

A photograph of Pope Francis from behind, wearing a white zucchetto and a purple cassock with a gold fringed collar and a gold floral emblem on the back. He is standing in a doorway, with his hands raised against the dark wooden door. The background is a bright, bokeh-filled light. The title 'THE YEAR OF MERCY' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

THE YEAR OF MERCY

The Jubilee the Pope wanted, to keep “our eyes fixed on Jesus,” has begun. It is more urgent now than ever.

Bangui, Central Africa. Pope Francis opens the Holy Door of the Cathedral.

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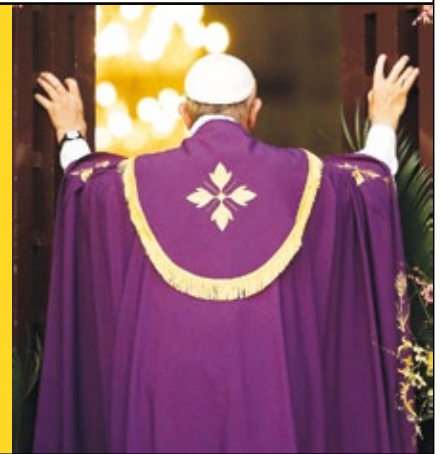
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CLOSE UP

THE YEAR OF MERCY

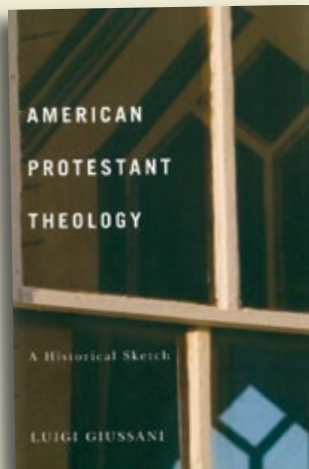
A great journey of grace begins. The Holy Year is even more urgent now after the attacks that wounded the entire world. Here we will explore this word who opens us up to the one experience more powerful than chaos.



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LUIGI GIUSSANI

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

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

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

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

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

GOD'S METHOD

Those who have had the grace to go at least once to Bethlehem or Nazareth know those places were truly a nothing, just holes and hewn rocks in the desert of places that even back then were periphery, unknown to the world. And yet God chose to become flesh there.

We have heard this a thousand times, Christmas after Christmas, but if you think about it, it is truly difficult to imagine yourself in that Christmas. We almost inevitably superimpose the “after” on it, overload it with what we know now, after two thousand years of faith and works, an impressive historic form, something that has changed the world, and which is impossible not to deal with, whether we like it or not. We often lack the perception of how *real* that nothingness was, because we look at it already mindful of how the power of Christianity expressed itself over the centuries, and how it expresses itself today.

But back then, that night, Christianity *did not yet exist*. Its cultural power, the values it would instill in people, the very powerful impact and benefit it had and has on politics, peoples, and history did not yet exist. There was nothing of any of this.

There was only a child in a stable; nothing could be more helpless. Just as John, the last of the prophets, was helpless, a man dressed in rags and a cord belt. Or Abraham, with whom everything began: a shepherd on the steppe of Asia. Nobody would ever have wagered that history would have been changed in this way.

But He did. It is His method, His road.


And it is to that road that we must look. This has always been so, but it is even more so now that uncertainty has taken us by the throat, now that leaders are seeking the best ways to react to the massacres of Paris, Bamako, Beirut, and Tunis, now that weapons are being sought to face the “world war fought piecemeal,” of which Pope Francis spoke (and about which this issue of *Traces* speaks).

It seems like nothing, to think that the path is to keep your gaze fixed on a child. It seems too little, compared to all the analyses, the activity, the battle to which reality calls us. But it was this way, literally this way, that the human began to blossom, that the human begins to blossom. This is why the Pope asks us to look there, now, to fix our gaze on that child, because in that helplessness, in that “God who emptied Himself,” as he said at the Conference of the Italian Church in Florence, there is an extraordinary power. In that apparent “sign of weakness” that is Christ, the *Face of mercy*, there is “the mark of His omnipotence,” as he wrote in the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy, all the power with which God continually gives form to the world, within all the horrors and the evil of history. It is not that the world was better two thousand, or one thousand, or two hundred years ago. And yet He changes it this way: a child, a man, and then women and men who are taken by Him, slowly but surely, in history.

This is the method of God, capable of changing the world by the only road possible: the heart of the human person. One at a time, because through one He communicates to all. Every other road that does not pass through this would be useless, any other conquest—of space, power, or influence—sterile.

We would have chosen other roads. We are continually tempted to choose them, attracted by our ideas and by the projects that we like to think are more effective. He chose this. He chooses it every day, in every moment: He touches the heart of a person with His mercy. Nothing else. It is His method. We have this upcoming Christmas to celebrate it, and a special year ahead of us, a Holy Year, to learn even better how worth our while it is to follow it. **T**

FEAR, RAGE, AND MY DAUGHTER'S PRAYER


 A few days after the tragic events in Paris, we were having a pizza with the families of two friends. We asked one of them about his mother, who lives in the French capital, and if any friends had been affected. On the way home my girls asked me what had happened in Paris. I searched for adequate words and asked the Lord to help me avoid showing the anger, fear, and rage that besieged me. I explained that some very bad men had entered some restaurants and a concert hall and killed many people. I didn't say who they were, only that they had allowed the devil to enter their hearts. They were shocked and asked me why. I said that often we cannot understand Evil and the best thing we can do is pray: pray for those who died, for their families, for the injured, for us, and for the bad people, that Jesus might change their heart. They asked if there was a way to stop war. Heartfelt prayer was my answer. I told them that St. John Paul II had consecrated the world to Mary and, with everyone's prayers, we avoided another world war. I said that Mary protects us if we ask her every day. I added that St. Michael fights the devil with his sword. Then I suggested that we recite a Hail Mary. That evening, while I was preparing dinner, I received a Twitter message with the photo of Delphine, a girl killed by the terrorists, who must have been about the same age as my oldest daughter. I fell apart thinking about how she could have been my own daughter. I couldn't



stop crying, thinking about her, feeling impotence, hatred, and rage that I continued to carry within me. The younger ones were watching a cartoon about creation and suddenly my five-year-old came into the kitchen and said, "Mom, if we are all children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus, we are the little sisters of those very bad men, and God is their Father and so we must pray for them." I am grateful to the Lord because He never abandons us. He doesn't leave us alone in this difficult and fascinating task of educating our children. Above all, if we ask Him, He doesn't leave us alone when we experience our own evil and pettiness.

Sara, Madrid (Spain)


THE FIRST PENSION CHECK FOR THIS COMPANY

 Dear Fr. Carrón: I just retired. At the end of my working career, the most immediate and concrete gesture, as a "dutiful" thanksgiving for what I have lived, is to donate my first pension check for the needs of the Movement. In all of these years, I have been constantly

called back to my commitment by my community, through the faces of the friends who have been a true and continuous "refresher course." Thanks to this, I have been able to express not only my professional capacities but, first and foremost, all of my being. The fraternal and charitable friendship has been my constant support since GS, making me live my work as a teacher with creativity, enthusiasm, and passion. I was thus able to see in the midst of my small students the daily presence of Jesus and I have reaped much more than I sowed. Now I ask only to be able to be faithful to that "gratuitous preference" that I have received, continuing to live always with greater passion all of the circumstances that the Lord will present to me.

Clara, Gorizia (Italy)

ARE WE SURE THAT LIFE IS WORTH LIVING?

 Dear Fr. Carrón: Perhaps because I am alone in Southampton for my thesis, the events of Paris have provoked me deeply. The first matter, after reading your words, was to answer the question, Is life worth living? Before we start to answer why, we must ask ourselves if we are sure that each day is worth leaving. Certainly, in life, many beautiful things happen, I see that every day, but then they end. Why study, go far away to do a thesis, get married, work, if, after all, everything can end unexpectedly? I must confess to having lived a couple of days in which I couldn't say "yes" with enthusiasm and conviction to this



THE CL CHRISTMAS POSTER

A VIBRATION OF THE HEART

by Giuseppe Frangi

“It is like a block of ice with a burning flame inside.” This is what Vasily Kandinsky wrote in 1925, the same year in which he produced this drawing of ink on paper, today conserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Fifteen years had passed from his first famous abstract watercolor of 1909. The appearance of Kandinsky’s art had become colder and more calculated: these are the years in which he taught at Bauhaus, the well-known German school of architecture and design tied to rationalism and functionalism. He also wrote an essay on artistic theory entitled, *Point and Line to Plane*. This drawing is the perfect exemplification of his intent: to express in a clear and pure way a dynamic that is fully real and human. This dynamic is the attraction exercised on the line (our life) by a point (the Other, the unexpected Guest). Something in Kandinsky’s representation, inasmuch as it is dematerialized, produces, as he, himself wrote, “a vibration of the heart.” Perhaps the curves that accompany the trajectory could be read as the representation of this vibration.



Each year, Communion and Liberation chooses an image to help us enter into the Christmas mystery. This drawing was chosen for the 2015 poster. This drawing has been chosen for the poster 2015. V. Kandinsky, *Free Curve to the Point - Accompanying Sound of Geometric Curves*, 1925. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource / Scala, Firenze)

question. On Sunday there was the Assembly of the London community about the CL statement. A friend impressed me when he said, “For me, life is worth living because Christ is risen.” His answer has silently accompanied me in these days. When my friend, Marcos, died, it was the first time that I had intuited the greatness of the hope and meaning that the fact of the Resurrection brings to us. To see with my own eyes that One has overcome death and that this is true now, is the only meaning of life. The drama is that if I do not see this possibility in every moment, life has no meaning.



If I do not believe that there is this possibility in the article I have to read, in the people whom I meet although I have not chosen to, in all of the friends I’m getting to know, then life isn’t worth it. Like never before, I pray the *Angelus* these

mornings, “May we, by His passion and cross, be brought to the glory of His Resurrection.” I see myself needing to stay attached to this prayer, because sometimes sadness and anxiety get the better of me. Another thing that I discover is that I feel a great need and desire to pray for the men who have killed, and for those who will continue to kill. Evidently, they have never experienced anything that makes life worth living. A gift has been given to me and I pray that this gift might also be given to them.

**Francesca, Southampton
(England)**

THE ONE WEAPON

A great journey of grace begins. The Holy Year dedicated to mercy is even more urgent now after the attacks that wounded the entire world. Here we will explore this word, beginning with the invitation from **POPE FRANCIS**, who opens us up to the one experience more powerful than chaos.

BY DAVIDE PERILLO





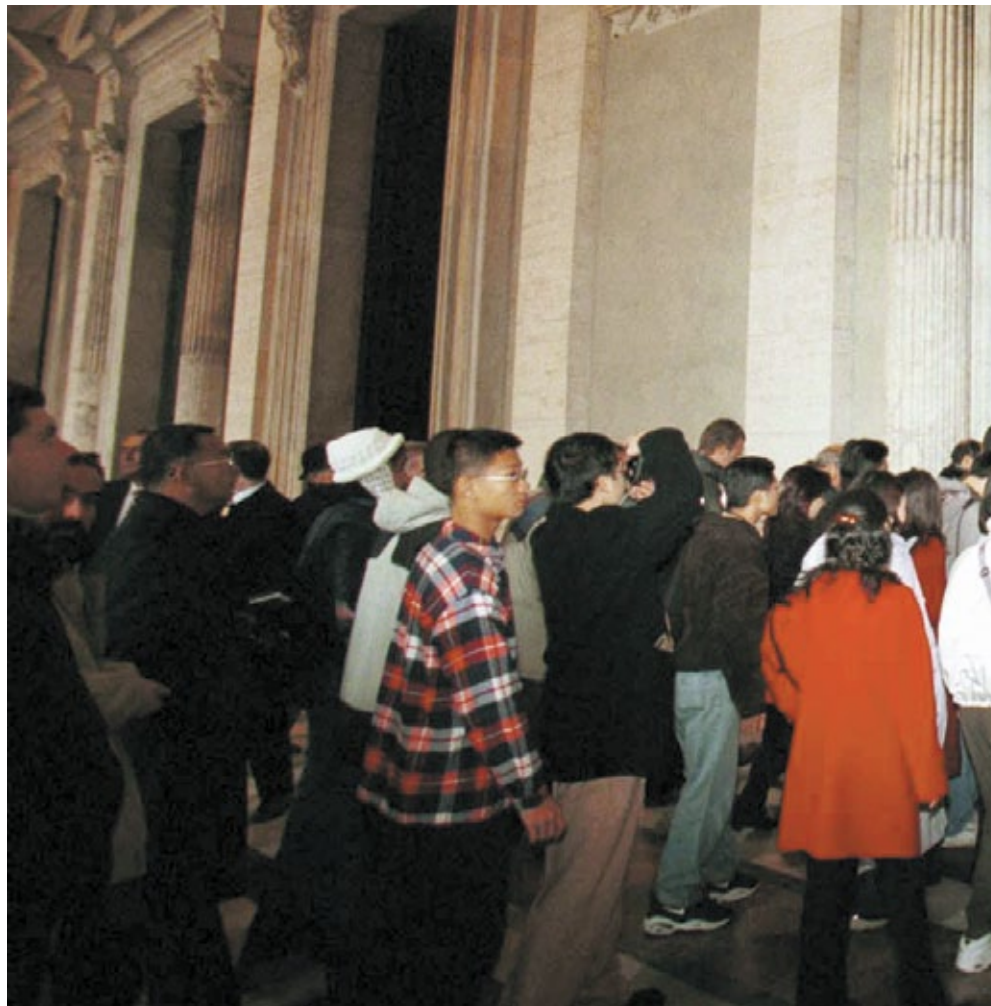
The Year of Mercy





We need it now, “more than ever.” Just as Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization said, when, shortly after the attacks in Paris, he was asked if they would cancel the Jubilee Year: there were too many risks, both for Rome and for the faithful. There was too much fear at the thought of concentrating so many people in a city where ISIS has pledged to hoist its flag. But the answer was no. Precisely because of the events in Paris—and before in Beirut, and later in Mali—the Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis is “even more urgent,” reaffirmed the clergyman tasked with guiding the event’s organization.

TWO DOORS. It’s beginning now, with a double opening of the Holy Doors: the traditional one, at St. Peter’s, occurred on December 8th, and the unusual one that took place at the cathedral in Bangui, Central Africa, which the Holy Father wanted to open during his recent trip. The year is set to close on November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King. Between those dates, there will be pilgrimages to Rome, Jubilee days for various groups (the sick, young people, priests, etc.), and initiatives that have characterized each Holy Year, from the very beginning. This one will also have Holy Doors open in every Diocese, giving all of the faithful the opportunity to participate, wherever they are (even in prison, seeing as the Pope wanted to bestow the honor of a Holy Door even to doors in prison). As well as a myriad of initiatives and events throughout the peripheries of the Church, to help keep our gaze fixed on Christ, the face of mercy, as the Holy Father referred to him in *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Bull that instated the Jubilee Year.



The document came out on April 11th, passing somewhat under the radar after the rites of Holy Week. The announcement of the extraordinary Holy Year had been a month before; the surprise and commentary had already run out. As a result, the text was likely not read by many, so it is worth going back for a second look to highlight a few elements. Looking over it, you will find a boundless richness.

To begin with, there’s the reason the Pope gives for thinking of such an initiative: “At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”

The goal, therefore, is witness. And the source and inspiration of witness

is to “gaze even more attentively on mercy.” It’s looking at Him and understanding the gift He is. It’s the most basic and important urgency the Pope perceives today, and it is the contribution that we Christians can give to the world. It is decisive for the very credibility of the Church’s faith, which “is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love,” as Francis repeats more than once. “It is absolutely essential for the Church and *for the credibility of her message* that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people.”

SIN AND FORGIVENESS. This is always the case, but takes on greater importance the more the darkness and pain of evil are felt. We’re reminded of this in another passage from the first paragraphs. “When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will



“At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.”

Pope Francis

always be greater than any sin.” Rereading it today makes an impression, because it shows us the road, the one weapon in the fight against chaos. More precisely, a weapon more powerful than chaos.

“Powerful” is not a word chosen at random. Mercy, as Francis reminds us, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, is not a “sign of weakness” but “rather the mark of His omnipotence.”

It’s part of His method, the way He continually chooses to offer Himself to our freedom. From the beginning, when He first created a covenant with man (the section in which Pope Francis reviews the Psalms is especially beautiful) up to the “apotheosis,” the full manifestation in Jesus, only the experience of His presence in the world makes it possible for John to affirm “for the first and only time in all of Holy Scripture” that “God is love.” So we can say that Christ is the face of mercy. In Him is revealed “the nature of God as that of a Father

who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy” as we see in the pages of the gospels with the Prodigal Son, the widow of Nain, the call of Matthew (from where Francis, as he himself noted, took his motto: *miserando atque eligendo*, “looking at him with mercy He chose him”). There is no other road for “overcoming the rejection” found in the hearts of men—to fully attract one’s freedom—besides that of coming to see Christ’s passion for us. Especially at a time in history that, as Pope Francis reminds us, citing St. John Paul II, seems to intentionally “exclude from life and... remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy.”

There is another striking aspect. What the Pope gives are not final definitions. Not a sentence of his seeks to close the door on the question for good (it would be impossible for a word that is so similar to the Mystery, as Fr. Giussani says, that it “should

be taken out of human vocabulary”). There are many ways to finish the phrase “mercy is...” and they are all like windows that open to the experience we have, first in the Gospel and later in daily life. They send us back to places—moments—when mercy was shown. And where, showing itself, it opens up unthinkable possibilities.

THE BEST EXAMPLE. It’s one of man’s critical needs, but it would be inconceivable to hold it together with the idea of a radical forgiveness that is always possible. And yet, “if God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness.” He always offers the sinner “a new chance to look at himself, convert, and be- ➤➤

“When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive.”

Pope Francis



lieve.” And this introduces into the world a real possibility of forgiveness, “the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”

TIME TO CHANGE. Rereading these words now, in the cultural climate that surrounds us, we are directed to a precious road that would be unimaginable on paper, but is possible with faith. It can also open up to us the path that asks us to be “merciful like the Father,” which, as Pope Francis notes, “is the ‘motto’ of this Holy Year.” Then it also becomes possible for us to look at mercy as “a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us.”

To help us on our way, the Pope

gives us some very concrete directions: his call for us to live this next season of Lent more intensely as “a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s mercy.” He invited us to make pilgrimages because they “represent the journey each of us makes” and are an “impetus to conversion;” he emphasized Reconciliation, which “enables people to touch the grandeur of God’s mercy with their own hands,” (“to be confessors,” the Pope reminds priests, “means to participate in the very mission of Jesus”); he is sending *Missionaries of Mercy* out to dioceses around the world, “priests to whom I will grant the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See;” and he emphasized the need to rediscover the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, because in the end it is these “criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the

thirsty...” He makes one other point that we need to reflect on, today more than ever. It touches on the relationship with Judaism and Islam. Mercy “relates us” to them, because Jews and Muslims consider it “to be one of God’s most important attributes. Israel was the first to receive this revelation,” and “among the privileged names that Islam attributes to the Creator are ‘Merciful and Kind.’” What road for the future can this remembering open up after the events in Beirut, Paris, and Bamako?

These are just initial reflections, a working hypothesis to be deepened and, more importantly, lived. Still, they are enough to show us that the Jubilee Year is needed more now than ever. “This is the opportune moment to change our lives,” the Pope reminds us. “This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched!”

(@dperillo14) 

THAT WORD IN MY LIFE

When did you see mercy happening? We asked this question to some people that answer with facts, memories, and new questions.

EDITED BY L. FIORE, A. LEONARDI, A. STOPPA

RITA SIMMONDS, poet



Rita cannot mention mercy without mentioning Frank. These are like two words made of each other.

“To me, mercy is to be loved by him,” says Rita, who keeps using the present tense even though her husband died a year ago. “Although Frank’s life was marked first by substance dependency and later by cancer, it has been an unending blossoming of goodness which has transformed my own life.”

They met in 1998, through a mutual friend, David, who managed an outreach center for homeless people in New York City. David asked Rita to introduce Frank to her friends in CL: “He’s an extraordinary guy, but he doesn’t have any real friends.” But Frank’s battle with drugs was not over until he reached rock bottom and wanted to end his life. This point of darkness was also the moment of Frank’s conversion. Rita remained faithful to their friendship throughout his time in rehab and then later as he struggled to enter society after years of joblessness and living on the street or in homeless shelters. As their friendship developed, they discovered their life together had a task, and in 2003

they got married. But it is chiefly through the experience of illness, which arrived after the birth of their two children, Micah and Martin, that Rita could understand the visceral and gratuitous love of God for man.

“During that time Frank opened himself up to everything and everybody. I have seen what it means to live without fear, being grateful for everything. For him nothing was any longer without a reason: from the friends who invaded our house to just a glass of water. He did teach us to savor this unending relationship with God.” Many times in the middle of the night, Rita would wake up because she thought that Frank was calling her. “‘Do you need anything?’ I asked, and he replied: ‘Shh, go back to sleep.’ He was always praying, talking to Christ.”

Mercy is this fullness that entered their home in Brooklyn, sustaining them in every moment. “But there is another word that is involved in all of this, and that is the word the ‘present.’ To live in the past or in the future for me would be like living in hell, in regrets and anguish. Instead, it is in the present that I realize that I am receiving what I need. Mercy is in the present, because the present is where Christ lives and where He is looking for me.”

PUPI AVATI, Film maker



“I’ll admit, it’s not easy to answer.” He feels like he’d have to tell the whole story of his life to do so. “Mercy is an act whose beauty, whose glow you perceive, but also sense how difficult it is to bring about. We know it to be so far from our humanity, because of our limitations and mental conditioning.... it seems inapplicable.” At the same time, “it’s so beautiful that an entire year will be dedicated to it. It’s definitely needed. I see a need for it.”

He thinks of those people who seem “farthest away” in every sense: “Even those people we don’t like much, who we don’t appreciate. I believe if anything is extraordinary, it’s getting close to and embracing a person who needs it but doesn’t show it, who doesn’t even ask, and where there’s no personal gain. It’s agreeing to bend, reaching out without a selfish interest.” Then why do people want to do it? “Because there is a law that’s higher than all of us that we can only intuit, due to the relativism that infects us today; but we can still recognize it as the truest way to act.” He speaks about the people and the lives he gets involved with, of the people who come to speak with him about themselves. “Mercy is listening. And it’s a sacrifice, sometimes a great one, to stay there, to care for the other, to begin a friendship. It’s very different from giving a gift, though both show generosity; in listening I experience the exhilaration of mercy. It’s being paid back to me now, because I am discovering it as I tell you about it.”

When have you received mercy? “From many people... I don’t know. Maybe it’s happened at times that I didn’t realize. All I can think of is something that transcends us. Of being loved by someone who tran- >>



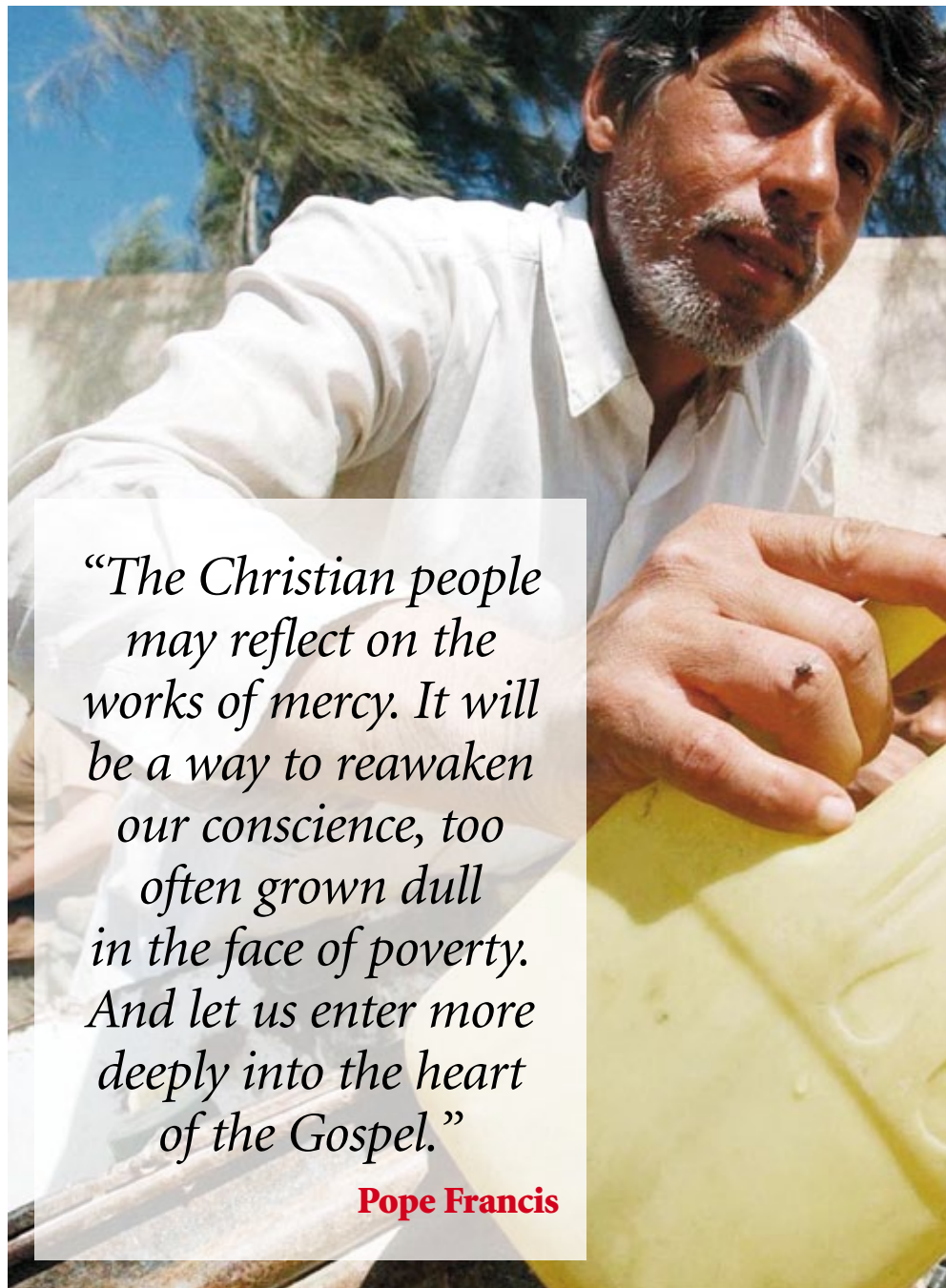
» sends us. By a God. Sometimes, in the times of my life that aren't easy, I've had the sensation of being loved. Of being within an embrace. Maybe because I ask to be loved."

He recently turned 77 years old. As he says, he is "close to going home." That phase in which you "improve yourself" and "the nostalgia for youth, which is Proustian, turns more and more into a powerful childlike nostalgia; of the child you were, and you begin to resemble him more and more, to the point of feeling an extreme closeness to those in difficulty..." In this he sees a profound and definitive potential for mercy. "In vulnerability. It's one of the most extraordinary learning tools; it allows you to really feel what the other person is living. To think, I am probably the object of the mercy of children. They look at me and my age with mercy. And I look at them with mercy." He feels like them: "We're afraid of the world of those who live only according to calculations. And we're easily affected." Without all the suspicion, the antibodies and precautions... "Perhaps mercy intervenes through vulnerability; those who are weak are those who are strongest. Most merciful. You have less and you have more to give. Strange, right? But that's how it is."

**ILARY,
Orthodox Bishop**



"When have I experienced mercy? That's bit like asking me when I breathe. It's something so ordinary that you can risk no longer noticing." Ilary, Bishop of Makarov, vicar to the Metropolitan of Kiev, in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Moscow, is a reserved and quiet man. But when you ask him to speak of what is dearest to



"The Christian people may reflect on the works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel."

Pope Francis

him, he doesn't hold back. "There was a very difficult moment in my life when I was on the edge of desperation. It was a long period during which I could find no peace. But at a certain point I had the same experience of Nathanael and heard the voice of the Savior telling me, 'I saw you as you stood under the fig tree.' God understood my problem, He knew what I was feeling. He looked at me as He looked at Nathanael; in fact, He never abandoned me."

What is the relationship between God's mercy and man's? "They're very connected. Acts of love by ordi-

nary people are the clearest signs of God's presence. Often, we think that only righteous men can perform acts of mercy, but that's not true. Just as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, often it's the people least expected and who are farthest from faith. In so many cases, it's people in humble circumstances." If it's like the air that we breathe, how can you not take it for granted? "You have to step off the tram when it stops and take a walk in the park. In other words, you have to pull yourself outside your daily routine and find a moment to think about what you lived during



the day. That way, we are able to understand many things, for example, we can notice more easily those around us who are suffering.” What does it mean for man to make divine mercy his own? “The problem is that, if you give God a hand, you have to know that sooner or later he will ask an arm. The logic of the spiritual life dictates that if you’ve begun to serve God, it can’t be done ‘periodically.’ Little by little, you feel that you have to dedicate yourself totally to the service of Christ, doing good. This is what happened to Him, too: He always did good and they put Him on

the cross.” But, in the end, what is mercy? “It’s welcoming the other inasmuch as they are other. Different than us and different from society’s stereotypes.”

RAUL GABRIEL, artist



“The day after the Paris attacks I was in the *Piccolo Cottolengo* in Tortona [a welcoming house for children who are orphaned or have disabilities]. Facing that humanity, those bodies, these ‘flowers’ with forms that pose

so many questions, I felt a sense of peace in the midst of war. It was like a caress. How much strength in that complete vulnerability. That made me think of mercy.” Raul Gabriel, an Italian-Argentine artist born in 1966, has an unusual story. Working as a musician, in 2000 overnight he felt a call to paint. “It all started with an image of a body that I felt the irresistible need to paint. It was the body of Christ in all His power, which I later found in all the bodies in my paintings.”

Now, after 15 years, his search has taken form in a video installation, “X-Fiction,” on display in Florence’s Basilica of San Lorenzo within the exhibit “Became flesh: contemporary art and the sacred.” He’s currently working on another project, “Seven Acts,” which touches on the seven corporal works of mercy. “For me, the experience of mercy is inseparable from what happened to me with the discovery of my vocation to art. More than anything, it’s something that’s happened inside of me. An encounter that changed my life. The perception of an imbalance. A fire that cannot exist outside if it is not first inside.”

And what about the seven works of mercy? “I decided not to depict those works according to tradition. Mercy is something that is there before actions, like giving those who are hungry something to eat. Through the video, I wanted to render the idea of what’s moving on the inside. For example: the other day I was at dinner at some friends’ house. At a certain point I could smell coffee, and it was like a revelation: if water doesn’t boil inside the coffee maker, you can’t smell it.

“It happens the same way with our actions. If there isn’t something boiling in us, then the actions we make will not carry the fragrance of mercy.” **T**

AT THE HEART OF AFRICA

“Africa is a martyr. That is why I love it.” The Pope wanted at all costs to open the Holy Year in the Central African Republic. From there, he asked everyone to pass over to “the other shore.” The story of Fr. Federico Trincheri, a missionary in the “spiritual capital of the world.”

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

“Even if the whole world has forgotten us, the Pope has not. He has not forgotten.” Today this is the experience of the Central African people, as recounted by Fr. Federico Trincheri, a Discalced Carmelite, shortly after Pope Francis

left Central Africa. Against all expectations, the Pope had insisted on opening the Holy Year in Bangui, making it the “spiritual capital of the world.” With a gesture he overturned all rankings and indices, where the Central African Republic is always at the bottom of the list. It is the third

poorest country in the world. “The biggest and the most torn to pieces of the three countries visited by the Holy Father,” continued Trincheri. “Most people don’t know it is a country. They think it is a geographic indication, the central part of Africa. Instead, the Pope put us at the top of



AS A PILGRIM. Pope Francis visited a refugee camp in Bangui. He arrived as “a pilgrim of peace” in conflict-ridden Central African Republic, the most dangerous destination of his three-nation Africa tour.

the rankings!” On his return flight, the Pope explained it this way: “Africa is a martyr. Historically it has been a martyr to exploitation... That is why I love Africa, because Africa has been a victim of other powers.” Asked what most struck him, he said, “I think of all those people, the joy, the ability to celebrate, even on an empty stomach. For me Africa was a surprise. I thought, God surprises us; but Africa surprises us too! They felt they had a visitor.” “He wanted to come at all costs,” continued Fr. Trincherro. “I have to admit that I was

among the pessimists. I really didn’t think he would succeed. Up until Saturday—now I can say it—there were still shootings here.” He was speaking about the “red zone,” a Muslim enclave, precisely where Bergoglio wanted to arrive, in a modified Toyota without bulletproof windows. This is not the only reason they were preferred. They were also preferred in the message the Pope wanted to bring: a continually high call, demanding, free of pietism, and full of predilection. He asked these sons and daughters to pass to *the other shore* and to be *perfect*. “Jesus does not make us cross to the other side alone; instead, He asks us to make the crossing with Him... This is our fundamental vocation: ‘You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’” Through our own lives we reveal to others “the secret of our strength, our hope, and our joy, all of which have their source in God, for they are grounded in the certainty that He is in the boat with us.” He added, “I realize the distance between this demanding ideal and our Christian witness is at times great.” But at that point he reminded his listeners of only one thing, Tertullian’s note of what the pagans said about the early Christians: ‘See how they love one another, how they truly love one another.’”

Watching the Pope open the first Holy Door of the Jubilee of Mercy, Fr. Federico no longer saw “the two heavy and solemn doors of an ancient Cathedral, but the bars of a prison, the prison of violence, revenge, and fear that entrap the nation. Before opening the doors, Francis said in the local language, *sango*, two words that he then repeated, shouting: *Ndoyé siriri!* Love and peace! As if they were two keys for opening that door and leaving. And the door opened.” According to Fr. Trincherro, what happened was “an historical fact. For once, this can be

written without exaggeration.” His convent in December 2013 became a refugee camp. Since then he and his fellow Carmelites have been serving thousands of refugees. Still today, on the land around the monastery, they host five thousand. “The first miracle of this journey,” he said, “is that everything went well. Truly, here, it was anything but taken for granted.” The Central African Republic is experiencing the most dramatic moment of its history, made up of coups, civil war, international military missions, and hundreds of thousands of refugees. In 2012, the Séléka, a Muslim majority coalition of local rebels and mercenaries from Sudan and Chad, sought to seize power, led by Michel Djotodia.

A CHRONIC WOUND. A year later they ousted President François Bozize. “Since then, the country has not recovered,” recounted Trincherro. “In fact, the Christian part, or better, the non-Muslim part, reacted out of exasperation.” The so-called anti-balaka were as violent as the Séléka. “Our bishops have always distanced themselves and forcefully condemned the actions of these militias, incorrectly defined as Christian because they are in total contradiction to the Gospel.” Notwithstanding, the arrival of the new transition President, Catherine Samba Panza, of the French army (operation Sangaris) and of the UN mission (Minusca), in recent months, after an apparent hiatus, the clashes resumed. There have been dead and wounded on both sides, homes and churches burned, streets barricaded, many people fleeing who have found refuge in the parishes. “The situation has become chronic.” It is not always war, but it is never peace. “It is not a religious conflict,” Trincherro explained, “but, as in the Holy Land, enclaves and deep divisions are being formed.” >>

“WE FOUND NEW WORDS”

Some woke up at four just to get to the Kasarani stadium on time. More than eleven thousand young people in Nairobi met Pope Francis as a “father and friend.” Here is the story of one of them.

» The words of the Pope, in his various talks, were a very strong appeal to set aside weapons and interests, to abandon every violent reaction, first of all by Christians, here where “up until four years ago, Catholics, Protestants and Muslims lived as sisters and brothers.” In his last homily there, at the Mass in the stadium with 25,000 people, the Pope asked all of the baptized to “break with the remnants of the old Adam,” and to ask forgiveness for “our all to frequent reluctance and hesitation in bearing witness to the Gospel.”

To young people gathered in the Cathedral Square for the Vigil he asked them to be “resilient” like the banana tree, the tropical tree that “keeps growing, spreads, bears fruit which always gives nourishment and strength.” Knowing that many want to leave the country, he said, “Fleeing from life’s challenges is never a solution!” He anticipated everyone’s question (“How is this possible?”) with specific directions: 1) prayer, because “Prayer is powerful! Prayer conquers evil! Prayer makes you draw near to God who is all-powerful. Do you pray? Don’t forget this!” 2) “Never hate anyone.” And, work for peace. “Peace is built day by day. Peace is crafted; it is the work of our hands; it is built up by the way we live our lives. No hatred! Much forgiveness!” 3) “If you want to be winners, we only win if we take the road of love. Can we love our enemies? Yes! Can we forgive those who do us wrong? Yes!” 4) “Trust in God! Because He is merciful; He is love; He is capable of giving you peace.”

FOR THE FIRST TIME. He came to probe our hearts in this way. For two days, risking, knowing of the danger, “the people of the country filled the streets of the capital, singing and dancing, yelling with joy. It had not happened for years,” recounted Fr. Federico. “It was all simple and very touching. For

turn around in my blue chair at Kasarani Stadium and, joking, tell Fr. Gabriel that I’ve never waited so long in my whole life! In the sector of the stadium where I am, there are many friends of Communion and Liberation, among them priests, sisters, families, students of the CLU and the St. Kizito and Otunga schools. All around us thousands of young people and other faithful (almost eleven thousand) are waiting for Pope Francis. We have been there since 8:30; the stadium was already half full at that hour and many others were trying to enter. The crowd is enthusiastic because what is about to happen is an absolutely new event. The group of bishops present, African and European, get up and dance as the images flow, as do President Uhuru Kenyatta and his wife, Lady Margaret; together they lead a traditional Kikuyu dance called Mugithi. The song goes more or less like this: “You who see that Pope Francis is here, know that this is a great day.”

It is his meeting with us, the youth of Kenya, and when he finally arrives, he is welcomed with acclamations of the crowd, in real ‘soccer stadium’ style.

What really captured my attention was the detailed way the Pope answered the questions asked by two students, Linet and Manuel. Some of the questions were of this kind: “Why do tragedies happen in our life? How can we face the problem of widespread corruption and tribalism in our country? What leads youth to join terrorist groups, and what can be done to save them? What can be done for those who feel unloved and marginalized by society? How can we Christians use the social media in a useful way, notwithstanding the worldly tendencies of our society?” I was enthusiastic about this dialogue between the Pope and us, because these are problems that directly concern African young people who live in a developing third world country. Just this year there were very grave cases of

a great many, even among the consecrated, it was the first time in their lives they had seen a Pope.” Delegations came to Bangui from all nine dioceses of this young Church, born a little over a century ago, in 1984, when a group of young French missionaries reached this land by travelling upstream on the Oubangui River. Everyone came to see him and hear him speak, to hear from his mouth that this is “the heart of Africa,” which can give “a stimulus to the entire continent.”

This journey was “an initiative of great meaning and very courageous.” The Pope also went to the Koudoukou mosque, which for months no one has dared to pass in front of because it was too dangerous. He greeted the Muslim community saying, “My Pastoral Visit to the Central African Republic would not be complete if it did not include this encounter with the Muslim community.” He spoke of the Christian and Muslim religious leaders who “have sought to rise to

corruption in the most important ministries of the government, such as the Ministry of Development's purchase of very commonplace ballpoint pens for almost nine thousand kenioti (about \$100). There has been tension between the government and some tribes that have been accused, also by the opposition, of unleashing continual rivalries.

Curious and amazed. In April there was a terrorist attack that caused the death of 147 students at the University of Garissa, the worst of the attacks so far, as before that they had struck busses and shopping centers. At times it seems that in this country, as in all of Africa, we bounce from one problem to next. This was the reason for my interest: I needed something deeper than a political judgement. And then I was curious. I wanted to verify whether the Pope understood what we experience. The dialogue captivated everyone, and I didn't realize that an hour and a half had flown by. The stadium was in silence, one broken only when he spoke about corruption. "Corruption is like sugar: it's sweet, we like it, it goes down easily. And then? We get sick! We come to a nasty end! With all that sugar we end up as diabetics, and our country becomes diabetic!" He then concluded in Spanish, "Corruption is not the way to life. It is a path which leads to death." I was amazed, and I still am, in front of his fatherly way of talking; he did not condemn, but with great humility and mercy, he re-centered us about what evil is.

To answer how we can stay in front



of tragedies like terrorist attacks, radicalization, and tribal battles, he proposed that we be attentive to those around us. In brief, loving others, to learn always, to defend the family, and to pray always, even when we do not understand the tragedies that touch us, remembering our hope in the Resurrection. To say it with his words, "The primary means of communication is the word, a gesture, a smile. The first gesture of communication is going up to people, seeking their friendship. If you speak well of one other, if you laugh, if you draw close to one another as brothers and sisters even though you belong to different tribes... those little signs of communication are more influential than any television network." Finally, he encouraged us to invest in education and in work to avoid falling prey to the temptation of drugs, radicalism, and corruption. He is an amiable man, but firm; both a father and a friend. At noon he looked at his watch and asked us if we were hungry. The crowd responded enthusiastically, "No." And so he continued talking

with us. In the end, he blessed the trees that were to be planted by the young people, in line with his encyclical *Laudato si'*. But before ending, he confided a personal secret to us: he always keeps the Rosary and the Via Crucis in his pocket, to remind himself that his hope is placed in an Other, and he prays every chance he gets.

We return home, tired but happy. Tired because we got up early, some of us at four in the morning, to arrive on time. Happy because we have found new words that the Pope told us. The next day, at charitable work, Stephen, a Protestant young man who was with us, told me, "Even if I'm not Catholic, I agree with what the Pope said. It was clear, everything he said about me and our situation as Christians and Kenyans." I asked him if he felt he lost something by coming with us Catholics (here, among Protestants, there is some prejudice against Catholics) and he answered, "No, it was a day well spent." I smiled at him. It was a day well spent for me, too."

Daisy Moraa, Nairobi

the challenges of the moment." There are Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, Archbishop of Bangui, Dieudonné Nzapalainga, and Reverend Nicolas Guerekoyame-Gbangou, President of the Evangelical Alliance, all who are engaged in an untiring work of reconciliation. "We can also call to mind the many acts of solidarity which Christians and Muslims have shown with regard to their fellow citizens of other religious confessions, by welcoming them and defending them,"

added the Pope, who was escorted by young Muslims all the way to the exit of the neighbourhood: "*Zo kwe zo*" he said in *sango*, the motto of the nation, "Every man is man." The *sango* expression for the Central African Republic is *Be-Afrika*, which means "heart of Africa." The Pope said: "This country, with its suggestive name... called to discover the Lord as the true center of all that is good, your vocation is to incarnate the very heart of God in the midst of your

fellow citizens." Becoming the heart of God for the world. Who would say this of one of the most ignored places on the planet? Instead, there is a man who said it, "Eternal life, heaven that awaits us," the Pope reminded us, "is not an illusion, a flight from words. It is a powerful reality that calls us and engages us. It transforms our life, already in the present. We are in the midst of a river, but *the other shore* is within our reach. And Jesus crosses it with us." **T**



THE “OFF-ROAD” POPE CONCERNED ONLY ABOUT HUMANITY

Aura Miguel, a Vatican correspondent for Lisbon’s Rádio Renascença, accompanied Francis in his visit to Uganda, Kenya and the Central African Republic. In this interview she offers a reflection on what she experienced during those days.

BY PAOLO PEREGO

Her voice is weary. “I can’t take it any more. The air conditioning and the sudden changes in temperature. And then talking for five days...” Following Pope Francis on his African journey was truly intense and demanding. Aura Maria Vistas Miguel, Vatican correspondent for the Portuguese Rádio Renascença, has followed the life of the Popes and their magisterium and journeys for years. Last week she and other colleagues from around the world accompanied Francis to Kenya, Uganda, and the Central African Republic. “I was very struck. I still have

to ‘absorb’ all I saw,” she said as she was waiting for her flight to Lisbon.

What did strike you?

When you arrive you are shocked by what you see. You left a “comfortable” life to which you are accustomed, but already as your plane descends to land at the first stop you begin to see brown spots, and slowly you realize that they are houses. The slums. And you think that those shacks of Nairobi house 65% of the population of the city! Then you see them close up: it’s a punch in the stomach. How can one live there? According to our criteria it

is scandalous. It is not that I have never seen a shantytown. Generally when we travel we come across these realities. But we often take no note of them because we are interested in other things, especially if we are travelling as tourists, going to see what interests us. We are distracted in front of what, instead, is there. Here, on the contrary, Francis shifted the center of his papacy to make the world see this humanity full of value, one of which few people take note, and many pretend does not exist. So you find yourself finally looking at these places and asking yourself how it could be possible to do something, to change all this. But the poverty is so immense that I thought, “There is nothing to be done...” Instead Francis went there, as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” to say exactly the opposite. He went right there in the middle of it, with the heat, the dust, the trips, the mosquitoes, the danger



IN THE SLUMS. People waiting for Pope Francis at the Kangemi slums on the outskirts of Kenya's capital Nairobi, on November 27th.

of attacks... He was only interested in that humanity, in people who have my same dignity, with the only difference being that they do not forget it, as they are forced to live in the essential. This sight, already difficult to understand in Kenya and Uganda, was even more visible and dramatic in The Central African Republic.

Why?

Because you see the shantytowns of Nairobi and you think, "What's worse than Kibera, a slum of a million people?" There is nothing worse. Then you arrive in Bangui, where there is violence, war, devastation, and at every corner you see what those people are living in all its drama. What a repercussion when you think that Francis chose to open the Holy Door there, where many had even advised him not to go because it would be difficult to guarantee his safety. It was true: tanks, UN peace-

keepers, incredible protection... The hotel where we were seemed like a bunker. In these neighbourhoods, as soon as we arrived, people poured out into the streets, with an indescribable joy. But what are they doing? It's something out of this world for me. Their hearts were more on fire than mine. It was so powerful that it made them go out on the street, notwithstanding the danger, with the curfew, after sunset and without lights, at the risk of being killed. And yet it was worth it because their heart desired someone who spoke the truth to them.

And then the Holy Door... But why in Bangui?

He called it the "spiritual capital of mercy," and I thought "Come on. Today Bangui could be the capital of human disaster." With four hundred thousand refugees, ten thousand child soldiers, a million and a half malnourished: how could he call it the "spiritual capital"? Instead, this was a sign of what his pontificate is, another help to understand where to look, that our small space of "daily comfort" is not so important. The truth passes through something else, through the things that most correspond to the heart, and perhaps he had to go this way to the extreme periphery to help us understand what is essential.

He seemed very happy to be there....

Yes, serene. More than on other occasions, during other trips. In Africa there is no space for subjectivism that measures and weights. For those people everything is a question of life and death, and the things that concern life you recognize immediately. The Pope's insistence on the peripheries is also for this. He goes to the periphery of the world to make us understand mercy. The Central African Republic needs forgiveness. But so do we. It's the same.

What does education have to do with all this? It was a leitmotiv in many of his "African" speeches.

Because he is realistic. Also others who speak about Africa underline it, but he is an "off-roader." He goes in the fields where others don't go, to accompany the sadness, the anguish, the joy and the human hope. But then, he is also the bearer of a proposal of growth of humanity, and this also passes through education, or in other words, in the awareness that in order to change and grow, one must relate with others. There is no other possibility, and this is all the more so in poor countries where there are conflicts of every type; this is the priority. Education and respect for others, which go together. There, this was clear. He spoke about tribalism, terrorism. Francis is phenomenal. He brings speeches from Rome, then,

above all when he meets young people, he sets them aside and starts to dialogue in a real way with them. He listens to them, asks them questions, starts from what they say to explain things. A catechist.



Aura Miguel.

So then, he is a Pope of the young people, not only of the peripheries?

He has always been this way. Certainly, people read him as a Pope of the poor. They always try to classify him, to put him in a framework. "The Pope of poverty." Instead, he defies every framework. He is a Pope given to the world to convert, to change, everyone. Even us who think we know and have seen everything. There is a freshness in facing subjects that we already know, and through him, we discover that we haven't understood anything. There is nothing taken for granted. He does this with the youth, with this vivacity, but he does it with everyone. It is a sight to behold. **T**

LE PETIT

PARIS

AND NOW?

The newspaper headlines, the fear, the analyses... and then the search for normalcy, while the questions continue to burn. After the massacres, the diary of a wounded city that is rediscovering the need to look life and death in the face.

BY LUCA FIORE



CAMBODGE



“Hello. This is the municipality of Paris. To ask for psychological support after the November 13th attacks, press 1. For other services, press 2.” For five days, the 3975 service answered this way. Instead, the “197, *alerte attentat*” received 13,000 reports in a week. Tension travels by phone lines.

Walking through Paris after the executions at the Bataclan, the shooting outside the *bistro* and the explosions at the *Stade de France* (129 dead and over 300 wounded), the impression is that the trauma is being experienced entirely *interiorly*. The roads are once again full of traffic, the subway crowded, schools, offices and shops open. A normal day of a too-mild autumn. It is true, today’s newspapers are emblazoned with headlines about the blitz in Saint-Denis on November 18th and the covers of the weeklies cry out “How can ISIS be defeated?” But these are words in ink, just as when the attack was in Tunis or Beirut. The emotion of the early hours seems to have met the same end as the flowers in front of the massacre sites, wilted by time and rain. The foreign news correspondents are already speaking about other things, such as the alarm in Belgium.

But something continues to brood over in the soul of Parisians, if it is true that those who have used the psychological support offered by the city have mainly been children (often Muslim ones who fear retaliation by their peers on the playgrounds). Little antennae of the tension experience by their parents, like canaries in a coal mine.

Life continues, but it hangs by a thread, as Julián Carrón observed in his letter after the attacks. We still need to be able to look life and death in the face, to find a hypothesis of meaning for our children, one >>

» that makes it possible to stay in front of these massacres, to have “a reason for returning to work Monday morning, continuing to build a world that lives up to our humanity.”

For Pierre, for example, that “Monday” arrived a few hours after the attacks. He is an architect and works in a large studio 300 yards from Le Petit Cambodge. The deadline for an important project was scheduled for the following week, so at eight in the morning on November 14th, he had to cross a deserted and fearful Paris to show up at his job. “I left my wife and little boy at home. It wasn’t easy. But I didn’t have any choice,” he recounts. “My colleagues took what happened lightly. They said they weren’t afraid. I wasn’t either, but it was a bit different. For example, my boss looked at it in terms of statistics: there is a higher probability of dying in a car crash. I returned to work with the positive hypothesis that Fr. Giussani taught us and continues to tell me: ‘Go and verify whether there is something interesting in reality.’ Things aren’t entirely clear for me either, and yet I see that it is possible to continue to work, loving life.”

AT SCHOOL. That Saturday morning Isabelle went to donate blood, but she was sent home because there were already enough donors. Returning on the subway, she saw a woman climbing the stairs with a stroller. “I noticed her and gave her a hand. It was a very simple gesture, but it held all my pain and desire for meaning for what had happened the night before.” On Monday she returned to the high school in the *banlieue* where she teaches. In January she had seen some of her Muslim students cheering for the Charlie Hebdo attackers. “This time it was different. For me, in all the confusion of that morning, it was useful to observe the minute of silence requested by President Hollande. It



helped me be aware of the deep question of what happened. Today the challenge is to go beyond the emotion of the moment, which never gets to the heart of the question.”

Also Silvio, the principal of a high school in the 18th *arrondissement*, had to return to school. He found himself in front of the eyes of his six hundred students, a quarter of whom are Muslims. “They asked if tests that day were cancelled. They said, ‘We couldn’t study. We were too upset.’” Silvio thought of Carrón’s words, “Continue to build a world that lives up to our humanity.” Continue. “It was not an easy decision, but I decided that tests would not be postponed. I said that we would keep in mind what happened, because it was terrible for me too. But we needed to start again immediately, with a positive hypothesis, because there must be a meaning for what happened, even if we do not see it. We have to start out from the

present.” At Notre Dame there was the annual mass for Catholic students with Cardinal André Vingt-Trois. The four thousand young people had to pass through three security checkpoints to enter the cathedral. Some could not hide their fear. As we waited in line, Caterina recounted that a few days earlier she had been in a café in town when a *gendarmier* agent ran in, yelling at them to hide in the basement. Half an hour of fear for a bomb threat that turned out to be a false alarm. “I feel the need to be filled with meaning,” continued Caterina. “I tried to understand the whys and hows of the attack, but it only fills me with fear and insecurity. I really need to look at Christ and ask Him to come, in every moment.” Shortly afterwards the Cardinal asked the students, “What do we truly care about? What dominates our life?”

The CL community gathered immediately for a Rosary in Saint-Ger-



“THE LIFE OF EACH OF US HANGS BY A THREAD. WHY IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?”

Communion and Liberation unites with Pope Francis’ deeply moved emotion, pain and prayer for the victims of the attacks in Paris and for the French people: **“These things are difficult to understand. There is no justification for these things. This is not human”** (Pope Francis, on the phone with TV2000).

Fr. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, has declared: “Evident before our eyes is the fact that **the life of each of us hangs by a thread. We could be killed at any moment, in any place, at a restaurant, a stadium, or during a concert.** The possibility of a violent and ferocious death has become a reality also in our cities. For this reason, the events of Paris place us in front of the crucial question: why is life worth living? It is a provocation that none of us can avoid. Seeking an adequate answer to the question of the meaning of our life is the one antidote for the fear that grips us as we watch the television in these hours. It is the foundation that no terrorist can destroy.”

“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”** (1 Pet. 2:23). With this Presence in our eyes, we will be able to look even at death, beginning with the deaths of those who lost their lives in Paris, to offer our children a hypothesis of meaning that enables us to stay in front of these massacres and gives each of us a reason for returning to work Monday morning, continuing to build a world that lives up to our humanity, with the certainty of the hope that is in us.” With these words Fr. Carrón invited all the friends of the Movement to participate in the moments of prayer that will be proposed by the dioceses, in union with the Pope and the entire Church.

main-l’Auxerrois, the Palatine chapel behind the Louvre. Under the slender gothic arches they sang the song Claudio Chieffo wrote after the Madrid attacks in 2004: “*Reina de la Paz te pido / da esperanza a mi dolor.*” The Thursday after the attacks they gathered for an Assembly, and began with the same song. Silvio invited Axel, a promoter of the *veilleurs* (see *Traces* n. 7/2013), whose meeting, planned for the same evening, had been moved for security reasons. At the end he said, “I began my conversion to Christianity when I began to curse the day I was born. Then someone took my desire for meaning seriously. These attacks have brought the idea of death closer to me now, and made my desire for meaning even more burning.”

THE WRITER ON TELEVISION. Also present at the meeting was Camilla, a young woman from Bologna who had come to Paris years before to study. Now she

works in one of coolest clubs of the city. She had met CL during high school, but in France had always avoided the relationship with the friends of the Movement. She spoke about bringing the parents of Guillaume, her friend, to the place where he had been killed. In that moment she thought of the terrorists, “but also of the evil I do. I discovered I want a gaze of forgiveness for myself. I thought of the line in Dante, “*Miserere di me.*”

She returned to work a different person, and her colleagues noticed. “One of them asked me, ‘You lost a friend, how can you be this way?’ I looked at him and answered, ‘Because there is One who overcame death. And after five years He has returned to yell in my face that I am not the creator of the world.’” She was at the Assembly, telling all this to these friends. It was an intense Assembly. There were those who admitted, “I know that it is wrong, but I just want to for-

get.” There were those who said, “I hate hearing people say ‘life goes on.’” Others asked, “How is it possible to put up resistance to terrorism?”

During *On n’est pas couché*, a very popular talk show on France’s channel 2, the journalist Léa Salamé asked this same question of Frédéric Beigbeder, who has been described as a “provocateur,” a “pessimist-hedonist,” a “lover of party-fuelled carefree lifestyle, convinced of imminent dissolution.” The writer responded in an undertone, “I know it is really strange to hear me say this, but according to the Catholic religion, Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of Matthew, in front of the amazed crowd said, ‘When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.’ How can someone be strong enough for such a gesture?” Léa Salamé is a tough cookie, famous for always having an answer ready, but this time she just said, “I don’t know.” **T**

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CENTER FOR ETHICS AND CULTURE
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MacIntyre, Brague, Fr. Pizzaballa... and to close, Julián Carrón. A report on Notre Dame's Annual Fall Conference, one of the most noted moments of encounter at American Catholic universities. The topic: the challenge posed by freedom.

BY ROBERTO FONTOLAN

“Wow, this is truly a dream come true for any American teenager,” exclaims a Californian woman as she gets out of her car: “A campus like this, with beautiful buildings, and football!” As matter of fact, the University of Notre Dame, resting in the endless plains of Indiana, is a wonder to behold. Halls, dormitories, department buildings, libraries, and the grandiose Basilica spread out among well-manicured lawns and walkways; and below, the football stadium. Everyone here is crazy about football, even the Italian girls, here to earn a graduate degrees and who back home couldn't care less about watching even major soccer tournaments.

Well, maybe not every American teen dreams to be here, but the university does not want to let down any of the students who decide to spend the best >>

» years of their youth here. Curiously enough, it seems that even in South Bend, the city where Notre Dame is located, behind the facade of same old small town with tiny homes and warehouses, there is a surprise: on television you hear that it is the top place in the United States where you can become rich before you are 30.

LIKE THE RIMINI MEETING. Who knows why, but Americans love statistics as a way to make reality accessible. But all of the young people that have crowded into the conference room, where the annual event organized by the Center for Ethics and Culture presided by the fiery Carter Snead, are not thinking along those lines.

Many are from here, Notre Dame, and others came from Minnesota, from Texas, or from Ohio. They came to hear what the 70 or more speakers invited to the “Fall Conference 2015” had to say on the subject of freedom. Year after year, the Conference has gained prestige and significance for the American Catholic *intelligentsia* (and for others as well). The topics are the cultural and academic debate (not in a specialized or scientific sense) most relevant to the hundreds of Catholic universities in the United States. Not to mention, this year Carter Snead went over the top, setting up the Conference even more like the Rimini Meeting (where he has been a repeat guest speaker), increasing the storm of simultaneous events and competing exhibits.

A blaze of names and discussions were set off, all under the same title “For Freedom Set Free.” A whirlwind of theology, philosophy, art, literature, law, history, education, business, a bit of science and technology, and



the discussions and questions go on; it is difficult to be unsatisfied.

The idea is that Christian thought, as much as it is a philosophy, shows no signs of dying: in reality, it shows its vitality and desire, energy and sensibility. An open field, such as the one seen in America, attracts the interest and dialogue of secularists, agnostics and atheists.

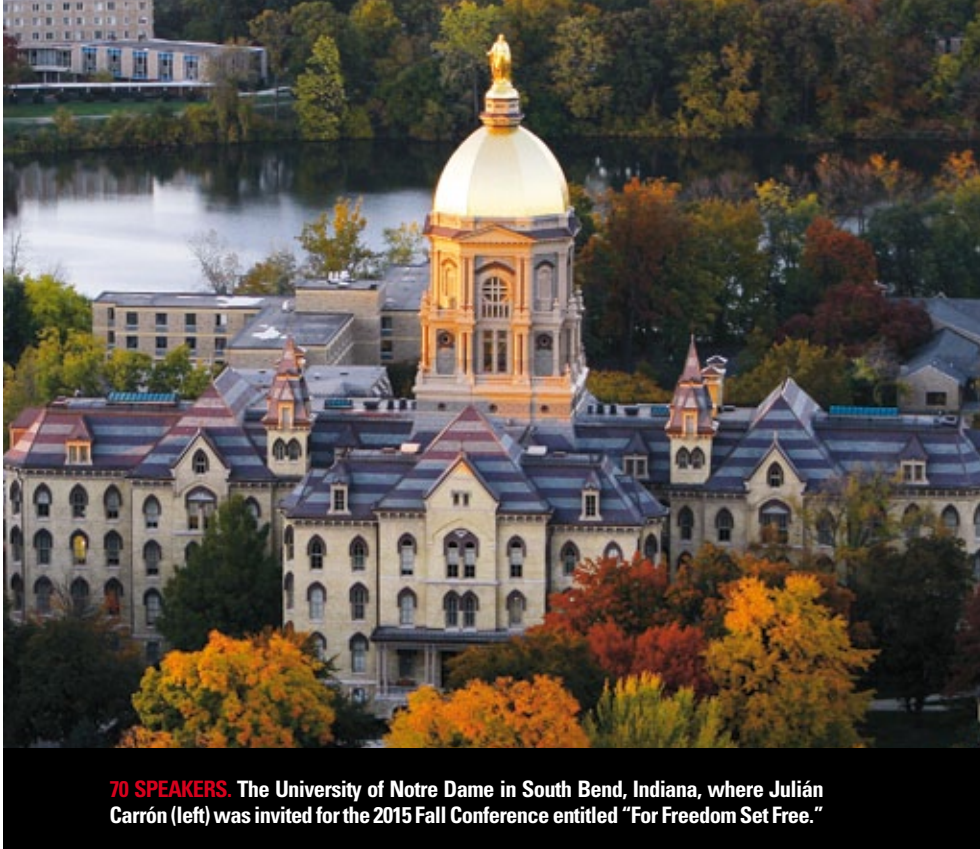
Avoid “every form of polarization,” said Pope Francis to the US Congress; do not close yourselves off from each other continuously establishing boundaries of right and wrong, of good and evil: this is no way to do politics, or to govern. This concept can be easily applied to culture and to academia.

And while there are many sides that try to close doors and build up new walls (it’s chilling to think of what takes place in many American universities, where there are student organizations that want to ban and to censure books, authors and thoughts), these days offer authentic spaces for encounter. For Snead, one

of the goals of the Conference is to “expand the network of friendships and human relationships, inviting scholars into a conversation to be continued, because ideas carry on in this way. Let’s not stick to pure scholarship.”

SUPERMAN AND THE FAMILY. Take Shavar Jeffries, for example. He’s the president of Democrats for Education Reform, had spoken at the previous Fall Conference, was invited to the Rimini Meeting, and now has come back to talk on the topic: “Poverty, Children, and Urban Ghettos.” He is a supporter of charter schools (schools whose property remains public, but are run and entrusted to an association comprised of parents or the private sector), which is why teachers’ unions cannot stand him. Most importantly, he strongly desires that every child, however they may be held back, by circumstances or the deficiency of schools, be given the opportunity to actualize the potential inside of him or herself, and that this right belongs to the child by the very fact that he or she exists. “Remember Superman? In one of his most famous stories, Clark Kent thought for a long time that he was

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70 SPEAKERS. The University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, where Julián Carrón (left) was invited for the 2015 Fall Conference entitled “For Freedom Set Free.”

Andrea Simoncini, and Mauro Magatti. (All of their talks, including the fascinating conversation between Thomas Pink and Fr. Martin Rhonheimer on the conciliar declaration on the subject of religious liberty, are available on Youtube).

THE GREATEST GIFT. The major concern that is at the heart of public life in America (whether progressive or conservative) is the profound, divisive conception of freedom as the expression of total and absolute autonomy and self-determination. It neither sees the disastrous consequences on social life and on the common good, nor knows how to respond. Within the general bewilderment in the face of shattered idols, the answers fluctuate between taking refuge in norms (anywhere you go here, rules of social and philosophical conduct are proliferate), defending oneself from the “evil society” and finding a safe haven among fellow ideologues, restoring “traditional” social values, or finding new ones.

In his talk Julián Carrón—where he quoted Jonathan Franzen and Jack Kerouac—did not wallow in fear of freedom, instead exalting the greatness of “the gift that the heavens have bestowed upon men.” To conquer freedom in its fullness, infinite human freedom, through that same freedom (without falling for coercions and limitations), walking hand in hand with freedom on the path determined by desire that thrusts the heart toward the fulfillment of its expectations. This journey is possible because the God who has granted this gift has made Himself one of us. Through Christ, freedom “from” turns itself into freedom “for.” “When the mystery, as does the beloved, reveals its face, man gains the clarity and the affective energy to engage all of his freedom,” in a path that fulfills our existence. **T**

“just” Clark Kent: nobody reminded him anymore that Superman was inside him. Our kids are the same way, so if nobody reminds them that they could be great, that they have quality, character, and ability, if nobody works with them with this passion, they will remain trapped in the scholastic frame of mind, stuck inside answers to tests, inside the marginality with which they are looked at.”

Jacqueline Rivers, sociologist and director of programs for families in African American communities, had contributed to the great “*Humanum*” conference at the Vatican, organized by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Now she is at Notre Dame to share the surprising results of her research, which demonstrates a strong connection between poor quality of life, as seen among African Americans and Latinos, and broken families. “Poor African Americans do not get married; 70% of children are born outside of stable relationships.” Next, the tireless world traveler, Fr. Pizzaballa, the Custodian of the Holy Land. He himself would not take this on were it not for the sake of bearing the witness and the drama of Christians of the Middle East, and adding

new thoughts to the common discussion. “For us in the East, the problem is coexistence; your problem is integration. For you the 20th century ended in 1989, for us it is coming to a close now: in the midst of war, the disintegration of states, the conflict between Sunnis and Shia, the persecution of minorities, the exodus of Christians. Our whole worldview has changed, the dynamics have changed, and while planes drop bombs and the most atrocious acts take place in cities, we ask ourselves out of frustration: ‘And when all of this is over, will there be an afterwards?’”

Another point of interest is that American academics would want to listen to a way of thinking that is not native to their land. The Frenchman Rémi Brague (Emeritus at the Sorbonne University of Paris now teaching at the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität of Munich) was given the duty of inaugurating the Conference by speaking on “Freedom and Creation,” and Fr. Julián Carrón had the honor of concluding it with “The Truth Will Set You Free.” In between, the great Scot, Alasdair MacIntyre, the humble and discreet star of Notre Dame, and a group of Italians of Lorenza Violini,

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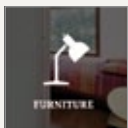
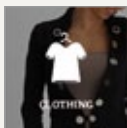
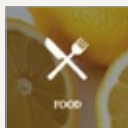
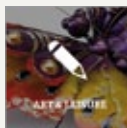
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