

2014

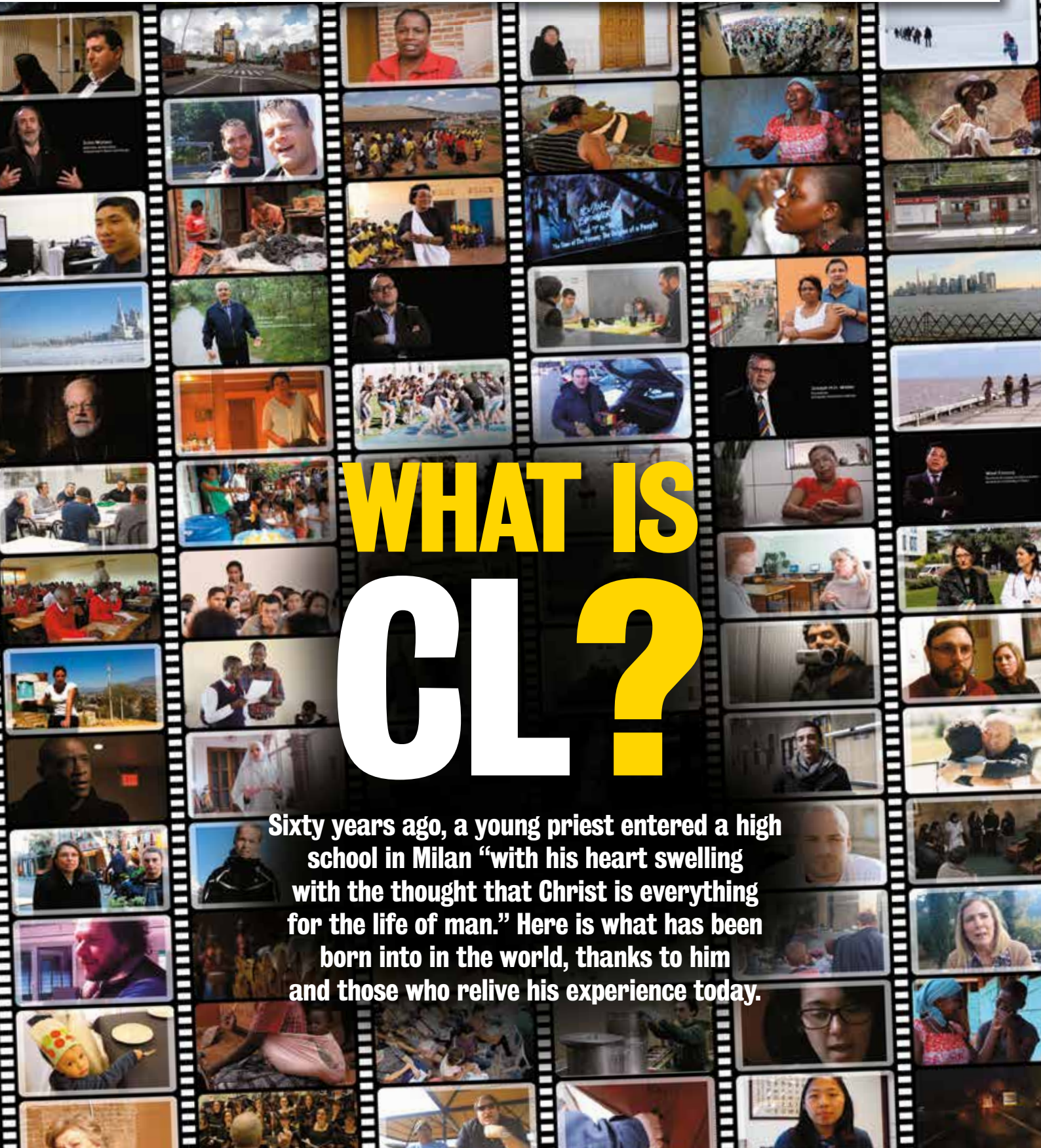
COMMUNION AND LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

TRACES

9

VOL. 16

LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



WHAT IS CL?

Sixty years ago, a young priest entered a high school in Milan “with his heart swelling with the thought that Christ is everything for the life of man.” Here is what has been born into in the world, thanks to him and those who relive his experience today.

PAGE ONE

I AM NOTHING WHEN YOU ARE NOT PRESENT

Notes from the talks by Davide Prospero and Julián Carrón
at the Beginning Day for adults and university students of CL
Milan (Italy), September 27, 2014



Communion and Liberation
International Magazine - Vol. 16

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Graphic Design: G&C, Milano
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Photo:

GettImages: 4-5, 8-9, 10-12, 13-28; Corbis: 6-7;
Shutterstock: 22/26, 28/31; D.Curatolo: 30-32.

Publishers (editore):

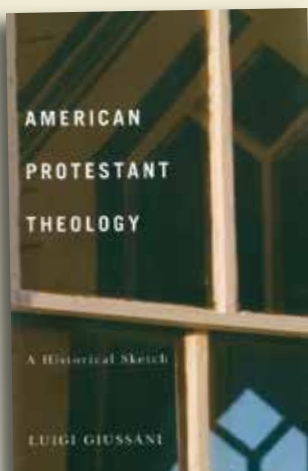
Società Coop. Edit. Nuovo Mondo
Via Porpora, 127 - 20131 Milano
Reg. Tribunale di Milano n°. 740
- 28 ottobre 1998

Iscrizione nel Registro degli Operatori
di Comunicazione n. 6.147

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the texts by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

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LUIGI GIUSSANI



276 pages - format 6 x 9 inches
ISBN-10: 0773541977

In **American Protestant Theology**, Luigi Giussani traces the history of the most meaningful theological expressions and the cultural significance of American Protestantism, from its origins in seventeenth-century Puritanism to the 1950s.

Giussani clarifies and assesses elements of Protestantism such as the democratic approach to Church-State relations, "The Great Awakening," Calvinism and Trinitarianism, and liberalism. His rich references and analytical descriptions reconstruct an overview of the development of a religion that has great importance in

the context of spiritual life and American culture. He also displays full respect for the religious depth from which Protestantism was born and where it can reach, and expresses great admiration for its most prominent thinkers and spiritual leaders, including Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich.

Further testament to Giussani's clear-minded and comprehensive knowledge of Christianity, *American Protestant Theology* makes the work of a master theologian available in English for the first time.

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS


THE FIRST STEPS AND THE ROAD

It was October 1954. A young Italian priest—having just left behind a promising career as a theologian at the seminary in Venegono—climbed the stairs of a high school in an affluent neighborhood of Milan. He entered with “his heart swelling with the thought that Christ is everything for the life of man, that He is the heart of life for all men.” He was animated by the desire “to be able to help young people rediscover the terms of an authentic faith.”

The priest was Fr. Luigi Giussani, and those stairs were in some way the first steps of the movement that would have its beginning in the classrooms of that school. It all started with a group of students who were fascinated by the challenge he had placed in front of them the very first hour of class: “I’m not here so that you can take my ideas as your own; I’m here to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you. And what I have to tell you is the result of a long experience, of a past that is two thousand years old.” A method, or we could call it a road, that leads one to discover the “relevance of faith for the needs of life,” because faith either helps us to live or it’s useless.

Sixty years have passed, and in February we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of Fr. Giussani’s death. This double anniversary was the inspiration for the video that is now available in English. The anniversary was the inspiration, but the video has a wider horizon. It is not meant to be a celebration of something in the past, and even less is it intended to be self-congratulatory. It is the product of our awe and gratitude for something present here and now, which does not belong to us but to God. For this reason, we are the first to be surprised and fascinated as we watch the images, faces, and events flash across the screen, even of those already so familiar to us.

What is CL? Many of our readers, especially those who have been in the Movement for many years, have their own definition; that’s unavoidable. Others, perhaps those who are reading this magazine for the first time, may not have a ready answer. The video reflects this reality well. Cutting back and forth between images of faraway lands—from the steppes of Kazakhstan to the skyscrapers of New York; from the Ugandan slums to the superhighways of Taiwan—the film makes clear what Fr. Giussani meant when he said, “In a society like this, we cannot create something new, except by living life.” It demonstrates why we cannot equate the Movement with good works, political action, or initiatives that we organize. It’s a *life*; it’s a road. A *beautiful* road, specifically, because we can travel it alongside Christ who is present here and now, as we will read on “Page One” of this edition of the e-magazine.

This is the contribution that we, with all of our limitations and poverty, offer to the world. We offer it filled with the desire to walk the road together. 

“DON’T LOSE THE FRESHNESS OF THAT FIRST ENCOUNTER”

We arrive in Rome on Wednesday evening. We’ve just come back from the leaders’ assembly in La Thuile, and can’t stop thinking about the beauty of the gathering: the testimonies, the tender companionship of Carrón, and the intense friendship among us. We eagerly look forward to tomorrow, when we will see Pope Francis and participate in the 7 a.m. Mass at St. Martha’s. We talk with our family and friends and hold each of them in our hearts, because we are here thanks to the history that precedes us. The alarm goes off. We jump out of bed and get ready for the big event, reciting the *Angelus* before we leave. When we get to the chapel the pope is already there. He speaks with assurance, strengthened by the loving encounter between his sins and the blood of Christ. In fact, it seems that he takes our sins upon himself together with his own, like a true friend. During the homily, he tells us that we have life when our sins, the concrete ones that can be named and listed, encounter the blood of Christ; while in those communities where this encounter has never taken place or has been forgotten there simply is no life. After the Mass, the pope comes back into the chapel and sits down next to us. We all pray together in silence. On our way out, Francis is waiting to greet each of us personally. In front of us is a girl from Argentina who has been healed of quadriplegia. She has recounted her experience in a book and has come to give a copy to Francis, because she saw that he was “very sad, and I wanted to cheer you up.” The pope takes the book and blesses her with a caress. We go up to



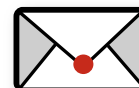
him, greeting the pope one by one: “We are members of the movement of Communion and Liberation in Argentina, and we are in Italy to take part in an international meeting of the leaders. We are grateful to you for the great help that you give us in putting the essence of Christianity, and not its externals, at the center.” The pope immediately points out what he considers to be a central value of our charism: “Be careful, don’t lose the freshness of that first encounter; when this is lost it becomes all about the externals. Divisions begin, the infighting is unleashed, and someone ends up founding another movement. Don’t lose the freshness.” We tell him that in Argentina, with the intention of following the emphasis with which he is promoting cultural ties, we are organizing an exhibition on the bicentennial of Latin American independence. This has given rise to a series of powerful encounters. Francis, nodding, tells us again: “Keep going, don’t lose the freshness.” We listen to his words attentively, then say goodbye to him with

the affection of one who is aware that the man standing before him has been chosen by God to preside over the Church, in love. Then we go, in silence, seeking to impress upon our minds and hearts the words that he has just spoken.

Fernando, Argentina

“GOD DOESN’T LOOK AT YOU THROUGH A TELESCOPE”

Dear Fr. Julián: I am a psychologist who, along with two others, works as a consultant for nonprofit businesses and organizations. I belong to the Movement together with one of these colleagues, but the other one does not come from this experience. Recently I was asked to take part in an AVSI initiative in Albania, for the development of local teams. Unfortunately, I was unable to participate, so I asked my coworker from the movement, but he couldn’t do it, either. So with a bit of trepidation I asked our other coworker if she were available. The trepidation was certainly not grounded in concerns over her competence; I was instead a bit worried about her personal experience, afraid that she might overlook some of the characteristic elements of the work of AVSI, which stem from our history and the charism of the Movement. With the intention of helping her, I did a lot of work on the project of our presentation, knowing that afterward everything could change on the spot: in order to do our work well, we have to follow what happens rather than our own ideas. In the end this coworker of ours departed and made the presentation to the great satisfaction of herself and the participants. Afterward, we met back at the office



and she wanted to tell me what had happened. One of the topics our team decided to address was a talk you had given on the theme of the “gaze” that generates development. We had decided to send the text to the participants beforehand so that an assembly could be conducted with them. During the workshop my coworker found herself having to prepare this assembly with some of the leaders of the NGO. In Italy I had reassured her, telling her not to worry about Carrón’s text, which would certainly be “interpreted” by someone else. When push came to shove, however, the one who actually had to work on the text was none other than this coworker. She had taken it seriously, so much so that she had completed a whole work of analysis using some of the themes that she had examined in her university thesis. In discussions just before the assembly she had said that the question of the gaze is important: in order to be able to work together, we have to look at each other. But one of the leaders told her that “here Carrón means another Gaze...” She thought about it for a moment and then replied: “But wait, do you think that God looks at you through a telescope? God’s gaze is in the eyes of those who are around you and are working with you.” There was silence, then someone else said, “But didn’t you say you don’t belong to CL? And in ten minutes you have become a teacher of the School of Community!” Then she said to me, “And I don’t even know what the School of Community is!” We are so often ideological; think of how much more we can accomplish with a simple yet serious attitude and an engagement with our humanity.

Stefano, Milano (Italy)



THE RIMINI MEETING AND THE BOSS’S RESIGNATION

In the run-up to this year’s Meeting at Rimini I read a few newspaper articles predicting it would be a minor league gathering, since the prime minister, various other ministers, etc., would not be attending. I have to admit that at first my reactions were identical to those of the articles, as if to say: “They could have paid more attention to the invitations. What can this matter now?” And yet I was stunned by what happened that week. Working as a facilitator, I accompanied the guests around the displays, the exhibits, and the seminars, and I was struck by the fact that, although there were no big names from politics or the media on the stage, there were the “unknowns” in the eyes of the world, all of them united by one thing: they were simple people certain that they had found the fullness of life in Christ. “But this is exactly what I wanted,” I kept saying to myself. The next week I went back to work. An important manager of the

company had left the firm, and chaos had erupted. I was amazed to see in the reactions of my coworkers just how much power and influence one person can actually have. I saw faces paralyzed by the fear of losing that power, or anxious about how to gain it and climb up the ladder of the changing hierarchy, or talking about which coalition was best to join. There was so much tension; people almost didn’t greet each other in the hallways. Everyone was on high alert. All of this made me ask: “But I don’t want to become like that, do I? What am I made of? To what team do I belong? To Whom do I belong?” It wasn’t a theoretical response, but an overflowing of gratitude for the real impact that I had felt at the Meeting—that “power of Christ” so fascinating and fulfilling to my heart. Because I am seeing that even I am attracted to worldly power, be it in the workplace or in dealing with little everyday things. I am not exempt from what is happening to my coworkers. The point, however, is not in pretending that it doesn’t interest me, but in allowing my heart to experience a greater and more loving attraction—the impact of Christ on my everyday life. Only this really allows me to be myself. A while ago you had read to us that passage by Giussani that is really on my mind these days: “Let’s remember that in everyday life either we serve any Power or an Other with a capital ‘O,’ either Power or the Mystery that passes through our hands.” Some of my coworkers have asked me why I’m not anxious like them but instead work contently; this has led to unexpected and interesting conversations and relationships.

Name withheld

CLOSE-UP

Kidnappings, decapitations, Christians fleeing for refuge, bombings in effort to limit the horrors of the Islamic State, and the Pope who prays for the violence to stop. But what is the Holy See asking of the international community? Archbishop **SILVANO MARIA TOMASI, the Permanent Observer to the United Nations in Geneva, explains what is really important for the Church, while the world is on the brink of a worldwide conflict being “fought piecemeal.”**

BY LUCA FIORE



WAR & PEACE



The images of the American F/A-18s taking off from the aircraft carriers alternate with those of the rubble of targets in eastern Syria and northern Iraq. While the exodus of the refugees put to flight by the Islamic State continues, the international community is seeking to stop the advance of the fundamentalists with bombings. Is this the right way? Are they repeating errors of the past? “War is always madness,” Pope Francis has repeated. He was referring to the Christians killed in Iraq, the decapitations in Syria, the church bombings in Nigeria, and also the violence in Palestine, Libya, Congo and Central Africa, the Russian tanks in Ukraine—war *also* against Christians. The pope is calling for an end to the violence, even by force if necessary. But he also knows that intervening in the wrong way could make things worse instead of resolving them. So what should be done? *In practice*, what is the Church asking of the international community? When it talks about intervention, what does it really mean? Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, is the voice of the pope in one of the most important diplomatic posts on the world stage. He knows the opportunities and limitations of the international organizations and he exerts his energy everyday so that the Church’s message may reach the great powers of the earth.

The pope has spoken of a “third world war fought piecemeal.” Is this only a slogan? What does he have in mind when he uses this expression?

Pope Francis is expressing a well-founded concern. Today there are many flashpoints of war all over the world. The new development is that often these are not fought by regular armies, but by groups that are nevertheless capable of claiming thousands

of victims. The great powers are not involved in a direct way, but are interested in what is happening and are acting in a silent manner. It is not the classic world war, but just as before the world is dominated by the struggle for power, by the use of weapons and by bloodthirsty ideologies. The human person and peace are of no interest, and are sacrificed without hesitation. The risk that the fires may spread and erupt into larger conflicts is real.



H.E. Archbishop
Silvano M. Tomasi.

In Redipuglia the Pope said “war is always madness.”

History shows that violence does not lead to any positive result, and in the long run generates more violence. We Christians support the way of love, of dialogue, and of peace.

But this ideal comes up against the reality of evil. John Paul II spoke of “structural sins”: these are behaviors that in themselves conflict with the fundamental principles of Christian ethics and the natural law. This is evidence that the message of the Gospel is not being heard. It is a decision of personal freedom. But this leads to the tragedies that we have before our eyes.

Right now what is the Holy See concerned about with the situation in Syria and Iraq?

The so-called Islamic State, ISIS, is acting in a completely unacceptable manner: genocide, violation of the right to life, of freedom of conscience, of freedom of religion, of personal integrity. We’re talking about women being sold for 150 dollars, people who won’t convert to Sunni Islam having their throats slit... Pope Francis is asking that the unjust aggressor be stopped. When a state is not capable of protecting its own citizens, the international community has the duty to intervene with the tools it has avail-

Pope is asking that the unjust aggressor be stopped. But the use of force is not synonymous with war.



Captions. The President of the United States, Barack Obama (top), with his primary ally, English Prime Minister David Cameron, who obtained approval from Parliament for air raids on Syria and Iraq.

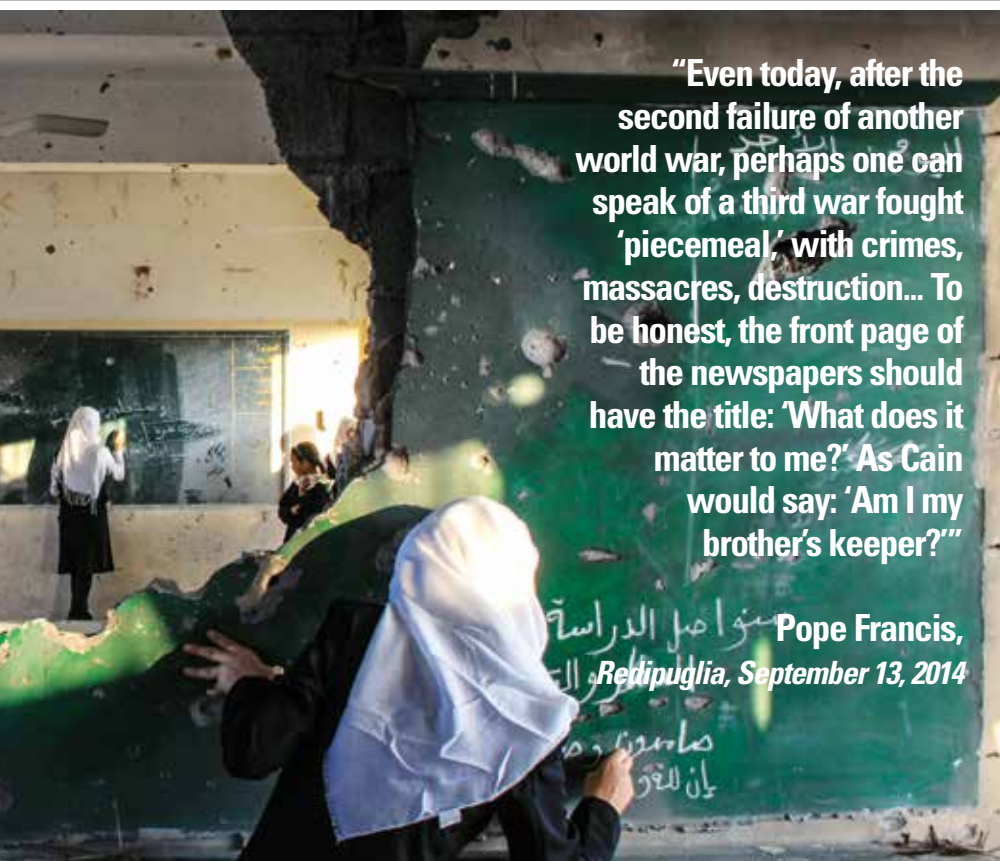
able: the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations.

Is war one of these tools?

The use of force is not synonymous with war. Effective action is necessary. It is like a policeman in a tough neighborhood: he’s not declaring war on the population, but protecting the residents. This is what we are asking for: that the violence that is taking place be stopped.

Are the American aerial attacks going in the right direction?

The correct way for the international community is that of dialogue, of encounter with the other, of negotiation. But an emergency situation has developed that is extremely complex and marked by incredible violence. ISIS is a threat to neighboring countries and to the world. In order to stop this unjust aggressor the use of force seems indispensable. Various experts are asking if the aerial attacks are sufficient or if action on the ground is also required.



“Even today, after the second failure of another world war, perhaps one can speak of a third war fought ‘piecemeal,’ with crimes, massacres, destruction... To be honest, the front page of the newspapers should have the title: ‘What does it matter to me?’ As Cain would say: ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’”

Pope Francis, Redipuglia, September 13, 2014

invited the Catholic and Orthodox patriarchs of Syria and Iraq here to Geneva so they could tell us about what is happening on the ground. The Holy See is a sort of voice of conscience that says: look, the situation is difficult and complicated you *have to* do something.

Why this insistence on the involvement of the United Nations?

Because it guarantees a juridical objectivity of the action by the international community. It is the way to ensure that the common good prevails over party interests. The machinery of the UN is chaotic, slow. But it is the place of encounter for all, and therefore the right place to agree upon an action in the interest of all. The aim is truly to safeguard what we have in common. And as human beings what we have in common are fundamental rights, which are characteristic of and intrinsic to the person.

The experiences of Rwanda and Bosnia teach us that the UN does not always arrive in time to disarm those who want to kill. Is it always worthwhile to follow this path?

The difficulties of the functioning of the UN are objective and connected to the quantity of interests in play. But, with a unilateral intervention, there is the risk of causing more harm than the good that could be achieved on paper.

The Church is concerned about the situation of Christians who are often persecuted precisely because they are Christian. But at the same time it does not maintain that a clash of religions is underway. What is going on?

Today within the so-called caliphate, Christians have no choice: either they convert or, under the best circumstances, they are forced to pay a tax and live >>>

An intervention that did not involve Muslim countries would be perceived as an act of aggression.

The American intervention does not have UN approval, even if Washington insists on the fact that America is not acting alone.

The coalition currently involved in the military campaign against the Caliphate could constitute an accepted approach, since it includes majority Muslim countries. Together with Western nations, these countries of the Middle East in some way represent the members of the UN. An intervention that did not involve Muslim countries would be perceived as an act of aggression or, worse, as a war of religion.

But a few of the Arab countries involved financed ISIS, at least until a short time ago.

At this moment, in the Middle East one finds many contradictions. There are interests that go beyond the countries directly touched by the violence. If it were possible to do something together for the common good, this would already be a step forward...

Last year the vigil of prayer for peace contributed to stopping the American raids. Back then as well these were being proposed in the name of “human-

itarian intervention.” What has changed?

The adversary has changed, which is no longer a member state of the UN, but terrorist groups that have taken control of the territory on which they are acting with unprecedented cruelty. The duty to protect communities undergoing such tragedies is clear. And it is a sign of solidarity with the persons that the governments of Iraq and Syria are no longer capable of protecting.

What else can the United Nations do?

The international community can issue sanctions and block the weapons trade and the sale of oil under the table. And it could bring many of the crimes up for charges at the International Criminal Court in Rome.

But does the Holy See have a solution of its own to propose?

It is not up to us to specify the technical details of the intervention. We are seeking to sensitize the international institutions. In September, for example, we

» as second-class citizens. In the worst case, they are decapitated. They are persecuted precisely because they are Christian. But it is not only Christians that are under fire. The equating of the religious and civil dimension in Muslim countries eliminates pluralism and does not guarantee freedom for all. This is why Christian leaders, from Syria to Afghanistan, passing through Iraq and Pakistan, insist on the concept of *citizenship*. It is to the citizen that equal rights must be guaranteed. It is a different way of conceiving of society. It is not a new phenomenon, and it is no coincidence that in countries like Syria or Turkey, Christians, who a century ago were at 50 and 20 percent, today have been reduced to next to zero. They are such a small community that they are considered insignificant thus they have no political weight in order to make them useful to the great powers. And it is because of this they are easily forgotten.

The references to peace made by so many popes over the past century have been as farsighted as they have been unheeded. There is a strong component of realism in this “voice of conscience.” It is not only a matter of good intentions. Is this the case?

The voice of the popes calling for peace and showing all its advantages sometimes seemed to echo in the desert. Economic and ideological interests prevail too often over the demands of the common good. But it is not useless for the pope to ask and bear witness to the way of peace. It is an appeal to the heart of man to encourage him to start over again to pursue that peace with which everything is gained, while with war everything is lost. This is not only a matter of an ideal inspiration, but also an accompaniment of the efforts of the international community, so that hope may remain alive and that none may tire of seeking peace. The Prince of Peace, apparently, was defeated on the cross. Today history continues to be made even through apparent failures. **T**



“A ‘JUST WAR’ BEGINS WHEN WE TRY TO AVOID IT”

According to Gerard Powers (Notre Dame) the debate about war in the western world, even among Catholics, is vitiated by a lack of realism...

BY MATTIA FERRARESI

It seems that the discussion about the Church’s tradition of a ‘just war,’ a concept we sometimes misuse, only takes place when a conflict is imminent.” This comment by Gerard Powers, Professor of Catholic Peace Building at the Kroc Institute of the University of Notre Dame would seem very appropriate in a country that remains uncertain about the wisdom of another intervention in the Middle East but has now begun air strikes against ISIS. It is not an obvious choice, if we keep in mind the close connection between war and peace. A war does not break out instantaneously; the conditions that generate it come together over time. It feeds on the conditions on the ground. It proliferates and protects the sparks

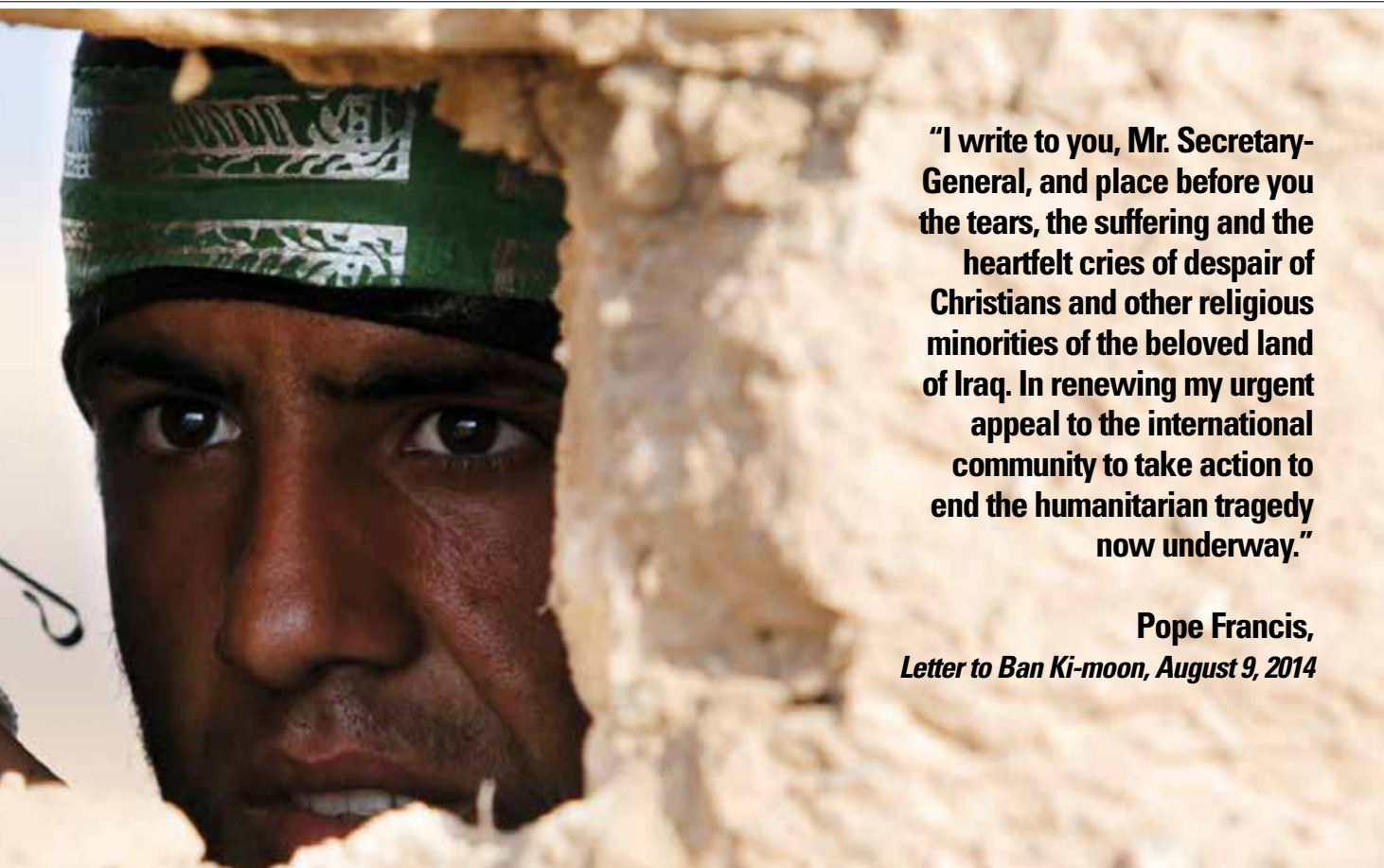
that one day could explode in a giant blast.

Prof. Powers helps order the paradoxical problem of a “just war” doctrine in a time of peace: “In times of peace, we should be asking ourselves what we are doing to address the conditions that lead to war. This proactive outlook is part of the concept of a just war. In the West there is the tendency not to deal decisively with the conditions which run the risk of creating a conflict and when it



Gerard Powers.

happens, everybody then cites this or that reason to justify an intervention. Moreover, the decision to invade a country cannot logically be made without a clear and reasonable understanding of the conditions to be faced the day after



"I write to you, Mr. Secretary-General, and place before you the tears, the suffering and the heartfelt cries of despair of Christians and other religious minorities of the beloved land of Iraq. In renewing my urgent appeal to the international community to take action to end the humanitarian tragedy now underway."

**Pope Francis,
Letter to Ban Ki-moon, August 9, 2014**

the conflict is over. That is what happened in Iraq in 2003 and we are now seeing the consequences of that war." Prof. Powers continues, "it is important to remember that the doctrine of a just war is very restrictive and it can never be construed in a lax or unregulated sense. Resorting to force should always be seen as a harmful context and approached reluctantly because the consequences will almost always be negative. Furthermore, it is very important to be extremely realistic in considering and comparing the consequences of action versus inaction."

Blame and compassion. In the open debate in the United States, there is also a more contentious interpretation of the Church's teaching on the subject. There is a widespread viewpoint, among some circles of American Catholic scholars, that moves from "the need for justice, not from the presumption against war," explains Powers. Catholic legal scholar Robert George, for example, has begun a campaign to collect signatures of those supporting an expansion of the intervention against the Islamic State, and it is in the name of justice that several Catholic intellectuals have signed on, as have some Protestants and Jews.

The text states it is "not to point fingers or apportion blame, but to recognize that justice as well as compassion demands that we take the steps necessary to end the ISIL/ISIS campaign of genocide and protect those who are its victims."

The objective should be pursued while "respecting the principles of a just war," but there is no mistaking the outcome of the intervention: "Nothing short of the destruction of ISIL/ISIS as a fighting force will provide long-term protection of victims." In this case Powers recognizes the "rational reasons" to use military force "in a limited way" but makes the case that not all political, diplomatic and financial avenues have yet been fully explored. "Sanctions to cut off funds to the terrorists could be better used and in this area the UN has ample systems in place to effectively intervene. Certainly three years ago a lot more could, or should, have been done in Syria but we let the situation deteriorate and now a military solution does not seem feasible. If the answer is not military, it must be political: I fully approve

of Obama's insistence that an inclusive government must be formed in Iraq. There is a desperate need there for an injection of political legitimacy to bring the country out of its sectarian violence."

Past mistakes. Pope Francis has stated clearly that it is right to put a stop to an unjust aggression but that stopping it does not necessarily mean bombing it. Prof. Powers thinks that, "since the World War II, the Church has been much more prudent about the use of force and has forsaken political realism in the name of cosmopolitanism. Because of this, anybody that says that there is a clear-cut moral solution does not recognize the complexity of the problem." What responsibility does America bear? "America

has a great responsibility and I use this word in its double meaning of *fault* and *duty*. Fault in the sense that much, though not all of what has happened is the result of the invasion of 2003. But there is also a duty: the mistakes of the past do not release us from the responsibility of taking action to put a stop to this ongoing tragedy."

"America has a great responsibility: in its double meaning of *fault* and *duty*."

“CLOSE TO THE WOUNDS OF THE HUMAN PERSON”

While the Synod takes place, we share with you an interview with Julian Carrón published in the Italian daily *Avvenire* on the vigil of this important event, that is an opportunity to “return to the essential, to the newness that Christianity has brought into the world.”

BY **GIORGIO PAOLUCCI**

A few days ago, at the Beginning Day of Communion and Liberation in Milan before 19,000 people, with 34,000 others following by satellite link-up from many cities in Italy, he invited the communities of Communion and Liberation to pray “that the next Synod of Bishops may help everyone grow in the awareness of the sacred and inviolable nature of the family and of its beauty in God’s plan,” and to join on Saturday in the prayer scheduled at Saint Peter’s Square and in their own cities. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, sees in the assembly that will

open in a few days at the Vatican a great opportunity to “return to the essential, to the newness that Christianity has brought into the world to offer each person a life that is humanly more worthwhile.”

What is at the root of the crisis of marriage and the family?

First of all, it is an anthropological crisis. Before being a problem of the relationship between man and woman, there is the way each person responds to the ancient yet ever new question: who am I? When there is confusion about the “I,” bonds become problematic as well. In an authentic loving relationship the other

is lived as such a great good that she or he is perceived as something divine. This is why Leopardi wrote “Divine ray to my thought appeared / Woman, your beauty.” The woman awakens in the man a desire for fullness, but at the same time she cannot fulfill him; she evokes an expectation that she cannot meet. She is a sign that refers to something beyond, something greater for which each of us is made. The genius of Pavese expressed this well: “What a man seeks in pleasures is the infinite, and no one would ever renounce the hope of attaining this infinity.” The other cannot fulfill the promise he enkindled and this generates dissatisfaction and



disappointment. We are made for something greater than the other person, and if we do not realize this the difficulties that arise within a relationship can become suffocating. This is why Christ came, as an authentic response to this inability of the human person to satisfy the desire of the other.

Ideals such as the indissolubility of marriage and a love that lasts “forever” seem to belong to another era. How can they be experienced again?

This is not just a problem today. Two thousand years ago, Jesus said, “What God has joined together, no

human being must separate,” and the disciples responded, “If that is the case for man with his wife, then it is better not to marry.” Therefore, today’s difficulties should not surprise us: even they thought that certain things were humanly impossible. Christ came precisely to make possible what to the human person is impossible. This is why outside of the Christian experience the indissolubility of marriage or a love that lasts “forever,” which is desirable for two people who love each other, are in fact perceived as impossible. For that matter, the Church, as far back as the First Vatican Council, said, “the precepts of natural law are

not perceived by everyone clearly and immediately. In the present situation sinful man needs grace and revelation so moral and religious truths may be known ‘by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error.’”

Many come to marriage without an adequate awareness of what they are about to do. How can they be helped?

Those who turn to the Church, at times even in a confused and contradictory way, do so because they recognize their need and their inability to manage on their own. The problem lies in the answer that is >>>

» given. They need to be helped to become increasingly conscious of what they have received through tradition or social custom. The Church must demonstrate that there is a possibility for staying together in a way that is humanly worthwhile, that there is a place where they can find an answer to the difficulties that they will encounter and that supports them in a journey of maturity. Benedict XVI said, “From the initial attraction and from that ‘feeling good’ with the other, learn to ‘love’ the other and ‘to want the best’ for the other.” Families must find help in the ecclesial community for this education.

Does it seem to you that this happens in the Church?

There are many places and experiences where people are accompanied and supported and where they can experience as possible what appears to be unpopular or humanly impossible. Pope Francis teaches us that it is not enough to repeat correct formulas: you have to stay close to the wounds of the human person, in any condition and in every existential periphery. We must embrace those we encounter in virtue of the embrace that we have received from Christ.

The Synod will examine the challenges that come from a society that is increasingly secularized: forms of co-existence different from marriage, homosexual unions, sex changes, and other things, and a mass-media that fuels the clash between liberals and conservatives in the Church. What criterion should be used to judge and act according to the Gospel?

The point of departure is to understand that underneath so many demands there are profoundly human



needs: the need for love, the desire for maternity, and the search for one’s identity. It is at this level that the response must come. There is a work of education that must be done to help people grasp the profound

“Christians can witness to the many Samaritans of today the fullness that Christ brings to life.”

nature of the needs they feel and to understand that the remedies called for are inadequate in answering what is at the root of those needs. Fr. Giussani said “the solution to the problems that life sets before us every day does not happen by directly facing the problems, but by examining more deeply the nature of the subject who faces them.” This goes beyond the conservatism or liberalism in the Church. The Samaritan woman also tried to respond to her thirst for happiness by changing husbands six times but the thirst remained, so much so that when she encountered Jesus at the well she asked to have “that water” that would make her thirst cease.

Christians can witness to the many Samaritans of today the fullness that Christ brings to life.

In the debate that preceded the Synod a discussion emerged between those who, quoting the Pope, ask us to be merciful first of all, and those who highlight the need to safeguard the truth. What do you think?

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis writes, “We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness.” This is why the Pope insists that we find “forms and ways to communicate with an understandable language the perennial newness of Christianity.” This is what Jesus did with Zacchaeus: His gaze of mercy reawakened in that man the desire for truth, to the point that he converted. This is why it is a mistake to see an opposition between mercy and truth. **T**

**I AM NOTHING
WHEN YOU ARE
NOT PRESENT**

Notes from the talks by Davide Proseri and Julián Carrón
at the Beginning Day for adults and university students of CL.
Mediolanum Forum, Milan (Italy), September 27, 2014

Notes from the talks by Davide Prospero and Julián Carrón
at the Beginning Day for adults and university students of CL.
Mediolanum Forum, Milan (Italy), September 27, 2014

L'illogica allegria [The Illogical Joy]
Amare ancora [Continue to Love]
La strada [The Road]

DAVIDE PROSPERI

We would like to welcome all of you here in Assago and in the all of the cities throughout Italy and abroad that are joining us via satellite. In these days I have been reflecting on the value of an event such as this, which can seem repetitive. After all, we do it every year! But as we said two years ago, for those who walk, the first goal of starting again is to avoid losing gusto for the journey. There is only one reason that beginning again helps us to not lose gusto for the journey—because the beginning always contains the criterion of everything. The beginning is a gift, a preference, just as the beginning of life is an unmerited gift, it is the greatest sign of the relationship with Him who wanted us. For this reason, every beginning is always a special opportunity for memory, to recall the fact that we are loved, that we are not in the world by chance, that there is Someone, One, who loves us now, still loves us right now, and this is the first factor of certainty in a person's life.

Today, perhaps more than at any other time in history, the certainty that the human person needs is not just an intellectual, dogmatic understanding of things, but rather, as Fr. Giussani called it, an affective knowledge of reality: relying entirely on the living relationship with Him in whom reality has its ultimate substance.

What most helped me to understand this was something Rose from Kampala said this summer at the International Assembly of Responsibles of CL, held in the beginning of September in La Thuile. She recalled a conversation with Fr. Giussani in which he said, "If you were the only person in the universe, God still would have sought you out so that your nothingness would not be lost." She commented, "For me, when you talk about Beauty with a capital B, it is in this that my nothingness, my life, has gained this Beauty, this value that does not depend on my nothingness, but depends instead on this preference that God has had for me. Saying that I am fulfilled, that I am affectively fulfilled, is not something made-up, it is a fact: that I am breathing this morning is possible precisely because Someone loved me

this morning and is not afraid of what I am, but had pity on me and wants me to exist." Anyone who meets Rose, sees what she is, and sees what she does, has no doubt that what she says is true, as Monica Maggioni and Dario Curatolo—who with Roberto Fontolan produced the video on the sixty years of the Movement—told me when they returned from Kampala.

The "I" is reborn in an encounter where this choice—this preference—happens, this is the factor of certainty in life because this choice is an initiative of the Being who loves me. Our uncertainty—which can concern relationships (normally, it concerns relationships), can also concern our capacity for initiatives and therefore it can also be insecurity about a presence or a judgment—arises from fact that, since we do not experience this relationship with the Being who loves me now, we try to fill the void with something else, with other relationships that substitute it, or with our initiatives.

In fact, during last year's Beginning Day we were provoked precisely by this in the story of Mary Magdalene—we remember it well—who went to the tomb where she expected to find the lifeless body of Jesus to venerate and instead heard herself "called by name" by the risen Lord. Precisely in being called by name, Carrón told us, the "I" is reborn and we desire to tell others about Him and to take initiative in the world.

Our first step in recognizing the importance of this announcement that we received, this year came with the letter that Carrón sent to the Fraternity of CL after his private audience with Pope Francis. In the letter he summarized the Pope's fundamental concern: it is necessary to concentrate on the essential, which is the encounter with Christ. (cf. Letter to the Fraternity, October 16, 2013, in *Traces*, n. 10/2013)

The challenge of what is essential arose immediately as the decisive factor in continuing to build the Christian presence in the world. From this point of view, the publication of Savorana's book, *Vita di don Giussani* [*The Life of Fr. Giussani*], and the presentations that followed throughout Italy, proved to be a formidable instrument for new encounters, well beyond our own efforts, because this capacity for encounter is at the origin of the charism. In fact, we are asked precisely to remain faithful to this origin, if we do not want to lose it.

There is only one reason that beginning again helps us to not lose gusto for the journey—because the beginning always contains the criterion of everything. The beginning is a gift, a preference, it is the greatest sign of the relationship with Him who wanted us.



The Pope's invitation to focus on the essential then accompanied us along our journey in rendering a judgment on the European elections, culminating in Carrón's talk at the Milan expo—a talk which then became the content of *Page One* of the May issue of *Traces*: "Europe 2014. Is a New Beginning Possible?" He said, drawing upon Fr. Giussani, "The solution to the problems life poses every day does not come from directly facing the problems, but from exploring more deeply the nature of the subject who faces them." And Carrón commented, "This is the great challenge Europe is facing. The great educative emergency demonstrates the reduction of man, his dismissal, the lack of awareness of what man truly is, of what the nature of his desire is, of the structural disproportion between what he expects and what he can achieve with his efforts" (*Traces*, n. 5/2014, p. 18).

This judgment was the point of departure for the work in many of our communities this summer. Certainly, we have had the greatest testimony of this for the last several weeks in our fellow Christians who are being persecuted, who are suffering and risking their lives every day to affirm their faith. In their testimony we see what the essential is, what is essential for those living in this situation. In *Traces* we read the interview with the Archbishop of Mosul: "It is

possible to live every moment full of hope and joy." When asked "How did you learn that this is possible?" he answered, "I myself began to live this way, and then I started to communicate this in my homilies and in meetings. Over time, I noticed that the people changed too." "How have you noticed this change in the Christians?" "From the way we live. They were the ones to tell me that they needed to be more attached to our faith. It was they who told me that they began *to live* again amidst the many difficulties. They told me in words, and I, from their eyes, could see that it was true" (A.S. Nona, "I Remain in Mosul," interview by L. Fiore, *Traces*, n. 7/2014, pp. 10-11).

Here you finally understand what testimony is (and it is no coincidence that this was the original meaning of the word "martyrdom"): a judgment of love and attachment for which you give your life, first of all because life changes through a new gaze upon yourself, upon your own destiny, and the destiny of the world; you give your life because of the gaze that faith introduces into your own existence. This testimony judges us, because it shows clearly that because of the judgment on the experience you live, you can risk your life without being a hero, wherever you are, simply by the fact that, without defending this experience, life would be less than living! This is a wake-up call for the entire >>>



» Christian people, which is also one of the tasks of our friendship: that the “I” be re-awakened, not that it be consoled; or better, consoled as well, but not in the way we usually understand the term, as if to say, “Well, yes, cheer up, you’ll see that tomorrow will be better.” It is not this. The one consolation we seek is to be before the meaning of life. Nothing less than this can truly console us, because anything less than this—that is, without this meaning—life is solitude. In fact, I was thinking this summer, that when the love of our life enters into our existence, when you have an encounter that can reawaken your “I”—if you are true to what you encounter—you are ready to give your life for it. You would not hesitate to give your life and you even begin to do it, making your whole self, all of your energy, available for this. And you begin to experience life as sacrifice, that is, as given for a greater purpose that is not an imaginary purpose but something real: to love Him who loved you to the point of saving you from your nothingness, as we said before. I began to understand that all of this is only an introduction which allows you to understand what we are made for; an introduction to discover that there is more, that there can be more. Life can even be more profound than this. You can love the love of your life even more than this heroic impulse. For us, sacrifice still contains a final misunderstanding. We are ready to give our life according to the modality, the form—maybe even a great one—that is needed, as a service that we can do,

but there is an even greater sacrifice, which is giving your life according to the *how* and the *when* that He decides. Maybe you are not ready—or do not feel ready—for what is asked of you in a form that is so different from the one in which you are already giving your life, but everything is asked of you there. And so then you understand that the moment—as we have said many times to each other, but you only begin to discover it within your own experience—acquires an infinite value when you give your life according to the *how* and the *when* that the love of your life asks of you. This openness is learned and deepened through all of your *yeses*, even the small ones, that you have begun to say out of love.

Well, this summer among many of us (in different ways and in many stages) it has emerged that the journey we are making is becoming the factor that enables us to “explore,” as we said earlier, “the nature of the subject more deeply.” But often we sense the distance between this heroic impulse—felt as something lively—and normal life, which we instead perceive as a sort of “lesser” reality, or between the judgment on reality that comes to us from faith and the need to look at the person before us and encounter him truly, and not in a dialectical way, as the Pope asks us. So then, I ask you: what makes the “I” unified, so that we can live everything that is given to us, all the challenges we face, as fullness and gusto of living?

JULIÁN CARRÓN

WHAT MAKES THE “I” UNITED?

“I am nothing when you are not present,” says the song by Francesco Guccini that is the title for our gathering. (*Vorrei* [I would like], words and music by F. Guccini) Of whom can we say such a thing? Of whom can we say this *now*? This expression struck me for two reasons. The first is that I recognize what is essential for me because I am nothing when it is not present, and I can see this from the fact that “I remain alone with my thoughts,” as the song by Guccini continues. The second reason is that the essential thing must be present *now*. If it is not present now, then I am nothing. It seems to me that there is no other criterion for recognizing the essential to which the Pope recalled us to again in his Message to the Meeting of Rimini if not this: a presence that makes me exist. I recognize it because when it is missing I am nothing, I do not exist at all. You see right away that it is not primarily a problem of coherence, but of belonging to a presence without which I am nothing.

But what makes us exist? What makes us exist *now*, in this historic situation that we find ourselves living? Nothing, nothing can keep us from having the same experience that Giorgio Gaber recounts in the song we listened to earlier (*L'illogica allegria* [Illogical Joy], words by A. Loporini, music by G. Gaber). I can be “alone” in any place, “along the highway,” at any hour, “in the first light of dawn,” even knowing that “everything is going to ruin,” but “just a little nothing suffices / maybe a small glimmer / an air already lived / a landscape [...] / and I am fine.” The mere entrance of reality, any fragment of reality, even almost nothing, into the horizon of our “I” through any circumstance can reawaken and make possible the experience of this good—one so surprising that it almost seems like a dream and we are tempted “to be ashamed of it.” But an evidence imposes itself: “I cannot deny that “I am fine / precisely now, precisely here / it’s certainly not my fault / if it happens to me this way.” It is as if reality, an instant before we can defend ourselves from it, before we can raise a wall against it, succeeds in penetrating into the “I” to make it itself, “precisely now, precisely here.” I find inside myself an “illogical joy.” In fact, it seems totally disproportionate that “a little nothing / maybe a small glimmer / an air already lived” can bring to life this joy. “An illogical joy / for which I don’t know the reason / I don’t know what it is,” so real and at the same time so mysterious. If it were not real, what Gaber says next could not happen: “It’s as if suddenly / I was given the right / to live in the present.” Something enters

into life and makes me present to the present, “precisely now, precisely here.” A little nothing that seizes me so much that it makes me present to myself. I am entirely whole, present, when you are present.

It is hard to find a song that better expresses the meaning of the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*. The “I,” recognizing the inexorable presence of reality, “reawakened within his being,” says Fr. Giussani, “by the presence, the attraction, the awe [at reality], is grateful, joyful” (*The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal: 1997, p. 105) and is fine.

Who would not desire this every morning, in every moment of life? A moment of fullness that you discover, as we too have experienced many times. In that very simple elementary experience, within reach of everyone, in any moment, in any place, in any circumstance—there lies the whole **method**: a presence that makes me exist. No attempt of mine can give me what that instant gives me. There is no other criterion for recognizing the essential. And I see that it *is* the essential because it makes me exist so much that, when it is missing, I do not exist—I really do not exist! As soon as it appears, I exist, and I am happy. I experience an “illogical joy,” “precisely now, precisely here,” that enables me to live the present.

Instead, when this method does not predominate, “what bitterness, my love, / to see things as I see them [it is not that reality changes, but the way of seeing things changes] [...]. //What disappointment [...] / to live life with this heart [so often twisted and numb] / and not want to lose anything” (*Amare ancora* [To Love Again], words and music by C. Chiuffo), seeing anyhow that everything slips through your fingers.

But changing is easy: “You just have to return to being a child and remember [...] / and remember that everything is given, that everything is new / and liberated.” You just have to remember that our first activity is passivity, this accepting, this receiving, this acknowledging that everything is given. A glimmer suffices to be able to say that something is given to us. Nothing particularly exceptional is needed. Just a little glimmer, because anything, even the smallest little thing is evidence that there is something else. “Here is our method,” Fr. Giussani says in the last book of the Equipe, *In cammino* [On the Journey]: “To clarify the problem of the human person as religiosity—which is the deepest and most totalizing problem of the human person—it is necessary, first of all, to personalize the relationship between the human person and reality, from which it originated” (*In cammino*. 1992-1998, Bur, Milan: 2014, p. 316). **»»**

In that very simple, elementary experience, within reach of everyone, in any moment, in any place, in any circumstance—there lies the whole method: a presence that makes me exist.

» In certain exceptional moments, we have all had an experience of that kind, but we wonder how it can become stable. How can the relationship between the human person and reality (inasmuch as originated) be made a stable personal experience? This is where the issue of the journey comes in. In fact, we can have exceptional moments, but if we do not make the journey we can return to the same-old-same-old and everything can return to being flat, squalid, and reduced. We belong to the Movement to make this journey together, to support each other on this road. Every time we gather, as Davide said before, it is to continue the road, for the gusto of the journey, because without making a journey—that is, without an education—this method does not become personal experience, that is, it does not become mine. Reality is there, in front of all of us, but it is not mine.

At this point, we need to take up the question we asked each other this summer: “What are you looking for?” Seeking is the sign of someone on a journey. But we said: let’s not take the question “What are you looking for?” for granted. We can belong to the Movement, be here physically, and no longer seek. We can be here, yet be stopped, blocked. You see it because what prevails in living is not the “illogical joy,” but complaint.

It is impressive how all of these experiences we live are similar to those of any person who belongs to something. In another song, *Qualcuno era comunista* (“Someone was communist,” G. Gaber and A. Luporini), Gaber made a very long list of all the reasons for being a communist: because you “need a push,” because you “need a different moral system,” because you need “impetus,” etc. What was he seeking through membership in the party? What did he desire? To overcome the dualism we so often find within ourselves. “It was like two people in one,” he says. “On the one hand, the personal daily toil, and on the other, the sense of belonging to a race that wanted to take flight to truly change the world.” Belonging has a goal: to change life, the “living that cuts the legs out from under you” (C. Pavese, *Dialoghi con Leucò* [Dialogues with Leucò], Einaudi, Torino: 1947, p. 166).

Then, over time, after years of belonging, the dramatic question becomes: “And now?” And now? Whether you like it or not, belonging needs to pass through the verification of daily toil. Has this belonging shown that it responds to the challenges of living, to that desire for change? Gaber’s honesty in acknowledging the result of the verification is surprising: “And now? Even now one feels like two people: on the one hand, the man who is inserted and obsequiously moves through the squalor of his own daily survival, and on

the other hand, the sea gull that no longer even has the intention of flying, because by now the dream has shrivelled. Two miserable conditions in one body” (*Qualcuno era comunista*, G. Gaber and A. Luporini).

You see that not just any belonging resolves the question of life. And it is not even just any old way of living a true belonging resolves the dualism. The problem of the unity of life constantly presents itself. Mere words to affirm belonging do not help us get by. Voluntaristic insistence on this belonging does not help us get by. In fact, we can still live a deep division within ourselves between “the squalor of [our] own daily survival” and “the sea gull that no longer even has the intention of flying.”

We who belong to the reality of the Movement have the same problem. Just as being communist had to pass through the verification of history, so we verify faith in front of the challenges of daily life and history. And now? One of you writes me: “In our Fraternity group”—but I have heard the same thing from other groups, too—“it is often difficult to achieve that fraternal friendship which enables us to share in common the experiences of each person, and to do so in a way that makes it possible to express common judgments, so the group can be useful for everyone to rediscover the “eyes of heaven” in their own lives. Rather than seeking a fraternal help with this objective, we limit ourselves to comments, often of an intellectual nature. In the end, however, our dissatisfaction remains, and we ask ourselves what should be done, as if the solution were outside ourselves.” As you see, not just any modality of living the belonging is satisfying. Substituting experience

with comments is not useful for rediscovering the “eyes of heaven.” Fr. Giussani foretold this: “Only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life’s needs) [...] could be sufficiently strong enough to survive in a world where everything, everything pointed in the opposite direction” (*The Risk of Education*, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York: 2001, p. 11). This is the risk of living a belonging that does not respond to the needs of life.

The honesty with which Gaber acknowledges, in another song, *Il desiderio* [Desire], that “it is senseless to continue listing problems / and invent new names [‘comments, often of an intellectual nature,’ as our friend said] / for our regression / that is not stopped by our continual talking. // Love, / it is no longer necessary / if what we lack / is called desire” (*Il desiderio* [Desire], G. Gaber and A. Luporini). Stunning! We do not stop our regression with our chatter or our discussions, with the avalanche of our comments, be-

Then, over time, after years of belonging, the dramatic question becomes: “And now?” And now? Whether you like it or not, belonging needs to pass through the verification of daily toil.



cause precisely this is already the sign of our regression. If we lack desire, if we lack that which is the motor for living—because “desire,” Gaber says, “is the true interior stimulus / [...] it is the one motor / that moves the world”—who will re-awaken it in us? If our staying together is not useful for rediscovering the “eyes of heaven” that enable us to fly again, who can make us so present to the present so as to awaken all our longing?

I have always been struck to think that the first gift I received from Fr. Giussani was to be able to see that he was unafraid of saying things that we all live, but that were kept hidden in shame, even to ourselves. We can look at them in the face, say them and challenge them only through what we have received. This is why each of us, after years of belonging to the Movement, must see whether we are already in the condition of the “the sea gull that no longer even has the

intention of flying,” or whether we still find in ourselves the desire to fly (because desire is the motor that moves everything), with the awareness that not only we have not “lost life in living,” to use Eliot’s words, but we are actually earning it in living. For this reason, the question is not banal: are we still seeking, or have we stopped?

THE LORD HAS NOT ABANDONED US

Whatever point we have reached on the journey, whatever point of the itinerary, whatever moment of difficulty or of joy—the Pope tells us in his Message to the Meeting: “The Lord has not left us to ourselves [that is, to the squalor of our daily survival or our being sea gulls without the intention of flying], He has not forgotten us. In ancient times He chose one man, Abraham, and set him on a journey toward the Promised Land. And in the fullness of time He chose >>>



» a young woman, the Virgin Mary, in order to take on flesh and come live among us. Nazareth was truly an insignificant village, a 'periphery' with respect to both politics and religion; but that was exactly where God looked to fulfill His plan of mercy and faithfulness" (Francis, *Message to the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*, August 24-30, 2014). For us, the place through which the Mystery continues to prefer us—we know well—is our charism, the place where the Lord still has mercy on us. This is the place where He continues to call us, through each gesture, each word, each attempt.

Yesterday, one of you, having just learned of the title of this Beginning Day, wrote: "Dear Fr. Julián, 'I am nothing when you are not present.' Today I discovered that this is exactly how I am. When Christ is in the horizon of my gaze, of my day, I 'live.' I live even when I am travelling for weeks far from my family and my children. I live in the change of time zones and beds, in the struggles of my work. I live thanks to the 'memory' of Christ who comes before me in many

ways—the same ones you described recently: the Sacraments, Morning Prayer, a phone call, the School of Community, an encounter, even a testimony at the Meeting that I see later on YouTube... Even the gestures that before seemed ostentatiously pious to me I now realize are a gift of real companionship that I love. It is the memory of Christ that illuminates everything, even the most simple or most toilsome moment. But if Christ is not my memory, I truly am nothing. His absence is a mortal weight, as in this week: even though I was home, sheltered from the struggles of life, nothing was enough. I am writing these few lines to tell you how much I am looking forward to tomorrow. I truly am nothing if You are not present."

The question is how each of us responds to this historical modality through which the Mystery still has mercy on our nothingness. A formal belonging is certainly not what keeps alive in us the desire to fly; real following does this. The one possibility for still searching, for re-awakening desire, is to follow. "I'd like to take advantage of this opportunity

to thank you for the 2014 Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in Rimini, because in those days you gave new birth to my desire (you gave me back my life, I would even venture to say). Before you, before encountering you, I reduced everyone and everything. I reduced Christianity to a good example to give, but then I couldn't do it myself and so I was always dissatisfied and without God's grace; I wandered alone and in solitude like a vagabond, without a true goal. I was even afraid to be by myself... During those days in Rimini, however, you reawakened, in the depths of my being, the gift of His presence and now I feel that nothing and nobody can stop me. 'I feel life bursting inside my heart,' as Chieffo sang. Thank you! After the Spiritual Exercises, when I was back to my true life, in daily life, I dove (literally dove) into reviewing the Exercises, and something began to germinate. I am happier. I continue pondering and reading the text. I delve deeply into it and something, a little flicker of hope, begins to illuminate my shadows. I am another person, and I thank God for it because—unlike the miracle I awaited for so many years—now I enjoy every step of the journey I have to make, in joy and in pain."

The encounter with the Presence that makes me exist, to use Fr. Giussani's words, "makes the personality perceive, or perceive anew, makes it discover the sense of its own dignity. Since the human personality is composed of intelligence and of affectivity or freedom, in that encounter the intelligence is awakened to a new curiosity, a new will for truth, a new desire for sincerity, a desire to know how reality truly is, and the 'I' begins to tremble with an affection for existence, life, oneself and others that it did not have before. And thus one can say: the personality is born" (*In cammino, 1992-1998*, op. cit., pp. 184-185).

But what is this following? A formal belonging? A verbal repetition of the right and true definitions? Or is it, as Fr. Giussani says, the experience of true things? Here, too, the Mystery had such pity on us that He gave us everything needed to respond, and with the life of Fr. Giussani He testified to us what this following means, so that nobody would be confused, so that everybody would have in hand the instrument for knowing what it means to follow (and thus to decide whether or not to follow); He left us a signpost in the road, enabling us to reach the point of making ours all the true things ours, and reaching that unity of life that everyone desires. The alternative is clear: it is between a formal belonging to an association, an organization, that does not stop the regression of our life, or it is a belonging that is a following, as Fr. Giussani described it. How many

more times will we need to repeat it: to pass from intention to experience! "Following is the desire to relive [relive!] the *experience* of the person who provoked you [relive the experience!] and who provokes you with her presence in the life of the community. It is the striving to become not like that person in her concreteness, full of limits, but like that person in the value to which she gives herself and that redeems—deep down—her face as a poor human being. It is the desire to participate in the life of that person in whom you are brought something Other, and this Other is that to which you are devoted, that to which you aspire, that to which you adhere, within this journey" (*Il rischio educativo: Come creazione di personalità e di storia* [The Risk of Education: As Creation of Personality and of History], Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino: 1995, p. 64.

Reliving the experience of another is not formal repetition or participation in an association. There is an enormous gulf between this and true following! In the first case, the regression is not stopped, desire is not rekindled, no wings to fly are given; while in the second case, you are more and more fascinated, you become more and more yourself.

One of you writes, "Rereading the assembly of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, I am experiencing again the liberating and provoking impact of your first response. I am one of the so-called 'oldies' of the Movement (I am 60 years old), and I feel that it is a crucial point for starting anew, as it has been ever since the beginning of your leadership. This challenging correspondence takes me straight back to the days when, as a fourteen-year-old, I discovered the Movement as the road of salvation for my life. In front of those who complain I feel a bit like the man born blind in front of the objections of the Pharisees: 'You say this isn't good; but in following I find again the sense of the encounter with the Movement, its freshness, its ironic youthfulness now with a bit of maturity added in. It seems to me to be the road of freedom and a renewal of an awareness of the faith that is entirely new. Should I therefore ignore all of this in order to give space to your objections?' For me, in following I see and I breathe, and you cannot take this away from me. It is a fact." You can answer the question "And now?" finding yourself at the age of 60, after more than forty years of belonging to the Movement, with a freshness, a lungs-full breathing, a freedom and awareness of the faith that is entirely new, that no objection can take away. What enabled him to make this newness a constant in his life? Following.

This therefore is the level at which our life is constantly wagered: in following the charisma or not. A line of Fr. >>>

The encounter with the Presence that makes me exist, to use Fr. Giussani's words, "makes the personality perceive, or perceive anew, makes it discover the sense of its own dignity."



» Giussani's that I often repeat to myself describes this method succinctly: "A definition must reflect the experience of an acquisition, otherwise it would prove to be a ideological imposition (*At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal: 1997, p. 61). Either the definition is an acquisition that has already happened in my own experience, or it is a schematic imposition. For this reason, the choice is between those who want to follow someone who imposes a framework, and those who want to follow someone who helps them to personally acquire the content of the definition. Helping the person to achieve this acquisition is the method followed by Jesus. There is no alternative. And if we do not understand how critical it is for us, then we do not realize that this is exactly what we do with others: we impose our mental frameworks on them. Since we often think we can settle for repeating

definitions and discourses to ourselves, we end up thinking that it is sufficient to impose our correct definitions on others, or worse, beat them over the head with them. But, as we know well from our experience, this does not make my life whole; it does not make the definition that I know so well my own. To acquire it, an experience is needed. For this reason, I do not know how many times since I have been here that I have repeated this line: "Reality makes itself evident in experience," and again, "Experience is the phenomenon in which reality becomes transparent and makes itself known" (*In cammino. 1992-1998*, op. cit., pp. 311, 250). What a "nuclear" line of Giussani's!

So then, what does it mean to relive the experience of another? What does it mean to relive Fr. Giussani's experience? What has he testified and proposed to us as a hypothesis for entering into reality, for being human persons, for not los-

ing the intention of flying, for being people who do not stop seeking, people whose desire never diminishes? Let's listen to the words of the Pope again, in his Message to the Meeting, inviting us "never to lose touch with reality; rather, to love reality. This too is part of the Christian witness: in the presence of a dominant culture which gives top priority to appearances, to all that is superficial and temporary, the challenge is to choose and love reality. Fr. Giussani left this legacy as a plan for life when he said: "The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious, the formula for the journey to the meaning of reality is always to live reality intensely without preclusion, without negating or forgetting anything. Indeed, it would not be human, that is to say, reasonable, to take our experience at face value, to limit it merely to the crest of the wave, without discerning the core of its motion" (Francis, *Message to the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*, August 24-30, 2014). With this exhortation the Pope gives us again—"now"—the program of life that Fr. Giussani always proposed to us! And the program is not repetition of the right definitions; it is the indication of a journey that all of us can make. To be authentically human persons we must "always live reality intensely" (*The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 150). Each of us must decide.

THE VALUE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

But what is reality made up of? Of circumstances, of circumstances through which the Mystery calls us, reawakens us, comes to us—as Davide said before—so that we never diminish, never succumb to nothingness. Precisely for this reason Giussani invited us to look at circumstances in a way that keeps us from remaining merely at the level of appearances, because circumstances are the modality through which the Mystery calls us, draws us forth from nothingness, and prefers us. This is why he tells us in *The Religious Sense*, "Man, the human being's rational life would have to be suspended on the instant, suspended in every moment upon this sign, apparently so fickle, so haphazard, yet the circumstances through which the unknown 'lord' drags me, provokes me toward his design." A definition is not requested, but the answer to a provocation. And these circumstances [Fr. Giussani adds to it!] can be at times a "sign so obtuse [the toil of living, the squalor of daily life, the dramatic situations, the most apparently inhuman things], so dark, so opaque, so apparently random that to pursue it is like placing yourself at the mercy of a river's currents that toss you here and there." This is nonetheless the modality through which the Mystery calls me to keep me from falling into nothingness.

But who can demand this kind of following from us? Only God. Who else can demand something of the kind? Only He who calls us. This is why the crucial question is to understand how God calls us, because otherwise we talk about God in the abstract.

"I would have to say 'yes' to every instant without seeing anything, simply adhering to the pressures of the occasions. It is a dizzying position" (*The Religious Sense*, op. cit. p. 135). For this reason, many times we become afraid and we back down from the challenge. But what a testimony Fr. Giussani gives us! "I hope that my life," Fr. Giussani said, "was lived out according to what God expected from it. One can say that it was lived with urgent need, because every circumstance—, in fact, every instant of my Christian consciousness—was the search for the glory of Christ" ("Don Giussani: 'Io sono zero, Dio è tutto'" [Fr. Giussani: I am Nothing, God is everything], interview by D. Boffo, *Avvenire*, October 13, 2002, p. 3).

Because for him, "Life coincides with reality inasmuch as it touches you, calls and provokes you; therefore there is no life without a task." How does life touch you? "It touches you as reality [a reality that calls forth your freedom] and reality always provokes you to a collaboration, a commitment—that is, to a task." Friends, this is what we must follow. It is through this that the Mystery calls us. But who can demand this kind of following from us? Only God. Who else can demand something of the kind? Only He who calls us. This is why the crucial question is to understand how God calls us, because otherwise we talk about God in the abstract; we throw Him out of reality, relegate Him to where we think He is, and we look at reality this way, as the Pope says, remaining on the level of appearances. We do not recognize that we are called to respond to Him through the circumstances. But Fr. Giussani educated us to acknowledge them and look at them for what

they are: the modality with which God calls us, which can be something absolutely commonplace (a small glimmer) or a dark circumstance, at times opaque; but, it is as if through these things the Mystery tells us, "Look, this modality that you do not understand, that seems so dark to you, is the sign through which I who make all things build your life, help you to mature, make you yourself, make you united, rekindle your desire, make you present to the present." What a sensation when you embrace this design!

"Dearest Fr. Carrón, I am writing to thank you for what you proposed at the Spiritual Exercises, and the work on 'iving the circumstances' with which you challenged us this summer. I am 27 years old, have been married for two years, and have become the mother of a 9-month-old girl with Down syndrome. I am also a physician looking for work. This situation is not exactly normal. I am writing to thank you, because in these months I have come to realize how much I need to follow. An exceptional fact is not >>>

» enough (in my case, daily life is exceptional in some ways thanks to the mysterious presence of my daughter), nor is all of my good Catholic openness to life. I am a Christian, in the Movement for practically forever, and yet all this is not enough for truly living. Today I need a reason for living what exists. In these months, following the Movement not just formally but letting myself be educated, often even harshly, has introduced into my days the consciousness that what is given to me today is the most useful companionship for me now, my road for knowing what truly fills the heart: Jesus. He has made Himself my faithful companion, as a necessary and loving presence; it's not that I need someone to tell me that my daughter is of infinite value, that her life is great (this is evident in the daily relationship with her—you should see her!); but the difference is in the gusto that comes from the consciousness that the Lord is calling me here, and not where I thought it would be. It is as if each day the little things—our home, my husband, my daughter—were 'restored' to me! This truly fills my heart with gratitude. I had never thought that living reality would enkindle my desire for happiness instead of placating or settling it in some way. Once again, my heartfelt thanks for the guide you are in this human, very human, journey." What she is given today is the most useful companionship for her now. She had no need for someone to tell her that her daughter is of infinite value (a definition); for this young mother, "the difference is in the gusto that comes from the consciousness that the Lord is calling me here, and not where I thought it would be." And thus everything is restored to her: things, home, husband, and daughter.

But at times we do not want this method: you do not acknowledge it and so you withdraw. In the face of the challenges of the current circumstances, which often shock us, what is our temptation? It is to give into fear, thinking we can reach unity, as Professor Eugenio Mazzarella said to us this summer, being "exonerated from risks." We do not believe the circumstances were given to us by the Mystery, by the Lord of time and history, so we could re-acquire the truth. There is no way to re-acquire a truth that we already know other than through freedom, through the involvement of my person in the Truth that calls me through circumstances.

As Cardinal Scola reminded us in the interview in *Tracce*, at times there prevails in us "a static vision of the human person: one still thinks, with a certain ethical intellectualism, that the one problem is to learn the right doctrine and then apply it to life: 'Authentic doctrine, once proclaimed, will be victorious.' However, this position does not take into account one thing: by the very fact of being 'thrown' into life,

people find themselves living experiences in which questions, interrogatives arise. Doctrine, which for the Christian is based on the original experience of following Christ, proposed with authoritativeness by the Magisterium, must be rediscovered as an organic response to the 'why's' that arise from experience. Otherwise it is not enough" ("Le conseguenze dell'bell'amore" [The consequences of beautiful love], interview by D. Perillo, *Tracce*, n. 8/2014, p. 31).

For this reason Fr. Giussani presses us, emphasizing that after the encounter, "reality is not to be archived because we already know [and] have everything [out of the simple fact of having encountered Him]. We have everything, but we [only] understand what all of this is [...] in the encounter with circumstances, with people, with events"—as that mother bore witness to us. Either we understand this

We have everything, but we cannot understand what this everything is by merely repeating definitions. If we do not understand that the entire complex of circumstances is given to us for our maturity, to re-acquire our unity, we withdraw from this verification.

or all the historic challenges we have to face have nothing to do with our journey, and even become an obstacle. Instead, Fr. Giussani believes they are precious for our path. We have everything, but we cannot understand what this everything is by merely repeating definitions, by merely adhering formally: we understand in the encounter with circumstances. If we do not understand that the entire complex of circumstances is given to us for our maturity, to re-acquire our unity, we withdraw from this verification. Fr. Giussani insisted that, "nothing is to be archived, [...] or censured, forgotten, or rejected. [Because] the meaning of everything we have, the truth that we have, [...] the meaning of this 'everything,' we understand [...] is in facing things, therefore, through the fact of encounters and events, through the encounter [...] and in events" (*L'io rinasce in un incontro. 1986-1987* [The "I" Is Reborn in an Encounter], Bur, Milano: 2010, p. 55).

IN HIS COMPANY, SURE IN ANY PLACE

Only in this way can we reach that certainty which enables us to enter into everything, into any periphery; and, instead of letting ourselves be defined by fear, we are determined by the certainty that He generates in us. As the Pope told us in the Message to the Meeting (we need to look at this whole message again!): "A Christian [who lives as we have sought to describe] is not afraid to decentralize, to go toward the ends of the earth, because his centre is in Jesus Christ. He frees us from fear [not because we formally say 'Christ; everyone knows that this alone does not suffice, that a type of formal belonging does not suffice to overcome squalor, to overcome fear, but an experience of Christ], thus in His company we are able to move forward safely in anyplace, even through the dark times of life, knowing that wherever



we go, the Lord always goes before us with His grace, and it is our joy to share with others the good news that He is with us. Jesus' disciples, after completing a mission, returned with joy because of their success. But Jesus told them: 'Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (*Lk 10:20-21*). It is not we who save the world, it is only God who saves it" (Francis, *Message to the Meeting...*, August 24-30, 2014).

Only those who are certain of the essential will be willing to seek forms and ways to communicate the truth that they encountered, otherwise the inability to communicate

with others will be absolute. The Pope continues: "A world in such rapid transformation calls Christians to be available to look for forms or ways to communicate with a language which comprehends the perennial newness of Christianity [Fr. Giussani is an example of this revolution in ways and forms]. In this too it is important to be realistic. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 46)."

"How many people," says the Pope, "in the existential >>>



» peripheries of our time, are 'tired and exhausted' and await the Church, they are waiting for us! How can they be reached? How can the experience of faith, the love of God, the encounter with Jesus be shared with them? This is the responsibility of our communities and of our pastoral care. [...] In the face of so many pastoral exigencies, before the people's many requests, we run the risk of becoming frightened and withdrawing into ourselves in a fearful and defensive attitude. And this gives rise to the temptation of self-sufficiency and of clericalism, that codification of the faith in rules and regulations, as the scribes, the Pharisees, the doctors of the law did in the time of Jesus. To us, everything will be clear and set in order, but the faithful and those in search will still hunger and thirst for God" (Francis, *Address to the Participants in the Meeting Sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization*, September 19, 2014).

In order to respond to these challenges, the Pope indicates to us the ways that Jesus Himself faced them: without becoming frightened or withdrawing into Himself, Jesus goes out to those who are "tired and exhausted." A good example of these kinds of people is the publicans, hated by everyone for their obvious inconsistency. Jesus' relationship with them leads the Pharisees and scribes to murmur against Him: "He welcomes sinners and eats with them." But their objections do not stop Jesus. Rather, He defends His way of relating with the publicans even more vigorously with parables like that of the prodigal son (*Lk 15:11-32*), which shows how aware He was of the risk He ran with His way of proceeding. The prodigal son will always be the image of those who, having received everything (father, home, wealth, etc.), cannot resist the fascination of autonomy; everything seems an obstacle to his anxiety for limitless freedom, as we see in ourselves and many times in our fellow citizens. We can all imagine the father's feeling about his son's freedom. Notwithstanding everything, the father runs the risk of his son's freedom. What love for the freedom of his son, that he might re-acquire through his own experience what he already knew!

And the unexpected happens. Precisely in the moment in which his son is most lost, when to survive he abases himself by eating corn cobs with the pigs, he is not entirely lost. Why? Because precisely in that moment, when one would least expect it, the son "returns to himself." The son finds within himself something that was not lost. Precisely in what was apparently the darkest and most confused moment, his heart emerges with its constitutive evidences and needs. All of his mistakes cannot eliminate the

memory of his home, of his father, and the quality of life of his workers. And this enables him to judge, to make a very quick comparison between his previous and his current situation: "How many workers of my father have bread in abundance and here I am dying of hunger!" And so he can recover from within his experience what he thought he knew. He realizes the dimensions of his need and of the good of having a father. Finally he understands where freedom is found, discovers that freedom is a bond, a home, a father; recognizes the good it means to have a father who embraces him again and welcomes him back as a son. The father, in turn, is happy to see how his patience with the freedom of his son has enabled him to find him again as a son, and is grateful and glad to have a son who is happy to be his son. At the same time, we will always have

before us the fact that a formal remaining at home, like that of the other son, does not necessarily mean understanding what it means to be a son and to have a father; in fact, one can stay home but complain.

Precisely to defend His way of proceeding with those who live on the periphery of human life, because their anxious, impatient, and restless thirst for freedom has taken them so far away, Jesus sets before His critics this relationship between the father and the prodigal son. The publicans seem to have preferred to abandon their Father's house because it was too tight for them, and Jesus, in treating them in this way, seemed to be saying to the Pharisees, "I act this way. I run the risk and I wait for them because My Father acts this way." This certainty of Jesus' relationship with the Father—"I am not alone"—

is essential for Him to live and risk everything with those who have strayed, even to the point of allowing them to discover from within their own experience who they are and to Whom they belong.

In this particularly challenging moment, characterized—as we said about Europe—by the collapse of historic evidences, through tremendous labor, through many sufferings (think again of the episode of the prodigal son), and in front of so many of our contemporaries who insist on travelling the strangest of roads—just as we can seek satisfaction following our imagination—we can understand how the Mystery can run the risk of freedom to make them and each of us discover who we truly are and to what we are called. To what does the Mystery entrust Himself? To our heart and to His presence, which has become flesh in order to be close to us and to reawaken in us the desire to return home, so that precisely through our difficulties and sufferings we can discover what freedom is. »

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» We have not been chosen to withdraw from reality, but to be inside of situations even more. We have been chosen to accompany anyone “who has faltered along the way,” as the Pope tells us. Fr. Antonio Spadaro, speaking at the Meeting, used the image of the torch: “The torch [...] journeys in the midst of women and men, illuminates that portion of humanity where it finds itself. If humanity moves toward the abyss, the torch moves toward the abyss, [not because it wants to push toward it], that is, it accompanies people in their processes. Obviously, in this way, it may be able to save them from the abyss, enabling them to see it. If you are not on the journey with people, if you stand there and say: ‘The light is here, we are the salvation, come, and those who don’t want to come, go ahead and kill yourselves,’ well, this image of the Church is not the ‘field hospital’ of which Francis speaks. It is necessary to accompany the cultural and social processes, no matter how ambiguous, difficult and complex they may be” (A. Spadaro in *Le periferie dell’umano* [The Peripheries of Humanity], edited by E. Belloni and A. Savorana, upcoming publication by Bur).

Therefore, acknowledging that we have been chosen and insisting on the essential is not so that everything ends there, but so that everything can begin from there. In his Message to the Meeting, Pope Francis calls for “this return to the essential, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” because “Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’ (*Evangelii Gaudium* n. 15), that is, ‘by the way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation’ (*Ibid.* n. 128) (Francis, *Message to the Meeting...*, August 24-30, 2014).

This is our task. This is why we were chosen, as Fr. Giussani reminds us: “There was nothingness, the nothingness of everything, but more precisely your nothingness, my nothingness. The word ‘election’ sets the limit, the boundary between nothingness and being. Being blossoms out of nothingness, as a choice, as election [we were drawn out of nothingness because we were chosen]. There is no other condition that can be proposed, no other premise imaginable [as Davide said at the beginning]. This choice, this election, is the pure freedom of the Mystery of God in action, the absolute freedom of the Mystery that expresses itself” (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-

Queen’s University Press, Montreal: 2010, p. 45).

Fr. Giussani continues: “The Mystery of God, which expresses itself in freedom of choice or in election, vibrates, it can and must vibrate, with fear and trembling, with absolute humility, in human preference, because human preference is the shadow of the choice of God’s freedom” (*Ibid.* p. 45). God calls us so that we may communicate Him to others. God had this preference for us, so that through us His love could reach all. As Saint Paul says: God chose me to be able to show in my person what He wanted to give to everyone. Therefore, all of His passion for every person vibrates in this human preference of God. For this reason, our first preference is for the One who chose me.

This is why we often repeat the word “gratitude.” Acknowledging the great preference of Christ for us means acknowledging with gratitude this place that is constantly given to me. But to understand deep down the whole task that is contained in this preference, first of all we must acknowledge that our first response is to He who prefers us this way, we must realize that we have been chosen by Him. Only then do I understand that “the choice of God’s freedom, which chooses One, hidden like a tiny flower in Our Lady’s womb, is for the whole world [this is why the Pope says there is not a Church that is not missionary. The Presence that we bear is for the whole world: for the whole world, not for the sphere that we decide, choosing those who are more or less adequate]. So the humble echo of preference, full of fear and trembling, does not exist unless out of love for the world, for the benefit to be brought to the world, out of passion for

God calls us so that we may communicate Him to others. God had this preference for us, so that through us His love could reach all. All of His passion for every person vibrates in this human preference of God.

the world. And how wonderful is this supreme paradox of a preference that chooses and elects so as to embrace the world, so as to draw the world along with itself. In making this preference, choice and election coincide with a love that fixes itself on every living person, on all flesh” (*Ibid.* p. 46). The preference of the Mystery enables us to look at everything, even the most dramatic situation, with a “redeemed gaze” as Fr. Pizzaballa said at the Meeting (cf. *The Peripheries of Humanity*, op. cit.)

Who can say this? Who can prefer this way? Who can love this way? Who can love all flesh this way? I can prefer only if I realize that I have been and am preferred, if I live on the basis of this preference, if this preference makes me overflow so much that it becomes contagious, makes me capable of preferring everyone, of drawing others. This is why we can risk, because those who do not risk will be unable to re-acquire all of this today and reach that wholeness of life that everyone desires. **I**

CL LIFE
60 YEARS



THE BEAUTIFUL ROAD

A common theme that spans the globe: “Ordinary people with ordinary lives, who show us the few things that are necessary to live.” The producers of the video for the anniversary of Communion and Liberation recount the adventure of the past year, and give us a peek “behind the scenes.”

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

About a year ago, an idea sprang from Roberto Fontolan, Director of the International Center of CL: make a documentary on the sixty-year life of the Movement. Journalist Monica Maggioni and architect/photographer/art director Dario Curatolo were well-known producers of weighty documentaries, including *Out of Teheran*, which highlighted the plight of Iranian refugees, and *Ward54*, which captured dramatic stories of American soldiers returning home from war in Iraq. However, it was not only their repu-

tation that drew Fontolan’s interest. Monica tells us: “Roberto is an old friend. Around the same time of his request, I had personally met Fr. Carrón and others in the Movement. Roberto asked us to join in an adventure: to tell the story of a history, of a life, through our perspective as ones not ‘native’ to the Movement.” The challenge was not a small one. “I felt like an alien,” says Dario. “I identified CL with the things I read in the newspapers. And they were not always nice things.”

They prepared by studying the writings of Fr. Giussani and Fr. Carrón, and lis- >>>



Monica Maggioni.



Dario Curatolo.

» tening to Fontolan’s tales of what is happening in CL communities in Italy and abroad. For Monica, to read the writings meant “to rediscover a freshness and truth in Fr. Giussani that I had previously only known through the lens of a thousand interpretations and judgments.” In Dario, “Gradually my curiosity was growing. I was struck immediately by the way of speaking about beauty. The challenge was becoming more and more attractive.”

FROM AFRICA TO BRAZIL. In the beginning, the workload was overwhelming. The team watched 600 videos from around the world. The idea of a user-generated story came to Roberto through the inspiration of an American film. Each and every submission was viewed from beginning to end, even those that arrived after the deadline. The constant was a desire to tell one’s story and to describe a life full of meaning, walking toward what is good.

Another element that made an impression on the two artists was the intensity of the contributors. “I’m used to a world that’s always running,” Monica says, “where we make generalizations and never stop to reflect on what really matters in our lives. In every video that we received, though, there was a common theme that spanned the globe: ordinary people, with ordinary lives, who stopped to think and identified the few things that are necessary to live. They did it without heavy-handed statements; they simply showed it in their lives.” One clip from the documentary was a gentleman who, carrying a bag of food to a family in need, says, “I am not a hero. I do something very simple. I take a little of my time to help others. It’s an ordinary thing to do.”

“The perception that you are building your history gives you the energy to face the day.”

The Christian life is an ordinary life. “But not only that,” adds Dario. “There’s another factor. The protagonists are always at peace. There’s no frenetic attempt to dramatize, but rather we see the blossoming of a beautiful, and I would say happy, aspect of life.”

One video at a time, Monica and Dario entered into this history. They saw it in person through their travels to Uganda, surrounded by the kids at Luigi Giussani High School and the women with Rose; to São Paulo, Brazil, where they met the Zerbinis and the “Landless Workers;” and lastly, in the United States, at the New York Encounter. Neither filmmaker emerged untouched. Dario felt like a circle had finally closed, and what he had read from Fr. Giussani and Fr. Carrón and

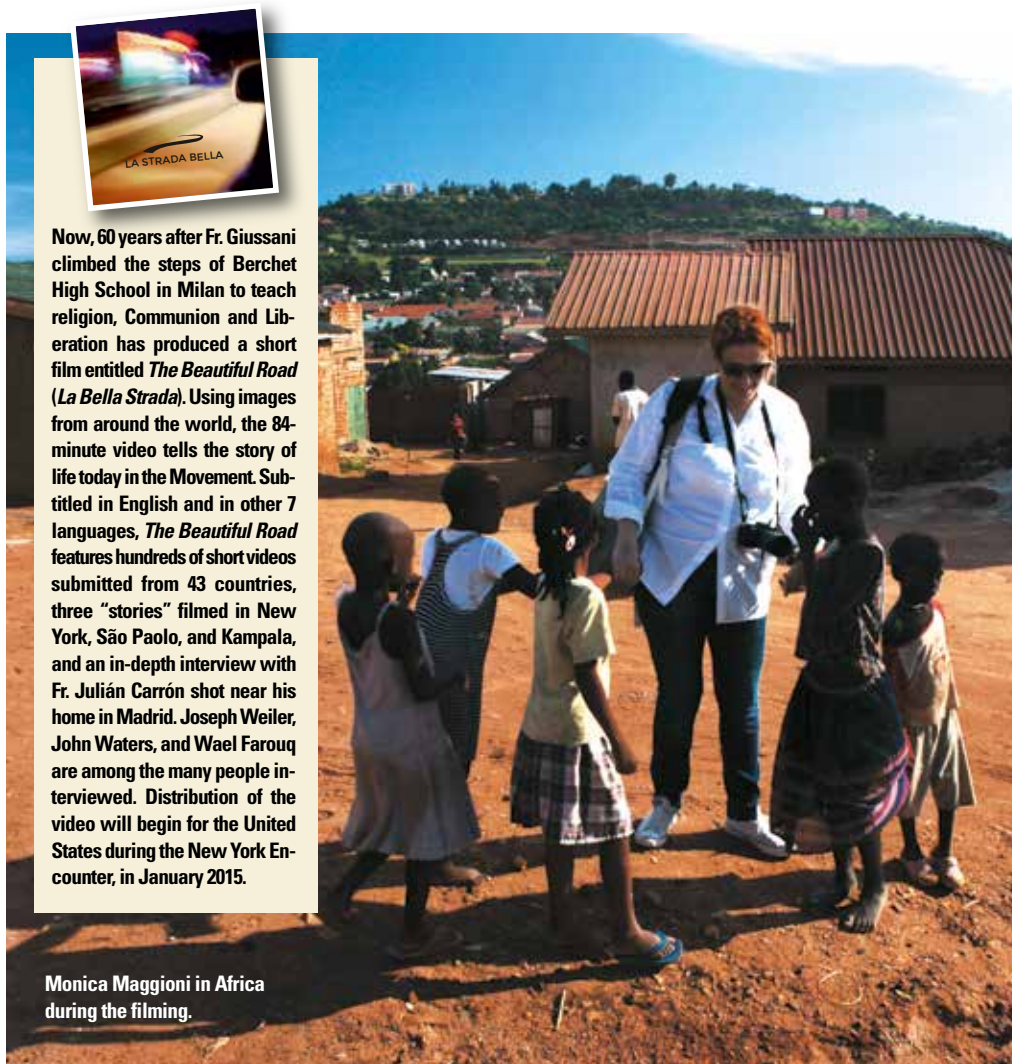
heard from Fontolan became flesh. Joy and beauty took on flesh—even, paradoxically, within circumstances of poverty or difficulty. He says, “The desire to stay right in the midst of things, in action, and to start again really moved me. I could go on about it for days. Above all, both in Uganda and Brazil, what struck me was the path that the people were walking. Nothing is given without effort; change is possible through the knowledge, or better, the awareness of reality.”

THE BIG APPLE. In her travels with Dario while making the film, Monica perceived the same newness her friend had noticed, though she’d long been used to traveling the world for the Italian station RAI. “Having put the person, who has his or her own dignity and meaning within the world, at the center of every initiative, every



Now, 60 years after Fr. Giussani climbed the steps of Berchet High School in Milan to teach religion, Communion and Liberation has produced a short film entitled *The Beautiful Road (La Bella Strada)*. Using images from around the world, the 84-minute video tells the story of life today in the Movement. Subtitled in English and in other 7 languages, *The Beautiful Road* features hundreds of short videos submitted from 43 countries, three “stories” filmed in New York, São Paulo, and Kampala, and an in-depth interview with Fr. Julián Carrón shot near his home in Madrid. Joseph Weiler, John Waters, and Wael Farouq are among the many people interviewed. Distribution of the video will begin for the United States during the New York Encounter, in January 2015.

Monica Maggioni in Africa during the filming.



THE SCOTT BROTHERS AND THE BEGINNING OF OUR JOURNEY

by Roberto Fontolan*



choice, and every action completely changed things. The monotony and difficulties of daily life do not magically disappear—they return every morning; but the perception that you are a person within a history and that you are building *your* history gives you the energy to face the day.” Uganda found a permanent place in Dario’s heart, and he is now planning to bring famous art designers to Luigi Giussani High School as teachers. “It’s something for them to learn about, and for me, the opportunity to go and stay for a while.”

In the frenzy of Manhattan, the New York Encounter was the last thing that Dario and Monica (who considers herself an adopted New Yorker, having lived in the Big Apple for a number of years) expected to find. At first they felt as if the Encounter were somewhat “outside of time,” but “then you rediscover the >>

I confess: I copied. Some time ago my son, who is one of those “perpetually connected” types, told me about the ninety-minute film *Life in a Day*, produced by the Scott brothers (of *Blade Runner* and *Black Hawk Down* fame, to give you an idea), which is based on thousands of video submissions sent from around the world. A wonderful documentary, it’s an invitation to enjoy the wonderful spectacle of humanity in its “pure,” boiled down form, whether cooking eggs or getting married; mourning a death or toiling at work; rejoicing or asking oneself, as does the girl who appears at the end of the film, “Did I reach the height of my expectation for today?” *Life in a Day* won me over with a poeticism and authenticity that could never have been achieved through the traditional medium of a directed documentary.

Later, speaking with Monica Maggioni and Dario Curatolo about the documentary on the Movement, we were scratching our heads trying to figure out how to “bring to life” experiences such as School of Community or charitable work. The Scott brothers’ idea came to mind (“Let them tell us!”) and we humbly followed in their footsteps. I liked many of Monica and Dario’s documentaries that were more like movies, in that they were not dry journalistic reports, but rather had a developed narrative framed around characters and plot lines, which were stitched together with a thoughtful and creative use of cinematography and editing. This was the reason I approached them.

I have known Monica for a long time. The first piece I remember from her was a story for Italian television about a rickety bus that brought immigrants from Morocco to Milan. With Dario, after having talked a long time about the adventures of Fr. Giussani that began at Liceo Berchet, I discovered his many talents. Another

great thing about Monica and Dario is that along with them, you also get the added value of their collaborators, who are also friends, including technicians and producers with a perceptive and artistic touch that is truly rare. And so, working with this team, the road was beautiful.

We received 603 films from 43 countries. Despite our careful specifications regarding the format, main themes and duration, we received a little bit of everything. This made it all the more beautiful, demonstrating that our experiment was successful, with the contributions being the source of many new ideas. There were so many amazing stories—of which we could only use short clips—that were all worth knowing in their entirety. This goes not only for stories, but also for witnesses and initiatives. Perhaps it’s time to see if we can launch a new project...



Roberto Fontolan.

After receiving the contributions, we began traveling to film the stories and the interview with Fr. Julián Carrón, we then added clips from a few dear friends (Prof. Joseph Weiler, for instance). Dario left a piece of his heart behind in Uganda at Luigi Giussani High School, and his eyes are still recovering from filming the fast pace of the streets, faces, and *favelas* in São Paulo. It was in the Brazilian city that we noted the most distinguishing elements of the homes of the Zerbini’s *Landless Workers*: their balconies and terraces. In New York, I particularly loved the choir. Monica relentlessly promoted a Spanish element in the setting for the conversation with Carrón: she wanted the unique colors and sky, and she got them.

Simplicity, humanity, and universality: this was the narrative style with which I desired to tell this story, a kind of aesthetic of the life of the Movement, in all of its drama and beauty.

* Director of the Communion and Liberation International Center



Cleuza Zerbini (center), founder of the Associação Trabalhadores Sem Terra (Association of Landless Workers) of São Paulo, Brazil, with her husband Marcos.

» energy and tension of the city.” They could see it in the meeting with the college students that Fr. Carrón held in the ballroom of the hotel where the event took place. “It’s a short clip in the film, but we were there to see these young people full of hope, entrusting their questions about life to Fr. Carrón and desiring an all-encompassing answer.”

“There is one thing that, over time, paved the way for me,” says Monica. “The relationship with Carrón, which was an ongoing discovery. I was always trying to be myself, with my own history and doubts, even my doubts about the truth of the Movement. What struck me about him and helped me along was, on the one hand, the lack of judgment in the shallow sense of the term—in the sense of a prejudice—and, at the same time, a very clear judgment about things. It pushes you to look at the facts, at people and at relationships, entering into them with all your humanity and your reason,

which always puts you in a different starting point than the one imposed by the common mentality. It pushes you to go to the bottom of things.” “Carrón became my friend,” says Dario. “This unexpected fact remained with me through the whole process, and afterward.” Among their travels was a trip to Spain to shoot an interview with the priest. “We wanted to go back to where his story began, to uncover the deeper sense of his journey. He was very patient with us. Since it was a chronological account, the lighting for the beginning had to be the morning light of dawn, no other time would do. And the last light had to be that of sunset.”

THE WHOLE AND ITS PARTS. After months of work, they had completed the final edit. At the end of August, after a sneak preview during

the Assembly of the Responsibles in La Thuile, Carrón said, “It’s a really beautiful video, but for me what is even greater is the possibility of a friendship beyond what a mere collaboration could have brought

“It a journey of discovery that overtook me, because nothing is as it was a year ago.”

about. I thank you for this, because we don’t know what will happen with the film, but we can be sure that the friendship that has begun will remain.” “That was everything,” says Dario. Monica adds, “It was an adventure, in which we

used all of our experience, but even more than that it was a journey of discovery that overtook me, because nothing is as it was a year ago. The title *The Beautiful Road* refers to the story in the video, but also to the road that we walked. I can really say the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and this applies to us as well.”



THE STORY

THREE CARESSES TO LIVE BY

The news had arrived a few weeks before. A delegation from an American foundation that finances development projects in Uganda was visiting one of their projects and would stop in Kampala to visit the Luigi Giussani School and Meeting Point International. They were intrigued by the stories they heard from one of their colleagues. “Go see them, you will find something different there.”

Matteo, director of the school, had been fretting about the meeting for days: what to say, what to present, how to explain? Then, all of a sudden, it hit him: too many worries. He would let the students talk and the visitors would see.

As the visitors arrived, Matteo was there to greet them with introductions, handshakes, and then a tour of the school. On walls near the entrance, instead of posters with rules to follow, as is customary in African schools, there was a large poster of Van Gogh’s “First Steps” and a photo of Fr. Giussani at the blackboard, drawing the “X” of the religious sense: God who enters history.

Matteo stops to explain, “The painting is there because we believe that beauty educates more than a thousand rules can. The photo, on the other hand, is our logo. This man, Fr. Giussani, changed my life. He changes every one of our lives every day.” Everything is clean, tidy and beautiful. The students, in their uniforms, are waiting for them in a classroom. Outside of the building lie the slums where the majority of them live.

After more greetings and applause, Matteo speaks. “The students will be the ones to explain to you what this school means to them. Aciro, why don’t you start?”

A GIRL STANDS UP, clears her voice, and speaks: “I would like to start from an event that happened to me a few days ago. One morning, I awoke to my mother’s caresses. I asked her, “Why are you caressing?” “Because you were smiling in your sleep, and I was touched.” she said. “Here at school, I feel that my life is being caressed every day. Let me give you three examples,” Aciro takes a breath and continues. “The first caress comes from my teachers; they do not hit me, they love me even when they correct me. For this reason I’m not afraid to ask questions. The second caress comes from my friends. Together we try to comprehend the meaning of things. Finally, the third caress comes from the administrators, from the principal. I understood this very well that time with the toilet paper...”

THE AMERICAN VISITORS LOOK AT EACH OTHER WITH SURPRISE; some of the students smile. Matteo stands up. “Aciro, if you will permit me, I need to give some background.” Addressing the visitors he says, “Many of our students live in the slums, where there are only latrines, basically a hole in the ground without water. When they first came to school, they didn’t know how to use the toilets, and the plumbing was constantly clogged. When I figured out the problem, I went downtown to buy some toilet paper, the most expensive kind I could find...”

Aciro raises her hand, “Excuse me, Sir, may I continue?” “Certainly,” Matteo gives in. “So the principal entered the classroom with a roll of toilet paper in his hands. He called one of my classmates over and he stroked his cheeks with the toilet paper. ‘Do you feel how soft it is?’ and then he began to explain to us... I started to cry. The principal was concerned and said to me, ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you.’ He didn’t understand, I answered: ‘I didn’t know it was possible to love to this extent.’”

THE MEETING ENDS, we walk toward the exit, and from the staircase, a woman from the group stops Matteo. “You are telling me that all this beauty originates from the man in that photo?” “Yes.” “And you also said that meeting him changed your life, am I understanding correctly?” “Yes.” “Let’s stay in touch. You must tell me who he is...”



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