

# VareseNews

## Don Gallo draws a full audience

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What a success, with the municipal hall in Vanzaghello packed for the evening (attendance by invitation of the council), in which showstopper, Don Andrea Gallo, the indefatigable soul of the community of San Benedetto al Porto, in Genoa, presented his book *Così in terra come in cielo* (*On Earth as it is in Heaven*). At the end, everyone lined up for an autograph, a photo, a handshake, and an opinion. In short, Don Gallo was a true star.

The presentation was anything but standard: **three hours non-stop of tales**, told with the ability of a true showman, with digressions, invectives, appeals, anecdotes and readings, of the life of an eighty-two-year-old who has seen so much, and is afraid of nothing, particularly of saying what he thinks. Even about his Church, which “**should not speak with Jesus, but listen; should not judge, but welcome**”. And the Church should not hide the fact that “since the Second Vatican Council, the highest example of individual thought is the official doctrine.”

His words flowed unstoppably, as this elderly priest jumped from one subject to another, with the life force that he exhibits, spending the evening on his feet, walking back and forth, addressing his audience directly, rather like his friend, the comedian and political activist Beppe Grillo, without shouting and without swearing. He recounted episodes in his long life, from the times of the Resistance to the **1968 Movement** (“It’s thanks to that that we have Obama today.”), of which he still remembers Mario Capanna (“a true leader”) and the sacrifice of Jan Palach in Prague (“if he’s not a martyr ...”); to the **2001 G8 in Genoa**, for which he had already used harsh words against the police repression. He also had harsh things to say about the rejection of migrants, about the capitalism that “promotes the free circulation of goods, **but not of people**, in the world”, because the former are worth more than the latter, and “for those in power, anyone that is not productive, must be cancelled”. To the **processions of the unemployed behind San Precario**, with Don Gallo leading the chanting against the (umpteenth) scandal of the superiors, with whom, relations are not easy, but there has never been a break.

“**What would Jesus have done?**”

“**Ah, if you put it in those terms ...**”

To his pacifism; like the time when he opened his door to a soldier that had fled from Peschiera after refusing to attack farmers in revolt, or, ten years later, when he shuddered at hearing his senior director, an ordinary soldier, praise the “peace mission” in Iraq. To the **cuts** of the crisis, that affect even the road unit in the community of San Benedetto al Porto. “How is it possible? They tell us not to go out more than twice a week, but three times a month ...”

Don Gallo’s work has brought him in contact with many famous people: from Manu Chao, with his extremely generous donation to the community, to film directors like Mario Monicelli and Ettore Scola, to a ... Muslim prince, the heir to a minor oil state in the Persian Gulf, who had come to meet the priest.

And **many, many more tales**, about what it means to be a priest “on the edge of society”, a priest of the outcast, of drug addicts, of transsexuals, of humanity in various states of suffering, dwelling in the lowest parts of a seaport town.

**“Every film has its soundtrack,” he says, “and mine is Fabrizio De André.”** Don Gallo says that, in his own way, De André wrote **a fifth canonical gospel**, full of poetry and songs; he had grown up middle class, but told of the lives of the less fortunate, “combining spiritual restlessness with tension for social justice.” This friend and fellow-Genoese was a true inspiration, whose line ‘obstinately and against the grain’ summarised the Gospels in one phrase”.

And the numerous letters that people write to him, the unemployed worker, the young dropout, the girl, the homosexual seeking a companion to give sense to his life, asking for his prayers (it’s true! he read the letter out), to name but a few. **The laughter, and the cries, of existence; he is a point where lives cross, “a pavement priest”**, troublesome, “anarchic” – “I’ve also set off bombs, but in people’s consciences” – with his cigar and the language of his crowd of “outcasts”, to whom he modestly tries to bring the Gospel.

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