



SAFEGUARDING THE HEART

Africa, the Middle East, Pakistan... thousands of people continue to suffer because they are Christians. What can sustain them in this drama?

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ONLINE



A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE

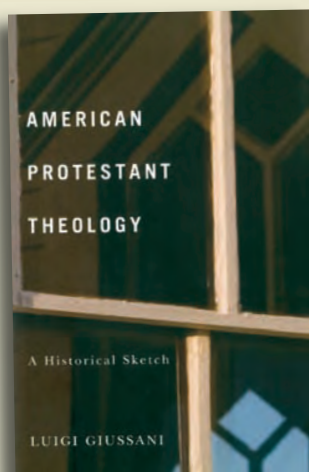
The booklet with texts of the Communion and Liberation Fraternity Exercises 2015.

Download it at www.tracesonline.org

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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.

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WHAT IS TRULY WORTHWHILE

We should reflect more often on this gospel. It is in our best interest because reality closes in on us so tight at times that it seems ready to crush and overwhelm us, yet in these lines we can always find solid ground on which to stand firm and carry on. A good part of the Christian proposal, of the contribution that faith can make in history, is expressed in these words of Jesus: “What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? What could one give in exchange for his life?” (*Mark 8:36-37*).


It is a crucial question. Nothing is more important than your life, your soul, that is, your person: not power, not money, not ideas, not projects... nothing is more worthwhile. For Christ, the individual—you, me—is of greater worth than any other good. Worth has two meanings here. Nothing is worth more, has more value, or is more precious than that infinite treasure that is the human person. And, nothing is more valid—or in other words, strong, powerful—than a free person who says “I,” who truly has an adequate awareness of herself and reality, because, in the words of Henri Daniel-Rops, whom Fr. Giussani often quoted, the awareness of the “I” is the point in which “the destiny of the world is shaped.”

It is not by chance, then, that God wagers on this, and has done so since Abraham. He could shift the course of events as He wills, do and undo every moment of history, impose Himself on everyone and everything, but instead merely He proposes Himself to my and your freedom. He invests exclusively in the “I” because He knows that from there every kind of fruit can come forth. When one person willingly says “yes” to Him, He can use that breath to reach everyone. He can offer to everyone’s freedom the fascinating attraction and beauty that is born from Him.

The theme of this month’s *Traces* is *the person*, beginning with our “Close Up,” an interview with Fr. Pizzaballa, Custodian of the Holy Land, who describes how the possibility for a novel witness is discovered precisely in a person, even amidst dramatic contexts like those of the Middle East, as happens in the story of a banker who forgave his kidnappers after eleven months in prison.

The importance of the person emerges in many other facts that you can find in these pages, all stories of people who, saying “yes” to Christ, in their own little way change a piece of the world around them, make it more human, and invest a grandeur in it. **T**

NOW I AM AT PEACE WITH MYSELF


 I write to you to tell you about an encounter. My friend, Alessandro, who is in Newcastle (near Durham) for a PhD, casually exchanged a few words one day with a guy from South Africa who is in his same course of studies. Neil asked Alessandro why he always had a smile on his face. Alessandro, with his remarkable simplicity, told him that it was because he encountered Jesus and that changed his life. A few days later, Neil decided to go to the Mass with him. The following week Alessandro invited him to School of Community in Durham. In his first week, Neil recounted the reason why he approached Alessandro. The second week, he listened and went away having said almost nothing. The third time—by now having read all of *The Religious Sense*—he arrived with a long list of questions. He visited us for the next four months, until he returned to South Africa. Once, at the School of Community, he said to us, “For years, I have lived with a profound unease for which I have been unable to find an answer: about the meaning of my life, the usefulness of what I do, etc. I read Nietzsche and many other philosophers without finding adequate answers. To meet all of you and to read Fr. Giussani has reawakened me completely. I believe I have found the way. But one fact speaks louder than any words: after so many years, I sleep at night. I feel at peace with myself.” Then He expressed the desire to be baptized. We put him in touch with friends from the Movement in Africa, and now that he has returned to his country he continues to attend School



of Community. It is so true that in following Fr. Giussani’s proposal—and now Fr. Carrón’s—we receive more than we could possibly imagine, and life takes on a new zest.

Michele, Durham (Great Britain)

IRISH REFERENDUM: RESTARTING FROM ONE

 The day after the victory of “Yes” on the referendum to introduce gay marriage, the Irish media’s headlines couldn’t have been more thunderous: “The Beginning of a New Era”, “The New Ireland, a Beacon of Civilization for the World.” On the other side were the reactions of the defeated: “The End of an Era,” “The End of Church Presence in Society.” The total intolerance displayed by the “No” campaign, where every opposing argument of a juridical nature was labelled both bigoted and stupid, leaves little doubt about the fact that, in reality, the game was never allowed to be played. From here comes the understandable rage of the defeated, not only for the results, but also for the way in which the results were obtained. Instead of analyzing this event, I would rather talk about my experience. I was surprised at feeling neither angry nor defeated. The day after the vote was

Pentecost, and I participated in the liturgy that every year the Archbishop of Dublin celebrates on this occasion. I was moved to see people from all over the world fill the church. The words of Fr Carrón at the Spiritual Exercises came to mind: “Only the risen Christ, through the power of His Spirit, can adequately explain the people born of Easter. Peter was entirely dominated by the presence of the risen Christ and could look at reality without remaining at appearances, and this overcame any kind of reductive interpretation.” I saw this people before my eyes. Outside the cathedral, people were celebrating the liberation of the land of Saint Patrick from the Church; inside the cathedral, the faces of people from different places were the tangible sign of the victory of the Resurrection. It is not up to us to decide in which way the Mystery chooses to reach us; it is not we who decide how the victory of the resurrected Christ is manifested each time. The smiling faces of a Chinese family during the Pentecost celebration was a stronger and more convincing fact than any rage or disappointment about the referendum. Sure, the bitterness over the way in which the campaign evolved remains, along with the sadness for the thousands of young people who voted “Yes” on the wave of emotions without reason, easy victims of fads and power. Nothing, however, can take away the gaze I received in my encounter with Christ, a gaze capable of giving value to all my humanity. Talking with a friend devastated by what is happening, it came to me spontaneously to say that this “crisis” in some way helps us to empathize with John, the women, and




the disciples gathered closely around Mary after the crucifixion. Who knows how many questions they had, how much fear for their future, after what they'd seen happen. Even the dismay and the disappointment for the poor performance of their leader (think about Peter) could not take away the awareness of what they'd seen and experienced. This is what made them ready to recognize Christ after the Resurrection, even in an unexpected way. With humble certainty, I want to say that it is for me no different. I don't feel defeated, but desirous to see the way in which Christ will reach me here and now, in Ireland; this, thanks to God, does not coincide with a law or with its abolition. A commentator in one of the major Irish newspapers asked, "With what will we fill the void left by the Church, now that we have rid ourselves of her?" I'm glad because I have encountered Someone who has revealed to me the nature of that void, of that need. This is the origin of not feeling defeated, and even of human sympathy for those who today cheer a new beginning. The words of Fr. Giussani following the referendum on abortion in Italy come to mind. To those who advocated starting again from the faithful but defeated 32%, he responded by inviting us to restart from the One. Here in Ireland as well, it is not a matter of starting again from the 38% that opposed gay marriage, but from that One, Jesus of Nazareth, who first looked at man for what he is, and who revealed to me, too, the true nature of the need and the desire that we all have in common. He thereby established the conditions for authentic progress and coexistence. Restarting



from Christ, recognizing Him present here and now through the Church and the charism of Fr Giussani, whom I follow, does not coincide with regret for what was lost, nor with the attempt to reconquer it by diving into this or that battle. It means, instead, the simple recognition of the company of Christ, His gaze full of mercy that is capable of awakening the truest desire of every man in every time and place. The campaign was made in the name of equality. I do not feel defeated because I have received the grace to go to the source of this grace, a grace for which I can continuously beg.

Mauro, Dublin (Ireland)

THAT PRAYER CARD IN THE BOSS'S WALLET

 Dear Fr. Carrón: I work in a bank. I returned from the Exercises and, for the first time, was not wrapped up in my frequent sentimental confusion, but rather in a profound and immense gratitude for being in this adventure that is the Movement, in this friendship that never lets me go. I write to tell you of an incredible episode that happened to me at work, where everything is an affirmation of cynicism, opportunism, and indifference. This week, my boss called me

into his office to discuss a matter pertaining to work. Then suddenly he asked me, "Last Friday, didn't you take some vacation time to go to the CL Exercises? Aren't they around this time?" At his question I broke out in a cold sweat. See how small my faith is? If the experience that overwhelmed me is the greatest and truest thing that could happen to me, why was I hesitating instead of responding with a resounding "Yes"? In fact, I answered his question with my own question: "Why do you ask?" After understanding from the look on my face that I had indeed gone to the Exercises, he pulled from his wallet a prayer card of Fr. Giussani. Incredible! My boss, who remarried after his first marriage was annulled, and who has recently become the father of two beautiful daughters, began to tell me a piece of his story. What struck me most was his affirmation: "Look, Alberto, I heard Fr. Giussani speak in person." When he said this, his face was transformed; his eyes told me that he had been seized by the same fascination that had seized me. I understood that something in his past caused him to drift away from the Movement, but in his wallet, he had that prayer card. I thought about what we often repeat among ourselves: you can leave, you can drift away from this story, but once you have encountered it, once it has captured you, it never leaves you. If you encounter the Truth, it is forever and it is for everyone. This is why, when my boss began to speak about Fr. Giussani, he had a radiant gaze in spite of all that has happened to him and that I do not know. What an adventure life is!

Alberto, Italy

J MIDDLE EAST

A “REDEEMED”

Two Syrian children at a temporary clinic in Douma, just a few miles from Damascus.



GAZE



Outlook on Syria, the lives of martyrs today and what we can contribute, from the perspective of a “redeemed gaze.” Published below are excerpts from a talk by Fr. **PIERBATTISTA PIZZABALLA, Custodian of the Holy Land.**

EDITED BY COSTANTINO ESPOSITO

The faith of Christians in Syrian villages threatened by ISIS, farmers who are “simple [...] but know very well who they are and live that fully;” the weight of suffering that has crushed every family, without exception; the bombs and their unceasing destruction; the role of religion... and what this all elicits from him: Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Custodian of the Holy Land, shortly after his return from Aleppo, spoke April 28th at the Cultural Center of Bari, Italy, at an event titled “A Redeemed Gaze: Witnesses of Hope in the Midst of War.”



Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

After four years of war and casualties, there are currently 10 million refugees in Syria. What is the situation at the humanitarian level, and how are those who have remained trying to sustain general wellbeing? The situation is definitely a dramatic one. Syria is now divided into three regions, not of political power, but of war. The northwest region, the Tartus governorate, is mostly Alawite and is relatively peaceful. The rest of the North is in the hands of rebel groups, divided between Jabhat >>

OUR MARTYRS

» al Nusra, a branch of Al Qaeda, and ISIS, the Islamic State. The South is spotted like a leopard: some regions in the hands of Bashar Assad's government, others in the hands of opposition groups. Let's look a little more closely at the situation. In Syria, lines of communication and transportation are blocked. The main roads are in the hands of rebels; big cities, for example, have a single access road. In regions controlled by Assad, they only have electricity for about six hours a day, while in other areas there is none. All of Aleppo is without water. The only way to get it is from private wells; but without electricity to draw it out, you have to have a generator. Gasoline is extremely hard to find and very expensive. This year, winter was long and harsh; you can imagine what that meant. Basic resources are now lacking; everything is now lacking. Worse than all this are the bombs: you don't know who they are coming from, because everyone is attacking each other, and when you go out, you don't know if you'll return. Even at home you're never safe, because the bombs hit homes as well. They fall day and night without ceasing: after sunset they begin, and one falls every five or six minutes. In Aleppo, which has a large Christian presence, most of the churches have been destroyed, along with some mosques.

Fr. Pizzaballa, what can one do in the face of all this?

I was there when the bombs fell in some of the working-class neighborhoods of Armenian Christians. We held their funerals, and I saw the immense weight of pain and powerlessness. An entire family was killed:

I am not among those who are crying "clash of cultures." There is no culture that corresponds to what is happening.

mother, father, and two children. We'd have to multiply this by thousands of instances every day, without ceasing. In front of all this, you try to help as much as you can. The border with

Turkey is wide open, and we get everything from there, of course through a black market; you have to have the money to buy things. Every neighborhood has its own committees to distribute necessities and collect money. Then, you try to identify areas where you can give shelter to those who are displaced. For example, when those

missiles fell, about 200 people died, but many more families ended up homeless, because the shock wave is devastating. So, you have to find places to house those who are displaced: convents, schools... and you

have to organize kitchens, mattresses, etc. There's an organization set up to try to take care of all this. It's all that you can do.

How much does religion have to do with what is happening?

In the Middle East, religion pervades everything. They don't have the concept of secularism that Western countries have. Your religious affiliation is a big part of your identity. So, to say that religion has nothing to do with it and that it's just a war between tribes is true, but it's not the whole truth, because the religious element is like the lens through which you understand the element of your identity. A person could be an atheist, but they are a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sunni or Shiite atheist. The religious factor, then, is being instrumentalized, yes, but you can't discount it. It's above all a war within Islam, between Sunnis and Shiites. It's between those from the United





A Christian boy from Mosul who now lives with his family in a camp for refugees in Erbil (Iraq).

Arab Emirates, who are mostly Sunnis, and the Shiites who give their allegiance to Iran. Syria is at the heart of all this: there is a Sunni majority, but governed by Alawites, a Shiite minority group. Then you have Iran, Iraq, Syria, and southern Lebanon that are Shiite; the Sunnis refer to this as the “strip of evil” and want to break it so they can enter Syria. In addition, there’s the international dimension, because the UAE are leaders of the Western part of the region, while the Shiites are more influenced by Russia... but I don’t want to talk about politics here. I am not among those who are crying “clash of cultures.” There is no culture that corresponds to what is happening, and, more importantly, it would be dangerous to open these frameworks of the past up again in the West, as they will not bring about anything positive. As for the persecution of Christians, we can say that Christians are not the first target,

but they are a target. When you want to homogenize a region to be like you, you have to get rid of everyone who is different. It’s a war against cultures: it’s an extreme reaction, outside of the times and of the history of a large part of Islam in how political, moral, ethical, social, and economic issues are treated. It also must be said that if there is a clear, as well as direct, intent to harm Christians, that doesn’t come from nowhere; there must be a certain formation, teaching, or system of thought that feeds it. It’s not that Islam is this, but there must be a cultural context that is the source of these mentalities, and which sustains them.

Help us to enter into the lives of the people. How could religion build a culture of dialogue, of peace?

Life is not good during war. Quality of life is bad. Then, you have to look to the future and read what signs of hope there are, because all wars create

opportunities for dialogue and relationships. You have to recognize that almost every family in Syria has someone who has died or was wounded, or they have been displaced; entire families who had built their future there had to leave everything behind. Ten million Syrians no longer live where they did at the time the war began. They had to move. Moving didn’t mean simply relocating; they had to try to rebuild a life somewhere else. Work, home, school. Young people who had begun college in Aleppo had to follow their parents, interrupting their studies, and start working to bring home some money... potential thrown away. And on top of all this a suffering that touches so many, and the frustration that comes from the difficulty in envisioning the future: how will it all end? Everyone knows that it will end, but it’s hard to see how. The dynamics of the situation are slow and very dire; it will leave deep scars. Having said this, no such situation could last forever. When it does end, they’ll have to begin to rebuild. The Middle East will begin from where it is now. Starting now, we need to make sure that hate does not become the language, or criteria, to interpret things.

What do you mean when you say the Middle East will begin again from where it is now?

I have seen the displaced families in Aleppo: poor families who had homes like shacks made space for those who were homeless. Without knowing them. They recognized each other in their common need: “We don’t have anything, but four people with nothing or eight is still nothing. Somehow we’ll help sustain each other, or if nothing else we’ll be in it together.” This is happening among Christians and Muslims, so we can see everything is not lost. I think we need to begin from this. There >>>

» are wars, and those fomenting them, because someone is providing the arms, and they are not giving them for free; there are surely complex interests that dominate the conflict. There's ISIS, for instance, cutting off the heads of Christians and even of Muslims, of anyone who is not with them. What I know, as a religious, is that I can stay side by side with people, helping. Maybe I don't always have something to give them, but I can stay there, with a word or an act of love. There's nothing else you can do. They need food, water, and electricity, but there's also the need of the heart: rebuilding, the future and life are all born from this. War cannot cancel it out; it's impossible. There will always be someone who will continue to think with his head and love with his heart. We don't have to think of great feats, but about daily realities; about the little Christian villages in northern Syria, where terrorists said, "You have to get rid of all crosses and statues, no more wine, no more liturgies," and Christians obeyed, but continue to hold on to wine to celebrate the Mass, even though it's risky, and they buried the crosses and are still praying, in carefully chosen spots because "one day we will retrieve them and we will love them even more, because they will be a sign of our life." They are farmers who know very well, with complete clarity, who they are. They know. And they live it. You begin from there.

What does it mean, in a region where Christians are persecuted, to be the "custodian" of not only the historical sign of the presence of Christ, but also of the presence of Christian experience?

To be a custodian means to care for

To be a custodian is first and foremost to love: you cannot take care of something that you don't love.

and to love that world. Safeguarding the Christian experience means making it your own. You can't just protect the stones that remind you of Jesus, you have to safeguard the memory of Jesus. Safeguarding Calvary doesn't just mean holding liturgies at Calvary, but safeguarding the meaning of Calvary. Calvary is Christ on the cross: it's forgiveness, reconciliation, and the gift of self. To be a custodian is first and foremost to love: you cannot take care of something that you don't love. To understand who the custodians are, you need to think of them more like a mother or father who care for their families because they love them, so they take care of them, they want to protect and nurture them in every aspect of life. Translated into the concrete reality of today, avoiding sentimentalism, it means to stay with people, to help, supporting schools and hospitals. If I think, for example, about Syria today,

it means simply staying there. No one is making us stay. But just staying is important. A brother who was kidnapped later returned, saying, "If I leave, then my people will leave." "But you're alone." "No, I'm not alone; my people are here." "My"... In other words, it's not just staying there to do various things, but staying with a certain attitude: one that is free and serene. I always use the word "redeemed" because it means that, before all else, you have been touched by redemption; you have had experience of your personal salvation, and this becomes the life and the criteria with which you look at everything. If you are in love, you see everything in a positive light. If you have strength—which you receive, it's not something you had before—it allows you to see that even when things are difficult, you can have an outlook that is free and won't allow you to demean yourself. In a way it forces you to see others as a beautiful reality, or at least as a reality with which you can do something, with which you can build something, always.





Some Yazidis escaping the advance of the Caliphate. Many of them have been trapped in the Jebel Sinjar mountains.

You have said that at the heart of your being there is “love: love not so that things will change, but because they exist.” Can you help us to understand this better?

For a Franciscan, knowledge always comes through experience; it’s never an intellectual exercise. I was sent to the Holy Land 25 years ago. I didn’t want to go, but my superior told me, “So long as I am the Provincial, you are the one who has to obey. So you obey.” And so I went there, because he was right... It was worth it! It is always worth it. There, I began to appreciate and above all came to know this world that I wasn’t familiar with before. I spoke only Italian; I didn’t know anything. I found myself in the midst of this place that was so strange, even a bit hostile. I was 25 years old and at 25 you want to change the world; you also need the world to feel useful. However, when I first arrived, there wasn’t much for me to do. The beginning wasn’t easy. My first question was: Who’s making me do it? Why am I here? Other people, especially the Jews, asked me, “Why

are you here? Where in the Gospel does it say that you should be here? I was constantly wrestling with questions of faith. Little by little, you begin to appreciate the world in which you live: you begin to see, after the first hardships and difficulties, a lot of beauty and a radical way of life that strikes you. Little by little this interest becomes participation in a world that overtakes you and that you love, though you don’t like everything about it. In the Middle East, there are plenty of relationships of hate, but in the mix there is also a world that you love and that you feel belongs to you. That’s it: there aren’t many other explanations. You’d like to change things precisely because you love it there, but in the end you are always aware that when you love it, you love it and that’s it, you don’t even want to change it. You just love it. You always try to contribute something, but you are a part of it, and it’s a part of you. And that’s just fine.

What allows you to “just love it”?
Love makes no presumptions. When

you love a person, you love them for what they are. Not because it’s useful for something or because you get something out of it or because there is an answer to “why.” You love them and that’s it. That’s my experience. A little at a time, maturing there, in that world, I was able to get to know it, enter into it and love it. Then there are the individual experiences, encounters, relations and relationships that reality brings about. You don’t make reality on your own. For me, there were plenty of failed relationships, but others—they are few, but very rich and intense—that gave me a lot; they changed my life. I will always be indebted to those Jews and Christians who encouraged me, helped me to grow, helped me to read by giving me different perspectives and ways of looking at things. Without being aware [of the change], you realize that you are already part of that world. Of course, there are plenty of things that you’d like to change or that you’ve changed a little bit, but if they don’t change you don’t get frustrated, because those relationships still nourish you and give you life. It’s not the prospect of the result but the relationship that nourishes you, however shaky it can be. For me, as a religious, all of this becomes part of the experience of faith; it’s within a wider relationship. My faith life, after those relationships, changed radically, because their questions become mine as well. All of this has created an environment that’s neither perfect nor ideal, that always has room for growth, but that nourishes you; that you love and that—even though it’s incomplete, even though you want it to change—satisfies you.

What can we do?
Concretely, you can’t do much. With regard to Syria, you can give financial support to the select organizations that have managed to continue >>



Before the persecutions, the Christians in Iraq numbered more than 1,000,000. Today, they are less than 400,000.

» their work. For those who have faith, however, certainly pray. And one other thing: I think it's important to talk about it. Media plays a very important role today. After the first reports in the newspapers, after the first few weeks, everyone stopped talking about [the violence]. As if it didn't exist. These days, what's real is dictated by what's in the newspapers, not by what happens. We need to get the media to understand that what's happening is real. Even if they don't write about it. It's important, then, to talk about [the crisis], from the media to the political scene, to the international community. Still, the constant sense that people have is one of powerlessness.

What relationships are there with other Christian communities?

In the Middle East, as you know, relations between Christian communities have not always been ideal. However, Pope Francis uses this expression, "an ecumenism of blood." These barbarians, when they murder Christians, don't distinguish a

Catholic from an Orthodox; they kill them because they are Christian. This has helped the Churches to associate with one another. They come together much more easily, they try to work together as much as they can. The brother I spoke about earlier was left alone. In that area, his is the only Catholic village—all the others are Orthodox—but he goes to celebrate Mass even there, because they ask him: come bury our dead, come do baptisms, come celebrate the Mass. In war, no one cares if you're Catholic or Orthodox. The war has broken down a lot of barriers.

What keeps them getting up out of bed every morning and doing daily tasks, knowing that it's not likely that they will finish what they're planning? Then, what can help us, who are comfortable, to live out the faith?

I'll answer both questions together. Everything comes through experience. No matter what it is. The faith that you received as a child is not a lived faith until it becomes an experience

of life for you. It sits there as something that's perhaps beautiful, but never becomes an experience that touches you at the depths of your being, that overtakes you. This is true for everything. For you who are here, as well as for us who are there. In comfort or in war, in good times or bad, what gives you strength—strength comes from within—doesn't come from other people. Certainly, the circumstances of those who give their lives for the Lord are rare, unique; but what matters, in any circumstance, is experience. Your life changes, so long as faith has sunk down into your experience, if it doesn't stay at the level of an idea, something abstract that you don't assimilate and that doesn't "bother" you—in other words, if it doesn't push you out of yourself. It's the same for us and for you: you know things won't change all that much, but you feel the desire to live. That desire prevails over everything. And then, who said that things won't change? Maybe I can't change the course of the war in Syria, but I will change that little that I can do: I will have something to cook for that woman who ran out of gas, or that family that has nothing left to eat. Something changes. There is no circumstance that can keep me from living my life in its fullness. Circumstances can get in my way, I can even be in prison without seeing anyone, but they can't take away the desire to dream. There is always that something inside of you that no one can take away. That is, if you have it inside of you. This comes from experience, it's something inside of you that helps you to look at everything outside of you with a gaze that isn't already dead. Someone who has quit dreaming, who has quit looking and believing that they can do something, is dead inside. As long as you are alive inside, nothing can stop you. **T**

HOPE CANNOT BE KIDNAPPED

“What is the purpose for which this is happening to me?” This was the question that accompanied **GERMÁN VELUTINI**, a banker from Caracas, during the period from his kidnapping to his liberation. Here we recount the story of the eleven months that gave him a new affection to his life and his country.

BY ALEJANDRO MARIUS

Venezuela’s crisis affects all of us in one way or another, both economically, with the great shortage of oil and the high rates of inflation and devaluation, and socially, with almost 25,000 violent deaths in 2014 alone. There is increasing hopelessness among the population, accompanied by campaigns of politicized propaganda, rhetoric, and the sound of sirens. In moments like these, there is nothing more incisive than an experience, being able to listen to people who communicate certainty and



Germán García Velutini.

can give the reasons for the meaning of their life and for their hope.

Meeting Germán García Velutini, one’s first impression is not that of a man who has had a career in finance in one of the most successful banks in Venezuela. Instead, one is flooded by the peace of his gaze and by his smile which is full of hope. This can seem contradictory, given the tragedies in his life. He had a beautiful family with three children, but fifteen years ago his wife died. Then in 2009 he was kidnapped for eleven months. However, unlike »»

» many Venezuelans in this crisis, what prevails in Velutini is not complaint, but gratitude to God for what he has been given to live.

“For almost a year, I was isolated from my family and friends. I never spoke with anyone: total silence. I never saw a human face. Only on very few occasions, some hooded people entered the three foot by six foot cell where they kept me prisoner. It was a totally closed space, with no natural light, only a ventilator and an air duct. The food and sanitary conditions were truly difficult. But the hardest and most humiliating thing was to feel like merchandise in a context of violence that made no distinctions between political position or social class.”

THE BIBLE AND PIECES OF PAPER. This is how Velutini described, in only a few words, his eleven months of silence. Only the change in the overhead light bulb marked the difference between day and night. He could not exchange a word with anyone, because his prisoners communicated only through little pieces of paper. “In a kidnapping, the control is continual: the victim completely loses control of his actions, and the family is at the mercy of the whims of the kidnapppers, who can do whatever they want.” In the midst of all the uncertainty about what would happen, God manifested Himself in a concrete way.

After many requests, the kidnapppers finally allowed Velutini a Bible, which then accompanied him in his journey of interior *asceticism*. Starting from that moment, the word of God became the key for discovering the meaning of the circumstances through which

he was living. “Once again I give thanks to God, who through my kidnapppers brought me to reflect on His Word, which is easy to read and understand. I am also grateful to the kidnapppers. At that time, I never could have imagined how wonderful those months would be, listening to Our Lord.”

In such an extreme situation—but also in what each of us lives when things do not go as we wish—the need to discover the meaning of life emerges. In the words of Viktor Frankl, “There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one’s life.” “Our Father knows what we need! And most of the time it turns out not to be what *we* think we need,” Velutini writes in his book about the kidnapping (*Dios en mi secuestro*). He continues: “We believe we need many things, but reflecting carefully, on those occasions of the fullest relationship with our Father God and our most beloved Mother, we understand that what we considered fundamental for our life is not so. Is this perhaps why we were not granted what we had requested? What do I truly need?”

Thus, in the immense solitude of prison, the fruit of a grace was born. “I found myself filled to the brim by a certainty: my solitary life, unable to exchange a word with even one other human being, had a meaning. The question to ask myself wasn’t ‘Why me? Why is my family suffering?’ Rather, the question was: ‘What is the purpose for which this is happening to me? What is the purpose for which my family is suffering?’ Then I discovered that the ‘purpose’

“Hope and faith served me, but I don’t know how I had them. They were given to me.”



of life is to ‘serve’ our neighbor, and know that our prayers reach everyone.”

As the days went by, an “epistolary” dialogue began with his jailers: together with his meditation on the Bible, Velutini began to communicate his own experience to them. “They always took the pieces of paper. And I thought that they too were receiving something good, that their way of looking at life would be able to change. Even today I still think the same. I am certain that something reached my jailers, who, seeing the example of dignity that I sought to show them through my attitude and these writings, felt that something in them was changing.”

Velutini had been educated to Christianity from the time he was a little boy, but he confesses that this is not enough for truly explaining his experience. “Hope and faith served me, but I don’t know how I had them. They were given to me. They were a gift.” He is sure that even though faith, hope, and love are a gift of God, we have to live them personally, cultivate them, and give them a meaning. “In December they returned to giving



GERMÁN

Este 25 de diciembre, día de Navidad, se cumplen 10 meses del secuestro que te mantiene separado de tu trabajo, de tu comunidad y de tu familia. Sabemos, por tu profunda fe cristiana, que cuentas con toda la fortaleza moral para soportar semejante embate, sin embargo, sirvan estas fechas para hacerte llegar muy especialmente, nuestra palabra de amor y de unión.

Cuentan algunos relatos, que en la Noche Buena los pastores, a pesar del frío, cuidaban sus rebaños al aire libre contemplando el cielo cubierto de estrellas. Así te queremos ver, libre, junto a tu familia que te ama con todo el fervor de este mundo.

A nuestro papá Germán García-Velutini y a todas las familias venezolanas que sufren el cautiverio de un ser querido.



www.liberenagerman.com

THAT GOOD NIGHT The letter that Velutini's children wrote on Christmas Day, in the tenth month of his captivity.

Alegría [an NGO founded and led by the Jesuits—Ed.]. There is no reason to create something new if one can rely on an already-existing effort. Then he adds: “What is the use of my having fifteen minutes of glory, and being a person in the spotlight, when what is needed here is for everyone to do their work and shoulder their responsibility seriously?”

RETURNING TO WORK. Only two weeks after his liberation, Velutini returned to work in his office and continued living in Venezuela, doing his duty, and testifying to what he experienced. “In response to this avalanche that is falling on us, we Venezuelans think we are unable to resist it, much less overcome it and we share a common false consolation that there will be someone to help us overcome this problem: a family member, a friend, some stranger, a foreign country, a national organization, or in many cases, the political leader of the moment. Instead, what we have to understand is that by shouldering our own responsibility and working together we can resolve the problems and enable our family, community, city and country to make progress. In the world, in a country like Venezuela, and especially in a city like Caracas that suffers terrible violence, we do not look down on anyone. We know that Our Lord protects us from ‘evil,’ and guarantees that He is always in our hearts. We accept ‘the destiny that one does not choose,’ and are not afraid in the streets and in life’s worries. We dedicate our lives to loving and serving.”

We have encountered a man of faith who invites us to make love our criterion for living every relationship. In a country where many people walk with their head hung low, his experience demonstrates that the hope of a man, and thus of a whole nation, cannot be kidnapped. **T**

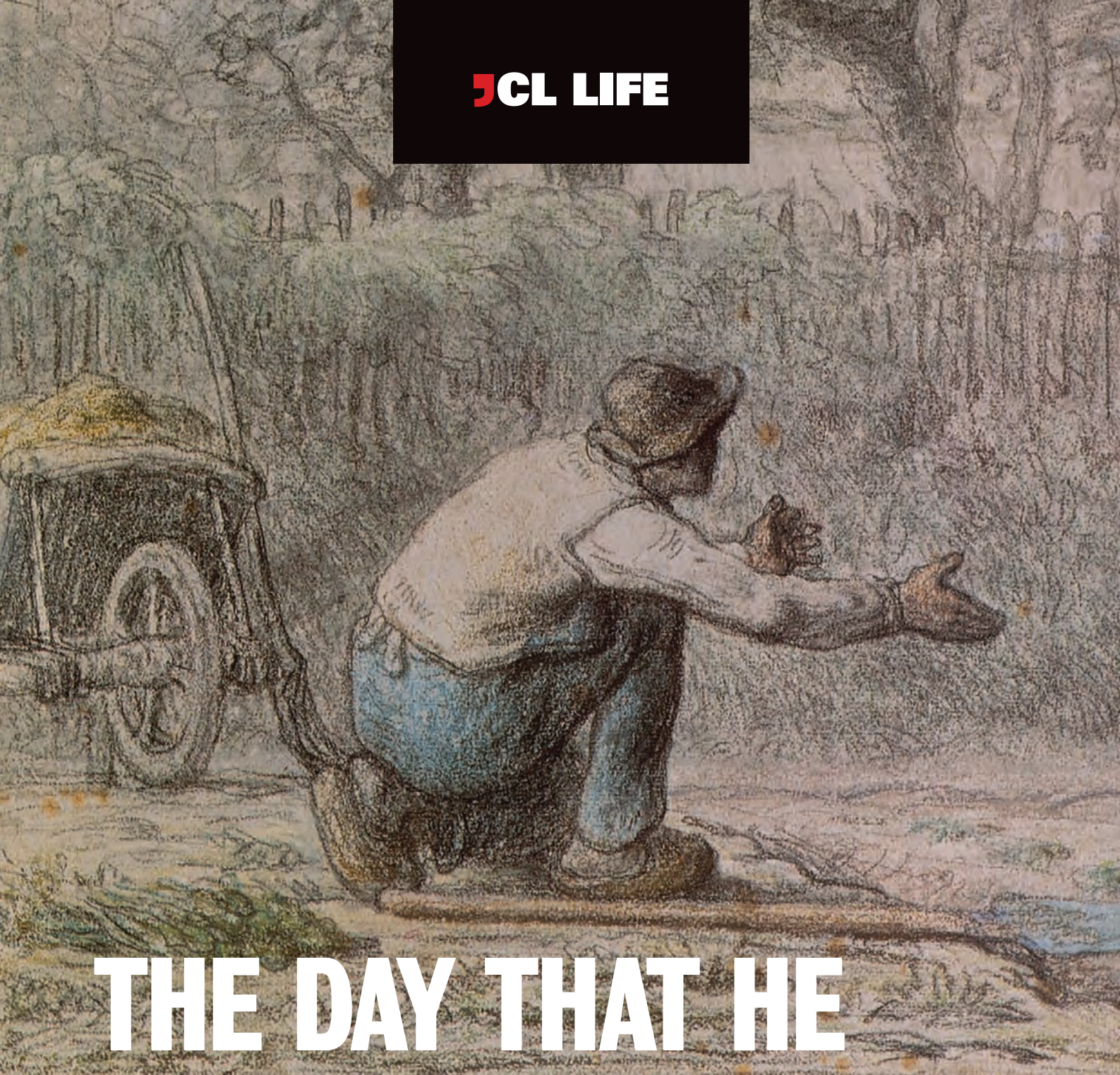
me the Bible, and they also gave me an image of Saint Michael the Archangel. After three months of the hard-line regime, this fact convinced me that the kidnapers were children of God and that it was not my place to judge them.”

When he was freed, the kidnapers wrote a longer message: “No revenge or persecution.” So he asked them for the Bible and had them read Matthew 5:45: “But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.” After reading it, one of the kidnapers put his hand on Velutini’s back and embraced him. Today Velutini says he has forgiven them, does not hold a grudge against them, and has not set out to hunt them down, even though, very humanly speaking, he says he does not know what he would feel should he someday find himself face to face with them. He recognizes that these people are not human refuse, that they have a heart and feelings, the harm they did to him and his family notwithstanding.

This is the attitude of a man who wants to continue on his journey, a

person who is not defined by hatred and ill will, but by love. Forgiveness is the starting point for reaching true justice, instead of increasing violence and the “eye for an eye” mentality that leaves us blind. One thinks above all of political prisoners and students who are deprived of their freedom in this country. How will they emerge? What adults will they meet to help them begin their life again? This challenge faces all of us as a society: we must seek justice that is born of forgiveness and mercy, as John Paul II said in his message for the World Day of peace after the September 11th terrorist attack: “There is no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.”

A short time after his liberation, Velutini’s friend proposed that he set up a foundation to help the families and victims of kidnapping. Velutini thought carefully about it and then decided against it for several reasons, the most important being his belief that the true possibility for avoiding cases like his comes through educating the country’s children and youth, and this is already being done by Fe y



THE DAY THAT HE HAPPENED IN MY LIFE



At this year's Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of CL, Paolo watched the video of the lesson called "Recognizing Christ," but in 1994 he was in the actual audience as Fr. Giussani spoke of Kafka, John and Andrew, and virginity... words that changed his life forever.

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

Jean-François Millet, *First Steps*, 1858.
Museum of Art, Cleveland, USA.



into a personal relationship with Him. For the first time, I saw and discovered Christ in direct relationship with me. This was the fact of the matter. Everything took on more weight, everything that had happened before and that I had not yet understood. However, to explain this to you, I have to go back to the previous year, to the autumn of 1993.” During a meeting with the CLU leaders, Fr. Giussani arrived unexpectedly. For twenty minutes the university students talked about the friendship they were living, how exciting it all was, and what an impact it was having on reality: the “Happening’s” of young people, the vacations, the booths offering assistance to first-year students—all of the opportunities for proposing this engaging friendship. At a certain point Fr. Giussani said, “I don’t give two cents about your friendship,” and he got up and left.



Paolo Trucco.

It was a challenge: What was at the core—their life together or what generated it? Everybody was stunned, riveted in their seats. Paolo recounts: “His words stayed with me and gnawed at me because it was as if my father, someone who loved me, had said them to me directly. He didn’t tell us what our error was, even though there were things to correct. This was not his primary concern. We understood that for him, the “center” was elsewhere.”

WHAT IS ENOUGH? The university students began to get together, focusing on themselves, on their own personal lives. Then those Spiritual Exercises happened. “For me, it was a Copernican revolution. I realized that I could experience not just the beauty that comes from Jesus, but the relationship with Jesus in the same way that Giussani lived it. I left saying to myself: ‘I don’t want to miss out on this.’ Two >>>

On the afternoon of Saturday, December 10, 1994, in the Rimini convention center, Fr. Giussani began his lesson for the Spiritual Exercises for university students with a quote from Kafka: “There is a point of arrival, but no way to get there.” He went on to tell the story of Andrew and John; then later, as he read the letter by Zibo’s friend, who was dying of AIDS, Giussani was so moved that he could no longer speak, and had to ask

another to finish reading it. The two hours of that lesson were amazing, dizzying, because each word shone with the living meaning of existence.

For Paolo, who at the time was twenty-six years old and had recently graduated with a degree in Engineering, that day was the high point for his life. “That afternoon was my discovery of Jesus, that is, the discovery that I did not just live in a human reality that had been generated by Him, but that He reached out to draw me

» thousand years of history was burned up in two hours, because this was happening to me in that moment. Giussani was telling me that not only was there something more important than our friendship, but that He was inside of our friendship, wanting a personal relationship with me. Jesus was becoming my friend.

That afternoon I had the same experience of fullness as the apostles within the life that I had lived.” Nothing was excluded, nothing was mistaken. “What Giussani had said the year before—‘I don’t give two cents about your friendship’—which up to that point I had only understood intellectually, became flesh for me.”

ADULT LIFE. It was a total change of course. Paolo and a friend had been working at Milan Polytechnic University with the rector, who had invited them to collaborate with him because of a relationship of esteem that had been built up over the years. “It wasn’t enough. It wasn’t enough that he appreciated our way of doing things. We wanted him to meet the human reality in which He who made us live this way revealed Himself.” It was the beginning of adult life.

Paolo’s friends were getting married and starting families, and they were helping each other find work after “Tangentopoli” (the wide spread political scandal of the 1990’s in Italy). In April of 1995, Paolo went to see a friend and told him about what had been happening to him for the past six months. “Since December I have been becoming more aware of Christ’s companionship in my life, and everything has become more

“That afternoon I had the same experience of fullness as the apostles within the life that I had lived.”

intense, truer. I feel that this can nourish my life. I desire to be able to recognize Him always.” His friend told him, “This has a stable form in life: it is called virginity.” This was just what he needed to hear.

“First virginity happens to you, then later you can put a name to it, because first you encounter Jesus. From that moment on, I began to say that the world could fall apart all around me, but I never wanted to let go of this thing. I didn’t have the perception that it was something different from what I was living. Slowly but surely I saw that Christ was changing me. I saw Him, I recognized Him.”

Almost naturally, as his friends got married, Paolo began his vocational journey in the *Memores Domini*. Twenty-one years later, on another Sat-

urday afternoon, and another Spiritual Exercises, that lesson happened again, but there was no sense of déjà vu or mere nostalgia. “He simply happened again. The Lord responded to what was happening to me, Paolo Trucco. Today. Those words are not mere content that one looks into more deeply. In all these years I had read and re-read that lesson, but in April 2015 in Rimini, Christ helped me and got me excited about being centered, or rather, de-centered, as the Pope said.” What does that mean? “Not only that I can fall away from the relationship with Him, but essentially that Christ overflows and when it happens He surprises me. It is an event that shifts me.” The same dizziness, and not only two thousand years were burned away, but also the last twenty-one: it was the surprise of a new beginning.

SHIFTED BY HIM. On Friday evening and Saturday morning, Carrón returned to the fact that being de-





Rimini, April 25th. The viewing of the video "Recognizing Christ" at the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises of Communion and Liberation.

centered can scandalize people. On March 7th the Pope spoke about a wound. "And Saturday afternoon, Giussani told us, 'Whatever your position, change it if it needs to be changed! Pray that the Lord have mercy on your coldness because I, too, have to change every morning.' There is no way around it: when Christ happens, He challenges you. And Giussani told us this because it happened to him, was happening to him.

It can scandalize you if you are not free, simple, that is, if you remain attached to yourself. The Pope told us this as the first thing: 'Be free!' Then came the recommendations. But what is more desirable in life than being shifted by Him who happens? Saturday afternoon this happened again: letting myself be drawn by this otherness that, when It happens, attracts me. I said again: 'You are worth my life and You surprise me.' He exerts the fascinating at-

traction that still causes me, twenty years later, to pursue Him."

After twenty years of the experience in the *Memores Domini*, with work and life in the house, it may seem that everything is settled or static. "There is the risk of skepticism. Things will never be the way I want them to be and thus I must resign myself to living according to my own measure. When Jesus happens again, as He did at the Spiritual Exercises, this alternative opens up: being free and, at the ripe old age of 48, childlike, saying *yes* and letting Him take me by the hand, or letting His happening be mediated and chilled by my own measure for myself, by my understanding of my vocation, the Church, and the Movement. But this event has happened

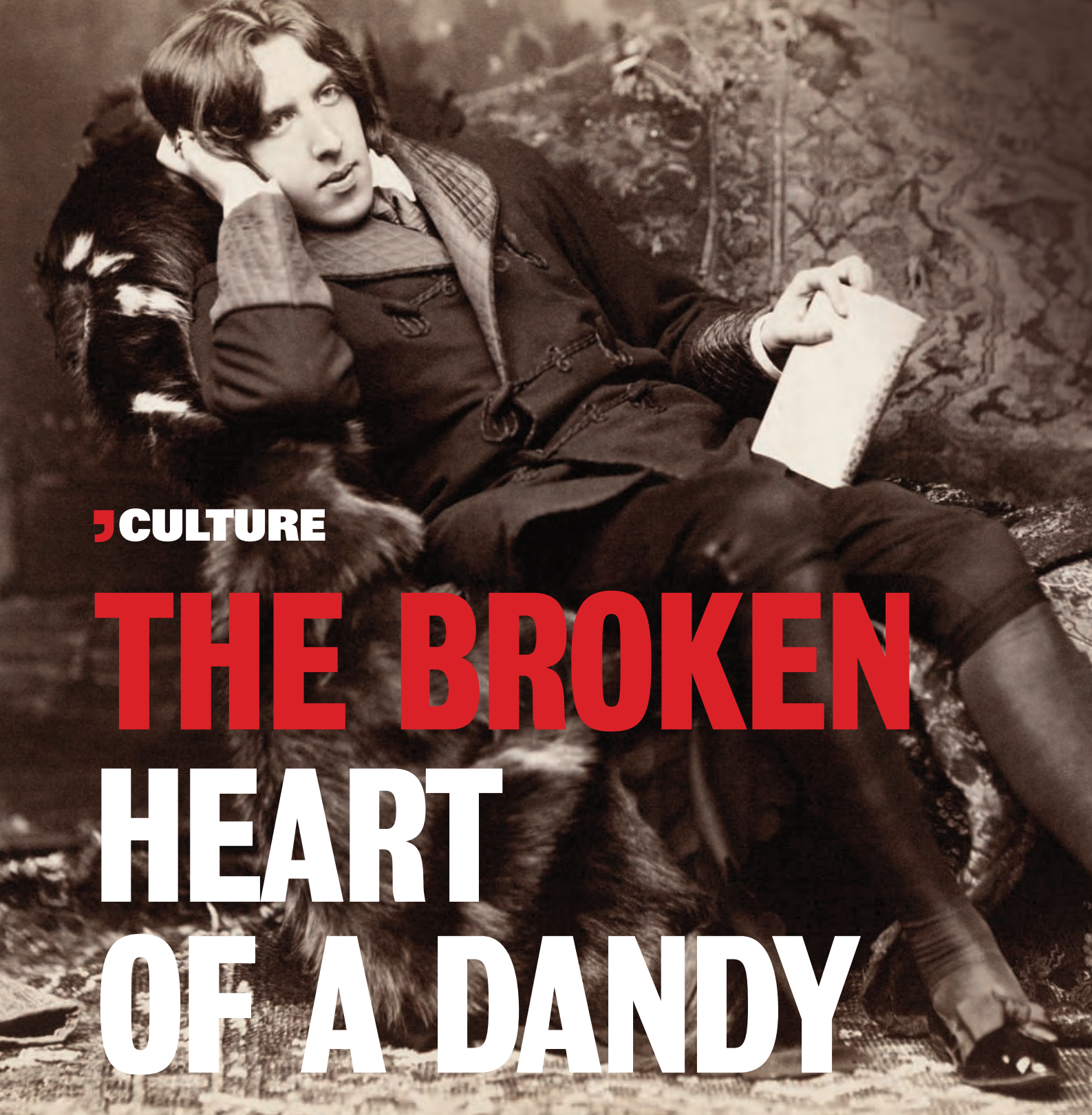
again today through what Christ is saying to me through Carrón and the Pope."

In the two previous lessons, Carrón had talked about the Resurrection and then returned to the March 7th audience, speaking of Pentecost. What was the connection? "I returned from Rome enthusiastic. I had no problems. But Carrón was putting me in front of that event again with the profoundness of an experience that I did not yet have. I asked myself whether I should follow him, or whether I had an objection. The best way to oppose is not to argue with someone but to make a side comment. In any case, I felt 'estranged' or alienated, but that estrangement was the most desirable thing: it was Christ who once again was making space for Himself in my life. This is His power: He can rebuild the simplicity that enables you to recognize Him. Friday evening and Saturday morning were part of this event."

NOT JUST A TRIP. Watching Giussani's face and listening to him speak, Paolo cried as he had back in 1994. "This was another great gift: Giussani, and his contemporaneity to my life. His experience as he offered it to me, twenty years later, through the video, is pertinent to me today. It was not just a trip down memory lane: he is my friend now.

Speaking of the audience with the Pope, Carrón said that there is not just content, but also a method: Francis not only said things, but made them happen. Returning home I thought that in recognizing Christ, Carrón treated me the same way the Pope did." What is more desirable? **T**

"This is His power: He can rebuild the simplicity that enables you to recognize Him."



CULTURE

THE BROKEN HEART OF A DANDY

He's one of the most elusive and least understood authors of our age. Everyone knows of his extravagance; few know of his suffering, his relationship with sin and beauty, or his deathbed conversion. An exhibit at the London Encounter has been dedicated to **OSCAR WILDE**, and it offers a portrait of "a soul" and its hope.

BY GIUSEPPE PEZZINI

Oscar Wilde. It's a name that often triggers only vague memories from high school or, at most (and depending on your allegiances), provokes either distaste or sounds of approval. During his life, in which he was a (voluntary) hostage to his reputation as a "dandy" devoted to pleasure, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)



became one of the most elusive and least understood authors of the past two centuries. He was born in Dublin to an influential family in Irish high society, studied at Magdalen College in Oxford, and quickly became, thanks to his poems, plays, and stories—and especially through his intense activity as a polemicist—an extravagant celebrity

amidst the dry English society of the end of the 1800s. He possessed an exaggerated taste for clothing and a razor-sharp wit. His aphorisms are unforgettable, for example: “I love talking about nothing; it’s the only thing I know anything about.” He spent his life chasing success and fortune, painstakingly constructing a mask that continues even unto today which misleads those who don’t look carefully.

Outside of literary circles, few know about Wilde’s inglorious end: how he was violently knocked from his pedestal by a hypocritical society that was ready to forgive anything except a scandal. Very few know about (or remember) his public shaming, the trial and prison sentence. Officially, the charge was sodomy, but perhaps his true “crime” can really be found in his fierce criticism of the materialism of his contemporaries. His conviction was followed by two interminable years in Her Majesty’s prisons, where he ended up writing two of his most beautiful works, *De Profundis* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Also little-known are Wilde’s infatuation with the Catholic Church—an interest, first stoked at John Henry Newman’s Oxford, that stubbornly persisted throughout his tormented life—and his deathbed conversion in the squalor of a cheap Paris hotel. These are not the only aspects of Oscar Wilde’s life that are not widely known: anyone who has read his fairy tales, or *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, cannot help but perceive something true and luminous that defies both his followers’ and his critics’ reductions.

Few are those who recognize or dare to admit it, but among them we ought to cite a critic above all suspicion, James Joyce, who in a harsh critique of *Dorian Gray* writes: “Here we touch the pulse of Wilde’s art—sin. He deceived himself into believing that he was the bearer of the

good news of neo-paganism to an enslaved people. His own distinctive qualities [...] he placed at the service of a theory of beauty that, according to him, was to bring back the Golden Age and the joy of the world’s youth. But if some truth adheres to his subjective interpretations of Aristotle, to his restless thought that proceeds by sophisms rather than syllogisms, [...] at its very base is the truth inherent in the soul of Catholicism: that man cannot reach the divine heart except through that sense of separation and loss called sin.” It is sin, then, that is the “pulse” of Wilde’s art, along with suffering.

A HEART MADE OF LEAD. Wilde’s Happy Prince, in the fairy tale by the same name, tellingly says, “When I was alive and had a human heart [...] I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here, so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead, yet I cannot choose but to weep.”

Sin and suffering are key themes in Wilde’s writing, as is the heart of his human experience. His life was one prolonged attempt to, on the one hand, kill his “soul,” which, like the portrait of Dorian Gray, reveals to him the signs of his sin, and, on the other hand, to flee from the experience of suffering. In *De Profundis* he writes, “I used to live entirely for pleasure. >>>

» I shunned suffering and sorrow of every kind. I hated both. I resolved to ignore them as far as possible. [...] My mother, who knew life as a whole, used to often quote Goethe's lines [...]. 'Who never ate his bread in sorrow, Who never spent the midnight hours weeping and waiting for the morrow—He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.' I did not understand. I remember quite well how I used to tell her that I did not want to eat my bread in sorrow. [...] I had no idea that it was one of the special things that the Fates had in store for me."

HIS OLDEST SON. Sin and sorrow, which Wilde was destined to live through, were not, however, the last word; they were, instead, a road. They were a road to the experience of beauty that Wilde longed for throughout his life. As many have noted, Wilde's theory of aesthetics was not merely a run-of-the-mill hedonism; if anything, it was an attempt to redeem reality through art, beauty, and imagination. It was a sad attempt that over the long term engendered a distrust in reality and a schizophrenic alienation that couldn't help but have tragic results. For Wilde, the beginning of his road of sorrow was like a return to reality, which continued in the experience of being stripped of everything and, finally, became prayer. It was a tiny opening through which "salvation" could come.

"But I still had my children [After the scandal, Wilde was never again able to see Cyril, his beloved oldest son]. Suddenly they were taken away from me by law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, 'The body of a child is as the body of the Lord: I am worthy of neither.' That moment seemed to save me." The image that best represents Wilde's human journey is a



The Happy Prince
illustrated by
Brad Holland
(Illustrations
created for the
exhibition at
the London
Encounter).

broken heart. Wilde later spoke of how his heart was broken by the years in prison, along with the mysterious link between sorrow and love and the discovery that, by humbly accepting sorrow, a man can truly become himself and find his "soul." Pain can be rebelliously refused or stoically tolerated, but only a broken heart opens up to the possibility of seeing the hypothesis of salvation on the horizon of a man's life, as Wilde writes in the heartrending *Ballad of Reading Gaol*: "Ah! happy day they whose hearts can break / And peace of pardon win! / How else may man make straight his plan / And cleanse his soul from Sin? / How else but through a broken heart / May Lord Christ enter in?" Wilde's Christ is gnostic, one who is human but not God, but One in front of whom he would eventually bow down, converting in the last moments before death. It is a Christ who teaches nothing, but "makes things change"; who unites suffering and beauty in Himself, redeeming both, a Christ that purifies the "ugliness of sin" and reveals the "beauty of sorrow" to those who come into contact with His person. This was the true discovery of Wilde's life, which was mysteriously prophesied by his writing, especially in his *Happy Prince*.

"Beauty and Sorrow" is the title of

the exhibition that the CL community in England prepared for the second annual London Encounter (June 6, 2015). At the heart of the exhibit is the story of the Happy Prince, told through original illustrations drawn by American illustrator Brad Holland who has worked for such publications as *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New York Times*.

TO OPEN THE DOOR. The fairy tale, written during the happiest time of Wilde's life, tells of a wealth that strips itself away to become visible only to the eyes of God and of a broken heart welcomed into Paradise. It's a prophecy, but it also expresses the hope that those who worked on the exhibition said were the greatest gifts of their encounter with Wilde. As Rowan Williams, Patron of this year's London Encounter, wrote in the preface of a new edition of *The Happy Prince* (published by Edizioni Nuages, Milan): "Written with a musical clarity that still demands attention, the story opens the door to a vision of the truth that Wilde himself did not have the courage to believe in completely until the end of his life. The story tells us, though, that Wilde earnestly desired that this vision was true even before he understood—with his own heart broken—that it was true. The story still has the power to open that door (and that desire) to many readers." **T**

LISA'S THIRST

Tor Bella Monaca, Rome. A high school in a working-class suburb in the unmistakable atmosphere of the last days of the school year—a decidedly remarkable school year. Teresa, who teaches Italian literature and Latin, looks at her assistant and thinks back to what began in class just a few months ago, when the attack in Paris interrupted life in the classroom. There was even fear amidst the headlines and threats from ISIS: “We will strike Rome as well.” There were days of panic, enough to decide to cancel a field trip to the Imperial Forum. Along with the fear was the stream of questions from the students, on Islam, God, Christianity, freedom of speech and of thought...

One day, Lisa jumps up: “Teacher, I don’t think that what the cartoonists of *Charlie Hebdo* did, making fun of Mohammed, is freedom. Last summer I discovered that freedom isn’t bringing others down, it’s living for an ideal... I don’t know exactly what [freedom] is, but it can’t be this. I’ve seen that it’s much more.” Teresa looks at the young, shy, and usually quiet girl with surprise. That summer she had come for the first time to a GS vacation, and Teresa was the very one who had invited her. “The father of one of her friends had died,” Teresa tells us. “After the funeral, Lisa came to me to say, ‘Miss, what you said, that reality is positive, isn’t true, because people die.’ I had simply responded by saying for me, ‘positive’ means that it’s full of meaning, and I invited her to the vacation.” Lisa signed up that same afternoon.

NOW TERESA, IN AWE, LISTENED TO HER SPEAK ABOUT FREEDOM. She would be even more amazed when she heard Pope Francis say the same things as the 15-year-old girl. In class, the discussions continue each day. They decided to organize a series of talks, inviting guests and witnesses to speak about ISIS, the Middle East, and Christians being persecuted. Their questions grew. One morning, Teresa entered the classroom and a boy told her in front of everyone that he no longer wanted to be Christian: “I refuse to recognize a God who lets his children be massacred like this.” Once again, it’s Lisa who leaves her speechless: “I was thinking: When these men will have killed thousands of people, what will they have left? When they have reached their goal, what will they do? It won’t be enough to make them happy. At that point, they’ll discover what I discovered, that the heart is insatiable desire. We are all afraid of them, but I know with certainty that their heart is the same as mine. Nothing will be enough to quench their thirst.”

A FEW WEEKS LATER, Teresa is speaking with Lisa’s father, the parent representative for the class. He shares with her that he was very stuck by something that happened during a lunch with the family, at Lisa’s grandparents’ house. “We were talking about ISIS, and everyone was saying what they thought; and at a certain point Lisa burst out saying, ‘The heart of those men is like mine. Only the infinite is enough for them.’ We were all shocked.” He above all, for it’s rare that Lisa speaks up, especially at family gatherings. “But what really threw me is how she answered me,” he continued. “I told her that she spoke that way only because she is young, and later she would realize that the world works very differently...” And what did she say? “She looked at me and said, ‘You are my father, but you still haven’t discovered what I am discovering now: what it is to be human.’”



ARTIMONDO

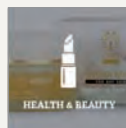
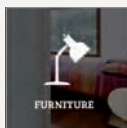
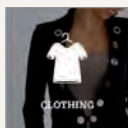
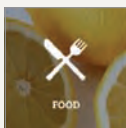
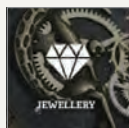
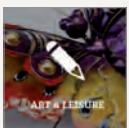
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