

The Gaze of the Meeting 2014 at the peripheries of the world
Dialogue, That Yearning that Prevails in History
By Giorgio Vittadini*

On today's world stage, war seems the only way of resolving contrasts, and grave injustices are committed against the weakest; in our countries, the economic recovery is still too timid; and a cloud of existential uncertainty that takes away energy and vision of the future covers everything. Do desperate times call for desperate measures? No; this year, the Rimini Meeting proposes the theme of "peripheral" measures, picking up on Pope Francis' call to go out to the "existential peripheries."

The 2014 edition of the Meeting, entitled, "To the Ends of the Earth and of Existence: Destiny Has Not Left Man Alone," is dedicated to man and to his heart, the irreducible desire for good that constitutes him. This strength of man is considered "peripheral," something insignificant. But it is exactly this strength, born of its own identity and authenticity, which is the true and enduring factor that determines the world and its history.

Let us consider various facts, characterized by this "leap" of the heart of man; the rebirth of Europe after the fratricidal world wars, the peace in Northern Ireland, the peaceful transition in Eastern Europe, the resumption of dialogue in South Africa after the detention of Mandela... In this regard, the Meeting (which by no coincidence is called, "For Friendship Among Peoples") has always been characterized by the commitment to show how dialogue, that is born when space is given to this yearning, reveals itself victorious in history. This year, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa (Custodian of the Holy Land and one of the decisive protagonists in the organization of the historical meeting among Pope Francis, Shimon Perez and Abu Mazen at the Vatican) will give witness to this point in the opening conference, "The Power of the Heart, People in Search of the Truth". Along the same lines, Paul Bhatti, brother of the Pakistani politician assassinated because of his efforts in defending persecuted minorities (Christians and others), and Ignatius Kaigama, president of the Episcopal Conference of Nigeria, will bring to the center of our attention dramatic facts that have been abandoned to almost total indifference, such as the rape of the 300 young Nigerian women or the daily killings carried out by members of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

But even in this case, this is the theme: it is the call to true freedom and the possibility of good for every person, and not a clash of civilizations, which can bring peace and can offer a turning point, as it is evident in the total failure of strategies based on a show of force.

Therefore, the center of the Meeting will be these seemingly peripheral protagonists, young people who remind us how after the revolution of the Tahrir Plaza in Egypt, a new affection among Muslim and Coptic Christians is the true possibility of a turning point; Ukrainians, who believe in the possibility of a new and peaceful coexistence with the Russians, like Aleksandr Filonenko, member of the faculty of philosophy at the University of Char'kov, who is charged with the presentation of the Meeting's title. Also,

Panteleimon (Vicar of the Russian Patriarchate), Shodo Habukawa, a Buddhist monk, and Joseph Weiler, a world renowned expert on the American constitution and the president of the European University Institute who will speak on the horizon of Europe, of today and tomorrow.

In order to respond to the present social and political crises, the Meeting rediscovers the existential periphery of the world that is aware to be on the road to a good destiny. Luciano Volante and Javier Prades, Dean of San Dámaso University in Madrid, will show us that justice is born from an affection for man, from gratuitousness. Starting again from human resources also means focusing on the theme of education and formation, the crucial point of a true social recovery. At the Meeting, diverse themes will address growth, work and welfare. Protagonists from the economic scene such as Sergio Marchionne, CEO of Fiat, and Giorgio Squinzi, president of Confindustria, together with entrepreneurs from small, medium and large companies, will engage in dialogue so as to help one another to understand how to turn things around.

This year, the Meeting examines in depth its original intuition; not to be a stage for those seeking late summer fame, but to show examples of human growth and of friendship amongst persons of different origins and extractions, who work peacefully for liberty, justice, development and human authenticity; that which remains when everything else seems to fall apart. As the characters from Enzo Jannacci's songs and Giovannino Guareschi's episodes witness, that it will possible to find in the area entitled "Mondo piccolo e Roba minima" (A Small World, a Minimal Stuff). These characters appear marginal; they do not look for social recognition, yet somehow, they simply are, living their needs and their desires. Their stories are unpredictable, always imperfect, as is man, but they bear good and newness. Stories in search of their "center", living the "periphery" as a place to discover their human roots, because then the branches of the tree can grow in all directions.

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