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# FROM BEGINNING TO BEGINNING

From Japan to Venezuela, from Azerbaijan to South Korea, a brief world tour among (small) CL communities. To see how the seed of faith can blossom



# THE CHRISTMAS OF JESUS IS TRULY FOR EVERYONE, NO ONE EXCLUDED

*This issue's editorial is an article by the President of the Communion and Liberation Fraternity, that was published in the Italian daily Avvenire on December 22, 2017.*

BY JULIÁN CARRÓN

“Realities are more important than ideas” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 231). There is no greater challenge to our reason, to our human logic, than a fact, a real event. Let us think of the Jewish people in exile, of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke. When everything seemed finished for the Jewish people, when they were in the midst of nothingness, the last thing they would have expected was something that would challenge the defeats they had suffered and the measure with which they judged. They had begun to get accustomed to the situation in which they found themselves. Yet in the midst of the desert, a voice cried out: “I am the Lord, your God” (*Is* 41:13ff), a voice that pronounced words that nobody would have had the courage to say, so distant were they from human logic: “Do not fear.” How was this possible? How could they not fear when they were lost in the midst of nothingness, in exile?

This is our same reaction in front of present-day challenges. We are assailed by fear, moved to erect walls to protect ourselves. We seek safety in something we build, reasoning according to purely human logic, a logic constantly challenged by God’s words: “I am the Lord. Do

not fear!” His otherness appears before our eyes. In fact, that “Do not fear!” is the thing least believed today, the least credible message for us. In front of everything that is happening in the world, who can say they do not fear?

“**I am the Lord. Do not fear.**” Our reason and our freedom are provoked by this promise, as they were for the people in exile. “Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you maggot Israel.” We, too, are like a worm, a maggot. We feel so small in front of the enormity of our problems. Are we willing to give credence to the announcement of liberation that rings out for us today? “Do not fear. I will help you.”

Commenting on these words, Pope Francis said that Christmas helps us to understand this: “In that manger [...] is the great God who is all powerful, but He makes himself small to be close to us and there, He helps us; He promises us things” (Homily at Santa Marta, December 14, 2017). Is there anything more revolutionary for our measure? The Lord always surprises us, because He has a different gaze on reality, a true gaze, capable of taking in things we do not see. If we accept the challenge, we who are so wretched will be able to recognize the response to our cry: “I, the Lord, will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.” Those who trust in Him, those who abandon themselves to the design of an

Other will see the fulfilment of the promise: "I will open up rivers on the bare heights." Isn't this perhaps what amazes us in certain encounters with people? While some people are ever more fearful, ever more drawn in on themselves, ever more closed, ever more discouraged, others blossom and testify to a different, positive way of living the usual things.

**Why is it that some people shine** with life and others find in every circumstance only a confirmation of their skepticism? The reason is that everything passes through the fine blade of freedom. "I will turn the desert into a marshland, and the dry ground into springs of water." If we respond to the Lord's call, we will be able to see life blossom in this arid land, in our historical situation—not in another one, but in this one. "I will plant in the desert the cedar, acacia, myrtle and olive; I will set in the wasteland the cypress, together with the plane tree and the pine." Those who trust this promise will begin to take hold of their lives and really live them.

And yet a question worms its way into us: could the Lord not spare us these unfavorable circumstances that we have to face? We do not understand that certain situations are the fruit of our misuse of freedom. Israel did not trust in the Lord and His word, but preferred to form alliances with the great powers of the time, and ended up in exile. Instead, those who entrust themselves to the Lord begin to see the signs of Him in action: God works in history "that all may see and know, observe and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it." Those who do not entrust themselves to Him will not see it, because the world will be ever more full of frightening contradictions, but in those who welcome Jesus, life will begin to shine. Those who acknowledge Him start to see the beginnings of a life that blossoms.

**It is necessary to be simple**, as was said by the Jesus who comes at Christmas: "Among those born of women, there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (*Mt 11:11*). For two thousand years, the announcement of salvation, as unthinkable for the human mind as it is real, has been for everyone. It is within everyone's reach, no one excluded. **¶**

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by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

## I WAS JUST WAITING FOR MY RETIREMENT


 Dear Fr. Carrón: The recent events involving some banks resulted in an agreement with the union that includes the anticipated voluntary separation of 3,000 employees who meet the requirements by a certain date. I discovered that I also qualified. My first reaction was of great euphoria. Not because I was unhappy at work, but because of all the things I could now do without limiting myself to evenings and weekends. But in the following days, other thoughts surfaced: what will I do all day, every day, all year long? If it is true that one's consistency is best revealed by one's free time, I had the terrible sensation of being at the edge of an abyss. Now my office schedule gives my life rhythm, I am always an active part of a larger social mechanism. If I leave, I will no longer have that safety net. And if my reduction in earnings is greater than the various calculations indicate, how will I get by? So, I found myself stuck and worried. What a test of gladness! We had been working for a few weeks on the text from Beginning Day but I hadn't considered that it might have something to say to me in these circumstances. Then, upon reading the text, my attention fell on the phrase, "At the Beginning It Was Not So" (I had forgotten that this was the title for the Beginning Day!). Previously, I had not read this as something that had to do with me, but rather as something that might be good to begin the meeting of School of Community. Another horizon opened up! It was as if, precisely through this



difficult situation involving a deep-down sadness, a friendly face had invited me to remember to re-live my story. When I started working, when we got married, when the children were born, and when we moved to a different city, what determined who I was? Only an analysis of the pros and cons, or rather a response to the One who had called me, who had promised He would never abandon me, so that everything would be a step on the journey of my fulfillment? Had I perhaps been cheated? No! And now, what has changed? This wake-up call changed my judgment and it was easier to make a decision. I had dissected all the factors in play. In the end, the choice was between two attitudes: the security of the known, where everything is predictable and manageable versus a curiosity about something new and the difficulties that might result, that is to say, accepting a broader measure. And so, I signed the application. I still haven't heard back, but today I am serene because I feel that my consistency is no longer about working or not working, but about obeying the form of my vocation.

**Paolo, Venice (Italy)**

## THUS I LEARN THE URGENCY TO DO HIS WILL

 Dear Fr. Carrón: Presently I find myself in Belgium writing my thesis. Studying in these months has not been at all easy and often I have found myself discouraged despite my initial enthusiasm. I spend my days trying to do a good job but it always seems to me that something is missing. The topic interests me, the professor is good, and the conditions are in place to do a good job, but I am not happy. I often find myself anxious or acting hastily to finish. Everyone tries to respond to or resolve the discomfort s/he lives. But what's worth wearing yourself out for? Experience, not images, must prevail to avoid the temptation of thinking that the problem is one's thesis or finding the right job. I try different solutions, but anxiety returns, contentment is illusory. I am a loose cannon. Saturday, I went for the first time to do the charitable work with Giulia, a girl with motor issues. It was the only moment of the whole week when I breathed. How can this small gesture be the only thing that can liberate me? Everything I lived during the week couldn't produce even a moment of gladness as compared with going to Giulia's. Usually we go to see her in pairs, but that morning I was alone. Instead of being discouraged, I was happy: it was my personal "yes" to Him. To tell Jesus that I loved Him, with that small gesture, was the truth about me. The truth about me is that He is the preference of my heart. How many people have I helped? And yet, never had I felt as free as I did that morning. I wasn't giving my time to



## GS VACATION

### STUDYING? IT'S A GESTURE OF FRIENDSHIP

I went to the GS vacation thinking: what kind of nonsense is this? I've always studied alone to avoid the distractions of study groups. The first evening, I barely sang. But after the first study session, I was surprised by how, in reality, it's easier to be distracted alone, while a gesture such as studying in companionship becomes a gesture of friendship; just as it is to not make noise in the evening even though we're four to a room. The second evening, when the songs were done, I was almost sad that the beau-




tiful evening had come to an end. The third study session was fantastic because I realized that even with my struggles with English, I was able to do a good job. Now I think I understand that this vacation isn't only useful for studying with people. Now I believe that studying is only a means to a more beautiful end. I came to the conclusion that friendship with my peers and even with my teachers is a way to live daily gestures in a more beautiful and true way.

**Yuri, Italy**

Giulia, but to Jesus. I wasn't performing a service for Giulia, I was serving Jesus. He isn't simply the image of the other whom I meet and help, but He is the Person I meet in flesh and bone. Otherwise, how could He have been so real? Because of this, there is a haste to do His will; the will of Him who alone fulfills my life.

**Marco, Italy**

#### ALESSIA AND THE QUESTION THAT ENTERS THE FLESH

 Dear Fr. Carrón: Since 2011, my wife, Alessia, has had a serious cancer and now her condition is very advanced. In May 2016, she started having problems walking, and in a matter of a few hours she was back in the operating room for a delicate sur-

gery. Then came a long hospital stay. On December 2<sup>nd</sup> of last year, she suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. This last event was a very violent blow for my family. I have followed with great pain the unending developments of this situation under the watchful eye of a dear friend. A few days before the cerebral hemorrhage, I wrote to my Fraternity group, "I embrace you and ask you 'the impossible,' which is to help us discover and experience the victory of Christ even in this existence." "The fact that you ask us is already a victory," answered Sandro, who had lived the same experience with his wife, Maria, who in the last months of her life spoke of the victory of Christ in her own flesh: something from another world that as if by contagion had pushed me to apply to

join the Fraternity. Then, Alessia's last episode hit like a wrecking ball that struck a blow to my humanity and to the humanity of my daughter, Lidia, the eldest of three siblings, and yet we were miraculously still standing. The day after Alessia's admission to the hospital, Lidia said to me, "Don't worry. I've held down the fort in your absence." A 15-year-old girl has faced all of the duties that were put before her, especially those most human and charitable duties such as encouraging her grandparents. I was waiting for a more "theological" answer to my question from the Mystery. Instead, it is in the flesh that I have experienced His victorious Presence. It is true that the Mystery always answers by a gratuitous exaggeration.

**Alessandro, Italy**

**CLOSE UP**

*Seul*

**B A K U**  
a z e r b a y c a n

# BEGINNING DAY

Stories from distant places where the same fact still happens. The encounter with Christianity, in Korea just like in Venezuela. Carried by the “wind” of a concrete history.

BY D. PERILLO AND A. STOPPA

*Tokyo*

# HIROSHIMA



Ho Chi Minh



Barquisimeto



## ■ JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

# LIKE LAVA FROM A VOLCANO

**In a society that “smothers humanity,” some friends live differently, because faithful to heart that can’t be silenced...**

**T**his tiny seed of the Movement is a witness for me every time. And their faithfulness moves me to tears.” These are the words Mauro Biondi wrote just after his return from Japan and South Korea. He lives in Ireland, but has been friends with the East Asian CL communities for many years, thanks to ties built during his frequent business trips. Over the last few months, he traveled to Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Seoul for their respective Beginning Days.

The Hiroshima community has 18 members: Fr. Arnaldo and Fr. Alberto, two PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions) missionaries, and 16 Japanese. Most of them met CL through their parish, but some in other ways; for example, Yoko, a musician, met Sako, a *Memor Domini* and one of the very first CL members in Japan, at her university. One day, as they were speaking two years ago, Yoko broke into tears. “I’m not happy, not even when I am playing music,” she said. “What am I playing for? What am I living for?” Sako answered by inviting her to School of Community.

That cry of the heart pushes to break through even where everything seems flattened and sealed tight, in societies like that of Japan, which “smother humanity,” as Mauro says. “They’re golden cages. The person is caught up in a perfect mechanism that plans your life from school right up to retirement. But the human heart remains the same. It bursts through like lava from a volcano.” He thinks back to what happened to a friend in Tokyo, a city with 30 million inhabitants. One evening on the subway, where the strict train schedules don’t bend for anyone, he noticed a man who was drunk. He knew what would happen: at the last stop, security would throw him out onto the street. Instead, Mauro’s friend accompanied the man and found him a hotel for the night. Mauro jumped when he heard this and said, “You were the hand of Providence!” His friend replied, “No, that man was providential for me. He reconnected me to the Mystery.”

“In lands as competitive as those of Asia,” Mauro went on to say, “School of Community helps you to not >>

» be enslaved by your circumstances.” In each city he visited, he worked with his friends on the text from the Beginning Day. “What we discovered, first and foremost, is that it’s possible to face everything.” That includes the fear following the sudden death of one’s boss, the monotony of work, the complete lack of certainty about the future, and the overwhelming sense of powerlessness when doing charitable work with the homeless.

**EMPTINESS AND BAPTISM.** Marco, an Italian living in Tokyo who opened his house to host the Beginning Day, felt like Julián Carrón’s reflection was “written just for me.” He spoke about the new opportunity opened up by moving to Japan for work; about starting over and leaving behind the framework of a life “made up of well-formed habits”; as well as his increasing unity with Elena, his wife, and his desire for the fire rekindled to continue to burn. Elena shared the question that has been most urgent for her: “In the morning, I wake up and make a weak sign of the cross. It’s not much more than a habit, but this is how I begin my day.” A day with every hour filled with appointments to keep, picking up the children from school, homework, dinner, bedtime. “I get to the evening and another day has slipped by. How can my life be useful in building up the Kingdom of Heaven?” Mariko from Hiroshima spoke about her struggle and longing for her husband who has no faith. “He’s seeking, and at times it seems like he’s burdened by things that he can’t express. Seeing him like this pains me, and I don’t know what I can do so his heart will be full. But one friend from the community suggested that we pray a Hail Mary for him ev-

**In South Korea, Catholicism blossomed spontaneously, sprouting from ordinary people.**



The community in South Korea.

ery day together...”

In Japanese culture, revealing one’s life to others is extremely rare. “Relationships are very formal here,” Sako says. “Another characteristic trait is extreme timidity, so it’s quite uncommon for a person to speak about him or herself. When Mauro or our friends from Taiwan come to visit, what I encounter in them is humanity. Mauro offered this familiarity in our relationship, speaking to us about himself.” The emptiness of most relationships leads many people to take steps toward the Church, perhaps even asking to be baptized, as they seek a place to belong. “But the relationship to reality is sentimental,” Sako says, “and at the first obstacle, they leave it all behind. An argument is all it takes: if they fight with a friend, they stop seeing him or her. There’s no other road; there’s no forgiveness. In School of Community, we help each other with this: friendship is not the fruit of our effort; rather, we ask for the openness to welcome the other. We can go beyond any discomfort provoked in us, because it is the Lord who gives us friendship for our sanctity; and therefore, for our happiness.

This is the education we receive from Fr. Giussani.”

Mauro is impressed by his friends’ experience of their need for the charism, and how they look forward the whole month to connecting by video to the School of Community in Milan. “They work on the video to see the point of unity with the origin of the Movement.” The assemblies with Carrón are on Wednesday evenings. On the next day, Marcia, a second-generation Brazilian and *Memor Domini*, takes the day off to translate the recording. On Friday, they get together to watch the video in Italian; they stop after each contribution for Marcia to give a summary. But they watch the entire conversation between Carrón and those who speak, even if they don’t understand the words. “We all want to see what is happening there,” Sako says. “Every time, I see my friends there attentively watching the video, in silence, without understanding a word, and I think of what Giussani said about the disciples in front of Jesus: ‘They watched him speak.’”

In South Korea, the seeds of the Movement arrived seven years ago in the form of an Italian family. Today, Francesco Berardi and his wife Antonietta live in Malaysia, but the mark they left on Seoul lives on in the



friendship of the small community that gathered with Mauro on November 19<sup>th</sup> to begin the year together. It's the only place in the world where Catholicism blossomed thanks to the evangelization of lay people, spontaneously sprouting from ordinary people. For this small group of friends, there is no structure that holds them together except their faithfulness to the history that reached them, carried by the wind of their intuition.

**HOJIIN AND THE THEFT.** The group includes Maria and her husband, who converted two years ago and took the baptismal name Peter, Kyoung Su who became Alfred, and James and the others, 12 in total. They have shared with Mauro their worries about political tensions and North Korea, the pressures of the workplace in a world where happiness coincides with wealth, and their need for a place where they can ask their most honest questions.

In addition, Mauro met with 23-year-old Hojiin. During the time he was studying in Holland, he had been robbed. He was so upset by it that he went to church, which he had not done in a long time, and ran into priests from CL. He kept going back to see them. Now, he has returned to Korea and wants to continue what he experienced in Holland. "We spoke with a familiarity that would be impossible to imagine, considering we'd never met," said Mauro, who demonstrated on his return that it was not he who brought something to those he visited, but rather they who brought something to him. "Seeing how God chooses them, just as he chose Abraham, to make Himself known, and seeing how much they desire to adhere to the history they have encountered, my heart is already looking forward to our next encounter..." **T**



**■ AZERBAIJAN**

## ESSENTIAL FOR LIFE

**The first meeting in Baku, and the first steps of a community being born where Catholics are a tiny minority.**

**T**hey met in a room at the parish. The only parish. In all of Azerbaijan. "Here, we have this church, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, and the chapel they used before it was built in 2007. That's it." Nothing more, in a country with almost 10 million inhabitants, and where Catholics number 700, give or take, including those who come to the country from all over the world for short stints working in the gas and oil industry. Paolo Gullo, a 34-year-old from Varese, Italy, is one of these. He has lived in Baku since March 2016, with his wife Marta joining him five months later with their three children: Andrea, Anna, and Sofia. This year, they held a CL Beginning Day for the first time. Nine people attended, attracted by what they've seen and heard from these new friends.

"I came here for the first time in January two years ago, just a little before I moved," Paolo recounts. He

wanted to go to Mass, so he looked online and found the church (again, it's the only one). There he met Fr. Vladimir Fetke, a Slovak who has been a missionary in Azerbaijan since 2001, at the beginning of the Catholic presence in the country. Paolo recounts, "After I moved, I started coming to the parish. We became friends. With him and a few other couples: Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and a young Azerbaijani-Ukrainian family... We met once a month to pray and to read something together." Nothing very formal. "But totally essential in my life. I work a lot: 12 to 14 hours a day. It's easy to forget, to lose oneself. Or at least to have an excuse to lose oneself. Within life's struggles, you have to latch on to what keeps you truly alive."

**AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.** This was one beginning, which was accompanied by another, equally unexpect- **>>**

» ed, took place a little later when Carlo, also in CL, came from Padua to Baku. “It’s incredible how the good Lord never leaves you alone,” Paolo says. “I didn’t plan his coming here; it was given to me. It made me understand how much I’m loved.” This is how School of Community started in Azerbaijan. And it grew almost immediately. First with Marta, who came to be with her husband, and then Luca, who lives in Moscow but had gone to Azerbaijan for work and tried unsuccessfully to meet with them. “But we were put in touch, and he decided to join us using Skype.” Then came Silvia from Kazakhstan, who was invited by Luca. This was all happening at the same time that other Kazakh friends had come to Baku for the most unexpected event of all: the Pope’s visit.

Francis passed through on October 2, 2016, a beautiful but unusual day. “Someone may think that the Pope wastes so much time: traveling so many kilometers to visit a small community of 700 people,” as the pontiff himself said. “It is a community which is not uniform, because among you there are several languages spoken: Azeri, Italian, Spanish ... It is a community on the peripheries. But the Pope, in this, imitates the Holy Spirit who also descended from heaven to a small community in that closed periphery of the Cenacle...” Another beginning, including for the tiny CL group.

**DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS.** From that point on, the School of Community started to build new momentum. “It helps me to take what happens to me seriously,” Paolo says, “To see everything as an opportunity. When things aren’t going well, I recognize my desire to look at the positive. A destructive attitude would be easier: if it doesn’t work, get rid of it. Instead, you try to find the value in



**“Fr. Vladimir has always impressed us with his openness,” Marta says. “He has a clear criterion: ‘If what you are proposing helps you to grow, all right. It’s a help for the Church here, too.’” This paved the way for meetings on *Amoris Laetitia* at the parish, and for a tighter friendship among a group of mothers.**



things. People often say to us, ‘You treat people differently, why is that?’” This is what happened with Namiq, a driver. “He works a lot, but he never went home. Not even when he could.” Paolo realized this and met up with him to talk, as a friend. “Why don’t you spend time with your family? They need you...” An unthinkable friendship began. “But the same thing goes for my son,” Paolo says, “who’s six and is constantly asking, more and more: either he’s a problem you manage, or someone who reminds you of Something greater. You

see, without working on this together, I wouldn’t realize that. I wouldn’t recognize the Origin of things.”

An origin that Fr. Vladimir, who has since been made bishop, also recognizes. “We’ve always been impressed with his openness, the way he welcomes us,” Marta says. “He has a clear criterion: ‘If what you are proposing helps you to grow, all right. It’s a help for the Church here, too.’” This paved the way for regular meetings on *Amoris Laetitia* at the parish, and for a tighter friendship among a group of mothers. “It’s a deeper relationship than I have with those I meet at the school,” Marta says. “We’re seeking the same thing. We’re walking part of our journey together. Those faces closest to you who remind you of Jesus.” Like the faces of Augusto and his family, who arrived from Italy at the end of the summer.

All this led up to the Beginning Day. The first ever in Azerbaijan. “I suggested we do it right away, but we didn’t have anyone to come, so we used the video,” Paolo explains. It was preceded by his introduction and a few songs, and followed by the parish Mass, in which the priest prayed in front of the entire community in thanksgiving that such a gathering had taken place. “They brought up many of the same topics we had mentioned in our meetings at the parish in the previous weeks,” Marta explains. Salvation, our desire for it, and the discovery that we’re incapable of it. The encounter with Christ that changes everything. “Becoming aware of God’s closeness to us is a grace,” as Danelius, one of the Lithuanians, said. “It’s true: we can have the same experience Zacchaeus did, right now,” Paolo added.

And he really meant *now*. “The beauty came right away,” Marta tells us. “The formalism they spoke about in the video is something we know first-hand, because we found our-

selves worn down by all the organizing, our concerns and ‘things to do.’ You can propose a beautiful gesture to everyone, but still forget the origin and suffocate in your attempt to do it right. In other words, it was a ‘live’ correction for us. For me, the first fruit was in becoming aware of that once again.”

**WINTER MARKET.** She realized it even more at the school’s “winter market” a few days later. She and a small group of Italian mothers were bringing sweets to sell. She and Silvia, Augusto’s wife, had suggested putting out a little nativity scene. The others were hesitant. “No, they’re all Muslims here; they might be offended...” They discussed it. “And I was really helped by what we heard at the Beginning Day and read in the conversation Carrón had with the CL leaders in Spain [*available at clonline.org*] about where culture is born, what it means to make a judgment that’s not detached from your context. Maybe you have a good idea, but without taking into account that those around you haven’t met Him yet... Time is needed.” As are steps, one at a time.

There was one more step this year in Baku: the Advent retreat. Paolo invited Fr. Pier Callegari from Kazakhstan. Bishop Vladimir opened the invitation to everyone. “But we proposed it most of all because we needed it,” Paolo says. “Whether our friends said yes or no, or whether 30 people or only two came, was secondary.” Ten people came, “despite an outbreak of tonsillitis.” It was another day together to help rediscover that origin, another beginning. “It was approached with a different attitude,” Marta says. “OK, we wanted it to be beautiful and well-planned, but without losing sight of what’s essential.” Which is? “That the Lord comes to meet us.” **T**



**■ VIETNAM AND THAILAND**

## THE DOOR IS OPEN

**A lunch together in Ho Chi Minh City: “I had forgotten that I am loved right now.”**

**I**t is pettiness and small-mindedness to think that the value of life lies exclusively in what life can give me.” That line from the Beginning Day is like a lightning bolt. Perhaps even more so when life can give you a lot.

Vietnam is a country of economic growth, full of opportunities. Giovanni Zangani is 35 and has been working and living in Ho Chi Minh City for four years. At the beginning of November, he gathered with a few friends to begin the “new year,” with Stefano, Liz, and Paolo, who live in Vietnam, two friends from Thailand, and two from Italy. “It was really a new beginning for me. I recognized the risk of muffling my most profound questions and equating the value of life and of relationships with what they can give you. Maybe you think ‘generously’ toward your family, or your close friends... but the standard mind-set for an ex-pat is, ‘I’m here to get rich.’ You forget that you are loved right now,” Giovanni says. “You forget that you’re loved, independent from the result of your

effort. The encounter that day and Paolo and Iris’s desire to come from Thailand to see us made me recognize this gratuitous love.”

Paolo Tognini’s expertise is in oil and gas exploration. He and his wife have criss-crossed the world for 26 years: England, Libya, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and (for the last three years) Bangkok. They met Giovanni and Stefano when they were living in Ho Chi Minh City, and they continued to stay in touch and visited each other “as much as possible, so that we can all feel the physical companionship of the Movement.”

Paolo remembers those first years abroad, when he and Iris retained their ties with their fraternity in Italy, rejecting any possibility of having such a friendship where they were living. “We were stuck in inertia.” But over time, they changed. “If we’ve learned anything, besides that you should never make plans”—he laughs—“it’s how to live those relationships that present themselves without waiting for ‘something **>>**

» to happen? Precisely because it won't happen if you don't keep the door open." And they were never lacking for friendship, for faces with whom they could share a journey or a place to do School of Community; not even in Libya. "Something always 'arrived' right where we were. And not because we were there, but because we needed it."

**PRAYER.** His job is finding new oil deposits. "There is a huge temptation to be possessive, trying to control everything, but you can never predict the results; not to mention predicting the relationships with the people I work with, trying to motivate them and not judge each other by our accomplishments." For him, the idea of dependence on God being the most useful thing in life was the biggest provocation. "We've helped each other on this point: asking that Jesus' living presence be our starting point, rather than what we 'do.' Hence the importance of prayer, of keeping a constant attitude of prayer throughout our day."

The life they live as ex-pats offers all the luxuries needed to live a comfortable life. These "put an end to the search for the 'hundredfold,'" Paolo says, frankly. "It's easy to settle for that. But then reality hits you, primarily through this friendship, making us ask what is the meaning of what we have and do." He has many reasons to be grateful for his life zigzagging around the world, despite the difficulties, because "after a while just punching the clock, you cave. And you need to be shaken out of your rut."

Deep down, one fact about his life is more powerful than any other thought or consideration: he was 14 when he encountered GS, and now he is 58. When he thinks of it, all he can do is say, "thank you." "Clearly, what attracted me in the beginning is still present." **T**



## ■ VENEZUELA

# AGAINST ALL PREDICTIONS

**A pilgrimage after not being able to see each other for two years. "Our need was greater than the crisis."**

**T**he Movement is present in three cities in Venezuela: Caracas, El Tocuyo (a six-hour drive from the capital) and Mérida (12 hours from Caracas). The communities used to get together at least twice a year before the country fell into a deep crisis. Since 2015, they have stopped gathering: the cost of travel and lodging was prohibitive and it wasn't safe. "But our need was even greater than those circumstances." Fr. Leonardo Marius, the leader of CL in Venezuela, describes how they decided to meet for Beginning Day on November 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>. About 130 people from all three cities gathered in Barquisimeto after not seeing each other for two years.

They made the trip on Friday, sacrificing some of the little money they have and a day of work because at night there is too great a risk of being attacked by armed gangs along the road. "It's not safe by day,

either, especially if you're carrying any food: they'll stop you and take everything." But they ran the risk to go together to see the Divina Pastora, the depiction of Our Lady closest to the hearts of Venezuelans, to entrust themselves to her, to give thanks and spend two days together watching the video from Beginning Day and working on what Fr. Carón proposed.

**LACK AND CRISIS.** "The more time passed, the stronger our desire to see each other grew," says Ernesto, from Caracas. "We're rediscovering the value of the Movement's gestures. None of it is automatic. It has been the crisis that revealed this to us." Of the 30 million Venezuelans, 70% are living in poverty, and of these, most go hungry; people are dying both at home and in hospitals because of the lack of medicines; and the political situation is at a standstill,



“The overwhelming feeling is that of defeat,” Fr. Leonardo says. In such a climate, he is moved by the hope of his friends. Within the struggle just to get by—from the families with young children to college students—what dominates is the desire that their hearts be educated by the crisis.



In front of Monumento Manto de María (“Mary’s Mantle”), in Barquisimeto.

deaf to the demonstrations that have mobilized thousands of people over the last few months but have come to nothing. “The overwhelming feeling is that of defeat,” Fr. Leonardo says. “Of having merely wasted their time.” In such a challenging climate,

he is moved by the hope exhibited by his friends. Within their struggle just to get by—from the families with young children to college students—what dominates is the desire that their hearts be educated by the crisis. “During those two days together, we

were reminded that we can lay bare all our needs, without embarrassment. None of us would be capable of it, but in a ‘living reality,’ you experience a new judgment on life that breaks down all our walls.” On Sunday, after Mass together, they headed back home, “full of gratitude.”

Why were they so grateful? Back at home in El Tocuyo, Nohemy said, “The Beginning Day referred to ‘the God of history.’ Within this situation, in the midst of all we’re living ... I give thanks to *that* God, because He makes it possible for me to walk a path and realize how Christ is happening in my life: through concrete faces, in help received, a hug, a smile, or a word. I know that I’m not alone, that Christ exists and is present.” El Tocuyo, a small, rural town up north in the foothills of the Andes, is probably the community that is struggling the most. Yet they still do charitable work. One Sunday a month, they make lunch for 1,300 people whose need is greater than theirs. When he goes to visit them, Fr. Leonardo is always impressed. “Their poverty is so free, and so full of hope.”

**OUR LADY’S GIFT.** He went to visit them after the Beginning Day, and five new people asked to enroll in the Fraternity. “This is a gift from Our Lady. I saw in them adults with a burning desire to belong to a concrete history... Christ is everything in their lives, and, precisely because He is everything, they have an even greater need for a place to meet Him. They said to me, ‘Christ is meaningful for us because of the charism.’” Fr. Leonardo continued, “To find men and women in such a challenging situation who, instead of despairing or just getting by, take their lives and the lives of those around them seriously, is a source of hope for the whole world.”



# THE "I" IS REBORN AN ENCOUNTER

## *Religious Sense, and Anarchy* (New York, May 2017)

My roommate Mike told me of a conclusion he had made: "Peter, I think the only way to truly live is to be an anarchist." When I asked him what he meant, he said, more or less, "I think that the past is full of people who have screwed things up for those of us living right now, and there's nothing you can do about it except rebel against it, like an anarchist." With this in mind I began to understand why he is such an avid fan of hip-hop — it's all about rebellion, in particular, one rapper named Ab-Soul and his album "Control Systems": this album is entirely about recognizing the things that are wrong with the world and rejecting them.

I decided to go see Ab-Soul in concert with him in the following month. I told him I would go. Privately, I had the idea to try and give a copy of *The Religious Sense* to Ab-Soul. At a certain point, when the concert was still a few weeks away, the topic came up in conversation again. I began to tell him about what he had told me about anarchy and why it was the reason I listened to so much Ab-Soul, and I told him about *The Religious Sense*. He reminded me of him, and I lent him the extra copy, the "Ab-Soul copy," and told him he could have it until the concert. This was the best of times. When we got back, I asked him what he thought of the book. He told me, "I really like it. I'm actually almost done." This was the best of times. I was very crowded and I couldn't bring myself to push my way to the front to hand this guy rapping on a stage a book about religion. After the concert, I was somewhat disappointed in myself. I gave the copy back to Mike and told him that it was probably meant to be his to begin with. He responded, "Don't worry Peter, next Ab-Soul concert we'll give it to him." (Peter)

## Words that Explain My Life (Washington, DC, May 2017)

I began reading the first three chapters of *The Religious Sense* during Christmas break. Since my conversion a few years ago, I still thought that to believe was just a mental exercise, that one day I would get really good at. While all of this was being worked out in me, my actual experience was still too peripheral to my faith and so, although I deeply desired to know Christ, he was still too abstract, too separate and distant. In *The Religious Sense* I read about Giussani's method of realism, and I felt like I was having some earth-shattering epiphany. As obvious as it all might sound now, I had never read something that so perfectly articulated how I experienced reality, and why I felt I had to ultimately accept that existence was meaningful. Learning about this method was more than just a better argument for what I already believed; it brought me clarity that actually began to influence the way I approached my daily life. I began to be more attentive to what was being said and intentionally making judgments about my experiences. When I really committed myself to this, I found that life became more and more meaningful. The way I listened to music, or read, or went to parties or did really anything at all, changed and became wrapped up in this disposition. I stopped looking for Christ in anything but my experience, and saw how real he is. (Marian)

**NEW YORK ENCOUNTER**

**YESTERDAY IS**

**TODAY**

**From the English edition of Fr. Giussani's biography to the life testified to by Margaret and her friends. The "raw nerve" of the need for fatherhood. Witnesses and topics from all over the world, exhibitions, performances... A chronicle from the event proposed by Communion and Liberation in Manhattan.**

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

**"D**id you realize two hours had gone by? I hadn't even noticed. I would've stayed there forever..." When Teresa Landi, a researcher by trade and an animating force in the New York Encounter, heard these words from Mark, a college student from Michigan who walked out of the auditorium in amazement, she immediately thought of what had happened to her and her friends many years ago while listening to Giussani speak the words of *Recognizing Christ*. "The same reaction. Total silence. And the impression that time had flown by," yet all of life was condensed in those hours of powerful witness. That was 1994. But it's happening again, now, at the Metropolitan Pavilion in Manhattan, for an audience who, for the most part, never saw Giussani, yet consider him a friend. Or, even better, a "father, because he loves my destiny," as Margaret, a college student, said in one of the most profound moments of the American cultural festival.

**WITHIN THE "I."** The "NYE," as they abbreviate it here, is in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition. The title: "An 'Impossible' Unity," seemingly impossible because what reigns in society today is division, distance, and detachment. Not only among people, but *within the person*, within the "I." This came to light during the weekend of talks (23), exhibitions (5), and performances (one

each evening), and of thousands of hugs and conversations among those who attended from around the world, and culminated with Sunday's presentation of *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, the English edition of the biography written by Alberto Savorana, published by McGill-Queen's Press. Joining the author on the stage were witnesses who knew the founder of CL well. Starting with Fr. Julián Carrón, his successor as leader of the Movement, who opened with a provocative greeting: "This book contains the method of Giussani: experience. He lets Giussani himself speak, his history. From this, we see emerge an 'I' that is totally human. You can see the kind of richness, of profundity that a man who accept to be attracted by Christ can reach. You can rediscover the nature of Christianity." Because within this world in which, as Péguy said, we have lost the capacity for wonder, "Giussani demonstrates how only the presence of Christ can reawaken the 'I,' can give fullness of life and an unimaginable fulfilment. Without this, we become apathetic about life..."

Savorana framed the topic ("Giussani's life is a historical path of self-awareness. He learned so much from the passage of time that he once said, 'For me, history is everything. I learned from history...'", then introduced the other guests. Five witnesses shared five vignettes of the history born out of Giussani's charism. Fr. Pigi Bernareggi, a missionary in >>

The exhibit on Fr. Giussani prepared by college students from the U.S. and Canada for the 2018 New York Encounter.



Above, Cardinal Timothy Dolan with the speakers of the panel on Dorothy Day. Right, a corner of the bookstand. Below, a guided tour of the exhibit "From My Life to Yours" dedicated to Fr. Giussani. Right, Fr. Julián Carrón during his opening greeting at the presentation of the just-released biography of Fr. Giussani.



» Brazil, was one of the first students at Berchet High School struck by the man who placed "God as the heart of life, the center and the attractiveness of everything: in following Giussani, I deepened my certainty that He was present and was my Father." Pier Alberto Bertazzi, a doctor, spoke about the crisis in the late 1960s when GS became CL, and what was most important for Giussani. ("He didn't want to give us a series of instructions on how to be good Christians, but for us to become aware of a Presence: the rest would follow"). Rose Busingye, president of Meeting Point International in Kampala, Uganda, spoke of the vocation born out of her encounter with him. ("He said to me: even if

**"Giussani shows how only the presence of Christ can give an unimaginable fulfillment."**

you were the only human being in the whold world, God would have come for you. Your nothingness will no longer be lost. At that moment, I began to live"). Jonathan Fields, a musician from New York, described a "flourishing life, because I discovered that my being 'nothing' was not the enemy; there was a someone to whom I could cry out, could beg." There was even a video interview with Shodo Habukawa, a Buddhist monk: "It was a gift walking with Fr. Giussani in the search for truth. He is still a presence for me." Then, Savorana called Margaret onto the stage.

She, along with a group of students like herself, had put together an exhibit on Giussani, and described how she perceives him as a father even

though she never met him, and how "he helps me to live" here and now.

**THE FIRST PIECE.** These were words transcending time and space, which also helped to reveal the first puzzle piece in the search for unity. "To reunite humanity, to reawaken the 'I,' an event that's happening now is needed," said Angelo Sala, one of the organizers of the Encounter. We need something—someone—who is present *now* who "makes what was impossible possible," as Bertazzi said. The Encounter, at its core, was a celebration of this presence.

It began with a tribute to Steven McDonald, a police officer who spent his life in a wheelchair after being shot and paralyzed while investigating a theft. He was a New York hero, "a witness" for Cardinal Timothy Dolan and many others. He was scheduled to speak at the 2017 Encounter, but



## A Human Gaze, A History



From left, Jonathan Fields, Rose Busingye, Pier Alberto Bertazzi, Fr. Pigi Bernareggi, and Alberto Savorana. They delivered eyewitness accounts at the presentation of *The Life of Luigi Giussani*.



Joseph Weiler, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, and Sayyid Mohammad Baqir Al-Kashmiri took part in the dialogue on "Abraham and the Birth of the 'I.'" Below, a moment from the panel "The Father: Who is He?"



passed away just a few days before it. On the stage this year was his son Conor, who has also been a police officer since 2011. He spoke about the same things his father spoke about for 30 years: forgiveness and love. "It's the only way to live," his mother would say to those who crowded around the stage after the talk. Sala said, "For me, it was a powerful example of what has happened at other times over the weekend...it was about the emergence of a life that was full and unified, that went against the current of the dominant mentality. Steven would have been one of the classic cases cited by those who support euthanasia. But, instead, he was extremely useful to the world by simply accepting his condition. This is what makes life useful: the awareness you have of yourself."

This point came to light in many of the talks. The speakers remarked on the "human factor" as the heart of economics (in the beautiful speech by Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development) and of education (in the presentation by the directors of ReConnect Brooklyn, a non-profit offering opportunities for at-risk youth), of poetry and film, and of American society (in the panel discussion with Amitai Etzioni, a well-known Jewish sociologist who just three months ago spoke at a presentation of Carrón's *Disarming Beauty*, calling it "the most interesting book of the last 20 years"). The question "The Father: Who is He?" was discussed by a panel in which, alongside experts and academics (including Dominic Aquila, a professor at the University of St. Thomas in Houston and father of 11 children) what stood out was the story Camil Martinez, a doctoral student in Business at the University of Maryland, who told of being a "spiritual daughter" of Lorenzo Albacete, the theologian and friend of Fr. Giussani to whom the



Some moments from the 2018 Encounter (January 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>). Clockwise: Cardinal Sean O'Malley celebrating the Sunday Mass, the photo exhibit by Joseph Weiler, the Metropolitan Pavilion auditorium, and the concert show "Fatherhood."



» New York Encounter and CL in the U.S. owe a great deal.

"Fatherhood was another recurring theme that came up often," Sala explained. "Many people spoke of it, directly or indirectly. We realized little by little as we organized the Encounter that it really hit a nerve: when it became clear that the heart of everything, including the divisions that mark our society, is the lack of unity in the 'I,' it became immediately clear how urgent it is that we rediscover ourselves as sons and daughters."

Just look at how Etsuro Sotoo, lead sculptor of the Sagrada Família, described his relationship with Gaudí in a presentation with John Waters. He told the audience about how his

entire perspective changed when he began to see clearly "where Gaudí was looking." This could also be seen in Saturday evening's performance titled *Fatherhood* (Friday's performance was inspired by Martin Luther King).

**"It became clear how urgent it is that we rediscover ourselves as sons and daughters."**

Then there were the exhibits. One on immigration, a hot topic in this part of the world as well, especially as Donald Trump continually changes his mind about walls, entrance visas, and the fate of the "Dreamers." Here at the Encounter, they addressed the matter

in its simplest terms with facts (the numbers and surrounding context) and stories: a series of video interviews of people who welcome immigrants, and in their hospitality dis-

cover more about themselves. This discovery was also dear to Dorothy Day, the social activist and heart of the *Catholic Worker*, the newspaper and movement that made its mark on 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Cardinal Dolan, the archbishop of the Big Apple and a regular guest at the NYE, sees her as "a saint for our time, because she exemplifies that our faith is 'both-and' not 'either-or.'"

**QUESTIONS AND MESSAGES.** Teens who served as guides led guests through the panels of the exhibit "Father Abraham's Tent" where "All Are Welcome." It was designed for the youngest swath of attendees, but spoke the same language as one of the most anticipated talks at the NYE: "Abraham and the Birth of the 'I.'" The speakers were Joseph Weiler, a Jewish law professor and friend of the festival since its inception (there was also an exhibit



of his photography this year); Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States (his summary of what makes encounters among people of different faiths possible was very interesting); and Sayyid al-Kashmiri, a Shiite Muslim. “When we went to see al-Kashmiri to talk about the Encounter, it was supposed to be a 20-minute meeting,” an organizer said. “We were there for four hours. He wanted to know everything about us, about Giussani, about CL...” Over the three days of the Encounter, he was often seen circulating with his assistants, looking at everything and asking questions. “At the end of the weekend, he sent us a message saying he had never felt so welcomed,” Landi said.

The final exhibition was about Fr. Giussani. The title was the same as an exhibit put together a few years ago, “From My Life to Yours,” but

the content was new. It was put together by a group of about 40 college students from the CLU-like Margaret—living in the U.S. and Canada. In three gatherings and many video conferences over a few months, they developed a striking reading of Fr. Giussani’s life and how it has helped them to understand their own. This was demonstrated through facts, moments, and encounters (about, for example, an illuminating conversation with a friend, the weight of solitude, the discovery of an unexpected depth to one’s studies...) that were juxtaposed on panels with quotes from the founder talking about his experience. Yesterday *is* today—there’s no separation. In fact, in some sense, “today” is even richer “because our awareness, little by little, has grown,” explained Riro Mascalco, President of the Encounter, in reviewing its 10-year history as a

sea of people swarmed behind him.

There are many young people: many families and even more students. Quite a few volunteers (370 this year) make up the heart and engine of a machine that has grown complex and must be assembled and broken down very quickly. There were many young priests; it would be hard to find so many clergymen under 30 anywhere else. “Forty-eight seminarians came; it’s become a tradition for them to plan the details of the Sunday Mass,” said Olivetta Danese, Event Coordinator for the Encounter. The main celebrant was Cardinal Sean O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston, who doesn’t miss an Encounter, like Dolan and some other bishops, both American and from other countries. Danese said, “It’s one of the things I reflected on this year—their availability in accompanying us and following, together, what is happening here. They could be doing something else, or just come only out of a sense of duty. Instead, there’s a truly strong tie. We are completely children of the Church.”

**ON FIRE.** Archbishop Pierre, the nuncio, stayed for almost the entire weekend. Pierre delivered Pope Francis’s message, his wish “that these days may assist participants in deepening their desire for truth, beauty and justice.” When, at the end of one of the many discussions about America, they asked Pierre, “What work are we called to do? How can we contribute?” he thought for a moment and then answered, “I would like you to set this society on fire.” “It made me think of Fr. Giussani,” Landi said. “One time, speaking when it was just a handful of us in the U.S., he paraphrased St. Catherine of Siena: ‘If you are what you should be, you will set all America on fire.’” It seems like yesterday, but it is today. **T**

# A YEAR WITH TRUMP

**From the presidential inauguration to today, a review of alliances forged and bridges burned, immigration, religious liberty, and much confusion... While Catholics face the dilemma of being “homeless” in U.S. politics.**

BY MATTIA FERRARESI



**J**ust over a year ago, American Catholics heading to the polls were faced with what Harvard legal scholar Adrian Vermeule refers to as “a tragic dilemma.” A little over half of the Catholics who voted decided to cast their ballot for Donald Trump, and studies on the election show that he won in part thanks to the support of Catholics in some key states. The drama surrounding the election has exposed a matter of significance that has become ingrained in American society over the generations but which is often overshadowed by party affiliation and debates between Republicans and Democrats: “Catholics are politically homeless in the United States,” explains Vermeule. Facing the choice between Trump and Hilary Clinton, it be-

came clear that neither of the major parties could provide shelter for the “homeless” Catholics who, in past presidential elections, have divided themselves between the two parties. “The Democratic Party,” continues the law professor, “believes in radical permissiveness in regard to abortion, while the Republican party stands for tax cuts for the rich and hostility towards immigrants, especially those who come from Mexico and Latin America.”

Now, a year since Trump took office, the dilemma has not dissipated. We have seen the nomination of a conservative and pro-life judge to the Supreme Court and a change of course for religious freedom issues, but also the saga of immigration bans in order to uphold the “America First” principle and the exacer-

bation of the turbulent feud with North Korea; there have been contentious terminations of employment and backpedaling within the administration, barricades erected, and rushed alliances of convenience. An administration in constant flux has been exposed for its fragility, and at the same time has been subjected to an investigation to set the record straight on the interference of Russia in the U.S. elections. The result: Catholics still feel homeless in the political arena.

Trump’s perplexing behavior, characterized by his breaking with all presidential conventions, and the equally confusing media coverage over the past year of his presidency have complicated the task of making a fair assessment of his performance in the first year. Yet the reign



Roe v. Wade [*the 1973 ruling that allowed the states to legalize abortion*] and to invest the states with the authority over the decision to end pregnancies.” In line with traditional Republican policies, the administration has also reintroduced the “Mexico City policy,” which blocks funding to non-governmental organizations seeking public funds to promote abortion as a method of family planning. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has applauded this decision.

**COMMON SENSE.** As for religious liberty, the topic most debated between the USCCB and the White House during the Obama years, Trump annulled the mandate that forced religiously affiliated institutions—schools, universities, hospitals, etc.—to violate their consciences by providing contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs to their dependents through the insurance plans made available by Obamacare. This was very significant, and not just for Christians: the mandate had reduced the freedom of religion to freedom of worship, blocking the freedom of religious expression in society. The bishops proposed “a return to common sense,” after “an anomalous failure by federal regulators that should never have occurred and should never be repeated.” Vermeule, who has often criticized the President, can see hope seeping through the cracks of this incredibly fragmented and cryptic political situation: “It is a positive sign to see that some politicians are starting to support the valid points of Trump’s agenda” without kow-towing to him.

The area of foreign policy is the most difficult for observers to interpret. The President had promised to launch an era in which America would scale back its involve- >>

of Trump, one of the most unpopular presidents of all time, has in a way “secularized” the political climate. From an administration of this caliber, exemplification of virtue is not to be expected, but using the lens of realism, his administration can be evaluated point by point. In this light, being homeless has its advantages.

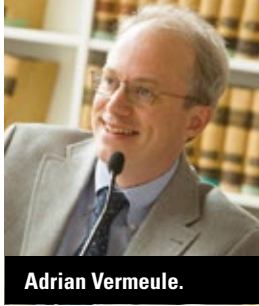
**ISSUES TO FOLLOW.** Joseph Bottum, an intellectual and a professor at Dakota State University in Madison, South Dakota, and formerly an editor of *First Things*, points out the irony in the relationship between Trump and Catholics: “He is one of the most provocative and uncouth presidents in history, still, the teachings of [Catholic] Social Doctrine have been able to thrive more during his presidency than under

Barack Obama or George W. Bush.” Bottum believes that issues of life and religious liberty are the issues to follow in order to unearth signs of hope. “For those who are genuinely pro-life, especially now that the movement is at its low point in influence, there is good reason to look at this first year of Trump’s presidency in a positive light. These are neither secondary nor should they be looked at as relevant solely to so-called conservative Catholics: the dignity of life is at the core of social justice, but in the past fifty years, in the United States and throughout the West, the children who have been aborted outnumber the immigrants who have been turned away. The nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court has rekindled hope in those who want to reverse

» ment in international affairs, but this year he has approached international accords with varying intentions. He did not renew the nuclear deal with Iran, and he escalated the threats against Pyongyang, even as Pope Francis was trying to encourage North Korean leaders to be “opposed to the rhetoric of hatred.” He has put all of the free trade agreements up for discussion. He has reinforced the alliance with Saudi Arabia and has rewarded a portion of the electorate by recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, thus beginning the process of transferring the embassy. This was yet another decision heavily criticized by the Vatican and many other countries. It is difficult to identify a coherent approach in an administration that favors bilateral agreements but that is skeptical of, and even hostile toward, multilateral discussions and international institutions.

**WALLS.** Immigration, environmental, and fiscal politics are also issues of great concern. Still, some clarification is needed to avoid getting caught in the abundant distortions of this post-truth era. Bottum explains that, “outside the United States, the issue of immigration has been blown out of proportion. I am in favor of more welcoming and generous laws than the ones currently enforced in America, but we must also be honest: this administration has not radically changed the immigration policy in place.”

In fact, the wall at the border with Mexico, the centerpiece of Trump’s politics, has not been built. The travel ban, which has been rewritten three times and has since been approved—though not fully—by the Supreme Court, temporarily limits entry into the U.S. by people from eight countries (concerning which rigorous restrictions are already in place) due to concerns about na-

**Adrian Vermeule.****Joseph Bottum.****Father Thomas Reese, S.J.**

tional security. During the electoral campaign, Trump promised to deport two to three million illegal immigrants with criminal records (out of approximately eleven million total living in the US), but actions to expel illegal immigrants have moved with less speed than anticipated. Under Trump, ICE, the federal body that guards the border, has repatriated an average of 17,500 illegal immigrants who have committed crimes each month, compared to the monthly average in the previous year of 20,000. In 2012, 34,000 a month were deported. However, arrests of illegal immigrants have increased this year.

Also among the decisions bitterly criticized by the bishops is that of drastically reducing the number of refugees that the United States accepts. Trump cut the number of entries to 50,000 per year, from the 110,000 cap that had been instituted by Obama, and has threatened to further diminish the number of entries to the country overall. The backlash against Dreamers, the children of illegal immigrants

who entered the country as minors with their parents, and who Obama granted amnesty, has garnered widespread criticism, also among Catholics.

The withdrawal from the Paris Accords to reduce carbon emissions sparked a political firestorm, and in the latest debate on tax reform, the USCCB made its voice heard. The bill proposed by the White House, explains the USCCB, “will raise income taxes on the working poor while simultaneously providing a large tax cut to the wealthy. This is simply unconscionable.”

“It is interesting to notice that the bishops have not allowed the political climate to alter their approach to problems. They have commended Trump when he did good things from the Catholic standpoint, and they also reprimanded him, quite severely at times, when he promoted policies that went against Social Doctrine,” explains Fr. Thomas Reese, S.J., a columnist for the *National Catholic Reporter*. “This freedom, I believe, differs from the attitude of

other groups; in particular it is in contrast to that of the evangelicals, who support Trump *a priori*, even when he sustains positions that contradict the Gospel,” continues the American Jesuit, who points to the meeting between Trump and Pope Francis this past May as a sign of the possibility for a dialogue about issues they agree on, from religious liberty to the protection of Christians in the Middle East. “The media described him as the anti-Pope, as a *persona non grata*, but then when they met, it was clear that much common ground was found that they could cover together. This is the attitude of the Holy See toward everything, but the media does not understand: they once predicted that John Paul II would put up a major fight against Clinton and they said the same about Benedict XVI with regard to Obama. There was no dramatic duel. Instead, there were both points for dialogue and a frank recognition of disagreements. In many accounts, the Church has often worked best with the most ‘distant’ presidents.”

**MARRIAGE.** A few months ago, Reese performed a study of the language used in the U.S. bishops’ communications on immigration, finding repeated use of particularly harsh words. They declared themselves to be “disheartened,” “disappointed,” and “deeply troubled.” They described fear of “bigotry,” a climate of “intolerance,” and some “alarming,” “devastating,” and “injurious” decisions. This tone signaled, according to Reese, the end of the “honeymoon” phase with Trump that had begun with some shared goals. Though he adds a revealing footnote: “Since in the bishops’ minds this marriage never took place, it may be easy for them to quietly climb out of bed and disappear into the night.”

## WHO CAN SAVE JERUSALEM?

**For the President, it is the capital of Israel. But now, in the “City of God” (and of peace), the risk of war is on the horizon. This is why.**

It’s a difficult situation that fills us with sorrow, especially because we are in the Christmas season. For this reason, we wish to pray for everyone, and with more fervor.” Fr. Johnny Abu Khalil is the pastor of Taybeh, the only entirely Christian village in the West Bank, where he speaks about the most recent political crisis faced by the Holy Land. Donald Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has devastated Arab-Palestinian Christians, and the tone of the Latin Rite priest’s concern escalates dramatically. “If this political crisis is not resolved soon, we will no longer be able to pray at holy sites.” So then, will they cease to be houses of prayer for all peoples? Fr. Khalil insists: “We repeat over and over what the Church has said all along: two capitals for two states, while the Old City of Jerusalem should be given an international status, so that all may enter.”

The priest of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has experienced the signs of the gravity of the situation: “Now, if I were to walk in Jerusalem’s Old City wearing a cross around my neck, it is likely that I would meet Jews who would insult me or spit at me. Is this the message that Jerusalem, a holy city, wants to tell the world?”

In the same vein as Khalil’s warning, but with a different tone, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has expressed in an open letter the opinion that “any unilateral solution cannot be considered as a possible solution. In reality, Jerusalem is a treasure for all humanity. Any exclusive claim—whether it be political or religious—is contrary to the very essence of this city.”

For Amira Hass, who writes for Haaretz (an Israeli newspaper with close ties to the opposition), this is a political opportunity. “The hope is that [this decision] will be used to effect change. The concern is that it [the change] won’t happen.” Sharp-minded,

with the realistic gaze of someone who, having lived in Ramallah for years, has seen just about everything, she is able to paint a realistic, but almost cynical, picture: “The call by Abbas’s Fatah party for three days of rage over the Jerusalem issue with no internal systemic changes by the party is a risky gamble. It endangers the lives and health of hundreds of Palestinian young people, exposing them to mass arrest, and all for nothing.” Hass believes that the only hope is for

the Palestinian Authority, in whatever action it decides to take, to once again seek out “the active participation of wide sectors of the population, something that the leaders of Fatah have long forgotten how to do. Then in a second phase, there could

be an attempt toward national reconciliation.”

**This could be the only chance** “to save Jerusalem,” in the words of Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah. Keeping in mind that the holy city is still standing, after being so long at the center of a conflict in which the Israelis never win and the Palestinians keep losing, a political accord at this point in time seems nearly impossible.

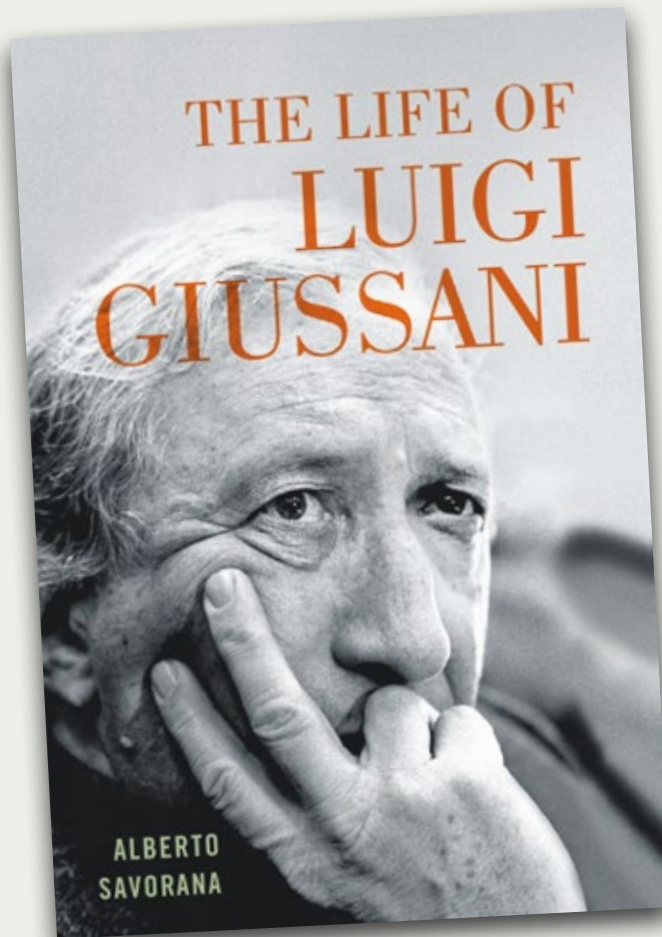
“Jerusalem, the City of God,” as Monsignor Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, stated simply, “is a city of peace for us and for the world. Unfortunately, though, our holy land with Jerusalem the Holy city, is today a land of conflict. Those who love Jerusalem have every will to work and make it a land and a city of peace, life and dignity for all its inhabitants.” For Fr. Johnny, as an Arab pastor of a few thousand souls, this hope comes with a concrete task: it comes—today—through the words Fr. Johnny almost whispers before leaving: “At the parish, we pray every day, and we also pray for Trump.”

**Andrea Avveduto**



# THE LIFE OF LUIGI GIUSSANI

by Alberto Savorana. Translated by Chris Bacich and Mariangela Sullivan



*A detailed account of the life and legacy of the founder of the Communion and Liberation movement.*

1416 Pages, December 2017

Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy, which has hundreds of thousands of adherents around the globe. In *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Alberto Savorana, who spent an important part of his life working and studying with Giussani, draws on many unpublished documents to recount who the priest was and how he lived. Giussani's life story is particularly significant because it shares many of the same challenges, risks, and paths toward enlightenment that are described in his numerous and influential publications.

In addition to providing the first chronological reconstruction of the life of the founder of Communion and Liberation, *The Life of Luigi Giussani* provides a detailed account of his legacy and what his life's work meant to individual people and the Church.

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