

Gabriele and Sesto Giovanni Castagnoli, interviewed by Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler from the Sisters of the Monastery Baldegg (near Lucerne), Translation Rolf Keiser

The Monastery Shelter has found us

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: Recently you moved from your spacious apartment in Zurich to an apartment barely half the size in our renovated castle in Baldegg. A deliberate renunciation of square meters or simply the desire to be lady and lord of the castle?

Gabriele Castagnoli: The idea was to reduce. In the meantime, we have become aware that “happiness lies in the meadow”¹ and not in a big apartment. We couldn’t imagine finding such a beautiful structure in such a lovely environment. I am less into being a lady of the castle. To me, castles and monasteries are interesting from the cultural and architectural point of view and not necessarily from the perspective of living in them.

¹ “Happiness lies in the Meadow” French film comedy, 1995

Sesto G. Castagnoli: It was a deliberate and material self-denial of square meters. Spirituality also called for a new episode in life. Scaling down and letting go turned out to be a lot of fun. The wonderful turn of events in connection with the apartment in a castle has given way to a more intense inner path. It is beautiful to witness how God fulfills all wishes at the right time. For decades, I have always wanted to live in a castle!

20 years after I first travelled to Africa from Malaysia, I have finally reached my destination - totally in line with the monastery guesthouses’ motto: “way station for life”. During this time I was able to let go of all my belongings. I am grateful for having experienced hard but educational paths. This process included deliberate abandoning of almost all of the 8 projects I initiated or accompanied, in order to focus on work in the field of economics. Here is where I want to exercise and develop a change in consciousness.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: Mrs. Castagnoli, what was important for you or what didn’t you want to miss when you moved here?

Gabriele Castagnoli: Exciting, your question as to what I missed, because, when hearing it, I notice that I “function” differently. There is simply the great confidence of being at the right place at the right time and in doing the “right” thing, even

though it makes sense only when reflecting upon it after some time. Today, I would say that the monastery shelter has found us.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: Mr. Castagnoli, is “downsizing” a general or personal goal for you?

Sesto G. Castagnoli: I have been living with two suitcases for the past decade. Even during my time in Africa I only lived in a very small, furnished room in Zurich, as a “pied à terre” so to speak. To me deceleration and disposal are two terms that lead to a fulfilled existence. Insofar, it is also a general goal. I would be very happy to see many people develop this insight and that consumer behavior would change accordingly.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: Two suitcases? Is that really enough? What do you need if ever you are in real need?

Sesto G. Castagnoli: I am still in the process of reducing and I think that even one suitcase or a knapsack would suffice. Now let me see, what do I really need? Actually, I don’t really miss anything. For many years, even in very difficult times, I have been grateful to God for every second of experience I have been able to make in my life. I am optimistic and positive in my thinking and live by the motto: “Love, laugh and live”. I always recall this motto when confronted with other thoughts which I readily accept and behold.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: You consider yourself to be a citizen of the world. What are the criteria in the making of a world citizen? Sesto G. Castagnoli: I try not to think locally, regionally, or nationally but focus on the global impact of our behavior. I can only take myself as measure. Primarily, I can change myself, be content and happy, be mindful and observe, and be thankful and share these values with my fellow human beings, regardless of where I may be on this wonderful, magnificent planet Earth. If satisfied within, I am satisfied outside.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: You are co-founder of the WSF World Spirit Forum and the World Spiritual Foundation and give lectures on global matters throughout the world while focusing on spirituality, change of consciousness, global transformation, etc. Doesn’t that, which ultimately benefits or hurts his/her existence, have but a small place at a very specific local spot? Why then this global commitment?

Sesto G. Castagnoli: I am very glad you asked! In itself it expresses a lot. Yes, I should be at home locally in my heart and within. Indeed, I should act locally with global and holistic thinking. I need not travel to distant lands in order to live my values, but I may, when I feel called to do so. It is true that wherever I am, I am in my own being. Since I feel comfortable at any time and place on this planet Earth and being able to adapt to the environment immediately my understanding of local, regional, national, and international is somewhat different from many dear fellow

human beings. Wherever I have been in this world, be it in Africa, Russia, Asia, Latin America, etc. I always felt at home. It would be wonderful not to have any boundaries so that all human beings could move freely. I am interested in a world where all could live in dignity regardless where they call home. And those wanting to travel could do so unhindered. After having engaged myself for many years with topics on change of consciousness, I now hold lectures on new economic and financial systems. My partners and I are working on important systemic changes our society needs in most aspects of life. Having returned to the business world, I try to set an example in my daily work.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: Mrs. Castagnoli, you spent quite some time working in marketing. What would you consider to be a “sensible measure”? Is it also a product of marketing or a gift from the soul?

Gabriele Castagnoli: (smiles) Undoubtedly, a sensible measure is not a fixed value but a variable that has to be sought and found by each individual on a case-to-case basis. It requires one’s own effort and insight. My understanding of a sensible measure is to keep in balance. A sacrifice compliant with sensible measure may not be sufficient in a given case thereby causing an imbalance. Ultimately, it is my inner morale, which decides if I feel something to be a sacrifice, a loss or just the capability of letting go. If I have a good “wavelength” to my soul then it undoubtedly gives me this present.

Turnover focused marketing is more or less aimed at disturbing this good “wavelength”. It sends out an entirely different message: “Without this or that product you are incomplete, it makes you prettier or happier”. For me, it has become a pleasant daily routine to disallow such advertising and other media from disturbing my wavelength.

Sister Marie-Ruth Ziegler: How do you recognize when the measure no longer suits you or, in other words, when are you happy?

Gabriele Castagnoli: An unsuitable measure always sparks off an instantaneous feeling. Sometimes, even the slightest imbalance can bring about this feeling, in total absence of reasoning. The same applies to my happiness: When my mind takes a pause happiness is here.

My mind is at rest in nature, with animals and when I encounter people who share in mutual cognition. Even in my every day routine when I am totally pre-occupied with some type of activity.