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# TRACES

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## STORIES FROM A NEW WORLD

A journey to Latin America  
to see how faith can change  
life and history.

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Giussani and Julián Carrón

## BRUSSELS

# THE MOMENT AFTER

The terrorist attacks on March 22<sup>nd</sup> shook Europe, but they also made people stop taking their daily lives for granted. Here, we offer stories of the people in Brussels who asked themselves what their lives are founded upon.



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## LUIGI GIUSSANI

This 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 practised in eighty 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, including

memorable 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.

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# A BOUNDLESS QUESTION

**T**here is a portion of the world that we look at rarely, and even then, only sporadically. We do so on particular occasions, for example, when protestors, for or against Lula, filled the streets in Brazil, or when Barack Obama made a historic visit to Cuba at the end of March, or when Pope Francis makes a pilgrimage, which is always impressive and thought-provoking, as was the case in February in Mexico. But in general, Latin America is out of sight and out of mind.

And yet the world of Latin America is one close to our own culture and tradition. Its history is the child of our own Western history, a broad, perhaps somewhat tired category, but still useful for understanding ourselves. Also, this continent has given us our Pope who, as he himself said immediately after the election three years ago, his “brother Cardinals” went “almost to the ends of the earth” to get.


**For these reasons, we have decided to see** what it means to live the faith there, in that world, to see what difference Christianity can make, how it can help life in such a difficult and harsh context, perhaps more so than many others. A context full of worries and fear of losing tranquillity, of wounds, pain, and dramatic situations, teetering under our feet, as is happening in other parts of “our” West, as you can read in the pages that follow. This context never, or almost never, enjoys “tranquillity.” It is not a part of the picture. Whether it is the daily violence in certain areas of Mexico, or the looming poverty that asphyxiates Venezuela, the misery of the Brazilian favelas or the villas of Buenos Aires, life is always pressing and challenging.

So then, what can we learn by looking at this world? What can we discover about the Pope, the faith, and ourselves?

These questions are important because there is nothing more crucial for life than finding something—someone—able to embrace all of it, in all its drama, especially now, in these times.

**A few weeks ago** we witnessed the terrible attacks in Brussels; once again terror, once again blood in the heart of Europe and in the midst of Holy Week. In a letter to the Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera* (which you will find on page 15), Julián Carrón, the leader of CL, asked a question that we all feel: “How can we look at these facts, as women and men, without yielding to bewilderment or rage? Only if we do not block out the urgent need for meaning, for a why... The more lacerating the pain, the more boundless is the question, the prayer of entreaty, that we sense within.” He indicated a point to look at: Easter, that is, the Mercy of God. There, “Christ offers Himself as the response worthy of the boundless prayer of entreaty for a why, and at the same time communicates to us that energy without which we cannot recover.” This is what we can learn looking at those who already live this experience. **T**


**WHEN THE MYSTERY BREAKS OUR IDEAS**

 As a physical therapist, I began to treat a patient from the United Arab Emirates. He had to return to his country and asked if I might be able to go with him so that he could continue his treatment. With a thousand reservations, I went for a month and then for another two weeks. The relationship with this patient and his extended family was truly unbelievable. They allowed me into their world as perhaps had never happened before (the Italians I met there told me that the Emirati are very closed). They wanted me to learn about everything: their traditions, their ways and customs, even their language. Being with them, I realized that they have an enormous sense of life and of the Mystery; they perceive that everything comes from an Other. An unexpected reciprocal affection and esteem were born. They told me that I, a Catholic, was more like a sister to them than other, less religious Europeans. They told me numerous times that when I got married, they would come to my wedding in Italy. Not only that, they wanted to throw a party for me in their country. What had they seen in me? “Only a life that is different and new can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships, in short, everything.” The Mystery entered into these relationships, breaking classic forms, so much so that a Muslim Arab, in a delicate period of illness, told me that I am no longer just his physical therapist, I am part of his family.

**Anna, Italy**



**“HE WAS JUST WAITING FOR MY YES”**

 This past Easter has been particularly crucial for me. To make a long story short, I was baptized right after I was born, but I was not raised in a Catholic family. I simply did not believe in God. However, something was constantly missing. Then, I met the Movement in Italy a few months ago and the fact of Christ became real for me. He became present in my life as never before. Since then, I have felt the desire to receive the Eucharist. I was about to leave for Kenya for a year of work. I think it was the first time in my life when I did not feel the urgency to run away, I wanted to remain close to those friends He gave me. However, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I took it, with faith and trust that it would lead me exactly where He wanted me to be. My desire to be with Him grew stronger every day and I didn’t want to wait a year to go back to Italy to make my First Holy Communion. I got in touch with an Italian sister here in Nairobi and she accompanied me in my catechesis, which was supposed to last until July. I had made a plan and it was a good one. Until He came up with a better one. After the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, Joakim came to me suggesting I should talk

to Fr. Valerio to verify the possibility of doing the First Communion during the Easter Vigil. I was about to say no, to let it go, but somehow the idea of this possibility remained stuck in my mind. So I spoke to some friends in Italy to tell them about it. They replied to me: “Who do you *really* want?” I realized how all of this was bigger than me and how infinite was my desire. I decided to go and talk to Fr. Valerio to see what he thought of the timing. I was ready to postpone it to July if he said I needed more time. Instead, he smiled and said “yes” with joy. I felt the greatest happiness exploding in me. I spent all of Saturday being anxious. I stood in the Church for 40 minutes before allowing myself to go to the confessional. I kept looking at my mistakes and my limits and judging myself for them. I was ashamed and afraid I could not overcome them. Fr. Alfonso’s invitation to join in the front rows of the church with the others who were receiving the Sacraments that night was the caress of Christ’s mercy on me. Now I can’t get the Beauty I have seen in these days out of my eyes. He came to me; He wanted to be with me even more than I wanted to be with Him. He knew better than me, better than my perfect plan and “right” timing. He was just waiting for my “yes,” as He’s been patiently waiting for 26 years.

**Federica, Nairobi (Kenya)**

**FROM THE FRIENDSHIP WITH FR. GIUSSANI**

*On the occasion of the opening of the Japanese Language and Culture course hosted by our friend, Wakako Saito, at the Catholic University of Milan, the*



## INTENSIVE CARE UNIT


### IN FRONT OF AN INCUBATOR

**D**ear Fr. Julián: On Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> my third daughter, Lucia, was born prematurely. For me, entering the neonatal intensive care unit was like entering into a fourth dimension. I had to learn how to be in that place: from the careful washing, the changing of clothes, the low voice, the worried expressions of the parents... down to the way of staying in front of the incubator. At first, I couldn't catch my breath, I couldn't understand what had happened, and that gave me a knot in my stomach. This feeling became a question when I met Katy, the mother of Nathan, a child hospitalized for some time and in serious condition. One day, while I was praying and watching Lucia, Katy approached me and said, "You look uncomfortable in that chair. Let me help you to lower the incubator so you can be a little more comfortable." Just a few words that surprised me nonetheless, because I thought, She is watching only her son, since his condition is the most serious. Her attention changed my way of being present in that ward. I started by asking: "Lord, my rock, make me stay close to You today." Every day something happened that kept me from feeling alone in front of my pain: Katy, my husband, the mothers of the Rome Fraternity, and all the other friends who prayed for my daughter every day. Slowly, Lucia grew, she got better, and now she is home. When Katy wrote to tell me that Nathan had died, I thought, "Why?" A dramatic question I could not answer; a question I hold onto in the certainty that Christ's presence is human, it doesn't let go of you, and it can cause your heart to be reborn. Katy and I stay in touch, and we'll have lunch together soon.



**Elisabetta, Vercelli (Italy)**


*chief priest of the Muryokoin Buddhist Monastery, Shodo Habukawa, sent this card:*

 Dear Fr. Ambrogio: I have heard from Professor Wakako Saito about the organization of the Japanese Language and Culture course given at your University. It truly gives me great joy. As you well know, words express what is in the human heart; through communication we can transmit the truth of the Universe. I am moved and am certain that from heaven, Msgr. Giussani is happy to see this work that we are doing together. I pray that this course may continue without limits, regardless of the number of participants, because my desire is that our friendship last

for eternity, a friendship that began with Fr. Giussani.

**Shodo Habukawa, Mount Koya (Japan)**

### A HUMBLE STEP AND THE COMMON FUND

 Dear Fr. Julián Carrón: In June I lost my job. The first thing I understood was what to ask for from the Lord: that I may live well every instant of my days, that is to say, with the awareness that my happiness is now, and not when I will find a job. This doesn't remove the suffering, but makes me free because, by living this way, I live waiting for Christ to make me more myself. I'm very grateful to Fr. Giussani, to you, and

to this company that continually embraces me so that hope is always alive. Because of this gratitude, I didn't want to reduce my Common Fund contribution; there always is something more that I can cut from my expenditures, something that is less important than this company and the mission of the Movement. Now, however, I need to make another step: the step to humbly accept that I cannot give the same amount. I ask the Lord to grant me the grace that this situation might lead me to take more seriously what has been given to me and to offer my not having a job for those who suffer more than I do.

**Leonor**





# THE REVOLUTION

**An exhibit that started with friends in Argentina that became a place of encounter for ex-guerrillas and followers of the regime. The creative charity in Venezuela, the novelty of Cuba... The life of the Movement in Latin America today, after the Pope's four visits. "Is an embrace enough to change the world?"**

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

It's a wounded continent. Plagued by the collapse of socialist structures in countries hoping for redemption, nearly all of them pinned between a violent past and a present of waiting in line for food, surrounded by drug trafficking, instability and social inertia. Perhaps it's because of this that, in Latin America, it's easier to admit that you can't live without mercy. Simply for the fact that nothing else is enough to respond to the situation. "The only power capable of conquering the hearts of men and women is the tenderness of God." These words from Pope Francis came up again and again during the ARAL, the Assembly of Leaders of the CL communities in Latin America, which took place in São Paulo just as the city was preparing for a demonstration that would draw a million people into the streets to protest political corruption after the Petrobras scandal, and amidst the economic crisis that has Brazil on its knees.



The ARAL is a three-day meeting with Fr. Julián Carrón, with approximately 250 representatives from communities spread throughout the continent, each who brings the drama of the often-tormented social situation they face at home. The fact is, these places have been touched by the embrace of Pope Francis who, since becoming Pope, has decided to make four visits to Latin America. This embrace is that "omnipotent weakness of divine love," that "delights and attracts, humbles and overcomes, opens and unleashes," as he said in February in Mexico, further describing "the irresistible force of its gentleness and the irrevocable pledge of its mercy."

"But is this embrace enough?" This is the question that came to Alejandro Mayo, leader of the CL community in Cuba, as he reacted to seeing how Francis acted during his visit to Havana last September. "From this third Pope who has come to our country, we expected him to say, 'Enough now!'" They expected >>



» him to bring about justice, but instead he came saying that history is changed by an “exchange of glances,” as happened for Matthew in front of Jesus. He came and greeted Castro, which was a scandal for many people. “Our first thought was that he was doing everything wrong,” Alejandro said, who, along with his wife, was overwhelmed. “His wisdom is free of any schemes; he doesn’t incite; he embraces. And he doesn’t communicate a ‘brittle’ truth.” Because of this, he may seem ambiguous to some.

**LIKE THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN.** “If we reduce everything to just Francis’ ‘style,’” Carrón said, “we defend ourselves from being converted.” Instead, we are given the Pope as a witness; “the Mystery gives us this opportunity: what kind of gaze did he have upon men? Why is he so insistent; why mercy of all things?” Without asking these questions, you’re an anti-Castro group stuck in the corner as history moves forward. “Being adversarial has never changed anything. Not even by way of exhaustion,” Carrón continued. “I don’t know what will happen, but there have been facts that are opening new pathways.” Just think of the end of the embargo or of the Communist party that brought its youth to hear the Pope.

A few months after the visit, Alejandro has turned to his relationship with his father. “He’s a communist, and I never spoke to him about the political situation or about my faith. Instead, today I feel the desire to. The way I look at government sympathizers and those who think differently than I do has changed.” Before, each year after the three days of Assembly in São Paulo, he felt uneasy about going home. “Instead, now I’m happy; I miss Cuba. Not because it’s my homeland, but I long for Cuba because I long for Christ. And it is the place that He chose for me.”



**VISIT.** Right, the Pope in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Above, with Fidel Castro on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

In a Mexico brought to its knees by drug trafficking and violence, the Pope spent more than 20 minutes in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe. “He showed us the method to enter into all of life,” said Oliverio González, leader of the community in Mexico. While there the Pope spoke about the family, giving examples of a single mother and a divorced couple. “While we were thinking of the perfect family, he put Christ back at the center.”

Onstage, they projected a video summarizing Francis’ visits to various countries in South America. From his speeches in Paraguay, they chose a passage dedicated to women and mothers, “who at great cost and sacrifice were able to lift up a country defeated [and] devastated....” The Pope said, “God bless the women of Paraguay, the most glorious women of America.” It may not seem like much amidst many important points, “but, with that phrase, he was saying something incredibly powerful,” explained Fr. Julián de la Morena, leader of the Movement in South America.

The War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870) was the bloodiest conflict in the history of South America. It was genocide against the Paraguayan people: the men were exterminated, along with the older boys who found themselves fighting to the end. Only one man for every seven women survived, and many of these sacrificed, together with these few survivors, disfigured by war, to give life to the next generation of their people. “To the world, those women were certainly not ‘following the rules.’ For the Pope, they’re the most glorious in America.” This is exactly what’s depicted on the Easter poster: the image of Jesus and the adulterous woman from Chartres cathedral, which serves as the backdrop onstage for the three days of talks and assemblies. You see the Pharisee who drags the woman by her arm, throwing her sin in our face. And the response of Jesus, who writes with his finger in the sand. “With just a few words, He introduces a new judgment on the world. A revolutionary one.” A gaze never seen before. “It





was clear, that woman had to be condemned,” de la Morena goes on to say. “But instead, that man bent over in the sand offers an awareness born of mercy. A different criterion, through which we are all redeemed, as we are that woman.”

**OUR TASK.** “It’s this love that changes life!” Fr. Carrón would later say at the final assembly. “Without mercy, we can’t enter into a world full of wounded people—our children, our friends, strangers... or ourselves.” It’s not a question of “conforming to the times,” and even less that the Pope concedes to Castro. “Perhaps we had to get to this point to understand the *truth*.” Carrón insists that we have to learn, once again, “what Christianity is! What the Movement is!” The encounter with the Movement had the power to change the life of each person present at the ARAL, to allow them to be reconciled with their own history. “But you can be in the Movement for many years and do everything, but not have a sense of the

Mystery; not look at ourselves and reality as Mystery.” The clarity about our task in the world, about “what witness is,” depends on this. Everything hangs in the balance of our freedom, and we have to give truth time to work in our hearts. Above all, we need to make space for a question so great and full of mystery that “only Christ can respond.”

We return again to Jesus’ response to the adulterous woman. “We can’t imagine what a radical battle Christ fought to change the mentality of his time,” Fr. Giussani said. He was speaking precisely of the root of a new culture, only possible in “the event of Christ present” that fills every situation with meaning, as testified to by the personal experiences of those gathered at the ARAL, and by the lives of even the smallest communities. For example,

by a girl from Venezuela who lists off the many medicines she received from friends in other countries, and tears fall down her face. They had brought medicine, money, anything they could, knowing what the Venezuelans were going through in a seemingly endless social crisis that is imploding. Shortages, even of basic needs, are a daily drama, as is security (since 2014, Caracas has surpassed the most dangerous city in the world, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in its homicide rate).

In Argentina, something unimaginable is happening with a group of friends who prepared an exhibit on the Bicentennial of Independence of their country for the Rimini Meeting in 2012. The exhibit sought to go deeper into the reasons that inspired the *libertadores* into action. Part of their research included journals and personal letters, where it became clear that not even the triumph of Independence, of having defeated the Spanish Empire, totally satisfied them. “It’s the disproportion between what man fights for—a just society—and what he manages to achieve,” explains Aníbal Fornari, one of the organizers. “It’s the tension each of us lives between a utopia and the search for

meaning.” The exhibit began, “as a historical review, and nothing more,” she says. But it took another path. Aníbal had sent the summary of the exhibit to Héctor Leis, a philosopher, friend and former colleague. He’d been living in Brazil since his exile after participating in the armed conflict between the *montoneros*

under the military regime of Videla between 1976 and 1983. “In the work we’d done, he saw something so new that he thought it could help with the reconciliation between the >>

☐  
**“I miss Cuba. Not because it’s my homeland, but I long for Cuba because I long for Christ.”**  
 ☐

# TIME TO LEARN

**A Church “going out” and unexpected encounters: JULIÁN DE LA MORENA, leader of CL in Latin America, talks about what is changing his life and that of his friends.**

**“T**he truth about Latin America is that Christ is there.” Just like that, it’s the first thing Fr. Julián de la Morena says about the “New World,” as he calls it. We spoke to him as he was preparing to spend Holy Week at a women’s prison in Belo Horizonte. The Spaniard has been in South America since 2002. Part of the Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, he’s guided the Communion and Liberation communities spread across the continent for six years now.

**What do you think, looking at Latin America today?**

There are some major problems: drug trafficking, violence, the economic crisis. But more than that, what I see are facts that demonstrate how Christ continues to be present. Pope Francis is very much a presence in South America as the universal Shepherd. And he’s offering a step toward peace in the continent. Or better, he’s at the heart of a “pastoral conversion” in the Church in Latin America. This is the key word: pastoral conversion.



Julián de la Morena.

**What does that mean?**

It’s a very concrete conversion, which is met with resistance from a certain “traditionalist” mentality. Even within the same Church, amongst us Catholics. Francis doesn’t want to identify which political proposal is more friendly or hostile; he gets rid of all the divisions and categories. He seeks out what is essential to the faith, with the strong desire to go to meet everyone, to create a new world of peace. He opens up dialogue with people who are, ideologically, far from the Church. Christ spoke to everyone. This means that there’s a seed in the other that we have to learn to get to know. How is this other person good for me?

In the fact that you see that Christ is seeking him or her. Whoever he is, whatever he may have done. What’s asked of us is to try not to “close up” the Incarnation, Christ who seeks others. Only a Church “that goes out” can nurture this. The strength of the “first” Church, the Church at the beginning, was that it didn’t stay in Jerusalem. They went to Spain in the first century and to India... Defensiveness is weak, because it cages in the Incarnation. This going out is what the Pope proposes to us. And the Movement as well.

**How is this changing Latin America?**

The New World is becoming a place of impossible encounters. Who could’ve imagined that Castro would offer the only communist airport in South America for a meeting to promote unity in the Church after a thousand years?

Unity, which is the greatest testimony to the resurrected Christ! So, Latin America is living the challenge of showing something about Christ the Church still hasn’t learned. This happens through new paths that are opened, that begin. The Church is a place of new paths. And it picked Cuba, a country that’s always been a problem, looking at it as a possibility. Bringing peace in Cuba means bringing peace in the entire continent, because though it’s small, it’s strategic.

**Can you describe the newness the Church is bringing to Latin America?**

Patience within history. The patience needed to resolve problems. Mercy is not something private, it affects how society is built, it’s pastoral. Jesus’ gaze changes the world. It opens dialogue between two enemies and show them that the point is not making accusations of the other. We all feel safer if we can say there is a “bad guy,” but



this offers nothing to help a man or woman change. Yet it’s clear that the Church, well before Francis, has always worked to build bridges in a world where we only point to limits, to what is missing. This doesn’t mean evil or mistakes don’t exist. The Church isn’t naïve, rather She looks at the person, not at the “offence,” because for Her, a greater power exists.

**What do you see in the experience of the Movement in South America today?**

Where people work on understanding their experience, they become like a lighthouse, wherever they are. They are tiny lights in an immense continent, like stars in the night, they help orient you. Our friends in Venezuela discovered that there was a better option than opposing the government. Two of them—two university professors—told me that they were no longer able to eat meat, fish, etc., and have resorted to potatoes: “We have to be creative with our potatoes!” they told me. I was very moved by this. You can go through life complaining or you can become ever more attentive to reality to find solutions. There’s a woman who’s well-off who is making her own undergarments; friends who are giving from what they have to meet the needs of the other; those who are younger are discovering charitable work, to the point of volunteering to help bathe one friend’s aging mother. I also see a great thirst. They ask question about each word, wanting to understand and go deeper.

A.S.





**A THREE-DAY MEETING.** Two scenes from the ARAL at the Espaço Anhanguera in São Paulo, Brazil.

» two factions: the guerillas and those who repressed them,” Horacio Morel explained. Leis was looking for a point of common ground and found the key theme of the exhibit, desire, to be a decisive one. “We didn’t touch on the themes of dictatorships or reconciliation, but rather man’s infinite need, the need of every man and woman, and his or her attempt to fulfill it.”

Leis, who had long been ill, died shortly after igniting the beginnings of this unimaginable story. Shortly after, Anibal, Horacio, Lola and other friends began to meet with former *montoneros*, relatives of *desaparecidos*, and those who were part of the military or para-military squadrons. “The exhibit became a place of encounter; we were witnesses to something immensely greater than any of our plans.”

**SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS.** The wound inflicted during those years of dictatorship is deep in the hearts of Argentines, and anger brews under the surface. Everyone, including the Church, has tried consistently in various ways to make room for reconciliations, but, “we’re learning,” Horacio says, “that encounter doesn’t stem from the logic of consensus,”

from renouncing a part of yourself to be able to come to terms with each other. “Unity is not agreement; that’s politics and it’s a human reality. Unity is communion; it’s a Divine reality.” Carrón adds, “We need an Other.” Something “beyond,” brought to the table thanks to the exhibit. Even for our Argentine friends, it wasn’t easy to face those who took part in the repression. “But everything changes when you recognize the mystery that we are, that each of us is,” Horacio said. “When you recognize the mystery of our being, so capable of evil—everyone. And of being incapable of escaping our own evil without others.”

The journey continues. The biggest publishing house in Latin America, the Spanish (radical) publisher Santillana, asked to have a public event about the exhibit, and there they assembled several educational materials presenting their work; witnesses of the unexpected dialogue that continues to move forward. The Argentine Bishops’ Conference wants to include the exhibit in the Eucharistic Congress, to be held there in October. “And all along the way,” Anibal tells us, “the question that always comes up is, ‘who is Giussani?’”

“We are all his children,” Carrón says. “What is happening in Argentina speaks to the question of our task. Having a critical eye doesn’t mean looking at the limit of what’s in front of us, but rather discovering its value. And judgment is neither taking sides, nor remaining on the fence. It’s an original presence.” Wounds, with the weight of decades, can only be embraced in a place of freedom, generated by a lived experience. A truth that’s lived, as John Paul II said. “And the single source of the charism is Jesus Christ, present. We can go through life either complaining or saying ‘thank you’ each time something is not enough. Thank goodness it’s not enough! Thank goodness you exist, Jesus. If not, what would life be?”

**THE ADVENTURE.** His words echo the words of Fr. Giussani cited at the presentation of the Spanish edition of his biography (see page 10). Giussani came to this very place, close to São Paulo, each time undergoing the tiresome travel just to meet with a few people. But that never stopped him. “The only One who can build the Church of God in the world is the Spirit of Christ,” he said. He was certain, because in the life of the Movement, “there was a sign,” he explained. “A certain encounter fixed our gaze on Brazil, and so we stubbornly—that is, with faithfulness—followed that sign.” He was talking about a boy who had come to Italy to learn about the Movement. Hardly a speck in the immensity of South America, but for Giussani the person was everything. He added, “This is the long journey that we need to take together, the real adventure: to discover that Presence in our flesh and blood, that our entire existence become one with that Presence—in other words, the adventure of Holiness, which is also the one real social enterprise.” **T**





# THE MOMENT **AFTER**

**The terrorist attacks on March 22<sup>nd</sup> shook Europe, but they also made people stop taking their daily lives for granted. Here, we offer stories of the people in Brussels who asked themselves what their lives are founded upon.**

BY LUCA FIORE

**W**hen Marta and Luciano had left him, there was a moment when Mauro Zappulli thought of the image that Fr. Giussani used to describe, the moment after the Annunciation: “And the angel left her.” The three friends had gathered to share those hours in which Brussels had come to a halt, dazed in front of the horror. That morning as they left mass, their cell phones began to be flooded with text and WhatsApp

messages: “Are you OK?” On their screens they saw images of the Zaventem airport, then those of the subway, in the center of the Belgian capital, not far from the headquarters of major the European institutions. For hours they did what everyone else in the city was doing, trying to understand what was happening and finding out whether their friends were safe. Among the many messages, there was one from Fr. Carrón: “I’ve just seen the news. I thought in si-





Presence,” recounted Marta, one of them. “I saw the glad faces and the desire to cry out with our lives that Jesus had vanquished death.”

After the terrorists’ bombs exploded, people stopped taking their daily lives for granted, at least for a few hours. The closer people had come to death, the more powerful the effect. “I’m alive, Mariangela,” a friend from the fish shop told Mariangela Fontanini. “Yesterday I was in that subway. If I had gotten off at the previous stop, I would have been blown up too.” Hélène Bleus, 25 years old, works in an important consulting firm, and had passed by 30 minutes before the explosions. She thought of that morning in 2011 when she was in Liege, when a lone gunman killed 7 people and wounded 120 with grenades and gunfire. Hélène had missed being there by a matter of a few minutes. After hearing these stories, her boss instinctively replied, “You must be here on earth to do something big.” Hélène smiled, but thought to herself, “It’s true. God truly wants me alive.” Luciano Porretta, a doctoral student in Computer Science, had a sense of *déjà vu*. “In 2009 I was in Aquila on the day of the earthquake. I felt the same fear of losing everything. I had the same experience of precariousness before and gratitude after, when I realized that none of my friends were among the victims.”

**IS SECURITY ENOUGH?** The images from Brussels illustrated the attacks and then the condolences. Photo galleries on sites all over the world showed the dust from the blasted cement in the subway and that of the colored chalk messages of peace on the pavement in front of the stock exchange. What the homepages of the news sites lacked, however, were the stories of fear or solidarity, perhaps small and far from the epicenter of the tragedy; the stories of those who gave a ride home to >>>

lence of the abandonment to the design of an Other... like Jesus. I offer up my day for you. An embrace, Julián.” They needed a point to look at in order to keep from being overwhelmed. They re-read the CL statement after the November Paris attacks: “Let us ask the Lord to be able to face this terrible challenge with the same sentiments of Christ, who did not allow fear to overcome Him: ‘When He was insulted, He returned no insult; when He suffered, He did not threaten; instead, He handed Himself over to the One who judges justly.’”

At the end of the day, among the 32 dead and 300 wounded, there were no friends or acquaintances, but they were still left with the impression that

life still hangs by a thread.

So, when his friends left, Mauro, an Italian engineer who has been in Belgium for 9 years, was alone at home. He thought, What now? The invitation to fix his gaze on Christ could have become just an illusion; it could have been easy to return to the worries, to feel alone in front of something so much bigger than himself. “In that moment, I wanted to truly understand what it meant that Jesus died and rose for us.”

Mauro and about twenty friends gathered that evening to pray the Rosary. “Looking at that little group of people, apparently a ‘nothing’ in the midst of the drama that the city was experiencing, I truly perceived a



Brussels, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, a prayer vigil for the victims of the attacks the previous day. The bombs in the airport and the subway killed 32 people and wounded over 250.

» a colleague because public transport had halted, those who hosted co-workers in their homes, those who called friends after a long time to know how they were doing and to make them unexpectedly feel loved. The Cappuchin monks of the church of Saint Anthony continued to do what they do every Tuesday, distributing meals to the poor of the predominantly Muslim neighbourhood in capital's downtown. These are only episodes, but perhaps they will leave a mark in the lives of the citizens of Brussels.

Luciano recounted that the day after the attacks, the Rector of the Université Libre de Bruxelles invited people to participate in a moment of silence called for the entire country. He noted that there was also the opportunity to bring flowers to the statue of

*“You must be here on earth to do something big.”  
Hélène smiled, but thought to herself,  
“It’s true. God truly wants me alive.”*



Théodore Verhaegen, the founder of the university, remaining faithful to the motto *Scientia Vincere Tenebras*, that is, knowledge to overcome the darkness. Then, it doesn't matter if along the university corridors someone, more or less under his breath, said “They should all be killed” (meaning Muslims).

**THE TIME OF THE PERSON.** François Gillet is a clerk in Brussels. When she and her colleagues were talking about security, many said that things had been managed poorly, that more should have been done, and should be done in the future. “I thought of Giussani’s provocation a few years ago: it is the time of the person, not of institutions. We can’t delegate everything to the State.” What can a person do in such a situation? “Explore more deeply our



# ONLY *MERCY* IS THE TRUE REACTION TO EVIL

The article by the President of the CL Fraternity published in the Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*, on March 24<sup>th</sup> after the attacks in Brussels.

**D**ear Editor: Once again lacerating pain knocks on our door, creating a total upheaval. In Spain, tragedy struck through the fragility of a bus driver who fell asleep at the wheel. In Belgium, the void once again showed its violent and merciless face, its “blind violence,” in the words of Pope Francis.

How can we look at these facts, as women and men, without yielding to bewilderment or rage? Only if we do not block out the urgent need for meaning, for a why, that these events provoke in each of us. The more lacerating the pain, the more boundless is the question, the prayer of entreaty, that we sense within, if only for an instant, before seeking an escape in distraction or forgetfulness from the sense of powerlessness that this question provokes in us.

We may put on a display of self-assurance, as people free of any bonds, but behind this façade we see all the depth of our need, the need each of us feels for someone to tend to our wounds, to raise us up from our affliction.

The Liturgy of Holy Week helps us in our incapacity to resolve this dramatic problem: “Omnipotent God, look upon humanity, exhausted by its mortal weakness, and grant that we may live again through the passion of Your only Son” (*Morning Prayer* for Easter Monday in the *Liturgy of the Hours* according to the Roman rite). “He strikes our prostration and mortal weakness a blow for life: may life be renewed through the sacrifice, pain and death (of Your only Son)” (Fr. Giussani). In this way, Christ offers Himself as the response worthy of the boundless prayer of entreaty for a why, and at the same time communicates to us that energy without which we can neither recover nor undertake the one road for defeating violence. Both we and the others need the one and the same mercy.

Recently Benedict XVI reminded us of the reason for Pope Francis’ insistence in this Year of Mercy: “Mercy is the one true and ultimate effective reaction against the power of evil. Only in the presence of mercy do cruelty, evil and violence end.”

own needs. Take what happens to us more seriously. Understand what truly satisfies us. Is security alone really enough for us?”

On the Tuesday of the attacks, Rosanna Pelosi, who teaches Italian language and culture, was at a school in downtown Brussels, in the Arab neighbourhood. She came upon a colleague who was panicking because she could not get ahold of her husband. “I can’t live without him.” Even when she succeeded in talking to him on the telephone, she was still in a state of confusion. “I could do nothing more than stay in front of her with my certainty,” recounted Rosanna. “I told her that life is a gift and that it’s not in our hands. We aren’t the ones to decide what will happen to us, even if we scream and feel ill. This colleague responded by saying

that her mother had told her the same thing. “But it’s something that I can’t see.” That evening, back home, I thought about that and said to myself, those people truly need to look at others who can stand strong in the face of the storms of life. I remembered what I’d seen the previous Saturday, when I took five middle school children to make their “Promise” to the Pope. Pope Francis is a man who stands firm. You see in his certainty that things are not in our hands. Looking at him gives me hope.”

Here Rosanna told us about an event that seemed to have nothing to do with the bombs of Brussels. “During an Italian course, I met a young girl named Maeva. One day she told me, ‘Sincere friendship does not exist.’ I replied by saying, ‘Look, this summer I’m going with some

friends on vacation, to Italy (I was speaking about the Middle school CL groups called “Knights”): it’s not that we resolve the problem of friendship, but we try to understand who the other person is.’ When the girl brought a permission slip from her parents, Rosanna could hardly believe it. “I called her mother, and she told me, ‘Our daughter came back home happier than we’d ever seen her. We had to trust her.’” To make a long story short, Maeva was one of the five young people who made “The Promise” to the Pope in Rome. So, what does this have to do with those killed in Brussels? Maeva was born and raised in Molenbeek, home to the Bakraoui brothers, who prepared the attacks. She and Rosanna met in that neighbourhood. It is a little story, but it happened. **T**

# RETURN TO DAMASCUS

The friendship with an Italian colleague. Then in Russia, the meeting with the CL community. The story of how **SOULAIMAN**, a doctor, chose to return to the country at war so that his childhood friends could come to know what had changed his life.

BY LUCA FIORE

**A** bomb, right outside. It came from the Jobar district, which is under the control of the terrorists. The house is small. The children watch. They go to hug their mother. “Dad, what was that? What do we have to do? Are we about to die?” Another hit. The fear of the entire country, Syria, is captured in those few square feet. The two small children scream and run around the house. “Stay calm, God is with us. He will protect us.” They sit down in the short hallway. Another hit. Which of the neighbors have been hit? Has anyone been killed? This is the most dangerous part of Damas-

cus. There, in the historic area, people live almost as if there was no war. But here... the sound of the conflict makes the walls tremble. That is, where they’re still standing. “I felt as if I were inside a dark tunnel looking for a way out of this nightmare. Then, suddenly, I saw the icon of Christ in the room in front of me. I saw His face, with no trace of fear, looking at me to say, ‘Do not be afraid, I am here with you and for you.’ I held them close to me, and together we waited for everything to stop. While I waited, the moments in which I saw God’s presence in my life came back to mind. The journey made with our friends in Russia.

Those moments gave me strength.”

Where to begin in Soulaïman’s story? From meeting Andrea, the Milanese doctor who came to work in Damascus in 2008? Or from the request to enroll in the Fraternity of CL, signed last August, before the final return to bomb-stricken Syria, after 3 years spent in Russia?

Let’s start on a night in February 2012. Moscow, 27 Pokrovka Street, the Library of the Spirit. Outside, the thermometer says that it is several degrees below freezing. Soulaïman had been in Russia for three months. He only knew a few words of English. His wife and two children stayed in Syria. Jean-François Thiry welcomed





Syrian children playing amidst the damaged buildings in the Jobar district in the Syrian capital.

Soulaiman, but he did not understand what he wanted. He thought he was asking for work, but that was not it. Soulaiman already had a job: he was a doctor, a hematologist. He had come to Moscow to do the training that he wanted to do in Italy, but since the beginning of the war, there were only three possible destinations: China, Iran, and Russia. He chose the last one for reasons that would seem obvious. One of his thoughts was: “At least there, there should be a few Christians.” The one who had sent him to the Library of the Spirit



Soulaiman Elias Soulaiman.

was Andrea, of course, whom he had met in Damascus a few years before. They had become friends. “I was struck by the way he looked at his patients and the way he looked at me. I even invited him to my house to meet my family,” says Soulaiman. And so, after some days of discomfort in Moscow, news of shrapnel damage and grief arrived from Damascus, and he wrote to his Italian friend who gave him this address, “You’ll see, there you will find some of my friends. They are interested in the same thing that I am: in being Chris-

tians in a serious way.” Soulaiman left the Library of the Spirit with an invitation to School of Community.

**LIKE A PRINCE.** “I began to go to their meetings, but due to the language barrier, the conversations were limited. And yet, with them I felt safe and loved. They looked at me with the same gaze that Andrea had. For Easter, I went to the women’s *Memores Domini* house for dinner. I did not understand what exactly they were, but there I understood that Andrea was a *Memor*. I felt like I was being treated like a prince; I felt welcomed. I told them, ‘I do not know how you serve God, but you have communicated >>



» a sense of belonging and presence. That night, I cried tears of joy.” Months went by and Soulaiman got to know the Movement and he felt attracted to it. “My life started to change and I began to see its beauty. The situation in Syria worsened, but I was not disheartened anymore.” In the summer of 2013, he was able to go back to his home country for a vacation. “In my heart there was a new spirit and a new life.” He said, “I was ready to work for my brothers in Syria, but at the same time, I asked myself, How can I show God’s love to a mother who lost her child, or to the child who saw her parents killed by a bomb, or to a family that had to leave everything behind? I had met the Movement, now how could I witness the love that I had experienced?”

**A MORE MATURE FAITH.** After some months, Soulaiman was transferred to St. Petersburg. There too he was welcomed by the small CL community that was stunned by his curiosity and his enthusiasm. During those months Fr. Julián Carrón came to Russia for a meeting. The Syrian doctor had the opportunity to tell him about the drama that he had been living, about the complicated situation in his country, and about his family. He expected the head of CL to give him some words of encouragement, to give him some peace in his heart. But Carrón interrupted, “Your faith needs to mature.” It took weeks to recover from that answer. “How is it possible?” he asked himself. “Does he have any idea what my situation is like? And he tells me that I have to mature?” Then, those words began to seep into his mind. They became the topic of discussion with his *Memoires Domini* friends in Moscow.

In Christmas 2015, when his friend Andrea came to visit him in Russia, Andrea asked if he wanted help to move to Italy, and to have his family



Children from the Oncology unit, for whom Soulaiman and friends organized the Christmas party. Below, Soulaiman (seated, center) with some of the women with whom he prepared the Mother’s Day celebration in the Christian Educational Center. Right, the ruins of the Jobar district.



join him there. “I told him that I wanted to return to my home in Syria. There were many people who were expecting something from me. Not just my wife and my children, but also my friends and my patients. I understood that this was being asked of me and that because I met my new friends, I would have the strength to do it.”

Once back in Damascus, the first thing he wanted to do was to move out of his house and to take his family to a safer neighborhood. He understood fairly quickly that he did not have enough money to do so. Every morning, to go to the hospital where he works, he has to go through an area controlled by terrorists. “They are seven minutes of fear, and the cross that swings and hangs from my rear view mirror gives me strength and hope. Sometimes I remember the faces of the sisters and brothers I met in Russia; their voices and their eyes speak.

The image of their smile takes hold of me and reminds me of Christ.”

Working at the hospital is a daily challenge. There is a shortage of medicine. “It pains me very much. I look at these people; I see them dying. I want to do something for them but I cannot. Together with Tareq and Bashar, two childhood friends, we decided to open a small pharmacy to collect the medicine we can find. We are just starting, but we want to begin soon.” The work in the hospital ends at 4 p.m., then Soulaiman goes to a part of Damascus where he has a private clinic. At 9 p.m. he is home in time to say good night to Elias and Mishia, his children who are 13 and 11.

The pharmacy is not the only project with Tareq and Bashar. Before Christmas, they organized a party for 300 children. “With the help of AVSI, we gave away warm hats and clothes for the winter. We spoke about the





presence of Christ in our lives. We were able to have another party for some refugee families who had escaped from other parts of the country. We also brought presents and decorated a Christmas tree for the children in the oncology unit.” His friends in Moscow received a video of children dancing to the beat of a drum, played from a phone. A flashlight was the only light in the room. There is a man dressed as Santa Claus, and another as a clown. The children are laughing. Outside, there is a war.

“Every Thursday we get together with a group of high school kids at the Christian Center,” describes Soulaïman. “We talk about faith. Once in a while I bring some passages to read, texts read at the School of Community in Moscow. The youth are grateful to be able to read these things. We are preparing with them something for March 21<sup>st</sup>, which for us is Mother’s Day.” The first people

who were curious about Soulaïman’s vitality were Tareq and Bashar. They asked him right away why on earth he decided to return to Syria.

**GIUSSANI ON YOUTUBE.** And he answered that he had met some special friends, and that their friendship made him understand that his duty was to go back. In reality, no one had ever had the courage to tell him to return to life under bombardment. Soulaïman had begun to desire it.

“Tareq and Bashar asked me what this Movement was. They asked me how it was possible for it to change me this way, and I tried to explain it to them. Sometimes I read them parts of texts sent to me, by Giussani

and Carrón. One day, they said that they wanted to see what Fr. Giussani was like, so I showed them a short film on YouTube and they were really struck.” Apparently, that short video was not enough, as Bashar, once home, searched the internet for other material by Fr. Giussani. He found another video that was 10 minutes long with subtitles in Arabic. “He told me that it was clear that, in spite of his age, that man, when he spoke about his experience, had an amazing energy.”

Curiosity remains. Coming up in the next few months are the Fraternity Exercises in Lebanon. Soulaïman cannot leave the country, but Tareq and Bashar decided to go. **T**

**“In Moscow I had met the Movement, now how could I witness the love that I had experienced?”**





# THE HAPPY LIFE OF JEAN

“Mercy is an encounter.” **JEAN VANIER**’s encounter with two mentally ill people gave birth to a story “that I never would have expected.” A theologian and philosopher, Vanier leads the communities of L’Arche spread throughout the world, as well as the Faith and Life Movement.

We went to visit him to discover what he has learned on his long journey of charity.

BY MAURIZIO VITALI

**J**ean Vanier is one of the greatest witnesses to Christian charity in our time. He was born to a Canadian family in Geneva in 1928. His father, a heroic World War I general, became an ambassador, and later Governor General of Canada. As a very young man, Jean served as an officer in the British Royal Navy and then the Royal Canadian Navy. He later became a professor of Philosophy in both Paris and Toronto. In 1964, he left his career, created a small community with two seriously mentally ill people, taking them to live in the small village of Trosly-Breuil in the region of Picardy in north-eastern France. This was the beginning of L’Arche, which now is a

network of 140 communities spread across five continents, where people rejected by society live full-time with others who welcome them. Jean also founded *Faith and Life*, a movement with the same ideals as L’Arche, lived out in meetings, spiritual retreats, and vacations together, now numbering 1,500 groups throughout the world.

At almost 88 years old, this lion of charity still appears tall and imposing like an oak, just a bit bent by the years, but mild and affectionate—one would say merciful—like a good, elderly father.

“Communion and Liberation!” is his greeting as the gate opens at the little house that has been his home for fifty years. Vanier has travelled

the world, met Popes, saints, heads of state, and received prestigious awards, but he still lives in those two little rooms, a kitchen and a study, which remind one so much of where Fr. Giussani lived in Via Martinengo on the south eastern periphery of Milan. “Le père Giussani! What year was it?” “1998.” Etched in Vanier’s memory forever is Giussani’s testimony in front of the Pope about the protagonist of history who is a beggar at heart. “He was already ill at the time, wasn’t he?” That figure of the beggar: that is the key for reading Vanier’s life and work as well.

To speak of mercy, “I must tell you about my own experience,” he says. “An absolutely surprising experi- ➤





**FAITH AND WORKS.** Jean Vanier, born in 1928, in front of his house in Trosly-Breuil, in France. Among his books: *Our Life Together, From Brokenness to Community, The Heart of L'Arche.*





» ence, one I never would have expected.” Everything happened in 1963, when the young professor had the opportunity to visit an “institute” where 80 mentally ill people were locked in. In other words, an “insane asylum.” “It was a shocking, frightening place, full of violence, where those people were not treated as human beings.” He wanted to eliminate that shameful situation, and change everything, but the sea of need was so vast that he felt totally at a loss. Then, something surprising happened: he met two of those poor ones, Raphael and Philippe, and they helped him to perceive a road. He decided to share his life with them. “That’s it, Mercy is an encounter.” Jean was never able to settle down and merely do his work, even though he loved it and was successful. “I wanted to follow Jesus but I had to find my road. I had the sensation that there was something else Jesus wanted of me, but I didn’t know where or how.” How did he understand that that encounter was Mercy, that that was what he had been seeking? “We found that we were happy. The two of them were happy because they had been freed from that insane asylum and from the inhumanity of it, because they had discovered that they were people of value. I was happy because the Lord had shown me the road, my vocation.”

**THE FIRST INDICATOR.** The revolution that Jean began was the result of a faith that embraces man. At that time, everywhere in the world, the mentally ill were sent to insane asylums, “rejected and isolated because they were considered a disgrace for their parents and a disturbance for society, and because their handicaps were seen as God’s punishment,” explains Vanier. And why Trosly, of all places? A priest friend lived there, and some good and willing psychiatrists had set up a clinic in the village. “This provided me with



**1964.** L’Arche was founded for people with mental disabilities. It is an international federation of communities, each with one or more homes.

**1998.** Left, Vanier next to Fr. Giussani in Saint Peter’s Square during the meeting of Movements with John Paul II.

spiritual and medical support.”

The extraordinary and happy life of Jean is the humble life of sharing small daily gestures, like doing the shopping, keeping the house tidy, cooking, organizing the chores, giving formation, maintaining good relationships with the neighbors, and, naturally, following the therapy regimes. “I discovered the truth of Jesus’ words in *Luke 14*: when you give a banquet, don’t invite your relatives, rich neighbors, and friends, but the poor, the lame, the sick and the blind, and you will be happy. Joy was the first indicator, the first manifestation of Mercy.” People arrived who were very difficult and violent: there was nothing easy about the history of L’Arche. “But the Mercy that has accompanied my entire life enabled the work to go forward.”

Vanier thinks of Pope Francis, whom he admires greatly, of his repeated invitations to go out to the peripheries of existence, to be in contact with the poor, “to meet them and to learn from them.” What has Jean learned from them? “That poor, humble, marginalized or deviant people have a healthy and open heart; their greatest need is to know that there is someone who

loves them. Only this can counter the discouragement, the sense of worthlessness, the hatred of God and themselves.”

The word “encounter” recurs frequently in Vanier’s stories and reflections. It marks the difference between doing something for others and sharing lives together. He explains with a very recent example. “Last night the director of our community in Australia told me that as he was crossing a park he came across a man who was dying from an overdose. He stopped to help him. In doing so, he recognized him, because some time before the man had some involvement with the L’Arche Community. He took him in his arms, and the man murmured, ‘You always wanted to change me: you never wanted to encounter me.’”

In today’s world, what most opposes Mercy? Vanier has no doubts: separation and fear, the walls of division that people build, the wall that imprisons Bethlehem, the fences to keep back the refugees and the desperate, but also the walls of human and social exclusion, as he saw in Santiago de Chile: “The road between the airport and the city runs between truly miserable



and marginalized, by her parents, by the school, and by her classmates. The psychiatrists say she should have become depressed, rather than violent, and then she wouldn't have been a disturbance. Instead, she is violent, and her violence is a plea for someone to love her unconditionally. What good would it do her for someone to approach her, proclaiming doctrine and the law, but without truly encountering her?"

**"NORMAL" PEOPLE.** So then, can Mercy have a social impact? Can it even be a criterion for policy or international diplomacy? "Certainly. In the world there are L'Arche communities where Israelis and Palestinians live together: Christians and Muslims. They are a sign and the beginning of great change. And what about the action of the Pope and the Holy See? What a sight, the encounter between Francis and Patriarch Kirill! I know that there was no lack of criticism, but that encounter was the fruit of Mercy that changes history."

Vanier always speaks about the most unfortunate, those most in need of Mercy. Asked about the others, those who are well off, he responds, "They need Mercy even more, as they have become indifferent and cynical. I met a banker who was this way, a successful man in every field. But when his daughter began to manifest a serious mental illness, he felt entirely lost. Only when he encountered others with similar problems, and found friendship and support, did he begin to discover Mercy, that is, the truth of himself." But then again, who says that "normal" people are happy? How many are wounded inside, but pretend to be well? "They hide the wound. Instead, they need to embrace it, because it is the gift that helps us to recognize how we are: poor and needy of everything. And God listens to the cry of the poor." **T**

shantytowns on the left, and on the right the neighborhoods of the well-off, protected by the police; and nobody ever crosses that road." Again, he refers to Pope Francis: "Separation is what most concerns the Holy Father. In fact, his pontificate, like that of John Paul II, is a great work of encounter and unity, of bridge-building."

Asked whether he thinks that the Church today needs to rediscover Mercy, the abiding father of many responded, sighing, "Eh, it's not easy." He tells about the prior of a monastery who had always been educated to be the best in everything: the best in Scouts, the best in his class, the best monk in his religious order—everything perfectly accomplished and perfectly clerical: "But Jesus' commandment is something far different. He says, 'Be merciful.'"

In today's Church, there are those who oppose Mercy and truth, and hold that being "compassionate," for example, to homosexuals or the di-

vorced, or to anyone who has made mistakes, is a negation of correct doctrine and constitutes complicity in error. "They claim to be perfect because they proclaim a perfect doctrine," comments Vanier, "but have they ever spoken with a prostitute, a thief, a mentally ill person, or a homosexual?

Have they ever gotten close, and listened? I know, you can't always find solutions to problems, but the only way to start is with an encounter between me and you, between an *I* and a *you*."

Vanier does not question correct doctrine. For example, regarding sexuality, he has written a book with a title that leaves no doubts: *Man*

*and Woman, God Made Them.* He certainly does not underestimate the need for law. "Mercy takes nothing away from the law." He recounts the story of a girl, hosted by L'Arche in Trosly; she had a grave mental handicap, her arm was paralyzed, and she was always very violent. "She is this way because her whole life she has been rejected

**"They need to embrace the wound, because it helps us to recognize we are needy of everything."**



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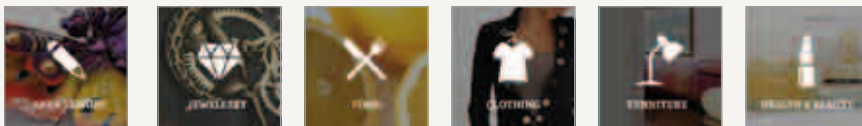
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