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KNOWLEDGE IS ALWAYS AN EVENT: Thirty Years of Dialogue

Presenters and panelists include: **Mary Ann Glendon**, Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard Law School; **Samuel A. Alito Jr.**, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States accompanied by **Mrs. Martha-Ann Alito**; **Jane Milosch**, Senior Program Officer for Art at Smithsonian Institution; **Paolo Carozza**, Associate Professor of Law, Notre Dame Law School and Commissioner, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; **Joseph H.H. Weiler**, Jean Monnet Chair, NYU School of Law; **Marco Aluigi**, Congress Manager Meeting for Friendship among People Foundation.

In Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Rimini Meeting in Italy
presented by
The Rimini Meeting Foundation
and Crossroads Cultural Center

Carozza: As you have already heard, as you will hear throughout the evening, the Meeting is a very unique event. For my own part, when I was first invited to the Meeting several times it was often referred to in conversation as “a cultural festival.” That made me curious. What could it mean to be a cultural festival? I had been, for example, to see the Folkloric Ballet of Mexico City, an extraordinary performing troupe, beautiful performances! So I thought it would be somewhat like that—a beautiful, artistic, somewhat nostalgic, idealized, sentimental remembrance of a time past, kind of romantic, that maybe never really existed, that we try and hang on to and preserve because it has great symbolic meaning. But the Meeting is not that; that’s not what I found. But I wasn’t the only one that was confused. Every year we read reports of the Meeting, and it’s hard not to see it and read about it reduced to merely a political event or merely a religious event, or framed in terms of some other categories of experience and knowledge that are opposed or separated from others. Even the guests who experienced the Meeting, as I imagine we will hear this evening, often come away from it struck by the realization that they didn’t know that something like this was possible; they weren’t aware that such an event like this could exist because it overflowed the boundaries of their expectations as they went in.

All of these misunderstandings and misconceptions, I’d like to suggest, are not merely a question of the size of the Meeting, the numbers of the meeting, the breadth, the people who attend it, the range of events of which it’s composed. I think the problem is even deeper than that. The problem is a problem of understanding in the modern world what culture is, what culture is as an experience of life. We live in an environment where the

word *culture* and our understanding of culture is fragmented, where knowledge and experience are separated into categories. I live that vividly in a university environment, but I think we all live it in this world. There is, as a variety of acute observers have suggested to us, a collapse of certainties in our time, and a collapse of certainties which leads to a fragmentation of our capacity to judge the reality around us. Everything seems provisional; everything seems ephemeral, shifting, uncertain.

In such a context, what could it mean to speak of culture? Is it just a longing for something past? A time that we think used to be that we want to retain as an idealized sentiment? Or perhaps for many circumstances we see it as a special realm of intellectual or aesthetic sensibility that's only accessible and available to a few of the adept, a certain post-Christian Gnosticism with regard to culture.

This is a pervasive problem, but not only a modern one. That problem of understanding culture and of seeing culture as a unified whole, as an experience of life is a problem that Pope Benedict XVI recently pointed out in his talk precisely to Representatives from the World of Culture, the Collège des Bernardins last September. He pointed out that it also was present at the origins of European culture, and the origins of monastic culture which he sees, I think rightly, as very closely related. According to Benedict, the origin of that culture at that time was to search for what is lasting amid the ephemeral. As he put it, "Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they [meaning those who lived together in the new monastic communities] wanted to do the essential – to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself... They wanted to go from the inessential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is... in an existential sense: they were seeking the definitive behind the provisional." That goal for them was, as he put it, a *Quaerere Deum*, a search for God, and out of this was born a passion for everything in life—knowledge, beauty, music, work. Benedict emphasized that that birth, that generation, was not out of a deliberate intent to preserve something, and even less to create a new culture. It was a passion for the reality in front of their eyes.

That is the same passion that animates the Meeting and the idea of culture behind it. It is not an effort to create a new culture, still less an effort to hang on to or preserve or defend anything. It is more elemental than that. It arises out of a sense of culture that is the consequence of a zest for life, a taste for what is good in life, a passion for humanity, a passion for reality that begins with an attention to our own lives, our own experience of what is good, what is beautiful, what is true. From that perspective culture becomes a lived experience of reality, reality not as a construction of our own ideas, but as an event, as something that is given to us. We don't seek to add something to that reality, or create something new that didn't exist, that was missing in the world, but rather to experience more truly, to learn always more deeply what is already there, what is already present before our eyes.

What moves us to engage and explore that presence is the curiosity and wonder and desire for truth and beauty that is rooted in every human heart, not just the heart of one expert or another specialist. And so the Meeting represents the fruit of this way of looking at reality—a method of living in relationship to all the world. The deeper our critical awareness is of what is in front of us, the richer is the culture that we are capable of living; experience and culture are co-extensive. Culture in a sense becomes something living, not something dead, something that constructs, not something to preserve, and still less a special privilege of the few.

The consequences of this understanding of culture are what make the Meeting so exceptional in the world. There are certain consequences, many of them we will hear about tonight. I will mention just a few that I think were most notable in my experience of the Meeting.

First, the Meeting is not about opposing anything. It's not an event that is conceived in any way to defend a particular position in opposition to any other one, and in this way it breaks all the schemes that people bring to it—the schemes of left and right, of nationality and culture and language, of disciplinary boundaries, and in particular of the pervasive dualism in the world between faith and reason as methods of knowledge. Instead it is characterized by an inexhaustible openness to things and to persons. Art, science, business, politics, history, theology—in all things an inexhaustible search for anything that is worthwhile, that is valuable, that is beautiful amid the disharmony and fragmentation of the world around us.

On the one hand, the Meeting does so deliberately by proposing pervasively the Christian tradition and Christian experience as a working hypothesis for explaining reality. But then a working hypothesis needs to be tested critically, examined, appropriated, and for that reason there is also on the other hand a marked ecumenism in the Meeting—not ecumenism merely in a narrow sense of religions, but ecumenism in a broader sense—political, ethnic, religious, disciplinary, people from all walks of life, the young and old.

Just as nothing is excluded, nothing is considered to be unrelated to anything else. The unity of what happens there is another one of its most distinctive features. From the area that I work in, the human rights concerns of someone who suffered torture at the hands of a government official, to the scientist of theoretical physics, or the musician who plays the blues, the discussion of the life of the prophet Jeremiah, the current financial crisis, the educational initiative that was begun in Uganda, all of these are a part of the same thing.

When that passion for life and that unbounded thirst for what is valuable and worthwhile finds an answer, encounters a response, that in turn generates in the world a commitment to work, to construct something, something beautiful in constructing something particularly that is educational.

Thus it is characteristic of the experience of the Meeting that it has also given life to many other realities throughout the world, inspired by the same view of culture and openness to reality. Cultural centers such as Crossroads in the United States, and many others in Italy and throughout the rest of the world, smaller versions of the Meeting in different countries, schools, and publishing houses.

In this way we can say that the experience of the Meeting generates a hope for the world, but a concrete hope, not merely a feeling or an idea or an image that things might be better at some future time, but a hope that has a certainty for the future, certainty because it's rooted in the experience of an extraordinary fact that we encountered there, that was present before our eyes.

Finally, what perhaps above all is characteristic of the Meeting and of its children, like Crossroads, is that it represents a culture that is embodied in human persons, in human agents. Most of all, above everything else, the Meeting is an encounter of peoples. The full title is in fact *The Meeting for Friendship among Peoples*, people who are united and brought there by this common passion for the pressing questions of the world that are put before us—a thirst for the enduring amid the ephemeral.

For this reason we have brought together this evening a number of extraordinary individuals who have participated in the Meeting once or many times. It's not the aim of this event here to engage in an abstract reflection on culture despite my opening remarks, but one that seeks to put flesh on those bones in a very concrete way, and represent, therefore, the experience of culture that the Meeting brings to life. We'll begin to do so with a short introduction to the history and character of the Meeting, what it is, by Marco Aluigi, and there's a short video that we would like to show you and after that I will invite our distinguished guests to take the podium.

Aluigi: Mr. Ambassador, Excellencies, distinguished speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good evening everybody.

First of all I would like to send you a warm greeting on behalf of our President Professor Emilia Guarnieri, who due to prior engagements today was not able to attend, to participate, in this important moment as she would have liked to. Let me tell you that it is a great honor to be here today to talk about this event for which I have been working in the past 10 years as congress manager: *The Meeting for the Friendship among Peoples*.

In my speech I would like to underline 3 particular key points:

How the Meeting was born. The 30th anniversary: an important step

The international dimension of the Meeting

The volunteers and the experience of friendship and of gratuity behind the meeting

One evening, a group of friends from Rimini was eating a pizza together and talking, talking for a long time. Ideas, desires, dreams, interests. A conversation full of love, vitality and enthusiasm. They were Christians, they lived their faith following the proposal of life made by Father Luigi Giussani, a proposal that has its roots in a Christian Community called Communion and Liberation. In the life of this experience they learned a faith that is a passion for mankind, for his liberty and for his research. On the horizon they catch a glimpse of a clear idea of a meeting, of an occasion of gathering, of friendship to be proposed everywhere, around the world. Culture, art, science, economics, politics and faith. The idea started taking shape. A place to meet, speak, become friends, in the middle of the confusion that at the end of August, fills the beaches of Rimini, one of the most famous tourist places in Italy. Young people, families, intellectuals, manual workers, mothers, Christians and non-Christians, Italians and non Italians that taking the first step of the question: What does existence mean? Began to discover the possibility of a response. And in this way the Meeting was born. It was in 1980. I was only 6 years old that time and today I'm here together with you to document the unforeseeable development of a reality like the Meeting.

This small group of friends was animated by the great certainty able to overcome the barriers, uncertainties, the lack of notoriety. The certainty that all men, for a simple and great fact of being man, had in common; that is; questions about meaning. In every culture, in every research, in every human heart beats a strong need to find a sense, a meaning behind things, an answer. The Meeting, as it suggests its same name, it is really a network of gatherings of meetings that are born from men that put in common a real tension to the truth, to the good, to the beautiful.

Andrei Tarkowski, the great film director, said prophetically at the 1983 Meeting “My impression is that we have lost interest in ourselves. We have lost this fundamental question: Why do we live? Why did we come into the world? Without answering these questions we don’t live like people; we are not worthy to call ourselves men, even though we think that our activities are full of meaning.”

Another great friend of the Meeting that has participated in various editions, Farouq Wa’el, professor of Islamic Science said at the Meeting 2006 that “Despite their differences, today humanity lives a common reality, because, by recovering basic experience, restoring this basic experience, humanity can find this common language in which they can dialogue. Father Giussani very clearly specified by saying, “The more an individual is human, the more he will obtain certainties about others.”

So finding a way to recuperate this basic experience in these 30 years, the Meeting has become “The biggest cultural manifestation in Europe” as the Italians have described it. This definition is justified by the numbers of the last edition of the Meeting: 700,000 attendances, 130 meetings, 11 exhibitions, 20 shows, 850 journalist accredited to the last edition. To see, to know and to learn, the Meeting likes encounter and dialog with everybody: 345 speakers at the last edition, 9 auditoriums seating from 200 to 10,000 people, 12,000 square meters of sports facilities, 4,000 square meters devoted to children.

The Meeting, since its birth, has always been characterized by a strong dimension and international horizon. This is the evidence of the participation of our event and of a few of our most important guests that have literally made an impact on the history of the world in the last 30 years. Nobel prize winners, heads of State, writers, poets, famous charity workers, Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, non believers. The list is endless. We can remember: Pope John Paul II, the Dalai Lama, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), Mother Theresa, Lech Walesa, Helmut Kohl, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Ibrahim Rugova, Eugene Ionesco, Francois Michelin, Krzystof Zanussi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israeli and Palestine, Shalom and Shaat with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Franco Frattini in 2004, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq and Afghanistan, Al Zebari and Abdullah, the General Secretary of the Arabic League the last year, the various Presidents of the European Parliament and of the European Commission, the various Presidents of Chambers and of the Senate of the Italian Parliament, the various presidents of the Italian Council.

And, for example, we can mention some great guests that participated at the Meeting from the United States: William Congdon, Martha Graham, Nicholas Negroponte, Carl A. Anderson, Kenneth Ciongoli, John Johansen, George Smoot, Charles Harper, Stanley Hauerwas, Robert Hollander, Anne Krueger, Richard Lindzen, Peter Ward, Edmund D. Pellegrino, Enrico Bombieri, and, obviously here with me Mary Ann Glendon, Samuel Alito, Joseph Weiler, Jane Milosh, Paolo Carozza, Lorenzo Albacete.

Apart from the guests and events, a characteristic that makes our event unique is gratuity. And the people that build and construct this event with care are the volunteers, students and businessmen that come from Italy and also from abroad. This year the Meeting has seen over 4,000 volunteers at work. Among the volunteers of the Meeting 68 per cent are 18-30 years old and 20 per cent from 30-50 and 12% from 50 upwards. Volunteers, doctors, and businessmen to cleaners, entrepreneurs and lawyers to restaurant workers, there are too many examples to mention. People that use their vacations, that use their money to build something that otherwise would not exist in order to live this experience.

The Meeting, though, is not only a place of cultural debate, a place of exhibitions and shows as you will see in the video, but also a great occasion to offer a human experience to all the participants. From the ones who are invited to participate as speakers to discuss a theme bringing their personal contribution and stories with them, to those who visit the Meeting, the general public made up of thousands of people, to those who build the structures, the stages, the exhibit space of the Meeting as volunteers. Also there are those who work in our offices all year with a monthly wage like me and my friend Matteo who is in charge of the press office and is here with me now. And the Meeting is above all a place of friendship: People come because other people say: hey come with me to see something interesting, something different. Professor Glendon might confirm this, because after many invitations we sent in the last 10 years, the last year, in 2008, finally accepted our invitation because Professor Weiler encouraged her saying, “Come with me to the Meeting; it is very interesting.” And she went, she attended to our Meeting, and this year she will return with our great pleasure.

I will conclude by saying a great friend, Julian Carron, president of the Fraternity and leader of Communion and Liberation to which I belong, at the end of the edition of the 2007 Meeting said to me and a small group of friends, “The Meeting may not exist anymore if you are not here with yourself and your friends are not here with themselves.” He wanted to say that the Meeting, the work of the Meeting, the experience that one has at the Meeting, either is the occasion to express man’s ultimate questions, man’s constitutive desires, or it is one of the thousands of marvelous initiatives that is destined to fail. The general theme of the last year, the title was “Either Protagonists or Nobodies” and never could a title be so direct with this implication quoted by Julian Carron. The Meeting is the history of this being a protagonist, of this proposal to keep open the questions of justice, the questions of truth, the questions of beauty of man, that can find in the Christian event the possibility of a real, concrete answer, which can open the doors of discussion and no one is excluded. Saint Paul said “Panta dokimazete, to kalòn katekete,” TEST EVERYTHING AND RETAIN WHAT IS GOOD, and this is that we have been trying to do for 30 years.

Again I am happy to be here and grateful for the celebration of this 30th Anniversary in Paris at Unesco in Latin America in Brazil, and in a few days in Rome with Foreign Minister Frattini, and especially here tonight with all of you.

And if it’s true that the theme and title of this 30th edition of the Meeting is “Knowledge is always an event” I wish everybody present tonight could come to Rimini next August to have a direct experience of knowledge of what our event is.

Thank you all for your attention.

Carozza: We have, as I mentioned earlier, an extraordinary panel of guests with us this evening. I’ll introduce them briefly. To do justice to their introductions would take the rest of our evening at least, so I will be brief and introduce them all at the beginning so then we can speak without interruption.

First, Mary Ann Glendon, who is the Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard University, and who has uniquely served as a diplomat of both the Holy See, heading delegations to, for example, the U.N. Women's Conference in Beijing, and also as a diplomat of the United States, the immediate former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See.

She writes and teaches in the fields of human rights, comparative law, constitutional law, and legal theory, and has written a number of award-winning books in these areas.

She has served as the President of the International Association of Legal Science, has been a member since 1994, and currently the President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

As a teacher and as a scholar, Professor Glendon has inspired so many of her students, myself included, with her capacity to embrace everything with measure and reason and charity and as a model of openness to the world.

Samuel Alito is Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Before being nominated to the Supreme Court in 2005, he served for 15 years in the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in New Jersey. Before that Justice Alito was a United States attorney and served in other high level positions in the United States Department of Justice and in the Attorney General's office.

We in the legal professions look with great admiration at the care, intelligence and dedication that Justice Alito brings to all his work on the bench, upholding the highest ideals of the rule of law for our country.

Joseph Weiler is a University Professor at New York University, the Joseph Straus Professor of Law and European Union Jean Monnet Chair at NYU School of Law, where he also directs the Straus Institute for the Advanced Study of Law and Justice, the Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization, and the Jean Monnet Center for International and Regional Economic Law & Justice.

He is recognized throughout the world for his groundbreaking work in international and comparative law and European law, and he is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

His scholarly activities and accomplishments are quite breathtaking, but instead of listing them, I would like to point out something much more important for our purposes today at least. He has been for years a great friend of the Meeting, and for a number of years now, one of its major protagonists because of the depth of humanity that he brings to all things to which his attention turns, helping to educate all of us without fail.

Next we will have the privilege of hearing Martha Ann Alito, the only one of our panelists who has participated in the Meeting not as a speaker, but as an observer when Justice Alito spoke there two years ago. Mrs. Alito is not just any observer. She was a real presence at the Meeting whose inexhaustible enthusiasm and curiosity struck everyone around her and set, for all of us, an example to follow of the way that we might all hope to look at the exceptionality of what happens before our eyes, and therefore an ideal person to hear from this evening.

And finally, although our panel is a little law heavy, I have to confess, giving truth to Professor Glendon's statement that America is a nation under lawyers, nevertheless, Jane Milosch brings us back also to the question not of justice, but of beauty. Ms. Milosch has been the Curator of Contemporary Craft and Decorative Arts at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery since 2004. Her particular interests include American crafts, decorative arts, contemporary art. She was the curator of a landmark exhibition *Grant Woods Studio: Birthplace of American Gothic* that was on view at the Renwick in 2006. She is someone who lives quite concretely Dostoyevsky's statement that we saw here in the video, "I believe that beauty will save the world."

Professor Glendon...

Glendon: Thank all of you for coming out tonight to hear about The Meeting. I guess my talk could be called “What I Did Last Summer,” since last summer was my first experience at the famous Rimini Meeting, but I’d like to start with a brief account of how I first became aware of the Rimini Meeting and what piqued my interest.

For ten years, beginning in 1995, I served as a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, a department of the Holy See that is primarily responsible for relationships between the Holy See and two hundred or so lay movements and organizations. I’d have to say that before 1995, I, like most Americans, had very little awareness of these great ecclesial movements that were coming along to help to fill a void that was created by the transformation of parish life. Many of us Catholics grew up in parishes that were our principal source of formation in the Faith, that provided us with fellowship of many sorts and with opportunities for service. But with geographic mobility, the parishes were transformed, and something really valuable was lost. So I would say it’s almost impossible to overestimate how important it is that these movements like Communion and Liberation have come along to energize the Church throughout Europe and Latin America. But they are still not very well known in the United States.

Another thing that Communion and Liberation does, as I became aware at the Council for the Laity, is to help people respond to the call that became ever more urgent after Vatican II for Catholic lay people to play a role, indeed to assume primary responsibility, in bringing a Christian mentality into culture, into all the spheres of everyday life. Pope John Paul II used to say over and over that the laity was a sleeping giant, and he spent many hours trying to wake it up! I hope he’s still trying. One of the organizations that responded most energetically to that call was Communion and Liberation, the group that has held the Rimini Meeting over the past thirty years, in addition to doing many other things.

Now you have heard others, Marco Aluigi and Paolo Carozza, who can speak much more knowledgably than I can about the distinctive charism of Communion and Liberation. But one of the features that strikes me is an appeal to men and women--artists, writers, and people in all walks of life-- who are searching for more effective ways to integrate their faith with their daily life, to integrate theory and practice, faith and reason. I’ve long been intrigued by the attraction of the Meeting. However, the word “Meeting” in English doesn’t necessarily cause your heart to leap with excitement. In fact, when somebody tells you there’s this five day meeting, it sounds somewhat purgatorial. But all these people that I thought so highly of were speaking very enthusiastically about it, so I had to go and see for myself. How could one fail to be curious about an event that draws almost three-quarters of a million people to Rimini year after year—well-known politicians, prelates, musicians, artists, writers, from all over the world? And why do they come back again and again?

So last August finally I went, and since it’s supposed to be such a wonderful event for young people, I brought my 17-year-old granddaughter Claire. I participated in the panel on human rights with Joseph Weiler. My stay in Rimini last year was too short because I had to hurry back to work, but it was long enough for me to realize something about the word *meeting*. Really what is important about “the” meeting is what you would find in the dictionary if you looked at the word’s secondary meaning: something like the Italian *incontro*, an encounter, an encounter with people and ideas, an encounter that can make you pause, an encounter with connotations of surprise and the unexpected. Even our panel on human rights was an encounter--it brought together Italian and

American lawyers; it brought together lawyers and theologians. This kind of encounter jolts you out of your usual way of looking at things, expands your horizon, invites you to explore some new avenues.

Now of course we lawyers can't match the poets and the artists in that respect. One of the great attractions of the Rimini Meeting is the very special kind of artistic offerings that it makes available. Last year, for example, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw this on the program: a production of a nearly forgotten work by T.S. Eliot, the unfinished *Choruses from the Rock*, 1934. *Choruses from the Rock* begins with a vision of Christianity in England that is strikingly prescient. You ask yourself, how could Eliot have seen that cultural trend so long ago? Let me just give you a few lines:

I journeyed to London, the time kept City,...

There I was told: we have too many churches,

And too few chop-houses. There I was told:

Let the vicars retire. Men do not need the Church

In the place where they work, but where they spend their Sundays.

In the City, we need no bells:

Let them waken the suburbs.

I journeyed to the suburbs, and there I was told:

We toil for six days, on the seventh we must motor

To Hindhead, or Maidenhead.

If the weather is foul we stay at home and read the papers...

And the Church does not seem to be wanted

In country or in suburb; and in the town

Only for important weddings.

Later on the narrator speaks of a society that has forgotten its past and whose leaders "dream of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good." The modern political project. What a remarkable example of how poets and artists can see things before they become apparent to the rest of us, and how impressive that the organizers of the Meeting rescued that intriguing work from near oblivion.

If you look at the programs for the Rimini Meetings of the past, you see that each one was designed to provide many opportunities for a creative encounter with something new, an encounter that shakes you up. And all in the atmosphere of a festival!

So my visit to Rimini did give me some insight into why so many people, like my friend Joseph Weiler, had gone to the meeting, and why they keep returning year after year. Certainly part of the attraction is the fellowship--the opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones. But another part of the story, most important I think, is what has been alluded to already by Marco Aluigi and by Paolo Carozza--it draws people who are asking the most important questions, often asking them all alone, feeling isolated--questions of the type that Eliot put in his *Choruses from the Rock*: "Where is the life we've lost in living?/Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?/Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

The Rimini Meeting has become a privileged place, a special locus, for pausing and pondering such questions in company with others. It's a place for the kind of encounter that can set your work or your life in a new direction.

Those are some of the reasons why my granddaughter Claire and I will be returning this year.

Thank you.

Alito: I was really not sure what the Meeting was going to be like when I first spoke with Paolo in Spring 2007. We first spoke on the phone about it, and then he was in Washington for a meeting, and he came by and gave me a description. It was a wonderful description, but it was hard for me to imagine what I would find there because it was totally outside the area of my prior experience. I had never participated in or even heard about anything that fit the description he provided, but it sounded intriguing, and I was very eager to go and speak.

In preparation for attending the Meeting, I thought I should try to get a better sense of what I was going to find when I arrived, and I had the idea to read one of Fr. Giussani's books. I had never read one before, so I read *The Religious Sense*; I also read Msgr. Albacete's *God at the Ritz*, which I highly recommend for those of you who haven't read it.

That filled me with enthusiasm to imagine an actual event which fit the description that had been provided—a cultural fair attended over the course of a week by nearly three-quarters of a million people that embodied some of those ideas and those feelings.

I arrived in Rimini full of anticipation, and when I looked at the program, and I saved the program from the Meeting that I attended, a number of features immediately jumped out at me and I hope you will pardon me for reliving with you some of the thoughts that I had when I looked at this. Now most of these are not events that I was able to attend, but they provided me with a sense of the nature of this extraordinary event. One of the first events on the opening day of the 2007 Meeting was an event called "Quale identità per l'Europa?," and if you look at the participants it included a video message from President Napolitano, and the participants were the President of the Parliament of Europe, an editorial writer of *The Irish Times*, and another government official. So it immediately struck me that the Meeting was quite an extraordinary event in the cultural life of Italy and of Europe.

I looked at the page of the program for the panel that Paolo and I participated on, and I saw that we were facing some competition with other events scheduled during that time. I wondered whether anyone would be interested in showing up and hearing a talk about law in the United States. One of our competing events was *Mathematics and the Human Condition*. When I saw that, it struck me: this is serious business! I was very

pleased that despite the competition (and many of the other events scheduled at the same time were more accessible than either *Law in America* or *Mathematics and the Human Condition*), our panel was extremely well attended by an audience that consisted heavily of Italians, and also people from other countries who were interested in hearing primarily two American lawyers, one a distinguished American law professor, talk about law in the United States. This openness to new ideas and ideas that are outside the realm of most people's daily lives really struck me.

When I looked through the rest of the program, I was just amazed by the breadth of the subjects that were covered—philosophy, religion, history, literature, art, world affairs, economics, the environment—just about anything that you can imagine.

In addition to the lectures, debates and panel discussions, there were musical performances, ranging from a performance of Dvorak to a performance of rhythm and blues; sporting events, including a triathlon; restaurants representing cuisine from different parts of Italy. It was truly remarkable.

Couple all of that with the ability to attract such a huge audience. The Meeting features (as you can tell from *Mathematics and the Human Condition*) rather scholarly presentations, and yet this is an event that is attended by ordinary people and their families.

When I heard about the number of people who attend the event, one of the first thoughts that came to my mind was that the Meeting must be like the Six Flags Amusement Parks. Of course, it's not like that at all, although it's not an event that people drag themselves to.

It struck me while I was attending the Meeting, that Rimini is a perfect sight for the event in this sense. I have tried to explain to Americans who have no familiarity with the Meeting or with Rimini—I've struggled for American analogies when people say, "What's the Meeting like? What is like it here in the United States?" I'm somewhat at a loss. There's a certain similarity to the Chataqua events that were held in the late 19th Century going until the 20th Century—the idea of Christian teaching with cultural performances and lectures. That's far from an exact analogy, but there's something there I think. And people said, "Well, what is the city of Rimini like?" It's a very nice beach town. I think it was mostly frequented by Italians. It's not a place where a lot of international tourists go. Think of maybe Atlantic City in the 1930s or the 1940s, and you get some sense of it. Or if you've ever seen any Fellini movies, many are set in Rimini. It's a beach town where ordinary people go to spend their summer vacations. It's a perfect place to have something like this, which is meant to be open to and accessible to ordinary people, but not in a didactic or condescending sort of way.

Anyway, those were some of my impressions of attending, but I will tell you that by far the impression that was the strongest was the one that I got from talking with some of the young volunteers. I remember going to see the exhibit on the prophet Jeremiah and we spoke with a number of young people who were responsible for putting that up, and I very vividly remember a young woman and a young man, I think they both were from Milan, university students. The impression that they gave me was that these were very sophisticated young Milanese. I say that in the good sense. I was struck that here were these young university students who had devoted their time and their money and their energy to put together this wonderful exhibit and bring it to Rimini and put it up and man the exhibit for the course of the Meeting, and they took the time out of their schedules patiently to explain it to us in English, which was far, far better than anything I could muster in Italian.

So I came away thinking that the Meeting did embody what I had gotten from the books that I had read before I went, and it did express in a way that was quite unique to me a sense of unity that we are in great danger of losing in the modern world—the sense of the unity of culture and the unity of truth and the unity of the human experience. In all of those respects it's quite a remarkable event.

Weiler: The Meeting is not a “place”, an “event” – it is an “Experience” unlike any I have had, and I assure those of you who have not attended, unlike any you are likely to have had either. Any person of culture should make a point of attending the Meeting – at least once. What is the secret of its success? After all, 700,000 visitors in one week, repeated year after year – and many, many of them not particularly religious persons – must have some reason to go.

When I was invited the first time in 2003, and I knew it was going to be interesting because many of my Italian friends said to me, “How could you accept to go to that “Meeting?”” And then, in the same breath they said, “How does one get invited?”

Here, then, are some of the factors which account for this success.

1. Imagine the Annual Autoshow fair at the Javits Center in New York or the famous COMDEX technology fair in Las Vegas: booths, and exhibits, and “hostesses” and “hosts” and thousands and thousands of people milling around. Familiar enough. Now comes the shocking difference: The overarching theme is ... culture. And my notion of culture is quite catholic, not Catholic: From Jazz to science to art; high brow and mid-brow. An exhibit about Beethoven nestling next to one about regional cooking. Imagine huge spaces with 5000 people facing a stage and listening. Not to a singer, to a panel discussing some book. Now imagine five or ten similar such “incontri” all taking place simultaneously. But this is not the Modern Language Association Annual Meeting or a Convention of cardiologists. The “Geist” of the meeting is defined too by the huge number of families and children and by the Pop Concert and sporting events which take place too. The book shop is huge and is crowded, at all times of day and night. And it is not packed with gifts and posters and trinkets: Just books. This is a unique combination. An event which squares the circle: Ennobling but pleasing and entertaining and enriching all at the same time.

2. Here I do turn to the Catholic rather than the catholic character of the Meeting. It is organized by a very, very, (very) Catholic organization—Communion and Liberation; more Catholic than that you can't get. But you get it! There is something shockingly irreverent, open, pluralist in the spirit of the Meeting. Again and again I have witnessed and experienced: I, an observant Jew, am made to feel quite welcome and comfortable. But so are my co-panelists – an ultra-orthodox card carrying Atheist and an observant Communist et cetera. (Make no mistake: The many lapsed Catholics, Jews, Communists and Vegetarians – the majority of us are all equally welcome...). One is not simply listened to with respect. One is respected through engagement, sometime combative, always hugely polite and friendly -- a higher form of respect. There is a refreshing absence of Political Correctness; Just old fashioned correctness – civility, good manners, and commitment.

3. At the heart of the Meeting, the deep key to its success, is that hovering everywhere in one way or another, is the spirit of Giussani and his Movement. Perhaps three things stand out in this respect. First, I read what there is to read about Communion and Liberation, but at the Meeting I experienced it. Now it's difficult to summarize or to give an essential point without trivializing. After all, it's a complex movement, inspired by a

very profound and deep, dare I say, holy person, Giussani. But there are some things that are very simple. For example, this true respect for the other with not a whiff of relativism; a real commitment to the search for the truth, and the belief that there is truth and that one can search for it, and that one can say with respect, “That is why I disagree with you.”

Second, what one finds when one does engage on religious themes – one can if one wants to – is the remarkable notion that holiness does not get left behind in the Church when you leave it on Sunday. This is not about people chanting Hare Krishna, or withdrawing otherwise from the world. Quite the contrary. Holiness is taken into everyday life based on the conviction that it is in the daily life, in industry, commerce, law, medicine, that there is place for grace for holiness in that kernel of daily pursuit. That is very much part of Giussani, and that is very much part of Communion and Liberation, and that is one of the things that one senses as an animating spirit of the Meeting.

The third thing is Giussani’s insistence on *presence*, one of his key words. In the United States, very often the line between religion and politics is blurred. In other words, when the religious goes into the public square, it’s a political event, and immediately gets translated into arguments about politics. Giussani, especially in the second phase of his life, very insistently affirmed that the turn to politics cannot be the central thing. The central thing is *presence*. Of course those of you who are here who are Christian or Catholic understand what he means by *presence*. For Giussani, if I understood him correctly, and I say this with humility—presence is not just limited to, say, the Eucharist. It has to be an animating sense of one’s life and one’s existence in a way that transcends politics. Even for people who are not Christian, even secular people and secularists, one feels that challenge, and that also explains part of the success of Meeting.

4. Finally, when I entered the building of the Italian Embassy in Washington DC, I remembered that the day before was the Italian National Day. Obviously there was a large party in celebration. I asked a friend who attended the party: How was it? His answer: “Very Italian—good food and *gran’ casino!*” In this respect the Meeting is very un-Italian. It is beautifully organized from beginning to end! That wonderful organization is because of the volunteers who for weeks and months suppress their ego work for something that is not about themselves or their immediate gratification. This in large part produces the organizational marvel which is, too, the Meeting.

M. Alito: Buona sera. As you know, our attendance was in August of 2007, and I want to give you a little background. I am a convert to Catholicism, so I have a little bit of understanding about gatherings in evangelical experiences in the Protestant church, and I was floored, absolutely unaware that there could be this celebration in Catholicism. As a child I had adored Catholicism and very much participated with one family that looked after me while my mother worked, and I always was excited about going to mass on Sunday. Well, the week at Rimini is that celebration in the best of possible ways. You feel enveloped; you are celebrating the beauties of life; you watch people come together and, as Joseph said, they suppress their egos for a week, or probably longer because the planning stage goes on forever, and you just are in awe. I personally was awed by the gathering, the numbers of attendees, the fervor with which they put together their exhibits, by their dedication of their time and their talent to open the world, to give us all the better things of life so that we could incorporate and remind ourselves that our life is a celebration through God. He gives that to us, and then we have the belief to carry through. Just as we’ve all spoken about, there is a greater presence than ourselves—to take that into

our world. And I saw that at work constantly throughout our visit. It really was God-focused, and it had the unity and the love that we need to express in order to continue our world.

I'm going to do a little impression of our arrival. When we arrived at the Grand Hotel, my children will tell you as well as my husband that I often don't want to go to any chain—whether it's food or a hotel system or an amusement. I'm always looking for that one place that exists solely in that place, and if I want to experience it again, I have to go back. We walk into the Grand Hotel, and I look at Sam and I say, "I've been here before." And his response to me was, "I don't think so." However, had watched *Amarcord* in college, and sure enough, I'm taking myself around the corner and see the room dedicated to the filming of the Fellini film. And I came back and said, "See, I knew I had been here."

But what that put me in mind of was that God had opened that little window, although it was many years ago, and here I was experiencing a place that I had had a little foretaste of. I didn't know what the ultimate savoring of this experience was going to be until I was at the celebration in the festive halls. So for me to see all of the Italian and international community coming together, was just a furtherance in my journey of Catholicism, that it was a celebratory event in life and in this particular week which I really did enjoy.

I have to also specifically discuss the fact that I attended the first lecture and, of course, I don't have a sound foundation in Italian language. I lived in France as a child and I went back to study university. At some point I felt as though I had been touched because I was translating to Sam, and he would say to me, "How did you know that?" And I said, "I'm not quite sure how I know that." But I did have that experience. There's a similarity in the romance languages, obviously, but overall, my entire experience was just a celebration. And whenever I reflect on it I am always filled with happiness, with the joy that we experienced.

I want to thank you for having me give my impressions of that day, and I hope that you all will have the experience to go over and enjoy the Meeting to understand the fervor that is placed in each of us through the beauty of life as we see it as well as the gathering and the intellect that we can all expand by opening our hearts the way the Meeting opens ours.

Thank you.

Milosch: I'd just like to start out by saying that it's really wonderful to be back up here again. I have to tell you that the last time I was here at the embassy it was probably six years ago. I was here to explain why the object that I went to find in Venice was missing. Something was lost, so I was invited back to the embassy to talk about how Americans and Italians can keep track of the art work that we were loaning, so I happen to be back here telling you what I found this time, not what I had lost. And what I found was an amazing experience that has been beautifully described here, and why all these wonderful professors and lawyers and Martha is one of the new friends that I made while I was there. But what actually took me there was not the art, although I've been involved with art in Italy for many exhibitions, but in fact it was a friend, Letizia Bardazzi.

While I spend a lot of time working with artists, curating exhibitions, talking about art, I've learned in my off time really to listen and follow my friends. And I feel very lucky that I met Letizia Bardazzi when my husband and I moved to Washington, D.C. and I became involved with Crossroads Cultural Center and they began these amazing programs in Washington, and I led two tours, and Letizia called me and said, "You need to give a tour

to Davide Rondoni. He's coming to talk about Dante, and we'd like him to have a tour of one of the Smithsonian Museums. I said, "Sure, what is he interested in?" because a lot of times people from Italy come and they think they're going to see the National Gallery of Art or see American Art, but the Renwick Gallery is dedicated to artists who work in craft materials—glass, metals, firewood—all of these materials create functional things that you use, applied design, but also works of art in sculpture. In fact, the last show we had at the Renwick was Lino Tagliapietra, a glass artist who trains a generation of American artists in the technique of glass blowing, and how to use it not just to create functional pieces, but also sculpture.

So being a fan of Dante, like Martha I'm also a convert, and I had this amazing Episcopalian priest at Wheaton College and he introduced me to Dante. We were lucky enough to have the Dorothy Sayers archives at Wheaton College, and Dante opened up my world in an unbelievable way to understanding art, beauty, journey and travel. So I went to hear Davide's presentation which was amazing, and I thought, wow, I wonder how I'm going to top this. And he was coming the next day and I went to work and I had a horrible meeting. The Smithsonian is very political. I had a meeting with the PR relations people because they were complaining, people were complaining in the institution, not outside of it, about one of the works by one of the artists who creates these very provocative sculptures that are human portraits in the guise of animal physiognomy. They are very powerful works, and what was interesting to me as we weren't getting any outside complaints; it was just internally the people who work in the museum. These are not necessarily art historians or curates, but just people who felt uncomfortable about this contemporary artwork. And they felt really surprised that I brought this really uncomfortable art into a very comfortable place. If you've ever been to the Renwick Gallery it's a very traditional space. And so I was perplexed; I didn't expect anything like that, so I kept trying to explain to them what the artist was thinking, why these were great works of art, and I went back to give Davide his tour, and what was so amazing to me is here there was a poet, an artist, a writer—he teaches poetry at the University of Bologna, from another country, another time; he had never seen or heard of this artist, and he understood the work immediately. He understood that the artist was saying, "Are you alive? Don't you feel? Who are you?"

And that's what happens at the Meeting in the sense that it's not something you go and observe, even though I did find out on Davide's invitation he was invited to be on this panel which I don't know if he conceived of the idea there called *Feigning the Truth: Issues in Contemporary Art*, but it was an opportunity to talk about contemporary art in a culture, and the role of art in our lives today. It's really not that different than it's ever been, even back from the time I worked on the Ancient Roman art show where art always had a function and capacity to educate us about who we are, why we're here, and so forth.

So that's how I got invited, through this poet talking on Dante, and then, with this topic, *Feigning the Truth*, I thought it was a very provocative way of looking at contemporary art. My other panelists included Beatrice Buscaroli, who is the Curator of Contemporary Art in Bologna, who had actually undergone a more heated scandal of some homosexual art that she showed in Milan that was attacked, and then a pianist, Ramid Farami, who was a pianist responsible for the revival of Bach. So it was really interesting, and at the panel I loved it when he said, "Oh yeah, at home we listen to Frank Sinatra and Brahms." So it was a very interesting panel in which we all presented some of the common ground and perspectives working with contemporary art from the perspective of contemporary artists.

And then aside from the presentations that we made, like my fellow panelists, you went around and met these people, and I was guided there to see where all the exhibitions were going on. It was very moving to me that so many young, contemporary Italian artists who wanted to share their work, tell me about their work, and that was just very moving because when you're a curator in a museum, people are constantly trying to show you their work, and it gets a little exhausting because they are always doing this sales job. But there they wanted to tell me why they're making art, which is so beautiful. The reason they did this is because they are moved by something, and I thought that just so profoundly described the experience that we were having there with the various volunteers.

But I have to say, though, I did know the Meeting meant culture, but when I heard "Rimini" and "the beach," and having lived in Bologna for two years, I knew about the food, and all those aspects are there, but it's an exceptional experience. I actually thought I run my life across the state of Iowa almost every year on something called *RAGBRAI*, five thousand bikers, and we used to compare that to a sort of spiritual pilgrimage in Woodstock. So I've had to turn a little Chatakwa, Woodstock, and a little bit of spiritual pilgrimage, and I hope all of you will have an opportunity to go. You really should. It's amazing. Thank you.

Carozza: Well, thank you to all of the panelists for the presentations. Thank you, again, to all the staff, the Ambassador, and thanks to all of you for coming.

If I might offer just one concluding word, the word that's been spoken by almost everyone to take with us, it's the word *friendship*. It exists in the title of the Meeting since its origin, and it describes in one way or another every experience that all of us have there. And as we all know, real friendship, an authentic friendship is not one that is instrumental, it's not one that is contained in boundaries, and it's not one that is conditioned. Real friendship is a relationship that is open-ended, that is an adventure of life with another person. That is the Meeting; that is the experience of the Meeting. We don't know where it's going to go, where it will take us, and that's precisely what one of the greatest attractions is, so I invite all of you to participate in this friendship together.