

The Human Factor

The title of this column is taken from Chapter 6 of *Why the Church?* By Luigi Giusanni, (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2004)

I find the perspective Giusanni brings to bear in this chapter a valuable one to balance the anger and consternation which has arisen in us with respect to the failure of our bishops to protect children from predatory priests who had infiltrated the Church over the decades. His image of the "gold in the mud," (which I have quoted here before), applies all-the-more when the "mud" has the evil stench of child sexual abuse.

The following is Giusanni's perspective:

The Divine communicates itself through the human

It was an insurmountable objection to the religious leaders and the educated people of [Jesus'] time, and it caused great scandal:

- *"Is he not the carpenter, the son of Joseph?"*

St. Paul was. . . perfectly conscious of the innate disproportion in the phenomenon of the Church. By bringing its message through the vehicle of human reality, it is, therefore, **exposed to all the individual instances of human wretchedness**, including his own, (eg. see 1 Cor. 4:9-13)

The first individuals who spread Christianity were perfectly aware that the divine shone forth in the world from what they said and did, **that their words were insufficient, their gestures weak, their personalities inadequate, their human condition wretched.** However, this did not mean that they were acquiescent and resigned. No, they proudly ran the race. . .

This is precisely the problem of the Church: God wants to pass through the humanity of all those he has taken hold of in Baptism.

A gold prospector would never be daunted by the mud of the river bed where he hoped to find nuggets. Rather, he would have been motivated by the probability of finding gold.

It is terrible to think how easily, in contrast, man can be detached from the problem of his destiny, to the extent of **renouncing the gold because of the**

mud that comes with it. . . A man, daunted by the mud of their rivers, has not taken into account the fact that **it is the gold of life which is at stake.**

To return to our metaphor: it is the responsibility of each one of us to desire the gold of the message. If one truly desires gold, then he is not scandalized at finding it in mud. He must dirty his hands and work hard to extract it. But if one does not want to get his hands dirty, then he is not all that interested in the gold after all; he is more concerned about keeping his hands clean.



[Quoting Henri Delubac]

The Church . . . they tell me it is holy, and I see it packed with sinners. They tell me that its mission is to tear man away from earthly preoccupations, to remind him that he is called to eternity, and I see it unceasingly occupied with the things of this earth. They assure me that it is universal, as open as divine wisdom and love are open, and often I note that its members, fatalistically almost, withdraw timidly into closed groups. . .

But let us sharpen our focus. Let us try to see beyond the over-superficial, rough-hewn façade . . . And then we will discover the characteristic paradox of the Church, and it is the same paradox which will introduce us to its mystery. The Church is human and divine.

. . . If we exclude human conduct as a basic factor, what would be the most suitable attitude to adopt for expressing an opinion about the Church?

The American bishop, Fulton J. Sheen, once made this acute observation: *those who flee the Church because of the hypocrisy and imperfection of the religious individuals in it, forget that if the Church were as perfect as they would like it to be, then there would be no place for them at all.*