

**FR. LUIGI GIUSSANI**  
**1922-2005**

Texts of the video *Fr. Luigi Giussani 1922-2005*, distributed with the Italian newspaper “Corriere della sera” on 21 February 2015.

Introduction

**Encountering Fr. Giussani, his gaze, his human vibration**

This video was produced to remember Fr. Giussani on the tenth anniversary of his rise to Heaven. The publication of the book *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, the numerous presentations of it and the video *La strada bella [The Beautiful Road]* for the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of Communion and Liberation evoked much more interest in the figure of Fr. Giussani that we had expected. I was the first to be surprised.

In these months we have seen a growing desire to know him better. Many who have heard people talk about him, who have read his biography or seen what started with him and has spread around the world, have expressed the desire to know what he was like, how he spoke, how he expressed himself.

We wondered what we could do to respond to this curiosity, to share with everyone what had happened to those of us who had encountered him.

Thus emerged the idea of a video that would enable people who had never met Fr. Giussani to “encounter” his face, his gaze, his temperament, his human vibration in the face of circumstances, to discover in his very voice what the encounter with Christ meant for him, to see the different humanity that Christ generates and the fascination exercised by a man who acknowledged Him present.

As soon as this idea was mentioned to the Editor of *Corriere della Sera*, Ferruccio de Bortoli, he immediately welcomed it. We are grateful to him for enabling the production of this video that in some way satisfies the desire to “watch Fr. Giussani speaking”.

Through Fr. Giussani’s life and words we discovered Christianity as an attractive reality; he was the one to teach us to be interested in our life and in a human journey. This fascination has never abandoned us; limping, erring a thousand times and a thousand times getting up, we have never taken another road.

The protagonist of this video is Fr. Giussani, a man called by God, who by virtue of this call became the protagonist of a story that ten years from his death has still not been interrupted: starting from his *yes*, others have flowered, that is, other “I”s, very normal people who today live the same newness to which Fr. Giussani testified with his life.

Enjoy the video!

**Julián Carrón**  
*President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*

## THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION FOR EVERY PERSON

The fundamental question for the human person, for any person in any time until the end of history, ever since the message that God became man was brought, entered the world, the greatest question of life is this: no greater question is conceivable, that is, the human person cannot imagine a greater question for his freedom. Christ, yes or no?

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“What does it matter if you take everything you want but then lose yourself? What could a man give in exchange for himself? Thus the sense of respect, veneration, attachment, love, trust, responsibility in the person—the person—arose in the world. Christianity was not born to establish a religion. It was born as passion for man.

Love for man, veneration for man, tenderness for man, passion for man, absolute esteem for man.

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“What is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?” No question in life has ever struck me like this one.

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In this instant, there is nothing more profound and tremendous and at the same time more evident for me, than the fact that I am not making myself. I do not give myself being. In this instant, what is most mine is something given to me. In this given instant is there an evidence that is experientially greater, more fascinating, more tremendous than this evidence? In this moment I would have to say, “You who make me.”

I am made. I am given. I am a gift of an Other -of an Other-that rightly is hidden within the word “Mystery.”

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The mystery of mercy shatters any image of complacency or despair; even the feeling of forgiveness lies within this mystery of Christ.

The Mystery as mercy remains the last word even on all the awful possibilities of history.

For this reason existence expresses itself, as ultimate ideal, in *begging*. The real protagonist of history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man’s heart, and man’s heart that begs for Christ.

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JOURNALIST: Why were they waiting for you like this?

FR. GIUSSANI: Because I believe in what I say.

JOURNALIST: That’s it?

FR. GIUSSANI: Yes!

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The human “I” is thirsty for this God, that is, as Jesus says, “is thirsty for eternal life.” Without this thirst everything would be opaque, obscure, an indigestible nothingness: the more one is a man, the more the “I” is aware and impulsively loving, the more everything would be stifling and intolerable. The “I” is thirsting for eternity, the “I” is relationship with infinity, that is, with a reality beyond every limit in which reality is known.

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The infinite is a *reality*! All the essence of man, all the essence and the dignity, the passion yes, the passionateness and the deeply moved emotion that it kindles in those who watch the “I” of man as if at the theatre, is when the “I” discovers, discovers itself saying “you”; it is when man, in front of a person he did not know, or for the first time in his life through acquired maturation, finds himself on reflection saying “you.” The *you*! It means another thing: you are not me. You are not me: I cannot be abusive to you, cannot use you, cannot appropriate you for myself, cannot rob you, cannot make you exist to serve my purposes, no! So then one realizes the meaning of respect, veneration, adoration. A man who does not live a moment like this with his woman has never loved her, never!

### A PRIEST LIKE ANY OTHER OF THE DIOCESE OF MILAN

How did my mother communicate to me the religious sense that she herself had received? How could she have that way of reading the Gospel, that made me stay close to the table—I was just barely as tall as the edge of the table, and I watched her reading?

She told me about the woman at the well, she told me... like my father came next to my bed and told me the parable of the rich man Dives (he was a deeply committed Socialist, and so every evening, the rich man Dives!). And I listened with my mouth hanging open and never tired of hearing it! But it was something in him that was similar, of the same nature as what had happened: he felt and suffered what had happened, in its truth of today. In this way he narrated the gospel parable with the impetus of one who verified in his days injustice, or justice, or the thirst for justice, the hunger of those who were hungry and the satiety of those who were full.

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I remember the moment and the thrill of the moment and the heart-thawing yearning of the moment when I understood in my life the fact of the existence of God, and it became charged with meaning. I was in the seminary, the first year of classical high school, during a music history lesson on Donizetti. The teacher put on the record player a piece of the *romanza* in the fourth act of *La Favorita*. When the marvelous tenor began singing “*Spirto gentil de’ sogni miei*, [Gentle spirit, in my dreams *brillasti un dì ma ti perdei*” you gleamed one day, but I lost you], at the vibration of the first note I understood, heartrendingly, that what is called God -the inevitable destiny for which one is born- is the ultimate end of the need for happiness, is the happiness that the heart irrepressibly needs. The human “I,” the heart of the human person is need for happiness.

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CHIARA BERIA DI ARGENTINE: But who is Fr. Giussani?

FR. GIUSSANI: He is a priest like any other of the Diocese of Milan, who completed the entire itinerary of seminary life, all of it, starting at age 10.

CHIARA BERIA DI ARGENTINE: So you entered the seminary at age 10?

FR. GIUSSANI: Yes. I also stayed on for a few years as a teacher. And then I left, in order to dedicate myself—through religious teaching in public schools—to attempting to communicate religion in a way that was more easily accepted by young people.

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I had just arrived from a trip: on the train I had found a group of students who were on their way to Cattolica. We had had a bit of a quarrel and I, a believer, in front of their fierce unbelief, was well aware that it was superficial. In fact, it was out of ignorance—this was the judgment I made—it was out of ignorance that they talked, acted, behaved this way... out of ignorance! So I wanted to say that Christianity had been given to them, that they had encountered Christianity, in a way that was inopportune, ill suited, that did not explain its meaning, did not clarify it: ill suited. In other words, it was a matter of method. The method, the way by which Christianity reached them was not a healthy way, did not healthily encompass the values that this Christianity provided life. This is why I decided to leave the study of theology, which suddenly seemed arid and abstract in front of this situation, and I went to teach religion in a Milan college preparatory high school.

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My story is the story of many who, in loving young people, succeed, by the grace of God—in this sense it can be called “charisma”—by the grace of God, succeed in communicating to them certainties and a capacity for affection, of which they would otherwise seem incapable.

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Going up those three steps of the Berchet High School, I asked myself, “What am I coming here to do? I come to give these kids the opportunity to know what I have come to know, because why should I have known and felt the reasons, and them not? Then, freedom will show the road as it wills.”

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CHIARA BERIA DI ARGENTINE: You have said that, in reality, you carry on the true motives that inspired the protest movement of 1968. Can you better explain this position to us?

FR. GIUSSANI: The love for authenticity, the need for authenticity or for freedom that animated a certain initial moment of the '68 protests found us in complete agreement. That is to say, that society be more true, led in a more exemplary way—this was not the desire of only some; it was, I believe, the general desire, everyone's desire. Our beginning in 1954 had the same inspiration: to create a more human humanity. I often cited a phrase from the Gospel that is very meaningful; the Lord says, “Whoever follows me will have eternal life and the hundredfold here below.” And I used to say in class, “If you do not desire eternal life, I understand you, because you have little imagination; but if you do not desire the hundredfold here below, then you are fools, because the hundredfold here below...”

We, like everyone else, want a better humanity, but it is not possible for humanity to live better by itself, alone, with only its projects, its fantasies, and its energies.

This is what we want to say with the term “Communion and Liberation:” it is only the communion that God made possible with Himself through Christ, it is only the communion among men who recognize this, that—in expanding itself—creates oases of truer humanity.

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In this season in which the Lord has me pass through the last cross of life, David's eighth psalm is normally the theme of my meditation. Since you know it well... But I'll read it anyway. “How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!...”

## THE RISK OF THE PARENT, THE FREEDOM OF THE CHILD

I remember that in the first years I was teaching religion, often in the disputes and dialectics in class, I would say, “Please, send us—us, the clergy—naked onto the streets, take everything from us, but don’t take from us the freedom to educate.” I was distressed to see in the years that followed—because thirty years have passed since I said that—that we have strived for everything, but have sacrificed freedom in education.

*Man develops through relationships, through contact with something else;* just as an “other” is necessary for man to exist from the start, it is equally necessary for man to become true, more and more himself. Thus man is destined for fulfilment of himself upon the total horizon. So, at least potentially, education must aim at introducing man into reality as a whole.

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The heart, as the Bible calls it, this original way the human person is made... This complex of needs and of meaning of their destiny, of needs for happiness and truth and the destiny to which these needs press The Bible calls it “heart”: the heart of the human person, identifiable as need of truth, of beauty, of goodness, of justice, of happiness is identical in everyone, everyone!

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A father and mother are such, not only because they give the child firstly milk and then more adult food as he grows, but because they give themselves.

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“Heart,” therefore, is the biblical definition for the ultimate criterion of truth for man and for identifying his purpose. If something corresponds to the heart, this heart understood in this way, it is right. If it does not correspond to the heart, it is wrong, against the human person. If it corresponds, it explains. If it does not correspond, it obscures.

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Therefore hoping against hope, hoping whatever the situation, continually grasping the opportunity for showing that what is maintained and given is reasonable, even when the reactivity seems to be opposed to it, even when it seems that the child or the pupil is impermeable, even when he is obviously following other paths, you must persist in this fatherly and motherly, parental duty, with this contrition of the heart, with this tremendous disappointment, and overcome your distress. It is at this point that the risk of education is played out, because our task, as adult people, is to love, in other words, to propose and accompany in putting things to the proof, so that the person proposed to can grasp the reasons that we have grasped. This is love. Love cannot be demanding obedience on the basis of a persuasion, a conviction not yet formed. Man, and therefore your child, or young man, is free relationship with destiny, with the infinite, with God, with truth and goodness. He is a free relationship, and so the way the search for destiny will follow in him is mysterious.

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Questioning what has been given to us, what you have found or what you have read, what is well-known, is right: this is critiqueing! Saint Paul has the most beautiful definition of critiqueing: *panta dokimázete to kalòn katéchete*. Test everything, retain and adhere to what is beautiful, to the value that things show they have—beauty being the splendor of the truth, the way the true becomes clear to the human person. Test everything—this is how the mature person grows—test everything and retain

the value, the beauty, the substance that it has, the interest that it has for your concrete life, for your life today, for existence: the value of existence that the thing has.

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Stephan, the centurion, Peter... are all people who came here, who passed here. What dominated them, what were their thoughts?

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JOHN PAUL II: Never allow the parasite of habit, of routine, of old age to lodge within your participation! This is not a threat, does not threaten, as Monsignor Giussani said: there are young people, there are some less young... the oldest would be the Pope... But he too, like all older people—he is old according to the expression of Saint Peter—he, too tries to be young, young in spirit.

### ALL MONTH LONG I READ ONLY LEOPARDI

I met Leopardi in May of my third year of middle school—I was in the seminary—when for a whole month, having found a certain poem, *La sera del di' di festa*, (The Evening of the Holy Day), which I hadn't yet studied, (they hadn't made me study it yet...), the whole month I only read Leopardi, studying everything by heart and from then on, everyday, I said one or another of his *Canti* from memory, until I found “the” *canto* and always used it as thanksgiving after Holy Communion. When I said this at a meeting of priests (I had already begun GS), Cardinal Giovanni Colombo—who was there—said “Oh gosh! If I had known that, I wouldn't have made you a priest” We will listen to the poem. ... thank goodness he didn't know...

From *Alla sua donna* (To His Lady) by Giacomo Leopardi

*Beloved beauty who inspires love from afar, your face concealed except when your celestial image stirs my heart in sleep, or in the fields where light and nature's laughter shine more lovely; was it maybe you who blessed the innocent age they call golden, and do you now, blithe spirit, soar among men? Or does the miser fate, who hides you from us keep you for the future? No hope of seeing you alive remains for me now, (...)*

*Whether you are the one and only eternal idea that eternal wisdom disdains to see arrayed in sensible form, to know the pains of mortal life in transitory dress; or if in the supernal spheres another earth from among unnumbered worlds receives you, and a near star lovelier than the Sun warms you and you breathe benigner ether, from here, where years are both ill-starred and brief, accept this hymn from your unnoticed lover.*

“Accept this hymn from your unnoticed lover”. Unnoticed lover. Man, unnoticed lover of this incarnate beauty that, if not on the paths of this world, must be somewhere, in some star in the sky, in some platonic world. Unnoticed lover: I, the unnoticed lover of You; You, God become flesh, unnoticed lover of me, ignored by me, not known by me, not remembered by me. This is, literally, the Christian message as I have known it, as it is objectively. What Leopardi expresses as the supreme need to be able to see and live the relationship with beauty with beauty become flesh happened two thousand years ago.

“The Word was made flesh” means “beauty was made man; justice was made man; goodness was made man; truth was made man...” *Quid est veritas? Vir qui adest*: what is truth? A man present. Jesus was prophesied by Leopardi's genius eighteen hundred years after His existence. Because

every genius is a prophet; every genius, in any great genius there is prophecy. Look for it, and you will find prophecy. Leopardi is the prophet of the Word made flesh.

### **A FAITH RELEVANT TO LIFE'S NEEDS**

Showing the relevance of faith to life's needs. Only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life's needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where everything pointed in the opposite direction.

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FR. GIUSSANI: For that matter, Eliot already had something to say with some certainty when he asked: "Did humanity abandon the Church, or did the Church abandon humanity?"

ROBERTO FONTOLAN: I've always wondered whether this line of Eliot's was a criticism of the Church or a criticism of humanity.

FR. GIUSSANI: Both. First of all, humanity abandoned the Church, because if I need something, I run after it, if that thing moves away. Nobody ran after the Church...

ROBERTO FONTOLAN: And when did the Church abandon humanity?

FR. GIUSSANI: The Church started to abandon humanity, in my opinion, in our opinion, because she forgot who Christ was, she didn't rest on... she was ashamed of Christ, of saying who Christ is.

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But all our weakness cannot disappoint or stop us: the mercy revealed in the Cross is the inexhaustible source of that luminous and persuasive force that will always indomitably make us start anew, "hoping against all hope."

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Faith is like a great working hypothesis that comes to us from tradition. But if the work of experience is lacking, it remains on a purely abstract level and is translated into mere rites and moralistic concerns, while faith is life, a way of conceiving of and feeling life.

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This is our supreme task: not that of being father or mother, not that of being a journalist or an engineer, not that of being a soldier or a worker, not that of being victorious in elections or slave to a master. It is not this: our task is to spread in the world the great message of Christ.

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I was given the gift of faith so I could give it to others, communicate it. The gift of faith was given to us so we have it to communicate, and our life will be judged on the basis of this.

That people come to know Christ, that humanity comes to know Christ, this is the task of those who are called, the task of the people of God, the mission: "I have chosen you, that you may go forth."

## HE WAS BORN SO ALL THE WORLD WOULD SEEK HIM

Jesus turned and saw them following Him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see" This is the formula, the Christian formula. This is the Christian method: "Come and see."

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John and Andrew, those who heard Him for the first time, went home and said: "We have found the Messiah." They did not understand what "we have found the Messiah" meant. They repeated the words they had heard Him say. What struck them was that that man had something strange, exceptional, irriducible, unthinkable, unthought of that did not derive from precedents, from antecedentes, but imposed itself.

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But imagine those two who stay there listening to Him for hours and then they have to go home. He says goodbye to them and they go their way silently, silent because full of the impression they have received of the felt mystery, And then they separate. Each of the two goes to his own house. They don't say goodbye, not because they don't say goodbye They say goodbye in a different way, they say goodbye without saying goodbye, because they are both full of the same thing, the two of them are one, so full are they of the same thing. And Andrew goes into his house and puts his cloak down, and his wife says: "Andrew, what's wrong with you? You're different, what happened?" And he burst into tears in her arms, and that she, upset by all this, continued to ask him: "But what's wrong?" And he holding his wife, who had never felt herself held that way before: he was a different person. He was a different person! He was the same, but he was different. If anyone had asked him: "Who are you?" he would have said: "I understand that I have become someone else... after hearing that person, that man, I have become another person." My friends, without going too much into it, this happened.

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Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. "Is he nuts?" He is not nuts. It is an articulation of a conception of the person, of their "I," of a vision of social relations, of a judgment on those who are powerful and those who serve, of a perspective on the future, of how to treat children. Who knows how often Zacchaeus got angry with his wife; people who manage money are prone to anger, patient with clients but mean-tempered with their wives. After that evening, Zacchaeus probably still got angry at his wife, but he began to feel the pain of it, to be uncomfortable about it; he was unsettled, changed.

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When he saw that funeral procession He immediately wanted to know, "Who is it?" "It's a teenager, whose father died not long ago." And his mother was wailing, and wailing, and wailing behind the bier, not according to custom, but according to the custom of a mother's heart that expresses itself freely. He took a step toward her and said, "Woman, don't cry!" Is there anything more unjust than saying to a woman whose son has just died, and who's left alone, "Woman, don't cry"? And it was, instead, the sign of compassion, affection, a sharing in that infinite grief. He ordered the young man, "Get up!" and he gave him back to his mother. But he could not give her son back to her without a word: he would have remained in his solemn role as a prophet, a healer, a wonder-worker. "Woman, don't cry", he said. And he gave her back her son. But first he said, "Woman, don't cry."

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I almost feel ashamed to comment this page, but nonetheless I encourage you to put the good will of your heart into what is ineffable and cannot be said of the mystery of God who touches the human person, and of the human person who is touched by the mystery of God.

Not considering the fact that He first asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” And it is almost understandable that Peter would have answered, “Certainly, Lord, You know that I love You.” But the second and third time Christ only asks him: “Simon, do you love Me?” not more, not less.

Let’s try to identify with that blunt and rough man in front of the Lord, his soul full of the memory of his betrayal. His betrayal was simply the epiphany, the epiphenomenon, the manifestation of a moment, of something he had within: coarseness, ingenerousness, obduracy, fear, timidity, cowardice, pettiness: he was all of this! Peter’s soul was full of this, and in front of that question everything came to the surface; the betrayal was like a point of revelation. All his miserableness came to the surface. The Church has us say, “To prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins.” How many of us repeat it when the Church asks us to say it! Simon felt all his smallness, pusillanimity and pettiness of man when asked “Simon, do you love me more than the others love me?” And he said “Yes Lord, I love you”, when he said, “Lord, you know everything, notwithstanding the appearances, notwithstanding all the appearances of me to myself, You know that I love you.” “I love you” means “I want You,” that is, “I affirm You, I recognize what You are for me and for everything.” This is the overturning of the moralism and justice made with our hands: that such a poor sinner like us, one who had just betrayed Him so indecently, as perhaps we have never done (to our memory so blatantly), loved him anyway. So then the Lord told him: “I entrust my testimony in the world to you.” He entrusted His testimony, little sheep, lambs, He entrusted His kingdom in the world to that miserable sinner.

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They had been looking for *Him*. He was born so that the whole world should look for Him. He was moved and all of a sudden—He was a man like us, to whom ideas come at times from circumstances—a fantastic idea dawned on Him. He changed the sense of what He was saying and exclaimed, “Not My word will I give you, but My own body to eat, My Own blood to drink!” The cue! Finally the politicians and the journalists and the TV columnists of the time had their cue. “He is out of His mind! Who can give people His own flesh to eat?” They all walked away. “He is mad, he is mad” they said. “*Durus est hic sermo*. “He has a bizarre way of speaking.” Until He found Himself alone in the twilight with His twelve friends.

“Do you too wish to go away?” And Simon Peter, hard-head, answered “Master, we too don’t understand what You say, but if we go away from You, where shall we go?”

John and Andrew, and those twelve, Simon and the others, told their wives; and some of those wives went with them...

They said it even to other friends.

The friends told other friends, and these in turn told others again. Thus the first century passed, and these friends invaded the second century with their faith; at the same time they were invading the world geographically. They hit Spain at the end of the first century, and India during the second century. Then those of the second century told others who lived after them, and these told others after them, like a great flow that grew wider and wider, like a river fuller and fuller, and they ended up telling my mother. Yes, my own mother. And my mother told me when I was small, and I say: “Master, I don’t understand what you say either, but if we go away from you, where shall we go? You alone have words that correspond to our hearts.”

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One still present among you another year wrote me this page at the end: “My name is such and such, I wanted to tell you that I exist. Pray for me, and remember me. Bye! P.S. May all this never end among us!” May all this never end among us. This is what we should wish for each other!

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I can be dissolved, but the texts left behind and the uninterrupted succession—if God wills—of the people indicated as the true hermeneutics, as true interpretation of what happened in me, become the instrument for correction and for reawakening; they become the instrument for morality.

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I hope that my life has unfolded in accordance with what God expected from it. One can say that it unfolded under the banner of urgency because every circumstance, indeed every instant for my Christian conscience has been to seek the glory of Christ.

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