

Political struggle, religiosity, human rights, and health: an interview with Júlio Renato Lancellotti

Luta política, religiosidade, direitos humanos e saúde:
entrevista com Júlio Renato Lancellotti

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Abstract

Júlio Renato Lancellotti is one of the greatest Brazilian references in the fight for human rights and, in particular, for the rights of homeless people. He is an educator and catholic priest, and he develops, along with social movements, practices of reception, education, health, and defense of homeless people's rights in the city of São Paulo. In this interview, Father Júlio talks about his career, which spanned over 40 years, working with "marginalized groups" marked by conflictual contexts; he highlights the lessons learned and the contradictions that permeate this reality, while new issues and struggles emerge; he also denounces the scenario of real estate speculation in the city and its impacts on the entire population. Due to his political stance, Father Júlio is constantly subjected to numerous threats, but nothing stops him from continuing hand in hand with his brothers, fighting for their rights, calling for love and the recognition of all humanity.

Keywords: Human Rights, Political Activism, Homeless Population, Religious Ethics, Necropolitics.

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Resumo

Júlio Renato Lancellotti é uma das maiores referências brasileiras na luta pelos direitos humanos e, em especial, pelos direitos das pessoas em situação de rua (PSR). Pedagogo e padre católico desenvolve, em articulação com movimentos sociais, práticas de acolhimento, educação, saúde e defesa de direitos com as pessoas em situação de rua na cidade de São Paulo. Nessa entrevista, Padre Júlio fala de uma trajetória de mais de 40 anos atuando junto a grupos desconsiderados e marcados por situações de conflito; destaca aprendizados e as contradições que atravessam essa realidade e como novas pautas e lutas se somam; denuncia o cenário de especulação imobiliária na cidade e os impactos para toda população. Por seu posicionamento político, Padre Júlio já sofreu muitas ameaças, mas nada o impede de prosseguir de mãos dadas com seus irmãos, lutando por direitos, clamando por amor e reconhecimento de toda e qualquer humanidade. **Palavras-chave:** Direitos Humanos, Ativismo político, População em Situação de Rua, Ética Religiosa, Necropolítica.

An introduction to the reading: regarding Júlio and the collectives, the context, and the territory of the interview

Júlio Renato Lancellotti is one of the greatest Brazilian references in the fight for human rights and, in particular, for the rights of homeless people (HP). Educator and Catholic priest, at the time of this interview, he was 75 years old and the parish priest of the Church of São Miguel Arcanjo, in the Mooca region, in São Paulo (SP). Through an articulation with social movements, like the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) and the Pastoral do Povo da Rua, as well as counter-hegemonic media outlets and State devices, such as the Street Clinics/Unified Health System (CnaR/SUS) and the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), Júlio Lancellotti and some collectives, relying mostly on donation funds, have been developing practices of welcoming, education, health, and defense of homeless people's rights in the city of São Paulo.

Photograph 1—Júlio Lancellotti baptizing a child



Source: Gilney Costa (2024).

“With one hand we give bread, and with the other we fight”

It was almost 10 am on Sunday, July 27, 2024, when we approached Father Júlio Lancellotti in the modest São Miguel Arcanjo Parish, located on the campus of São Judas Tadeu University, in the city of São Paulo. The Mass, broadcasted on YouTube as usual, summoned those present not only to reflect on religious teachings, but also featured a special call for the defense of human rights, the fight against hunger and aporophobia.

After lunch on July 27, 2024, we had the opportunity to conduct this interview at the MST Sacolão Irmão Pedro Bittencour, located in Mooca, a few blocks away from the parish of São Miguel Arcanjo. Júlio was presented with the proposed question script displayed here¹, which was read and generously answered. In the afternoon, after the interview, Júlio took us on a walk to (re)discover the parish surroundings, the space and practices of welcoming homeless people.

Photograph 2—A walk around the São Miguel Arcanjo Parish, São Paulo; from left to right: Father Júlio Lancellotti, Danielle Moraes, and Gilney Costa



Source: Own collection (2024).

That is one of the territories of São Paulo in frank gentrification², where conflicts over the right to the

city emerge³. Knowing this territory in loco made us realize that we were facing a battlefield, flanked on one side by the Emergency Care Unit (UPA) and a municipal social center for the homeless, the São Martinho de Lima Community Center; by the transit in the street and a square occupied by people, including HP; next, the food distribution headquarters linked to the Archdiocese of São Paulo (Santa Dulce dos Pobres Community Center) and the small parish, located at the crossroads of Taquari and Sapucaia streets; on the other side, next to the community nucleus, commercial real estate developments in the completion phase and the tall buildings of apartment condominiums that emerge beyond the parish, radically modifying the landscape.

Not even the threats received daily by the priest can prevent him from doing what he has adopted as his occupation: his unbending defense of the dignity of human life. In the midst of the battlefield, the resistance of HP and the collectives remains. We wrapped up the afternoon by getting to know Casa Santa Rosa de Lima, a space where activities and projects take place, such as workshops on promoting health, professionalization, self-esteem, among others, like the Therapeutic Garden, which has several medicinal plants.

Photograph 3—Santa Dulce dos Pobres Community Center, where a thousand loaves of bread are distributed daily



Source: Own collection (2024).

1 The following people participated in the interview: Júlio Lancellotti, Danielle Moraes, Gilney Costa Santos, and Marcio Antonio Bastos Amato. We were affectionately welcomed by “Tati” at Casa Santa Rosa de Lima.

2 In this regard, we suggest reading Reina and Comarú (2015) and Pimenta (2020), which exhaustively addressed the process of gentrification in the neighborhoods of the central region of the municipality of São Paulo.

3 Joice Berth (2023), architect and urban planner, discusses the bases of coloniality involved in the capitalist model of the city, mentioning the role that the homeless population, among other marginalized groups, play in this correlation of forces. Among the examples of conflict over the right to the city cited by Berth is the situation of Mooca and the groups that defend the guarantee of HP’s rights in São Paulo.

The interview

Interviewers—In this interview, we wanted to promote a dialogue between you and public health. We think that a point that connects, in practice, the actions of the Pastoral do Povo da Rua and the field of collective health is the recognition of homeless people as subjects of rights. This escapes a merely “philanthropic” or “charitable” view. On the other hand, there is a void in the production of scientific knowledge regarding the life and health of homeless people. There are even public health policy initiatives for these people, but they continue, at least in the academic sphere, invisible for the most part. You are also a reference in bringing HP, which are not few, into people’s attention. In this sense, we wanted to know your story and how you got started on the work and fight for the rights of HP.

Júlio Renato Lancellotti [JRL]—There is no specific “why it started.” It is a construction of circumstances, of relationships that are established; it does not have a determining fact. I have always coexisted with marginalized groups marked by conflict. I’ve always orbited this area. I’ve never been to another area. That’s when this homeless situation started. So, it’s been 40 years on this path, right?

Interviewers—In our view, your path in religiosity is marked by political struggle. And, in this sense, you are moving in a direction contrary to a common strand of religiosity today, present in different faiths, which is that of moral condemnation, often associated with discrimination of different kinds: racism, sexism, aporophobia, ableism, gender discrimination, including transphobia and LGBTphobia, and several others. What guides you in another direction, which is so different from moral condemnation, in your life and in your religious practice?

JRL—This is a conflicting thing. Because I come from a generation of training in the 1980s. In this sense, there is a historical context. In 1980 the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero

happened. So, there are many things that mark... We always end up staying, due to the orientation, the study of theology itself and everything, in a difficult strand. It is never an easy path. It has always been very difficult. A path that, I remember even when I was studying theology, others who were more advanced disregarded what we did. Because at that time we worked a lot with the emerging class, which are the workers. You’re with the *lumpen*, with those who do not make the Revolution. These people, the most advanced, said that these people don’t make the Revolution, these people won’t make a difference, they can’t make a difference. Even in this sense, the whole study of theology was very important to me, in this view and everything, but always with a very marginalized group. I commented very quickly in today’s word, the child is the one who has the bread and the fish, which symbolizes the marginalized, the weak, the one who has no intervention. So, at that time I hung out a lot with Pastoral do Menor, with homeless children, with incarcerated young people, deprived of liberty, the work was focused on these people: they don’t count either to the left or to the right. The right hates them and the left treats them with disdain, because: what is the use of these people?

In theology, in my interpretation, I considered them as important subjects of history, but in the whole context in which I was, I remember even a colleague from the theology course, one day he said to me: “are you going to say that even the chicken that is killed is a martyr?” Because I was talking about the martyrdom of Joilson de Jesus⁴, which was very remarkable for us in our history. This also had a great impact on the left. Because, suddenly, it was an insignificant person who didn’t come from the emerging class, this was mentioned a lot, the *emerging class*, the subjects of revolution, of change. It seemed that the revolution was going to happen the next day. And the issue of intentionality was very evidenced, and we have no intentionality.

4 JRL refers to Joilson de Jesus, a homeless child who was brutally killed in 1983, it refers to Joilson de Jesus, a homeless child who was brutally killed in 1983, allegedly during an attempt to steal a necklace, allegedly while trying to steal a necklace. “He was a homeless child who was looked after by the Pastoral do Menor in the 80s. He sold holy cards on the steps of the Sé Cathedral, in downtown São Paulo. [...] Someone shouted ‘catch the thief’ [...]. He crossed the path of a federal prosecutor who, with a blow, killed him on the spot, in front of the Largo São Francisco Law School” (Lancellotti, 2021, p. 30).

History is complex, it is confusing, it is difficult, it is contradictory.

Interviewers—Maybe the contact was the connection with reality; this is the contact with reality...

JRL—But they [the most advanced] oversaw the workers, in the strikes. We supported all of this. But, for example, right in the Montoro government (1983-1987)⁵, as soon as Maluf's government ended (1979-1982)⁶, police repression continued very strongly at the beginning of Montoro's government [even though it was the first direct election for the position of governor after twenty years]. In the former FEBEM (State Foundation for the Welfare of Minors)⁷ it was very difficult as well. And we once took a walk with the homeless to meet the people who had occupied SINE, which was the National Employment Service. And the intervention of Dom Paulo was a terrible struggle, everything that happened in those moments.

Interviewers—Today we were watching you [at Mass], and you incorporate the voice of the oppressed, right?! It's no wonder we chose you to do this interview, right?! And during the sermon, [you can see that] it is inseparable, not partisan politics, but politics in the sense of what changes people's lives, right?! I kept thinking, as I listened to you, about the relation between religion and politics. And, on the other hand, there is the far-right movement, which is also a movement that prides itself on being religious, but it is a religiosity that talks a lot about death. Or, even if it doesn't talk about death, it's the death of those who are not considered people, right?! And then I kept thinking about this relation between religion and politics...

JRL—That's why I said at Mass, I don't know if at 7:30 a.m. or 10 a.m., that we are one person, history is only one history, there is no spiritual history, political history, personal life history. Many say

to me, no, but you have to think of your own life. Separate. There's only one life; you can't separate it.

Interviewers—In today's world, is it possible to separate politics and religion?

JRL—The right is increasingly blending them. Because they are moving towards a theocracy. This is very dangerous. You can see Rio de Janeiro. Why are evangelical militias now shutting down Catholic churches as well? First, it was the *terreiros*, then it seems that they left the *terreiros* alone, now they have started against the Catholic churches. The original thought of Christianity is revolutionary. The thought of Jesus Christ is an extremely revolutionary thought. You see the texts we read today, which state that we should feed the people. Jesus saw the people and asked what we are going to do to feed them. Jesus didn't ask if they prayed, if they were good people, if everyone was married properly. He didn't ask any of that.

Interviewers—Recognizing that you are an educator, we wanted to know what you have learned in your work with homeless people? What do they teach you? And what do you teach them?

JRL—I think the main thing we learn from them, which is painful too, is that they are neither angels nor demons. They are people, with all the contradictions that all people share. And the hardest thing is that they are what Paulo Freire says, those who do not go through a liberating education... The dream of the oppressed is to become the oppressor. So they multiply what they live. This work of coexistence, pedagogical and all, is quite challenging. Even Simone de Beauvoir, who said that the oppressors would not have so much power if they didn't have so many accomplices among the oppressed. A large portion of the homeless population is an accomplice of oppression. Not intentionally, because they are subject to the dominant ideology. For example, if in the bread line, one can take all the

5 André Franco Montoro was a Brazilian lawyer and politician. Among other positions, he was the 52nd governor of São Paulo, senator, federal deputy, and minister of Labor and Employment.

6 Paulo Salim Maluf is a Brazilian politician, engineer, and businessman. He was the governor of the state of São Paulo, in addition to being the mayor of São Paulo twice.

7 State Foundation for the Welfare of Minors (FEBEM), institutions that began to operate in 1976 in the state of São Paulo, operating from the perspective of repression and control of children and adolescents understood as "minors who are deleterious for society." FEBEM was also created under the guidance and financing of the National Policy for the Welfare of Minors, in 1964, launched during the Brazilian business-military dictatorship. Cf. Ferrarezi (1995).

bread for himself, he will take it. “Are you going to leave your brother without? It’s his problem, he’s stupid, he’ll have none.” Or you hand out warm clothes and the next day no one has them, because they go and sell everything at the thrift store to buy *cachaça*, so... I don’t know if I teach them anything, but coexistence is very challenging, conflictive, and difficult, because you are not dealing with a blank slate, nor are you dealing with people who are not affected by the dominant ideology. They watch the same television; they listen to the same songs. The media is the same, so they are also affected by ambition; if they can lie to have an advantage, they will do it. The street is a summary of everything that is experienced everywhere. There’s no use in canonizing it, saying that the poor will make the change. Do we see how many from the oppressed poor class are Bolsonaroists? Otherwise, Bolsonaro would never win any election, if the popular groups didn’t join him, but they do, right?!

Interviewers—Father, you spoke of Paulo Freire and Simone de Beauvoir. Is there anyone else who inspires you? In addition, obviously, to the Bible...

JRL—I really like Ivan Illich, now I even wrote the preface to his last book that came out, *In the Mirror of the Past*⁸, which was released this week. But I think that the one who most marked my way of seeing things is Father José Comblin⁹, who was a Belgian-Brazilian theologian and was expelled from Brazil during the military dictatorship, under the National Security Law. He was expelled from Chile and then died here in Brazil; he is buried in the Northeast, next to the grave of Father Ibiapina⁹. Father Comblin, it is striking that today even theology students know little of him. He was my teacher and friend. It is now 100 years since his birth. Several publications are coming out.

Interviewers—Do you read [Michel] Foucault?

JRL—Yes. And some people are horrified by him because of the issue of what they call “gender ideology,” which is nonsense. There is no gender ideology. All these issues are conflicting for me, because this issue of gender ideology, the issue of

LGBT groups and all this, as it was, for example, it is interesting, when the Statute of the Child and Adolescent was approved, we created Casa Vida. Because I thought, let’s give a coherent response to the statute, which is considered an unrealistic law, meant for those who are currently the most mistreated within the proposal of the statute. And then I went to visit the Sampaio Viana unit, where I had worked in 1968, and I saw children suffering from vertical transmission of HIV. They saw the world through a window... That moved me, because I went with two friends, Cecilia and Regina, who provoked me right at the beginning of the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. [...] Then when I saw the children with HIV, they didn’t see people’s faces because people wore masks to touch those children.

Interviewers—You have been the target of recurrent attacks from conservative groups, especially those in the far right. There have been several, but recently there has been persecution from sectors of the far right in the city council here in São Paulo against you and, more recently, we have Bill 445/2023, which intends to criminalize the distribution of food to homeless people. We wanted you to comment on the emergence of these attacks.

JRL—This issue regarding the São Paulo councilors and this bill, everything they try to do against me... The worst thing is that many people say that they haven’t stopped yet, “be careful because they will still come with more things!” I think the real estate market is behind all this. I am insisting with the city hall that there is a bomb that will explode and that I don’t know what the consequences will be due to real estate speculation. Today, real estate speculation governs São Paulo. I think that the same must be happening in Rio. But here it is voracious, violent.

Interviewers—And São Paulo has a master plan, right?

JRL—There is a master plan that favors real estate speculation, focused on real estate speculation. The discourse of the far right, because it has so much adherence, is one of the things that I no longer have time for due to my age, otherwise I would go deeper.

8 Cf.: Illich, Ivan. *No Espelho do Passado*: palestras e discursos 1978-1990. Prefácio por Júlio Lancellotti. São Paulo: n-1, 2024.

9 José Comblin (1923-2011) was one of the theologians of Liberation Theology and other theologies considered progressive. Father José Ibiapina (1806-1883) was one of the pioneers in the fight for the poor and worked with rural communities in the northeastern hinterlands.

I think it has a lot to do with genetic epistemology. [Jean] Piaget defines the three stages of development as: preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational, complex thinking. And Lauro de Oliveira Lima, who is one of the greatest applicators of Piaget in Brazil, says that most of the Brazilian people do not go beyond the second level, which is the concrete. So: if it's red, it's communist; if it's green, it's Palmeiras. That is concrete thought. You see, yesterday, regarding the matter of the opening of the Olympics, the right took that photo of that DJ painting that was on the runway with the drag queens and such and said that it was the Holy Supper. It isn't. Even today, Forum Magazine clarified which work they based it off of. It's another work, it has nothing to do with it. What if it's Leonardo da Vinci's Holy Supper? Leonardo da Vinci was an atheist, that painting was considered a scandal, he included his boyfriend in it, Salai, and everyone thinks it's Mary Magdalene. So, at the time, Leonardo da Vinci was retaliated against by the fundamentalists. So, I think that this tension always exists. St. Thomas Aquinas was attacked by the fundamentalists. Leonardo da Vinci was attacked by the fundamentalists of the time.

Interviewers—Just as Paulo Freire himself still continues to be attacked today...

JRL—...Yes, there are many studies already today on the issue of adherence to the discourse of the far right; this is what affects me coming from these people, there is a fundamental tactic, they do not discuss the issue, they disqualify the interlocutor. So, all they seek to do to me is to disqualify me. They don't discuss the issue we are dealing with, they don't. No, you are this, you are that. And with social media today, everything is very instantaneous. On my Instagram [...] there are certain times that it seems like it's an organized machine because dozens of things come to insult me at all levels. It's a flood. [The issue of the far right] is an international articulation. [On the opening of the Olympics], the French bishops made a manifestation of repudiation,

desecration! But they didn't make a demonstration of repudiation regarding the "cleansing" they did in Paris, [about] uprooting immigrants and the homeless population. Then the French bishops did not manifest themselves. And the archbishop of São Paulo requested that today at Masses everyone make an atonement due to the desecration. There was no profanation at all! They didn't even refer to Leonardo da Vinci's painting. And Leonardo da Vinci's painting was once a desecration itself.

Interviewers—What does the population of the city of São Paulo need to debate regarding healthcare?

JRL—I think that people clearly perceive that they are underserved in healthcare in the city of São Paulo. And this is clear, if you ask anyone today, everyone thinks it's important to have the SUS, but the vast majority... I have a doctor friend here in the parish. He was in a UBS (Basic Health Unit) with one of the OSC (Civil Society Organization)¹⁰, which is terrible here in São Paulo. He was fired because he served well. Because all the patients arrived at the UBS and said they wanted to be seen by Dr. Lucas¹¹. And then they went to see the patient quota, which was 800 and Lucas reached 500. They fired him. He didn't achieve the quota. Now he has gone to another OSC, a Catholic one, where he does "empirical medicine"¹². You cannot ask for an exam. He already knows he can't ask for an urine test, he can't ask for a blood test, he can't ask for an endoscopy, he can't ask for anything. It is empirical war medicine. "My arm hurts." (gestures to write a prescription quickly) "Next!" It just treats the symptoms.

Interviewers: What about the bond, the word, the conversation, the listening...?

JRL—Dr. Lucas at the UBS knew the names of the patients. He's a general practitioner. [Now] He's working as a gynecologist, pediatrician, everything. He has to do everything and see to everything in a hurry [to reach the patient quota]. And he has relatives who study and depend on him. And his partner is also studying. He has to help maintain his

¹⁰ Social Health Organization, which is linked to the current wave of privatization in the health sector, as pointed out by Turino et al. (2022).

¹¹ Alias. We have subtracted some details in order to preserve the aforementioned physician's identity.

¹² Ironic term used by JRL. Here, the interviewee criticizes aspects of neoliberal managerialism within the health sector, addressed in the academic literature by Castiel, Moraes and Xavier (2016), Amato and Moraes (2023) and Orrillo and Figueiredo (2024), for example.

house and his partner... So, he cannot be unemployed. It's the destruction of the human being, right?!

Interviewers—Specifically regarding health conditions, homeless people and also domiciled people, what's your opinion on it? And also in the formulation of public policies, what are the possible paths for historical reparation for homeless people?

JRL—It's a big challenge. We have the Street Clinics, which are a great advance. There will even be a meeting now in Brasília, regarding the street clinics; they want me to go to the opening. I'm considering whether I'm going, if not, how am I going to do it, because I can't leave my team and come back on the same day... But I have a problem with the very concept of public policy, because the very concept of public policy is one of control. The origin of public policy is one of a police state of control. In the neoliberal state, there is no public policy that makes historical reparation. Because the neoliberal state isn't going to do that. Not even the entities that call themselves Catholic and such... [They] are doing empirical medicine. So, what is public policy in the neoliberal state? It's maintenance.

In the dialogue with health, health is not seen as a whole. So, for example, the mental suffering of the homeless population is not considered. There's not even a mental health aspect in street clinics. And the issue of mental health is not mental illness, it's mental suffering. The suffering of impossibility, of continued frustration, of the non-personalization of the person.

It's interesting, in today's word, when it says "crowd," Jesus says "people." John's writing is very interesting, they are very elaborate texts. So, Jesus saw the crowd, but he tells the people to sit down, not the crowd. He talks to people; he doesn't talk to the crowd. He looks at the crowd, but he sees people. And he asks them to sit down. It is a countercultural gesture, because only the free ate seated. The slaves, the servants, the people ate standing up. And he asks everyone to sit back. They didn't eat seated, but they leaned back. Imagine five thousand men reclining. Just to serve all these people, how long would it take? So, it's a symbolism of being concise but saying much, and how from the little you can satiate everyone.

And then I think we would have to deepen the discussion with someone who is a philosopher, a scholar of things, what is the concept of health of the World Health Organization (WHO) and what is the concept of neoliberal health. And if the concept of health as defined by WHO is not neoliberal either. Because it may be that their concept is neoliberal as well. I think it's neoliberal. You see in the pandemic the way the World Health Organization itself dealt with Africa. And the vaccines and everything! Why did the United States have so many vaccines? Was it just because of economic power? Or were there ideological interests at play as well? Regarding the patent issue and all that. What was the level of pressure that they (WHO) also suffered? From laboratories and this type of things.

Interviewers—We saw the workings of neoliberalism itself.

JRL—You can't just talk about the pandemic; you have to talk about the pandemic under neoliberalism. What is the pandemic under neoliberalism? What were pandemics in the Middle Ages? Did they affect royalty? No one had a yacht to stay on the yacht.

Interviewers—Oh, in that time doctors didn't really know what it was...

JRL—They thought they were all going to die quickly. There was no medication, there was no cocktail. They started using AZT, they took high doses of medication... Then I proposed something a little crazy: making a house, according to what the statute provided, that was closer to a family home for children with HIV/AIDS. The neighborhood sued me, I ended up in court...

Interviewers—The persecution isn't new...

JRL—They set the house on fire twice: twice on the same Sunday. The second time I was going to start Mass and I told the people, the Mass will consist of going there to help clean the houses, bathe the children, help them [after the fire]. And in the first six months one child died per month, all babies. The older ones were called long-[term]-survivors. They survived for a long time. That's when the medications came in, but several still died without medication. What I experienced at that time, what I went through... What I experienced at that time is too much. I had to bury everyone who died. The death

certificate of all of them was made by me. And I had to go there to dress those children...

One day a bishop said to me, "Why do they have to be your children?" I said, look, I never asked them to call me dad. They give me that title. I think that if you come here, change them when they have diarrhea, bathe them; hold their little hand when they have a fever; hold their hand so they don't suffer when they have to take intravenous medication. Stay in the emergency room, with them on your lap all night... If you do all this, have their vomit all over you, they will start calling you dad too. Just you do that, they'll call you dad too! [...] Because I have an immense love for them, and they are laborious, because there was a time when the health surveillance was watching me closely, and there had to be I don't know how many tiles, there had to be this sink, that sink and... It was a terrible strain. Dom Paulo gave me a lot of support. He just said to me, "you're going to suffer a lot."

Because Dom Paulo, as soon as the severe AIDS situation in Brazil began, immediately ordered the care of AIDS patients. And a Black priest was stricken with AIDS and he said, "pray publicly for Father Batista." Pray publicly for Father Batista! Then one day the journalists were there at Casa Vida and said to me, Father Júlio, can you explain why are there priests with AIDS?

I said, "Don't you know?"

"Are you going to talk?" I said, gee... "And are you going to say why are there priests with AIDS?" They turned on all [those devices], "and why is there a priest with AIDS?" I said because priests are not immune to HIV. Is there any class, any profession that is immune to HIV? A lawyer is not immune to HIV, a judge is not immune to HIV, a priest is not immune to HIV. That's why there are priests with HIV, there are priests with cancer, there are alcoholic priests, there are neurotic priests, there are psychotic priests... There are priests that have cancer, leukemia, schizophrenia. Because he is a priest, is he immune to any disease? I think you're the ones who are moralizing, discriminating, and trying to say one has it, the other does not have it.

Interviewers—How do you see this division that Brazilian society has today, not in terms of politics, but, for example, on the issue of abortion? How do you see abortion?

JRL—I don't know anyone who is in favor of abortion. Nor any woman who is in favor of abortion, "in theory, I am in favor of abortion." No bill has been made to legalize abortion. There was, however, one bill intended to criminalize raped girls who had abortions, and there is already a law that enables abortion in cases of rape. So, I think it's such a delicate issue, it's so difficult, [because] you hold to a principle, we will always be in favor of life. I don't know anyone who says, I'm in favor of abortion, "free abortion!" Abortion happens. More accessible than it already is? So, this bill is a moralistic, criminalizing, misogynistic bill, with all these issues.

I think that so far, all the issues concerning abortion have not been discussed in depth, theologically and religiously. As I say, no one is "for" abortion. No one says "yes, abortion!" I believe that we have to consider religious situations, moral situations, rape situations. It's difficult for a celibate man to know what rape is. Unless he's a rapist.

Then come those things: kill the rapist, castrate the rapist. And many times, when I say this in the community the women are very silent. I say that the largest number of raped women I know are married and raped by their husbands. I hear how many women say, "Father, my husband forces me to do things I don't want to do." I say, then why do you do it? "Oh, because otherwise he says he'll get someone who will do it."

So, what is this? What is rape culture? Is the woman always passive?! She has to accept everything to keep the marriage, her husband, even the ones that are silent when her partner is having a relationship with her daughter. The woman still says to her daughter: "don't say anything, otherwise your father will leave." All of this is very complex. But criminalizing [abortion] is a different issue.

Interviewers—What would be your message to the youth?

JRL—The difficult thing is to know which youth we are talking about. Because there isn't just one youth. There is Black youth, there is LGBT youth, there is... I think we retired social classes as if they no longer existed. So, if you talk about class struggle, you are the one who is inventing it, because you are a communist. Because there's no class struggle. Everything is beautiful.

I comment a lot on the real estate speculation that we're experiencing here in the parish, and I spoke about it today at Mass. Who remembers, I don't know how many memories you have of this, grandma's kitchen, which was huge, for the ones that have Italian or Portuguese ancestry there were those huge tables, huge kitchens, where everyone went to eat pasta at grandma's house on Sunday. Now you live in a studio, you can't even fit in the kitchen.

Interviewers—Life became smaller...

JRL—This studio generation will no longer know what family reunions are. The kitchen was the place where you stayed for how many hours on Sunday? Here in São Paulo, there are still some places that have houses, but it is disappearing. So, when we talk about young people, what young people are we talking about? Because there isn't one youth, there are many. The bourgeois youth, the elite youth, the Black youth, the popular youth. And there is no single message for all of them.

Interviewers: How do you see this movement that people call identitarianism? Because it seems that at some point it was important even to talk about, for example, the extermination of the Black population, to say that the youth is dying, that young Black men from urban peripheries are dying, right? So, how do you see this issue, which remains tense, identitarianism and class struggle?!

JRL—Class struggle is real. [...] These struggles are correlated, joint together, but the movements themselves are very sectioned. For example, in the LGBT parade here in São Paulo, the *travestis* follow the trio collecting cans, they are never on top of it. They... it's identity, they're all from the LGBT community group.

Who is part of the LGBT community? Because the *travestis* who are injecting liquid silicone, which is leaking to their feet, are there collecting cans at the end of the parade and getting beaten by the police. And the magnificent ones up ahead... A samba school one day invited me, they wanted me to go up in a trio car, so I said, "I can't go in a car like that, it's going to be a mess here." Then he said, "at least come to see the start of the parade."

I went to see the start of the samba school parade. Then, the naked beautiful bodies go on the top, while the ugly, Black, poor bodies go below, pushing the

car. Then they said to me, "but what's catching your attention?" I said, the ones who are pushing the car below are all sad, the ones up there are all happy, they are all beautiful, muscular, sculpted, desired, dressed, courted, and the others are dirty, sweaty, torn, hungry, underpaid and pushing the car. And no one looks at them. I said, "what do you do with this group?"

It's like [Gabriel] Chalita, a writer and friend, in many moments. When he was Secretary of Education [of São Paulo], he called me up there and said, "oh, everyone loves me here at the Department of Education, because I do this, I do that, right?" I said, "that's good, right?" Then he said, "because the best students get a computer course, a language course, because the best ones go on a trip." I said, "and the worst, what do they do with them?" He said, "I don't think I'd ever thought of that."

You only think about the best. What about the worst? What about those who don't learn? Who don't do well? What do you do with them? There is no program for the worst. I hope that the homeless population can help us to see their human dimension. They also have feelings, they feel anger, they also curse, they also say nice things, like everyone else. They are ironic, there is everything.

Interviewers—Just one last question. You also became very well known because of your fight against hostile architecture, right?! So much so that Law 14.489/2022 was named after you. How do you evaluate the implementation of this Law by the State?

JRL—The veto was overturned in that specific context. Because the law was approved in a government transition package, with interests characteristic of a government transition context. Bolsonaro vetoed it, even more because it had my name on it, he even cursed at me! Congress overturned the veto in two days. Because of the context we were in, he had to approve it. At another time, it wouldn't have been possible. It was that historic moment. Let's say it was necessity and chance. At another time it couldn't have happened. Because Bolsonaro vetoed it, and the veto was overturned and he approved it, and he was the one who enacted the law.

Interviewers—But do you think the law is having an effect in São Paulo?

JRL—No, it isn't. It's a legal framework that can be used, but it has not yet been digested, it is not enough to be put into law. Because aporophobia, hatred of the poor, is very common.

Interviewers—Thank you very much!

Photograph 4—The panel “Those who sleep hungry do not dream” decorates the entrance to Sacolão Irmão Pedro Bittencourt, in partnership with Father Júlio Lancellotti and the Movement of Landless Rural Workers



Source: own collection (2024).

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