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TRACES

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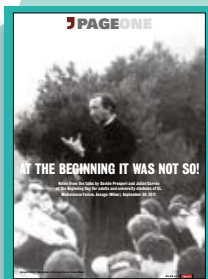
VOL. 19

LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



I DON'T HATE MONDAY

An investigation into work and the questions it raises.
Including how we can live it without suffocating.

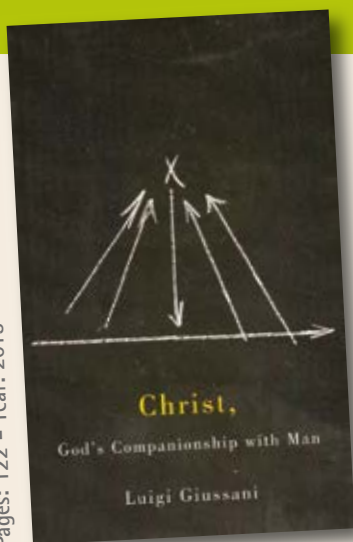
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www.tracesonline.org**Notes from the talks
by Davide Prospero and
Julián Carrón at the
Beginning Day of CL.****CONTENTS**

October, 2017 Vol.19 - No. 09

CLOSE UP

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NORM AT WORK**Work opens up many questions, both for those
who have it and those who seek it. A group of
young adults set out on a road that "shatters"
our mechanical ways of thinking.

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LUIGI GIUSSANIThis volume is a selection of the most
significant writings by Monsignor Luigi
Giussani (1922-2005), founder of the Italian
Catholic lay movement Communion and
Liberation, which is practiced in 80
countries around the world.Presented by Julián Carrón, Giussani's
successor as head of Communion and
Liberation, *Christ, God's Companionship with
Man* is the most succinct introduction to the
breadth of Giussani's thought, includingmemorable passages from works such as *At
the Origin of the Christian Claim, The Journey
to Truth is an Experience, Why the Church?,
Generating Traces in the History of the World,
and Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Many speak
of Giussani as a friendly presence, a man
who believed that it was possible to live in
faith every day and in any circumstance. As a
writer and religious scholar who was deeply
devoted to his work, Giussani's teachings and
reflections have come to generate worldwide
recognition and support.**MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS**

A RADICAL DIFFERENCE

This month, you could read the entire message of *Traces* in just one sidebar. You can find it on page 14 with the story of Catalonia preparing to face the post-referendum chaos. The vote took place before this issue went to press, but we don't know what direction things will have taken by the time you read this magazine; there is no question that the situation is serious and tenuous. The words of the sidebar, and the article it accompanies, contain something precious. It's the story of a group of students who participated in an assembly just hours before October 1st, and of a girl who found herself again accepted and embraced at the heart of who she is, beyond any differences of background, worldview, or political position. It's the story of a friendship that stubbornly contradicts the tides of the general climate, awash in bitter resentment.


It was a fact. A tiny one, one that at first glance is absolutely insignificant amidst the tempest that has enveloped Spain and, with it, all of Europe, where the push toward “everyone against everyone” is ever more apparent. But it's decisive, because it indicates a road to follow. It carries within it a seed from which everything can blossom or be reborn involving people who are alive. Young people who ask each other questions, take an interest in what's happening around them, enter into relationships with adults to be able to face their problems, their wounds, and their desires, who help and correct each other. And who, because of this, aren't ensnared in the framework of opposition, of “what side are you on?”

People who are alive, and facts—things that happen in places and in ways you'd never expect, because the current is pulling in the opposite direction. You'll find these people and facts at the root of the “Close Up” section dedicated, once again, to the topic of work—though we focused on it at length just a few months ago—because it's a real crisis. And also in other places in this issue of *Traces*. These people who are alive don't offer formulas or solutions to the problems of work, of sickness, or of the burdens of daily life. But they do point us toward a radical difference, simply because certain facts happen. These people show that within those burdens, something *other* is present. Not beyond reality, but *within* it.

What is this “something other?” What is its nature and its origin? Where do facts and people like this come from? We have to answer these questions if we don't want to lose sight of that new and different outlook we have seen opening up, that joy we have seen unfold where it seemed impossible.

At its core, this is the theme of Page One this month (you can find it at www.tracesonline.org), the notes from the CL Beginning Day. It's a help for us to look back on our history, including our personal histories, as well as the arc of events happening now. We need to compare this history with our desires, our aspirations, our hearts, and with what we see happening around us. Because we need to know, now more than ever, the truth of the promise that Christ brought into the world that Julián Carrón, quoting Fr. Giussani, summarized by saying, “It is in the relationship with Him that we can experience the hundredfold: ‘One hundred times the humanity that you have inside will blossom, will blossom one hundred times more than in others, and nothing will make you fall apart, nothing will perturb you to the point of frightening you, you will fear nothing,’ while instead, everything falls apart and upsets us as soon as we separate ourselves from Him.” **T**

HURRICANE MARIA AND SILVIA'S MESSAGE

 Dearest friends: Hurricane Maria devastated our island on September 20th and the aftermath is shocking. Some areas you can't even recognize anymore, because fences, trees, whole forests, power lines, street lights, signs, street lights, roofs, and in some cases even entire houses are simply gone! We spent many days with no contact with the outside world, and, like almost all the rest of the island, we're still without electricity, phone service, or internet. In the big towns the lines for gasoline have finally shortened, but there are still long lines to get into supermarkets and pharmacies. Unfortunately there have been deaths (16 caused directly by the hurricane; 34, if you count deaths because oxygen tanks couldn't be delivered, or people couldn't go for dialysis, or other causes related to the hurricane). Many people have lost everything in landslides or floods because Puerto Rico still has a lot of wooden homes with sheet metal roofs. Some of the families we know already know that they will not have their jobs even when the emergency is over. I think this will be the case for many of our university students, because most of them work at least part time to pay for their studies. When I think about the day of the hurricane, I realize that in those hours it wasn't difficult to say to Jesus, "Help me recognize You in this circumstance." Our awareness of the exceptional-ity of the event, the physical effort



(we bailed water for hours as soon as the wind let up enough for us to open the door a bit), being together with our friends of the *Memores* house, everything made it simple to accept what was happening. Then came the other difficulties and the absolute inability to communicate with friends and relatives. Added to this were uncertainty and fears: would there be enough water and food for everyone? How could we manage without gasoline? How can people buy food and basic supplies when they've run out of cash? So then, as the days passed, there was a big temptation: the measure, the sense of powerlessness and uselessness that invaded us. What's the use of my presence here? What good am I to others? What's the use of these days spent without seeing anyone outside those in the house? Finally, the essential question: what is the meaning of all this? Why are You asking this of us? Aren't You perhaps unjust in asking this people to suffer this pain and toil? In this situation, simplistic answers are not acceptable, and we realize for the first time how tight our

heart is, how small our "yes" is, how we resist the great sacrifice of saying "You" to Christ present in circumstances we do not like, Christ who became man precisely for this, not to take away the toil of living, but to stay with us within the toil of living. "Beautiful things, beautiful people, and beautiful moments are not what call us, what attract us, but it is always Christ who calls us to Himself through everything, and this makes everything and every person beautiful, makes every experience intense and eternal." You have no idea how hard I resisted, fought, protested, screamed, prayed, and offered in reaction to these words by Fr. Mauro Giuseppe Lepori that we heard this summer. What a simple heart is needed to adhere to the strange logic of death and resurrection woven into the life of each person! But what a grace it is to belong to this story of the Movement, where we're offered a journey so we aren't tossed around in the midst of the circumstances of life! This was testified to by Silvia, a woman who lost her husband less than two years ago, in one of the few messages that miraculously reached me in these days: "I'm well. We just had a few trees that fell on the house and the furniture in the bedroom and kitchen are wet. Nothing serious. I know that I am accompanied when I pray the Liturgy of the Hours. I have the certainty of praying them with others, even if we do so at different times. 'When I am weak, I am strong in Him.'" Then you suddenly realize how true it is that this story of ours



EARTHQUAKE IN MEXICO

THE RESPONSE TO THE GIFT RECEIVED

I was preparing the classroom for students when I heard the earthquake. Even though the school wasn't severely damaged, we realized the gravity of the event. The students were sent home. A pilgrimage on people's way home began. Thousands offered their help in any way possible. Families, friends, and neighbors left their homes in groups, bringing food, pickaxes, shovels, flashlights, and first aid kits to the areas most affected. At the twilight of a day full of pain and anguish, we dis-




covered our dependence and vulnerability, and at the same time the greatness of a heart well made, a heart that doesn't give up, because it knows that life does not depend on it. What happened to us is not an instinctive reaction of survival, but the response to a gift received. This dependence is a grace that made us and gave us a great and untamable heart, able to love the good, because this heart has been loved to the end, and has been and is continually saved.

Guadalupe, Mexico City (Mexico)

"saves," that the "yes" said to Christ with simplicity in the circumstances is truly the beginning of a new world, and the event announcing the possibility of salvation for all. Dearest ones, don't worry, because truly we're okay and our house wasn't damaged, both because it is very solid and its location is good, and because God, knowing our frailty, spared us worse trials.

Pinuccio, Cayey (Puerto Rico)


BOWLED OVER BY THE BEAUTY

 Mark, the responsible for the Ann Arbor community, told me about a phone call he received from a guy who lives in Holland (Michigan), two-and-a-half hours from here. This man found Mark's phone number on the CL-

US website. He had come across the book, *Disarming Beauty*, and he was "bowled over" (to use his own words). He told Mark that he wanted to read this book with other people, so that it could "better attach to his life." For this reason, he asked his parish if it would be possible to propose a reading group on this book, a chapter a week. Because of the attraction he feels, he wants to do School of Community without knowing of its existence or its name.

Benedetta, Ann Arbor (USA)

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES MORNING THOUGHTS

 Dear Fr. Carrón, this morning at breakfast I was struck by what my wife said to me after she finished reading the Exercis-

es. Closing the booklet, she said: "Done! These Exercises have been for me like the first time I met the Movement. I met someone, Fr. Carrón, who while repeating Fr. Giussani, communicates his own life, he communicates himself. He is not worried about repeating things, but he has a desire to live now what Fr. Giussani said. This is visible. I became aware of this when I realized that, thirty years after my first encounter, I was experiencing the same vibration, the same emotion, and the same attraction, full of reasons for the Christian experience. So strange, but it happened! This is what I know, and this sustains me and saves my life more than any reasoning." I started the day by desiring my wife's simplicity of heart.

Paolo, Milan (Italy)



BREAKING THE NORM AT WORK

Why is work so important? How do we become fulfilled? What can stand the test of “Monday morning?” Work opens up many questions, both for those who have it and those who seek it. A group of young adults attested to this at the Rimini Meeting, where they set out on a road that “shatters” our mechanical ways of thinking, that brings everyday experience to a halt.

BY PAOLO PEREGO

There are two words that the economic crisis has forced together into the same sentence: youth and work. In nearly every country, these two words together have been translated into raw numbers that are alarming. It is no coincidence that Pope Francis, during his meeting with some workers in Genoa last May said, “The work world is a human priority. Therefore, it is also a priority for Christians, for us, and even for the Pope. The Church has always had a strong connection to work, starting with Christ as a worker. Every worker attracts the interest and loving gaze of the Lord and of the Church.”

In these pages, there are no recipes for how to face the crisis. Rather, there is an attempt to look at it from another perspective that comes from reflecting on an experience: an experience lived by a team of young adults who prepared an exhibit at the Rimini Meeting this year dedicated specifically to work. More specifically, dedicated to the questions that work opens up in everyone's lives, job holders and seekers alike, of every age and situation. What are the criteria for a job search? How do you become yourself through your work? What contribution can you make to society by working? Why is work so important? Hence, we would like to start from our dialogue with them and from what they learned while working on these questions, without intending to provide solutions, but instead contributions.



“We took the questions that we face every day at work, and we posed them to people who live the experience of work in a fascinating way.” Forty interviews with businesspeople, some well-known and others less so, with various employees, entrepreneurs, and teachers, and many others. All took the questions of 30 or so young adults taking their first shots in the workplace. “How do you

face challenges? How do you interact with your colleagues? What is failure? How do you reconcile work and family life?...”

All of this was the crux of the exhibit at the Rimini Meeting titled, “Everyone Get to Work,” focused on the realm of employment. Many visited the exhibit. Some were struck, but others were turned off by it and criticized it: “So many questions, that’s great, but what good is it?” So, here we reconvene with some of the young adults

who created the exhibit: Marco Sapori, 27, a graphic designer; the siblings Martino and Giuditta Sartori, 28 and 26 respectively, the former a human resources consultant for an American company and the latter a designer; and Paolo Volpetti, a 28-year-old architect. We met with them one month after the Rimini Meeting for an evening gathered around the dinner table to see what had happened since their return to work from summer vacation. This was a brief peek into the world of work, of young adults, and of how they face the big changes of our times. What is their daily experience? And how do they conquer the Monday morning challenge?

Giuditta: It is easy to find oneself talking about work. It happens in the most basic conversations: “How are you? Good, bad...” It is true that people, more often than not, complain, are cynical about work, even more so if they had a bad day. And people vent, perhaps because they are frustrated. Instead, as we saw at the Rimini Meeting, the opposite can be true, that is, daily life can be faced in a different way. There, we found people like those we interviewed and we asked them, “How do you approach this?” From this sprang an ongoing discovery that not only delved more deeply into this question, but gave life to new ones. Now I ask my colleagues important questions that are part of the reality of every morning.

What do you mean? Can you give an example?

Giuditta: I am growing as a professional, and I am being given leadership roles. I have been put in charge of a team working on a project. The team did not work well at first, but when you receive an assignment, you have to produce results. My first response was to complain, and I was tempted >>

» to ask for another team, but that was not the solution. There were no simple answers. I reread some of the interviews from the exhibit, thinking about how to resolve the dilemma with my team. At a certain point, I realized that almost all of them were smokers, and so was I. I started to take smoke breaks with them, and during these breaks would propose ideas for the project: “What do you think? Any thoughts? What would you do?” After this, things were set in motion; one young woman proposed an amazing idea. It reminded me of when we were preparing for the exhibit—even when someone would make the most basic observations, another would take him seriously and push him to go deeper. I delegated a part of the project to that woman, taking a risk. From that decision, something extraordinary emerged. I still make mistakes quite often. Before, my reaction would have been to deny that I made a mistake or to justify myself, but when I faced my boss the other day, it was different: “You are right, how can I improve?” He took the time to discuss my mistake with me.

Martino: The risk we often face is looking too far ahead to what will happen *next*: a new position, a higher salary, my career... But by doing this you detach yourself from daily life. In contrast, seeing people who are passionate about what they do day after day, and more importantly who are so “present,” causes a change in outlook. I have also tried to apply this outlook at work, and I have been surprised that I was more myself, that I went beyond my simple task without complaining as much, doing more than just the “right” thing to do “because the boss wants it this way.”

And all of this came from just starting to ask questions?

Marco: That’s the method: to ask

someone else. The questions we discuss are shared by everyone and pertain fundamentally to the possibility of truly enjoying what we do. And so you ask and you follow the example of someone ahead of you on the path. Except that asking is the most difficult part. Asking about the criteria to use to make a career transition can be seen as a weakness. It appears to be the same as saying, “I made this mistake and do not know what to do about it.” The fear of being seen as weak can lead to a passive appeal to “I like it” or “I don’t like it.” Instead, there is another measure.

What measure?

Marco: Take Silvana, for instance, the long-time school janitor in Milan. She was one of the people we interviewed. She will tell you that when she cleans a bathroom, she does not do it to do a good job. That is not enough. She does it because a student will use it, and as an adult, that student will remember how nice and clean the bathroom was and will seek to do his or her job well. It is another way to live, another measure. And this measure is compelling even for Vitaliy Novikov, the General Manager of Coca-Cola HBC Italia. You see what I mean? This is a man who came to see the exhibit who at 35 has made his way to the top and speaks seven languages.

How does this relate to your life, to your work?

Marco: I, too, can make a flyer for a client following the right techniques. A job well done, that’s it. Or I could get more involved with the client, propose ideas, and forge a relationship with him. If Silvana’s perspective is bigger and her way of doing things for the world is better, then why not follow her example in creating my flyer?

Giuditta: It doesn’t matter what you do. Though at first glance my work is



more “beautiful” than Silvana’s, I want to work as she does. We are in a world where Monday morning in the office is a tragedy. Everyone is depressed...

Paolo: I love what I do, and I am also ambitious. A few months ago, I moved to a new studio, a tough decision that also cost me some money. The new office seemed to offer opportunities to have greater responsibility. Now, I have found out that, for the moment, things aren’t going to go as I had expected. Have I been deceived? I don’t know. But after everything that happened this summer, I have changed. It is true—at first, looking at things in a new way is unnerving. At the same time, it ignites an interest, and you can find possibilities in what you are given. Then you talk about your situation with those who can help you. This is not what it was like a year ago for me.

You seek out someone who is older, more mature...

Marco: In a way, yes. There are people



“ It’s like shattering the “bell jar,” which is that deep breath you take before you step into the office thinking that “no one can touch me,” and that after work you will see your friends and live again. But in the long run, this suffocates you.

”

who can help you even if they belong to another profession or to another generation. For this exhibit, I interviewed someone younger than me. He works in my field and we have worked together before. He is a step ahead of me, not just in terms of his abilities. When we were colleagues, he would spend time explaining things to me, even though we were falling behind, missing the deadline. He was passionate, almost paternal. And this surprises you, because you may not have done that if you were in his place.

Giuditta: It is not a matter of technical ability, of finding the expert that can solve your problem. If I were to talk to other friends about a difficult situation at work, they might open my eyes, even though they may not be knowledgeable about my work. Remaining with them, observing how they face what is before them, even their struggles, I begin to approach my own problems differently. This is

what I need. The technical solution is too “narrow” for me.

What does all of this have to do with macro-scale problems? Unemployment, unreliable contracts, exploitation... These difficult situations were the starting point of the exhibit. And you responded by posing your own questions.

Paolo: This may seem shocking, perhaps politically incorrect, but I cannot conceive of the problem as a dilemma of “work.” At least not without starting from “my work.” How to grow, face challenges, and interact with colleagues... everyone has these questions. Very often, these questions lead to nothing. But they can also be mulled over so as to reach the desire underlying your work. This is true whether you have a job or are looking for one. Circumstances may change, but human desire never fades. That’s the starting point; including for how you look at the broader problem of work.

Martino: To look at work in this way is a break from the norm. Our problems are everyone’s problems. Granted, we are not unemployed. And I, by myself, will not resolve the world’s unemployment problem. But looking at work in a new way is something that, in the minutiae of each day, generates change, new facts. It transforms how a person faces a particular task or an encounter with someone. This is what happened to Giuditta when speaking to her colleague. It changes the way you seek happiness on the job. Others will notice the change.

Giuditta: It’s like shattering the “bell jar,” which is that deep breath you take before you step into the office thinking that “no one can touch me,” and that after work you will see your friends and live again. But in the long run, this suffocates you. Instead, there is an alternative. You head into the break room and say, “Guys, let’s stop complaining! How can we solve this?” In other words, this new way of thinking becomes a point of view you propose to everyone.

But what makes this perspective possible? What have you seen in the people that you have met?

Giuditta: I think again of Silvana, and of other people as well. You must deeply love someone at the same time you are doing what you have to do. That was the common thread in all of the interviews, with people of great or little faith. The automatic answer is not “God.” For some it was their children, others their family. There were others still who learned to better love themselves, to have affection for themselves. Something new is generated. This is what I have seen: a love that mesmerized me and that I see verified. This is true even in my life, but for me it is ignited by the experience of faith with my friends. **T**

FULLY ENGAGED

How is it possible to grow in any situation? A dialogue with business consultant **MARIA ROSARIA NATALE.**

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

“I was very struck. I saw them talking about work in a precise, pertinent way, never ideological. I identified with what they were saying, even if I’m twice their age.” Maria Rosaria Natale followed the Rimini exhibit from afar, through the encounters that ended up online and what her friends told her. The 53-year-old co-owner of the Milanese company Your Business Partner worked as a director of Human Resources for companies all over Europe before striking out on her own as a consultant for managers and global firms, with a special emphasis on innovation. “I saw a serious outlook, a willingness to engage fully in a topic that concerns all of us. Above all, I liked their approach centered on questions and experience, which are much more useful than abstract analyses.”



M. Rosaria Natale.

doing? What does the firm do? What contribution can you make?” He was blown away because he hadn’t clarified those things, but the questions were the beginning of a journey. He took them seriously and began asking questions of others. “What kind of trajectory would be best for me? What do I need to become the entrepreneur I want to be?” He saw that this was useful and brought some of his friends here too. We began working on the same itinerary. “My boss is clipping my wings.”

“Well, what can you learn from this? What do you need to do to show him you have gifts to be valued?” And so on. What they learned were not the answers, but a way of looking and digging deeper. Only in this way do things slowly become clear. This method leads you to ask what *you want* to do and what *you can* do, truly. Asking questions is the only way to enter into a relationship with reality.

Why is this method often pushed aside? Young people say doing it is very difficult.

Because asking questions implies that you don’t have the answers, and that you can only find hints of answers in the difficulties of what you do. That initial “I don’t know” puts you in a very uncomfortable situation: it makes you leave your comfort zone

Why?

Asking questions, true questions, is the only way to grow in any situation, especially at work. I’ll give you an example. Some time ago one of the young people involved with the exhibit at Rimini came to me. He’d been offered a position in New York and naturally was very enthusiastic about it. I began by asking him simple but precise questions: “Well, what *exactly* will you be



and forces you to take some steps on your own to get an understanding of what’s going on. It’s not easy: it means admitting that you are in a position of fragility and weakness, which is hard for us to accept.

What helps a person to accept this position?

Always starting out from a positive hypothesis. Realize that it’s possible *in any situation* to learn something, to contribute positively to a situation, to engage fully. This dimension of the possible leads you to question reality and allows you to accept questions, and then to try, to do, what we call *prototyping*, putting yourself to the test, even knowing that you may make mistakes, because in any case you know that it will make you grow.

And yet work is one of the spheres in which we are the most defensive, ready to ward off any blows. It’s often difficult to admit you’ve made a mistake, and you blame things on your boss, colleagues, the environment...

This is true, but if you don’t admit you have a need, you won’t be able



What's the alternative?

At the end of the day saying, “OK, I didn’t do anything I planned to do, but what did I *actually* do? What can I learn from this?” This question, this dimension of a relationship with reality is what makes you grow even if you’ve failed to achieve your objectives, or think you have nothing in your hand.

But in all this, isn't there the risk of remaining trapped in a certain idea of success? Isn't success, whether big or small, still the measure?

This can be our idea, but it doesn’t hold up for the simple reason that reality is too complex, too big, too fast, too broad... You’ll never be able to encompass reality in your idea. Look, we collaborate with two important scholars of innovation, Hal Gregersen and Clayton Chrisensen, who for years have been studying the great innovators of the last century, such as Steve Jobs and the people at Google. Do you know what they discovered?

No, what?

There is a typical journey that contains a few steps. First, *observing*. Innovators are great observers of reality, instant by instant, in an almost obsessive way. Second, *questioning*, continually asking questions: “Why does this work? What impact does it have on me?” Third, entering into relationships with others. Fourth, connecting ideas, putting together notions that have never been linked before. And trying: *prototyping*. But before all this, in almost all cases of successful innovation, there’s a person who is able to ask crucial questions.

So then, what does it mean to be fulfilled at work?

I don’t want to give an abstract, general answer. I can say for myself that it means being able to grow constantly as a person, and being aware of who I am. **T**

to learn. You’ll never see the distance between what you’re doing, what you want to do, and what you can truly do. Everything will remain very vague. The most helpful work is one in which it’s the hardest to hide yourself, to cheat, no matter the job; it doesn’t depend on the type of job or the level of your career. A related issue that often emerges when I speak with young people is that of the “maestro,” or teacher, someone from whom you can learn.

Why?

The “maestro” doesn’t sit down and explain things exactly; instead, she or he helps you broaden your questions even more. This is very annoying, and we often try to avoid it. The “maestro” may be your boss, or somebody walking down the street who tells you something, or a newly-arrived colleague: roles and age don’t necessarily matter. Usually if you go back into people’s stories, you almost always find someone who opened their minds more, who communicated his or her experience in some way.

There is another point related to the

difficulty of accepting your fragility and need: failure. Not just failure related to the closure of a firm, but rather, as one of the young people at Rimini said, “My failure is daily, when I make mistakes. But you have to act as if it’s the project that fails, not you.” There’s also the interesting challenge of those who can’t find work.

Failure is *the* challenge. It’s the issue we battle every minute. You can have an idea—“I want to do this project, to achieve this goal.” It’s normal; you have to start out from a hypothesis. However, the possibility of truly creating something for yourself and others passes through the interaction between ideas and reality. The capacity to adapt, to ask questions of reality, and thus truly enter into relationship with things is what enables you to fail without giving up. This holds for a company, where you have to plan every day, draw up a budget, understand whether the plans are tenable, and change direction, but above all it’s true in your day-to-day life. “Today I wrote ten things on my to-do list, but I didn’t get them done. I’ll never manage, I’m a disaster.”

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF UNITY?

The referendum has provoked tension in Catalonia, generating irreconcilable positions and confusion and sowing division among friends... How can this be judged? What is the impetus for a judgment informed by faith? But a fact triumphs over all the opinions: A “pro-independence” girl speaks at the assembly...

BY IGNACIO CARBAJOSA



The current situation in Spain is very tense. The Catalan government's decision to stage an illegal referendum for independence has strained the already precarious relationship with the Spanish national government to an astonishing degree. In the streets, there has been talk of little else for over a month. We all have our own opinions that we believe to be well-founded and reasonable. Many of us have enumerated either demands of or accusations against "Spain" or "Catalonia." Compromise seems out of reach and there is no simple solution.

Outside of Catalonia, this situation has fueled indignation and embitterment, particularly toward the Catalan government's institutional violation of the Constitution, against centuries of coexistence. Meanwhile, in Catalonia, many hope to fulfill an ideal, through a "right to decide," based on the "individual rights of the people." This aspiration is shared by a good percentage of the population, but not all of it. Recent circumstances have deepened a wound that has divided families, stifled dialogue among classmates and colleagues, and fostered suspicion toward anyone who thinks differently from oneself. Finding themselves in the midst of this situation, our Catalan friends published a flyer (*available at clonline.org*) in which they ask themselves, "What allows us to build together?"

The CL community of Catalonia, whose members have taken different sides on this issue, started from the recognition of their own "poverty when it comes to pursuing a solution to the situation at hand." At the same time, the community

offers a treasure it has rediscovered in daily life that "can be useful for us now that we are confronted with conflict and tension." What is this treasure? "In our Christian community it is amazing to experience a unity stronger than any difference in opinion or beliefs. The presence of Christ, which transcends all discussions or projects, doesn't guarantee an end to all disagreements. Nevertheless, it does allow us to walk on a path together in which the other, regardless of what that person may do or think, is a good, because he helps me to be myself. This is the starting point for any form of dialogue."

THE "ENEMY." The Christian community: a place in space and time in which what may seem inconceivable at the local or national level is already happening. Is this enough? For many of our friends outside of Catalonia, it is not. "We must tell the truth, we can't remain silent," says one. "The intelligence of faith must become the intelligence of reality to judge all of its parts," others clarify. The positive aspect of this situation is that we are placed in uncharted territory, which is an excellent opportunity for verification. For the first time, the "enemy" who does not understand the truth does not come from outside the Church, an "atheist," an "anticlerical," or even a Christian who has fallen away. He or she is a friend in CL living in Catalonia, who at the very mention of "not silencing the truth," does not feel acknowledged or embraced. And, on the other hand, people living in the capital may perceive certain images of "Madrid the thief" as caricatures.

Through this "test lab," we have been able to concretely discov- >>

» er whether our judgments are born from what we take in from our surrounding environment (so only “fellow believers” can relate to them), or from faith, making them new, original, and welcoming toward others and enabling “process.” In these changing times (expressed by Catalonia’s dilemma), it is impossible to form a new judgment if we do not let ourselves be moved and changed by the charisma that in recent years has tried to make sense of this set of circumstances. With this in mind, we must look at the first few chapters of *Disarming Beauty* to interpret what we are going through here in Spain.

FAITHFULNESS. Anyone who maintains even the smallest shred of faithfulness to his experience has to come to terms with his own bewilderment, as in the case of this friend who writes, “For several days now, I have been reading countless editorials and opinion statements on various kinds of media platforms, trying to inform myself the best I can, while also having discussions with friends and colleagues. I am scandalized by the response of the Church in Catalonia, which preys on emotion, and manipulates propaganda in a way that is out of touch with reality. The problem is that my attempt to process the overwhelming amount of information makes me sad and exhausted. Moreover, I am concerned. What will allow us to adhere to reality and not to our imaginations and pessimism?”

“Adhere to reality,” not to an opinion. What will lead us back to a new judgment that embraces reality? What is our source of light? “The starting point for a Christian is an Event, while for others, it is their impression of things,” said Fr. Giussani. Fr. Carrón proposed



CATALONIA. THE POSSIBILITY OF AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

The flyer of the GS youth, created following an assembly on the eve of the vote. “Differences do not cease to exist, but as for estrangement...”

It is September 30th, 2017, and only 15 hours away from the referendum. A student from Barcelona stands up in front of the assembly of 250 students who have gathered in Madrid from all corners of the peninsula: “I am pro-independence. Setting aside the reasons I believe in this cause, I am more than just a proponent for independence. In fact, over the last few days, I have been trying to better understand who I am. It bothers me that I am called ‘separatist,’ as if that word defined me. There is one thing I am certain of: I have a desire to be loved. It upsets me very much to constantly feel judged. Today I am here, far away from Barcelona, because of a friend from Madrid who helped me to wake up, to set aside skepticism, and to judge what we are going through. She helped me to live, and to better know myself.”

The students exhibit two “peculiar” behaviors. First, they talk and listen to each other. They do far more than just converse: they tell each other about their lives, ask each other questions, take an interest in what’s happening around them, enter into relationships with adults to be able to face their problems, their wounds, and their desires. They help and correct each other. Second, they sing, like a people with a message to express. Having been formed in the Christian tradition, they have learned to appreciate the rhythm of African American spirituals, the uncontrollable enthusiasm of traditional Irish songs, and even the nostalgia of Catalan *habaneras*.

At the conclusion of the assembly, nearly 300 voices sing *El meu avi* with certainty and without holding back. They sway left and right to the music of this beau-

this again at the Beginning Day in Madrid on October 1st. “For it to become the starting point,” says Carrón, “the Event must be happening now, and must overcome the impressions I form of things.”

After Fr. Carrón had finished at the Beginning Day, we discussed everything with him at dinner, in the context of the situation in Catalonia. It was then that one of us who works at a school in a rural area of Catalonia, where there is a strong pro-independence base, described what happened to one of his students at the Beginning Day for students, which had taken place

in Madrid the day before.

The girl had stood up in front of the assembly of 250 students and said, “I am pro-independence. Setting aside the reasons I believe in this cause, I am more than just a proponent for independence. In fact, over the last few weeks, I have been trying to better understand who I am. It bothers me that I am called ‘separatist,’ as if that word defined me. There is one thing I am certain of: I have a desire to be loved. It upsets me very much to constantly feel judged.” Then she talked about her experience over the previous weeks, consumed by



or estrangement.

Spain's hope is found in these youths. They have met a human reality that helps them to rise above superficiality, skepticism, and resentment. In the face of the ideology that has overrun the country of late, their curiosity leads them toward the true path to freedom. Through an encounter with the Christian experience, a student whose hope was set on October 1st, as well as an entire community of students and professors, are transported outside of themselves and can now identify themselves as one entity.

That which is truly new is not always apparent: on September 30th, on the eve of October 1st, a group of fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds came in search of the possibility of authentic dialogue, founded upon mutual understanding and respect, even in political discourse. It is essential to understand what kind of pedagogical proposal can generate unity that is both courageous and unforeseen. *Long live Catalonia! Long live the "Català"!* For the youth, the song was not a sterile separatist cry, but the expression of a common experience.

The high school students of Communion and Liberation in Spain

tiful *habanera*, just as the ocean forcefully rocked during the singing of the "*Català*" (Editor's Note: a song written to commemorate the Catalan soldiers who died in the Spanish-American War). Finding themselves far from home, the brave and weary sailors thought about their homeland and sang in remembrance of what they had left behind: *Long live Catalonia! Long live the "Català"!* In the face of beauty, the students "laid down their arms" and sang as one voice. Differences did not cease to exist, but they no longer bred animosity

the prejudice of the "separatist" environment in which she lives, a prejudice against "Madrid." In spite of this, she decided to leave her city to be in Madrid on October 1st, a very significant day, as it happened to be the same day as the "independence referendum." As a matter of fact, some of her relatives spent the weekend barricading a school to keep the police from closing it, which would have forestalled the referendum vote on Sunday.

What compelled her to come? She continued, "Today I am here, far away from Barcelona, because

of a friend from Madrid who helped me to wake up, to set aside skepticism, and to judge what we are going through. She helped me to live, and to better know myself." The night before, upon their arrival in Madrid after a long trip, the group of Catalan students was hosted by a parish. They had come to the place "they had known as the cause of their oppression," fearing "how the other students would see them."

HOPE. During dinner, the most unexpected thing happened: the life of each person was embraced,

all united by one heart that desires, suffers, and seeks. Such was the effect that this girl, to her own amazement, thought, "If only my family were here. If only they could meet all my friends." Later, during the assembly she concluded, "After having spent these days with you, and having heard what was said about my heart, my desire, and Christ, I can no longer see myself as different from you. We are all one."

Carrón jumped up in his seat: "An Event just happened! Only the Christian Event has the power to change what we had already dismissed as impossible, such as in this case. What else can provide a response to our current situation, what other judgment can serve as a starting point?"

BACK TO SUNDAY. After their dinner, the Catalan students drew near to Carrón to say goodbye before returning home. He hugged all of them and then began a conversation with the girl who had spoken at the assembly, who said, "I am afraid of facing Monday, and that everything I experienced will be buried under the avalanche of things I'll have to hear and read once I am back home." "Don't worry about Monday," replied Carrón. "The question is whether or not something happened on Sunday. You must constantly go back to Sunday. The hope for the future of Spain rests on this, and I am curious to see how it'll develop." What is the origin of this new judgment that is able to consider reality in its totality? "New knowledge," said Carrón at the Beginning Day, "means being in relationship with the Event that generates and sustains it." This is our challenge and our conversion. From this arises *metanoia*, a shift in mentality, that is absolutely necessary at this time in Spain's history. **T**

ON THE ISLAND OF THE LIVING

He decided to live in a cell with the prisoners, and, like them, he experienced isolation. “It was the moment in which I learned the most.” We met with Jesuit Fr. **MARIO PICECH**, chaplain of the maximum security prison of Islas Mariás in the Pacific Ocean.

BY VICTOR VORRATH

Fr. Mario Picech is the chaplain of the maximum security prison of Islas Mariás, one with “walls of water,” located on the biggest of four Mexican islands off the coast of Nayarit, in the Pacific Ocean. For almost sixty years, a group of Jesuits has chosen to live here in order to share



everything with the prisoners. One of them is Fr. Picech, born in 1962 in the Friuli region of northern Italy, who graduated from high school as a surveyor and did his obligatory military service with the Alpine Corps. When he arrived on the island for the first time in 2008, there were about 8,000 prisoners in five complexes. Today there are fewer than 1,000. Opened in 1905 as a penal colony for the worst criminals and political prisoners, in 2012 it became a federal prison for drug traffickers.

What does this place mean for you?

For me, living on Islas Marías means sharing life with the prisoners. When I came for the first time it was a penal colony. At that time, there was a lot of freedom: the prisoners could live with their families and we could live with them. I asked the colony director for permission to live in a cell, to truly get to know the prisoners, to share their condition fully. It was a life like that of the Boy Scouts: we played guitar, cooked meat, and in the evening returned to the cells. Life with the prisoners was beau-

tiful. In 2012 everything changed. We couldn't communicate with them anymore. We only saw them at Mass. We lived in Balleto, one of the five prison complexes, and celebrated Sunday Mass in a different complex each time, where we remained only an hour and a half. We spent all our time at home without seeing any prisoners.

How did you feel about this change?

I asked myself what sense there was in living here. What pastoral activity could we do? But that was the year I came to understand the experience of the prisoners the most, and lived it most deeply, because I felt very limited. I said to myself, "I can't do anything." But what does *doing* mean in the eyes of God? Our Father Superior told me, "Mario, you must believe that this is your place. Without you, there are 8,000 people without a priest to take care of them." Obviously, you can't know all the prisoners by name, because there are so many, but they know there is a priest who is with them and this is the most valuable thing. More than with your words, you speak with your presence. I remember 2012 well, because it helped me to understand better what it means to live with the prisoners; even if I met with them less, I lived with them in a deeper way. I experienced the same things they did: missing one's family, missing deep relationships, all the problems that emerge from solitude. It's a world of battle with one's thoughts, theirs and ours. This is "prison," just as it was for Saint Ignatius, who was ill and bedridden and began to experience discernment. I realize that all this was a gift: a burdensome one, but a gift >>



Mario Picech.

» all the same. I remember that Mass was a true celebration, because we were all united. In that period, I thanked God because we were together in the same place. We could celebrate the fact that God loved us, and for this reason the presence of the priests was very important.

Luigi Giussani taught us that the heart is the core where the desire for good, beauty, and truth are rooted. Do you see this desire in the prisoners? Is it possible to build, starting from the recognition of this factor that makes us brothers with those who have given in to evil?

If I enter a prison judging the prisoners, I don't encounter them, because I set up a boundary line, a division. They immediately perceive the judgment you have in your heart: they see it in your eyes. I hear a great deal of violence, especially during Confession, but I say, "Lord, this isn't mine. It's Yours, and I entrust it to You." This is the Sacrament. It's not me. It passes through the faith they have in me. I don't live the violence that the prisoners live. What I experience is the desire for good that they have. This makes me their brother.

What experience provoked you the most?

One of the prison complexes is called Laguna del Toro, and the most difficult prisoners are sent there, together with those who have particular restrictions. Once we celebrated Mass there and a prisoner who was in isolation and only came out for Mass asked me, "Father, could you give me the names of some people I can pray for? I have a ton of time. I don't



MOTHER MARY. Here, Fr. Picech during the interview. The prison is on the biggest of four Mexican islands off the coast of Nayarit, called "Madre."

have a Bible or books or anything." I gave him the name of a family in Italy who had a very serious problem. Months later, that prisoner asked me how they were. "I don't know," I told him. "Find out whether they're okay. I've been praying for them every day," he replied. When I returned to Italy I called the family and they told me, "Father, we're fine. Everything's worked out." I told them, "You have an angel who has prayed for you a great deal." In isolation, the only action you can do is to pray, but this is the communication with

"I said to myself, 'I can't do anything.' But what does doing mean in the eyes of God?"

God that overcomes all the divisions that humans can construct. For example, I remember that a prisoner died in his cell and I asked another one to pray a novena for him. He was not a fellow who liked to pray. Afterwards, he told me that he was

deeply struck by this experience of having to lead the novena with the other prisoners. Each one prayed in his cell, so none of them could see the others, but they could hear each other. He said, "This touched my heart. Nine days we prayed, and nine days I cried." From then on, in the evening, the prisoners prayed the Our Father together, without seeing each other. That man offered me what he could, which was nothing, but that nothing was everything.

What did you learn?

I learned that to help them you don't think to yourself, "You're not alone, I'm here to support you." I'm there an hour. All the rest of the time, in whose company are they? What I tell them is, "Pray for this person, since you have time." In this way, that maximum security area has been transformed into a small monastery. The situations you are forced into help you to go deep down inside. Isolation puts you on



where I can send my children? Do you have a place where I can entrust them?" For this reason, I say we need to work to build places of education.

Today Mexico is devastated by the battles among the drug cartels and their clashes with the army and federal police. What can a Christian offer to people who live in this climate of violence?

I live the world of violence in Mexico indirectly, through those who have been involved in all this. But my experience is not one of violence: what most strikes me is seeing a desire for love and how people express it. They may be criminals, but this does not mean that they stop being children of God. They do not lose their opportunities to express goodness. If I just stopped at the violence, I would lose many things. The experience of our encounters is to help the prisoners not to fear sharing what they have lived. "Help yourself to be forgiven," I say to them. Then there are the people who have suffered this violence and they have another task, because in order to be free they have to forgive. It's not easy. On the one hand, there is being forgiven, and on the other, granting forgiveness. This is the only way to escape from what locks you into pain and suffering. We priests have in front of us brothers in the faith, brothers in the journey of life. We accompany them in this time in which they feel the most fragile and we offer them all that we can. They love us a lot. It is a very burdensome experience, but the love the prisoners give us is a hundred times what we give them. There are people here with very deep faith, and they express it. This is a living world where you experience how God is at the people's side. **T**

your knees. Everyone tells me this, priests as well as prisoners. It puts you on your knees. Either you go mad or you recognize that you are a son. And if you encounter God, you are never alone again.

For the prisoners, what is isolation like?

One of them told me, "When I was in other prisons, my family came to see me every day. Here, you have to wait a week to make a phone call, and for no more than five minutes. But in this way I've learned to value my wife, because I don't have her near me. Before, I thought she wasn't important. She has been with me for eight years and our union is stronger now than it was when we were together." In prison, the love of the couple opens to the experience of God. Many are not married. Here we celebrate weddings for people who have been inside for twenty years. I see the pain of not having everything close by,

but above all I see that what is far away draws even closer. This reminds me of the mystery of God, which is the mystery of faith.

Could you explain more?

Faith is this way—if we grab it, we lose it. If we want to hold God with us, we destroy it. If we open our hearts and accept the way He guides us, then we encounter Him and we live with Him. This is also the experience in the relationships of couples: being part of a couple helps the prisoner emerge from the condition of guilt. Love is a true offering. There is also suffering. Above all, the women and children who live outside suffer.

What do you think there is the greatest need for?

After these years of life in prison I think a lot about the value of education. We have to do something for the children. Many people tell me, "Father, do you know a place

A VOICE IN THE DESERT

He was born in Dubai, a place where abortion is illegal except in the case of his condition. This is the story of **GIACOMO AVALONE, who, during the eight hours he lived, “spoke” to everyone about what life is. The journey of Giacomo and his mother come together in her diary.**

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

In this diary we find Giacomo, in his mother’s womb, small and still without a brain. She is bearing him into the world knowing he will not live long. Some of the most moving words she writes during the nine months are those that seem to burst from her heart, as when she confides to him: “I am so proud of you.” They are said with the same admiration mothers have watching their children grow up and face important decisions. Silvia is proud of Giacomo, for everything that he has taught her in such a powerful way: “You are changing me.” Giacomo was born on February 28th, 2016, and lived for eight hours. “A pure and full life,” writes his mother.

THE FIRST VISIT. Silvia and Roberto got married in 2009. She is an obstetrician, and he an engineer. Even during their engagement, they dreamed of living abroad, and the moment he received a job offer, in 2011, off they went: Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Since then, they have lived in a world distant in every sense of the word from the life they had in Milan, with their three young daughters: Viola, Rachele, and Stella. In July 2015, they found out that they were expecting Giacomo, the first boy in the Avalone family. They began a journey with him, wanting to welcome their son with open arms, there in Dubai, the resplendent, perfect city, always pushing into the future. A place without beggars or problems, a strip of land between sea and desert, with the tallest tower and the most luxuri-

ous hotel, where “there is no pain or poverty.” Here, *sharia* is law, meaning that abortion is not permitted. With one exception: anencephaly.

In her diary (later made into a book), Silvia describes everything that happened, starting from the first prenatal visit. She went alone because Roberto was in Italy. She was asked if she wanted a screening for Down Syndrome. She refused. “Certain and proud, I thought, ‘Whoever you are, I love and will be with you.’” The doctor began the ultrasound. Suddenly, she froze and said, “There is a problem with the head. There is no skull.” Silvia recalls the sharpest pain she had ever felt. Life coming to a halt.

“The only thing to be done in these cases is an abortion.” These are the words she hears. “You already have three daughters!” She stumbled out of the Fetal Medical Center. Roberto was returning the next day, and she decided not to tell him over the phone. They talk, he is happy; he sends her pictures with smiling friends. “I cried looking at them: I realized how everything could change in an instant.” She had to return to her girls, serve them dinner, and put them to bed without despairing. “I believe that that night was the most difficult moment. I felt a great sorrow growing inside me. I asked the Lord: Why? Why are you asking this of us? And why did you let me discover this alone?”

During those hours, she struggled greatly, admitting her desire to end the pregnancy, feeling the pain at the very thought of it, followed by prayer and the immense love she already had for the child, then turning her gaze toward the Virgin Mary... “It was becoming clear that God was asking of us something big, though it may be a great challenge.” The next day, amidst tears, Silvia and Roberto embraced that mysterious design.

“Trusting in God was the only way for us to live truthfully,” they said. They never let go of this “yes,” not even in the most difficult moments:

it came from the path of faith they had followed within the CL movement. Silvia was very aware of the fact that it is not about courage: “I am no better than other mothers, but I have received a great grace during these years that allowed me to say ‘yes’ to such a special pregnancy.” It is also the fruit of the “yesses” of many other people, “which made our ‘yes’ possible.” They were accompanied by the witnesses of friends and people they had never met before, such as Chiara Corbella, then by letters from people who had come to know about Giacomo and were praying for him; and by the support of Elvira Parravicini, a neonatologist in New York, and of parents who had experienced what they were going through.

At three months, they went to >>>

“Why? Why are you asking this of us? And why did you let me discover this alone?”

» Italy for a consultation and the diagnosis was confirmed: the miracle that they asked for did not come. Yet, in contrast to what happened in Dubai, the doctor looked at the ultrasound and described every aspect of Giacomo. “Besides his condition, your son is doing well.” Roberto was very irritated by these details that seemed meaningless to him. Then he realized: “These details were important. My son was there and I could accompany him, even if for a short time, just as I had been doing with my daughters.”

THE WHISPER. So that their son could be born in Dubai, they went from doctor to doctor but received countless rejections. They were looking for someone willing to help them carry the pregnancy to term and provide comfort care in order to embrace their son in every way. “Giacomo is an evangelist. He is a little missionary. God is having you go to these hospitals to say that Giacomo is here and that his life is precious.” These were the words of Sister Rachele Fassera, an Italian Comboni nun who lived in one of the two Catholic parishes in Dubai. When faced with the diagnosis, she was one of the first people they reached out to. With her, they found hope, the freedom to entrust their hardships to God, and the simplicity to abandon themselves one step at a time. Silvia began to help Sister Rachele during catechism in the mornings. In her diary she remarked: “I go to see her gaze upon me, which is the gaze of God.”

As days went by, they realized that their son had, first and foremost, changed their hearts. “The world needs you Giacomo, to be freed from its schemes,” wrote his mother. “I need you most of all!” Even when the government hospital turned them away, they did not stop there;



they kept looking. For the doctors, “it did not make sense” to bring to term a pregnancy with an unsustainable malformation. Finally, a place accepted them, and agreed to allow them to stay with Giacomo even after the delivery. They would also be able to baptize him, a gesture which, in a Muslim country, cannot be taken for granted.

After living in Dubai for four years, with an ever-present desire to communicate the faith and the beauty they had met, Silvia and Roberto realized that the idea they had of being witnesses was being outshone by this little boy, who “spoke” to everyone about what life is. “You teach us that the most important thing is to let ourselves be loved. And to be ready to meet our Father.” She thanked him in the diary countless times: “You help me to look at your sisters. To truly love them. You are here, and you are the most alive among us!” With him, everyday life became intense, human, faithful. And even in the most trying times,

when Silvia wished to be at peace instead of constantly crying, when she was overcome by rebellion (“often I succumb to the desire to know what is good and what is bad”), she let herself be transformed. “You make me grow in relationship with the One who wanted you. You teach us that true love is gratuitous, nothing is expected in return.”

She never denied, “nor will I ever,” she wrote, “how painful and enfeebling it was to let you go. I confess that we have experienced pain, but we have also felt true and extraordinary peace and joy.” She felt these things especially when Giacomo was born. Chiara, a friend and pediatrician who was in the delivery room that day, said, “Your arrival was announced by a profound silence mixed with awe. You did not do anything, not even wail or cry. You simply breathed gently, like a whisper. Nothing stole your peace and composure.” It seemed that he would not breathe for very long; instead, he lived eight hours with them. After



ACCOMPANIED. Silvia after giving birth, with Sister Rachele Left, the Avallone family waiting for Giacomo.

having met his sisters and other relatives, he stayed on the couch between his mother and father. They held him by the hand; he wrapped his hands tightly around their fingers. “We experienced an other-worldly peace,” describes Silvia. They fell asleep beside him, unafraid.

It was a life shining in its fullness, because he was loved. “Pain and death are not absolute evil: absolute evil is the absence of meaning,” said Roberto, who, in the midst of bureaucratic challenges, had to plan his son’s funeral before he was even born. “Through Giacomo we learned that nothing is in our control,” he said. Especially not that “unknown grace” that was present among them and was so evident to their friends who came from Italy for the funeral. This grace helped them face “the most difficult journey of our lives,” with the small coffin in the luggage compartment of the plane taking him to Italy (had they buried him in Dubai, they would not have been able to move him later on).

At the end of the diary, Silvia asks how it is possible, “to go on living after something like that? How is it possible to face the emptiness that I feel every day?” She answers that she does it by “living,” giving thanks for “how much my eyes have seen,” and getting out of bed every day with great effort. “We can never stop saying yes to God and to life.”

Giacomo is a seed that was planted in their hearts and in the hearts of those who accompanied them, such as Lara, another friend who said, “Now my heart is bigger, awakened, and certain.” This is also the feeling of those who meet Giacomo today. This year, Silvia has presented the book several times and she is always surprised that her son “continues his mission.” “I am meeting a great humanity,” she said: “Many people on a journey. And I receive so much. They share similar stories or they lead normal lives, but that does not matter: the problem is not the circumstances you live, but how you respond to the One who calls

you. Giacomo had a task and he lived it.”

Just as they did. When people tell them, “You did well,” she responds truthfully, “We were accompanied. And we said ‘yes.’ Until the very end I told God: ‘I cannot walk along the path you have laid out before me; I don’t want to...’ If you entrust yourself, you will receive a hundred fold.” Even today when, as she says, “I miss him even more.”

FIXING THE GAZE. “It is not enough for us to remember that we have a son in Heaven,” says Roberto. “We have to live this fact every day. For me, it happens when I am in need. I struggle against my own weakness, especially in relationships, but whereas before it was a question of my own effort, now it is natural for me to ask, to beg: ‘Help me Giacomo,’ because I saw something exceptional and I know where I want to fix my gaze. Everything ‘changes’ with this outlook, thanks to a lived experience.” Just as when he trembled, like every father in the delivery room, except knowing that his son would die soon, and witnessing his Baptism right after his birth: “It was the apex of my relationship with him, giving him the most important thing in my life.”

Now, they are expecting their fifth child. Everything is still there: the fear, the worries, and “trust in God, which my son taught me. It is the only truly human disposition,” says Roberto. “But there is also a higher awareness of how essential your ‘yes’ is. We always used to say that we didn’t do anything... Instead, God acts through your freedom, your steadfastness. The beauty of what we lived was not a result of what we did for Giacomo; it was a grace. However, had we not embarked on this path, we never would have experienced it.” **T**

JULIÁN CARRÓN

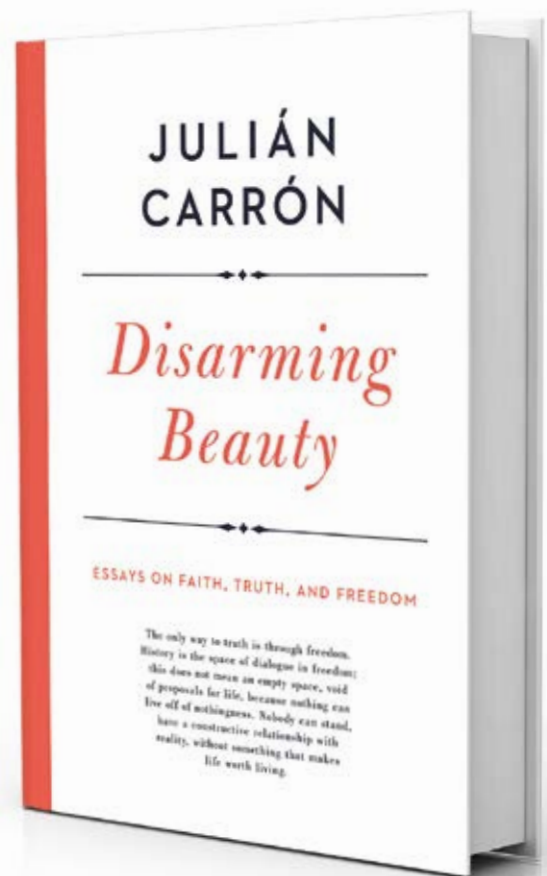
Disarming Beauty

ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM



In *Disarming Beauty*, Julián Carrón addresses the most pressing questions facing theologians today and provides insights that will interest everyone, from the most devout to the firm nonbeliever. Grappling with the interaction of Christian faith and modern culture, Carrón treats in very real and concrete ways what is essential to maintaining and developing Christian faith, and he invites an ongoing conversation about the meaning of faith, truth, and freedom.

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