads of red earth, the waterfalls of the Nile, and the emerald green hills that make up Uganda, the Pearl of Africa; and they, as beautiful and powerful as this nature. “We already have everything,” says Agnes. “We only need an education.”

**FROM THE HILL.** Here where educating is not even considered a job, the method born of the charism is reaching more and more people. In front of the prisons of the capital is the Luigi Giussani Permanent Center for Education, which the government has officially recognized as a higher education institute. With training founded on *The Risk of Education*, in ten years they have served over 20,000 people, Catholics and Muslims, people from Africa to Myanmar... “We also form young farmers, parents, social workers, and NGO employees,” recounts the director, Mauro Giacomazzi, here since 2007. “People first of all need to rediscover themselves.”

It is early morning. Rose’s jeep slowly makes its way down the hill where she lives with Lina Bonetti, who works for AVSI. We can see far off in front of us Lake Victoria, which is as big as the Lombardy Region, and the immense city, with shacks as far as the eye can see: all that need. “Seeing this, Giussani told me, ‘Rose, saving the world means crying out Christ to everyone. It means living your yes, so their destiny will be accomplished as God wants, just as yours is being accomplished.’” **T**

5 - 13 DECEMBER 2015

# L'ARTIGIANO IN FIERA

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