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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



CUBA

# THE SEED OF DIALOGUE

The diary of a journey to Havana for the presentation of Fr. Luigi Giussani's biography. A place where many things are changing after the Pope's visit.

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by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

CLOSE UP

**AN OPEN SPACE**

A report from Cuba where things previously impossible are now happening. A new openness to the Church and in the Church. Including the small CL community and the presentation of Fr. Giussani's biography.



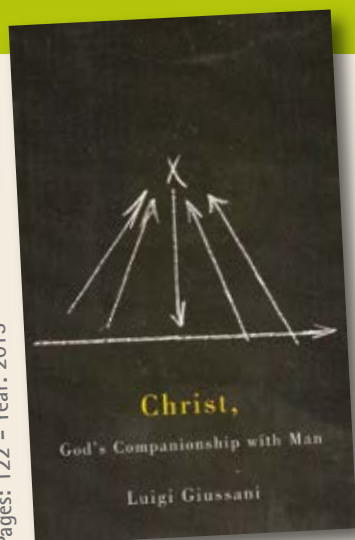
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**LUIGI GIUSSANI**

This volume is a selection of the most significant writings by Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005), founder of the Italian Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation, which is practiced in 80 countries around the world.

Presented by Julián Carrón, Giussani's successor as head of Communion and Liberation, *Christ, God's Companionship with Man* is the most succinct introduction to the breadth of Giussani's thought, including

memorable passages from works such as *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, *Why the Church?*, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, and *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Many speak of Giussani as a friendly presence, a man who believed that it was possible to live in faith every day and in any circumstance. As a writer and religious scholar who was deeply devoted to his work, Giussani's teachings and reflections have come to generate worldwide recognition and support.



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# A SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP

**T**he first chapter of *Disarming Beauty*, Julián Carrón's new book (which has just been released in English, following after the Italian, the Spanish, and Portuguese versions), concludes with words that were said three years ago in reference to the situation in Europe: "Our desire is that Europe become a space of freedom for the encounter among truth seekers. This is worth working for." At the time, the appeal may have seemed somewhat generic, almost a moral exhortation. The truth is that we're seeing the need for and the concreteness of such an aspiration more and more. And not only on the "Old Continent."


The need for open spaces, where "your freedom, which is also mine, can be defended," as the Catalan journalist Pilar Rahola said in one of the most beautiful presentation of the book, is made even more painfully apparent by the crisis and crumbling of long-standing certainties that we're living through. Spaces are needed where each person can offer a contribution, propose a way of thinking, or witness to a way of living that helps us to face all the current problems.

Life today has become a great struggle at every level of every context: from the broader sphere of politics to life in society to the daily life of each person. Still, if there's anything good in this situation, it's that this need for open spaces makes all of us less presumptuous and more open to seeking, ready to truly open up our personal experience to others, and to dig for every kernel of truth in our experience, along the lines of that very concrete definition of dialogue that Fr. Giussani once gave us: not "dialectic, [...] a more or less lucid clash of ideas and mentalities," but rather a "mutual communication of ourselves. The emphasis is not on ideas, but on the person as such, on freedom. Our dialogue is life, and ideas are one expression of this life."

**We are in great need of this dialogue** and of this freedom. And you can see it even in places where those words once seemed impossible. In Cuba, for example. For decades, the name of this country was synonymous with "walls upon walls," but now, as you can read in the "Close Up" (centered around the presentation in Havana of the Spanish translation of Fr. Giussani's biography), we see glimpses of a softening, of the first steps toward that "social friendship" that Pope Francis called for during his visit two years ago. Or look to Egypt, where another papal visit has just marked a historic moment in the relationship with Islam.

**Deep down, this is the same need** called to mind by the flyer CL put out on the upcoming local elections in Italy, which you can find on the Movement's website ([clonline.org](http://clonline.org)). "What's needed most urgently today are actors who can—in small things and great—come together, dialogue with each other, and offer credible proposals." Spaces for freedom and for encounter for those who want to seek the truth. And to build upon it. T

## THE HEARTBREAKING DESIRE FOR A CHILD


 Dear Fr. Carrón: These Spiritual Exercises helped me to understand what I have been living in recent years and have reopened my desire to know Christ. I've been married to Marco for eight years. We don't have children and the desire for them has left a mark on me. This infertility has caused me to be engulfed by pain, and at times has put me in a state of desperation. We have made so many pilgrimages asking for the grace of a child. I believed that God, being good and seeing my pain, would sooner or later work a miracle. But the answer I wanted didn't come and so my certainty began to waver... Last year, we received another blow: my husband was diagnosed with a tumor. I began to ask the Lord and Our Lady to stay close to me, to keep me company in my pain. The closeness of and gatherings with our friends and the beauty of the love between my husband and me, but above all, the gladness that has unexpectedly accompanied us in this year have shown me Jesus's true nature. He is not a God who grants all my wishes, even if they are good, but a friend who keeps you company and fills your heart to overflowing in such a manner that it is impossible not to recognize Him; a friend who makes you glad even in the most difficult moments. Even though the infertility has become permanent, my husband's tumors appear to be cured. Jesus could have worked a miracle and given me a child. Instead, he loved my freedom more than anything else because He gave me the possibility of



knowing and loving true salvation, that is, His company, as you said, "putting ourselves before a Presence that is more fascinating than minding our own business." Now that I am no longer attached to my desire, which doesn't mean I don't suffer or long to be a mother, but experiencing how my heart overflows with joy when He is near, has made me free. Before leaving for the Exercises, I realized that even all the positive experiences I've had and the awareness that I've gained might have remained only a memory or something in the past that doesn't have any bearing on my present life. I need this place so that my heart doesn't become drowsy, but continues to search for Him.

**Name withheld**


## THE COMMON FUND AND ITS WELLSPRING

 When I had finished college and was at the beginning of my marriage, I was more regular in contributing to the Common Fund. Then with the arrival of our children, it was harder for me, and so my husband and I reduced the amount of our commitment. For the last few years, we've been making only one payment, usually co-

inciding with the Exercises, and obviously we are behind. The justification that I often used was: after all, I'm generous, and I always try to respond to the local needs of the parish, the school project, the AVSI dinner, the Food Bank... But, when during the Assembly, Fr. Carrón told us that our generosity doesn't last if we do not remember its well-spring, my mind opened. It's true: everything began there, from Fr. Giussani who educated us to freely offer something of ours for the communal building of the works of the Movement in the world. I am still grateful for this help in discovering the true meaning of our gestures, but above all, for the possibility of always beginning again.

**Giusti, Italy**

## THE WEDDING OF A DAUGHTER

 A month ago, my daughter Chiara married Gianluca, who took her to live in Southampton, south of London. They were married in a parish church north of Rome where they hadn't celebrated a wedding in five years. The parish priest was amazed: six priests concelebrated, the church was full of friends and relatives, but there were also many people from the neighborhood, from nuns of various orders to preschool and middle school teachers, from grocers to the ice cream man. "How unusual to see two young people who are believers, what a beautiful witness." And so, even the heartache that made my legs tremble was dispelled, in the confused perception that the words to say would be "thank you" for the two of them, for



## AN UNEXPECTED INVITATION

### A SPECIAL DAY

**D**ear Fr. Carrón: For years I've been in contact with a young woman whose life is difficult—she has a handicapped child and recently she herself became ill. We see each other from time to time, and her question is, “What is the Lord trying to tell me with this?” In front of this drama, I can only pray with all my heart and entrust her to Jesus and our saints. These aren't just idle words because the last time she came to visit me, as I saw her limping up the stairs, I prepared myself to welcome her pain. Instead, her first words were that she was happy! She began to tell me that some people from the community, whom she had met years ago, had invited her to spend the day with them. She met an Orthodox priest who gave her a book in which she is discovering so many answers. So, on the one hand, nothing has changed, but on the other, it was clear that something had happened in her life that had completely transformed her. At a certain point, she told me how, in our friends, she had been struck that one of them had adopted a little girl and that another woman had brought a baby into the world despite not being particularly young. And then she added, “A few years ago, I had an abortion.” It was as if that encounter had removed all her pain, all her nostalgia, but also all her sorrow about what she had done, and had shown her hope for mercy through our friends' gesture. In that moment, I understood what Jesus must have felt in front of the poor he met, his grief and his desire to console them, to rebuild their humanity, but on the other hand, the meaning of our evil, of our sin. I understood His gaze, and the amazement and gratitude of those who were the recipients of His mercy. It's as if I understood the ontological bond that embraces us in the body of the Church and the immense possibility of living in the heart of the Church, in the simplicity of the offering of our days.



**Name withheld**

the greatness of a story that has seized us, first her father and me, then her, then the groom, and all those friends whom I've known since they were little. A Christian community. “But all these young people who pray together, love each other, sing together, take Communion... This never happens!” It does happen, if there is a community. And I thank Chiara and Gianluca for having given witness, first of all, to me along with their old friends and their new friends from England who came to the wedding, includ-

ing the Anglican priest and his wife who hosted Chiara for six months. Peter and Rosemary made a spiritual communion with us in the line for Eucharist, crossing their arms across their chest in front of the priest. They told me, “Thank you for allowing Chiara to live with us. We found a daughter.” Ecumenism without talk. What makes two young people so happy you can see it? What makes us so certain that they are accompanied that it makes you cry because you're moved, not because you are

sad? Without You, my God, I would be a finite creature. Without You, my God, Chiara would be a daughter departed and far away and I would be worried about her future. With You, my God, even when it's difficult, we are grateful: for the boldness that our children show us, for the grace of faith that through our nothingness is transmitted also to them, for the strength of trusting, because in every gesture, in every song, the belonging that has generated us is clear.

**Monica, Rome (Italy)**

# **]** CLOSE UP



**The Plaza de la Catedral  
in Havana, Cuba.**



# AN OPEN SPACE

**A place frozen in time. But where things previously impossible are now happening. Strategic meetings over global politics. A new openness to the Church, and in the Church. Including the small GL community and the presentation of Fr. Giussani's biography... A report from Cuba.**

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DAVIDE PERILLO



**DAILY LIFE.** A street in Matanzas. On the right, a group of friends from the local CL community, and (below) another group from Havana.

**T**he past is still there. Physically, concretely. It's something you can see and touch, in the murals of Che and the pictures of Fidel. In the *almendrones*, the American cars from the 1950s that serve as shared taxis you climb into on the go to get into the city. Or in the big letters on the sides of buildings reminding you of the moment when the calendar shifted: "It's the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution." That was the beginning of the "Wall in the Caribbean," when Cuba became the outpost, and later an example for half of the world, that half that was looking to socialism for solutions.

Elsewhere, this dream has almost completely dissolved. Here, no. You can still see it and touch it. You get the feeling of being in a place frozen in time, that doesn't know which direction the future will

take; rich with a vivacious humanity and, at the same time, tired and discouraged. In the end, the same thing often happens to us. To all of us. Though it may be a unique place from which to see the world, Cuba is also a mirror for us, a place where you can see right away how right Fr. Giussani was when he used to say to his students, "The forces that change history are the same as those that change the human heart." There's no other way.

Perhaps this is why Cuba became the "island of three Popes," receiving visits from each of the most recent Pontiffs: John Paul II in 1998, Benedict XVI in 2012, and Francis less than two years ago. Of course, it is a strategic stop, both for its history and its geography. It's a place for encounters that can shift the axes of geopolitical power (like that between Barack Obama and Raúl Castro

in March 2016 as part of the country's re-opening of relations with the United States) or even change the relationship between Churches (it was in the Havana airport that Pope Francis, one month before the Obama/Castro meeting, had embraced Kirill, the patriarch of Moscow and all of Russia). Beyond all of this is the central fact of that strange combination of desire and fatigue, of restlessness and disappointment, that we are all drawn into, and that the Popes continue to address. Like Francis, in that wonderful impromptu speech he gave to the youth here: "Dream, desire, seek new horizons, open yourselves to great things." But what makes it possible to open yourself? What can re-awaken all of this humanity and broaden the horizon? And what can the Church contribute?

It's moving to see these questions





watch: *Suite Habana*, by Fernando Perez,” Andújar says. “It tells the story of a single day for about a dozen Cubans, ordinary people. At the end, there are added scenes where the protagonists speak about the dreams they have.” And what are they? “Tiny desires. Fixing up his mom’s house, a car... things like that. One actually said, ‘I don’t have dreams.’ It always disconcerts me. It’s symptomatic of a people who no longer think big, who have given up on any ideals. If you reduce everything to instant gratification, to ‘I like this, I don’t like that,’ our criteria is really impoverished.” And it’s not just a problem for Cuba. “It’s important that Francis spoke about this; Paul VI said that the world doesn’t need teachers, it needs witnesses.”

**SIX PEOPLE AROUND THE TABLE.** These are words that come to mind again and again during the trip from Havana to Matanzas. One hundred kilometers on a four-lane road; you see palm trees, drills pumping oil, and lilac-colored Buicks that pass you on the right. It feels like being in a movie from the 1950s. In some stretches, you can see the ocean on the left. Signs point to the beaches for the inhabitants of Havana: Santa Cruz, El Friaile, Jibacoa... Varadero and the Cuba of tourists and resorts is still 50 kilometers down the road. Every so often, someone appears on the asphalt, carrying a bunch of bananas or a basket of fruit to sell.

Matanzas has 140,000 inhabitants. A maze of bumpy roads, low houses, and unexpected pockets of beauty. But your overall impression is that the heart is there, especially in those six peo- ➤

surface during our visit for the presentation of *Su Vida*, the biography of Fr. Giussani, which took place on May 25<sup>th</sup>. The day before, the author, Alberto Savorana, was at a table in a Havana restaurant with the two panelists who would speak along with him. One was Gustavo Andújar, 70. Andújar is editor of *Espacio Laical*, a magazine about culture and society, and the director of Centro Félix Varela, the cultural center which hosted the presentation. The other, of about the same age, was Roberto Manzano, one of the Cuba’s greatest poets. He’s Catholic but not practicing (“my father was a Communist; my mom wasn’t, but even he was a ‘Communist of the Sacred Heart of Jesus’; he never removed that image from the house...”). He was very struck by Giussani, by the way he talked about the “ultimate questions” and his attention to beauty (“It’s the quickest way

of getting to truth: through beauty, man faces his existential angst; it’s therapeutic.”); he notes how “reading about his life you get the sensation of watching someone who’s always on a journey: things build, accumulate, and proceed in a particular direction, and it’s always growing, a movement in which experience has a real impact.”

Dinner was an hour-and-a-half that would have, by itself, justified the trip: the conversation started with Giussani, found its way to Dante and Péguy, then from the Big Bang to the Sagrada Família, then freedom, the Trinity, the Mystery, and at some point that oft-cited word reappeared: “desire.” “There’s a movie you should

**“Reading about his life you get the sensation of watching someone who’s always on a journey.”**

## ▶ CLOSE UP

▶▶ ple around the table of a pizzeria with an Italian flag hanging outside. They're part of the small CL community; the others would make their appearance later at the event with Savorana in the parish, where they peppered him with questions about Giussani, the book, the beginning of the Movement, what they were living. Matanzas is the hometown of Alejandro, the leader of the Cuban community. He works at the chancery and teaches. Deivis and Yiadiana, both medical technicians at the hospital, were his students, and they spoke about how they were there because "he was a different kind of professor, in how he treated us. He didn't just ask us about his subject, he asked about us." Witnesses, not teachers... Then one time they saw a picture of the Pope on his computer. "Are you Catholic?" They became friends. Idelvis, Alejandro's wife, saw it begin from the outside: "He'd come home and tell me, 'You know, there are these two students who... I don't know how to put it, but *tienen algo*, they've got something.'" What this "*algo*" is, and how it can grow and mature, is what they're discovering one step at a time, following the Pope and the Movement. First, for Deivis it meant going back to the path of faith that he'd left in his teens, and for Yiadiana, starting with Baptism and her desire to get married in the Church.

"The other day a student said to me, 'The Church is a dictatorship,'" Alejandro says. "Two years ago, I would've gotten angry, and I would've tried to convince him with dialectic. Now, I found myself saying, 'Look, I want to understand why you say that. Because you are a good for

**“He was a different kind of professor. He didn't just ask us about his subject, he asked about us.”**



**SU VIDA.** The presentation of the biography of Fr. Giussani. On the right, top to bottom: Centro Félix Varela, Roberto Méndez, and the poet Roberto Manzano.

me. If you pose this objection, it forces me to go to the heart of what I live.' He looked at me confused, but it opened up a dialogue."

That's dialogue. It is something that can't be taken for granted here. It never is in times of walls and curtains: East and West, socialism and the free market, party and Church. And yet, it was the word that came up more than any other the days we were there, as if to show us just how precious it is.

We traveled back to Havana for the presentation. It was at Centro Félix Varela, located in the old seminary of St. Charles and St. Ambrose in the heart of Habana Vieja, named after the priest and philosopher everyone acknowledges as one of the fathers

of the country. "It was here that they started to conceive of Cuba," Andújar explains. The cathedral is just around the corner. Behind the seminary's façade—one of the most beautiful in all of Havana—you find a cloister and three levels of classrooms. The building hosts a center of Church studies which has been extended to cover humanities as well, to the point of becoming an alternative university. The government keeps a keen eye on it. Over 100 students are coming to know St. Thomas Aquinas's social teaching, learning a history and philosophy quite different from that studied in the official academic institutions.

**OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE.** The other activities happening inside the center are just as surprising. Four years ago, at the suggestion of Cardinal Jaime Ortega (*see p. 13*), here was born a place where talks, debates, and roundtables are held almost every month. They



involve people from many different backgrounds: authors and musicians, “organic” thinkers and dissidents, Catholics and non-Catholics. “They come because here they find a place where the debate is sincere, where you can really discuss things,” with the one concern of understanding the other person, Andújar notes. Once again, dialogue, where you aren’t expecting it. The presentation on *Su Vida* returned again and again to this theme. First through Manzano, who expounded upon many of the topics that had come out at dinner: life’s ultimate questions, desire, beauty as the path to truth, wonder at Giussani’s reading of Leopardi, his pedagogy. Then Alberto Savorana, who told the story of the “beautiful day” when the founder of CL discovered that the answer to all these questions was Christ: “Not a doctrine, but a person.” From there flowed “the desire to communicate this discovery to everyone” and the “incredible ca-

capacity for dialogue that he had, with anyone.” He, too, was struck by the fact that “this presentation is happening here, in this place founded to create a space for dialogue, not for dialectics. It’s the same way that Fr. Giussani lived. Having found the answer was the source of his passion for humanity.” Deep down, throughout his life, “he did nothing other than communicate that beauty which has the power to re-awaken all of man’s desire. Because Christ came for the heart that desires.”

“In Cuba, there’s a great longing for spirituality; people have to deal with a daily life that’s difficult; they thirst for something else,” Roberto Méndez said, the next day. He’s the editor of *Palabra Nueva*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese: at least 10,000 copies every month, up to 12,000, despite the fact that each issue is a bit of an adventure (“we lay out the pages by hand, print it with what means we have, and eve-

ry month we have to find paper and ink.... It’s more by miracle than by system that each issue goes out....” Their audience is wide, even outside their “circle” (“We may be read by more people outside the Church than within; I find all kinds of people who not only say they read it, but give you their commentary on the articles...”), and the range of contributors follows in the footsteps of the Varela center: intellectuals, economists, professors from all fields. Why do they do it? “Because we offer something that’s different from the majority of official periodicals. There’s no pressure to follow a certain line of ideology. Attention is paid to the person. And there is content that you can’t find anywhere else, not only about the Church or religion, but about society, art, culture....”

Briefly put, a place of freedom. “I’m a consultant for the Pontifical Council for Culture. When Cardinal Ravasi set up the ‘Courtyard of the Gentiles,’ I said, ‘Look, in Cuba we’re already doing this.’” Their reasons? “It’s simple: if we didn’t do it, we’d be *desaparecidos*,” Méndez says, smiling. “I don’t have a choice: it’s either dialogue or disappear. Because if I close myself inside these four walls, we don’t gain anything. And outside of here, there are more ‘Gentiles’ than Christians. Many more. How can we go out to meet them?”

They do it even though the debates can get intense, and they still feel the weight of ideology. The latest cultural polemic was about abortion, with strong attacks on the Church. “I could respond with a harsh editorial, and I’d receive an equally harsh response and it would all be over,” Méndez says. “The effect? Zero.” What’s the alternative? “We’re learning as we go. Like what happened a little while ago with a feminist sociologist who wrote something about gender. I called >>

» her. We got together for coffee. We started a discussion.” For you, what does “dialogue” mean? “It’s the space for an encounter with the other person. As they were saying yesterday at the presentation, it’s not posing counterarguments in order to assert yourself. It’s something we’ve had to learn here, after decades of conflict. But because of this we’re getting to know many non-Catholics who are starting to appreciate some things about the Church. It’s always a new discovery.”

**IRREVERSIBLE PROCESS.** “*Discussing* dialogue doesn’t help; you have to *do it*,” Andújar says. “By offering a space and receiving people who can express themselves freely here. It’s the most important lever we have to change the current state we’re in. The very fact that it happens means that it’s possible. And I hope that imitators will emerge; we don’t have the problem of wanting a ‘copy-right...’”

This sounds very much like the Pope and his invitation to be an outward-looking Church and to “a journey that you learn as you go along.” And meanwhile, a little at a time, things are changing. “We’re at the beginning of an irreversible process,” one friend from the island says. Again, you are reminded of Francis, and the importance he places on “beginning processes, not occupying spaces.” It’s no coincidence that after the Pope’s visit, Cuban television stations started to carefully report his words and actions. Meaning they even broadcast the Christmas mass, the *Via Crucis*... impossible before, but now it’s happening.

**┌**  
**“Discussing  
 dialogue  
 doesn’t help;  
 you have  
 to do it.  
 By offering  
 a space here.”**  
**┌**

Just as it was impossible only a few years ago to conceive of a presentation of the biography of Fr. Giusani here in Havana. Or to imagine encounters like the one Adalberto, a member of the CL community, told us about. A nuclear engineer who’d been sent to Russia to study (“nuclear technology was supposed to be the future of Cuba; now I do TV appearances...”), he first heard about Jesus from a *babushka* on a train to Voronez. “She sat down next to me, in an empty cabin, and asked me, ‘Do you know Jesus Christ?’ Then she added, ‘Look, He’s the only one who can help you to live, who can shine light on the way.’” Just like that, word for word. It stuck with him, after years

of research and struggle. Until the day when, outside of a church, someone offered him a copy of *Huelles*, the Spanish version of *Traces*.... Now he’s here, together with Silvia and Eduardo. And Rafael, who told us about their charitable work: “We go to visit the elderly who, for one reason or another, can no longer come to the parish.” If you ask him what good it does him, he simply answers, “It helps me recognize that Jesus is among us. I don’t know how else to say it.”

This seems small, but it’s everything. “You have to be patient and attentive to every sign, using a magnifying glass to see what’s there, instead of looking at everything that’s missing,” Alejandro says. “But it’s a good exercise. Because often what’s missing is an idea you have; what you see, no matter how small, is there.” And is at work, Fr. Giusani would say. **┐**





**AMIDST HIS PEOPLE** Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino was born in Jagüey Grande, in the Matanzas Province.

# “THIS IS HOW THINGS CHANGE”

**The history, the turning points, the people. How the Pope mediated for Obama... Perspectives from Cardinal JAIME ORTEGA Y ALAMINO.**

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

“**M**any doors are being opened. And when the doors of hearts are opened, you never know where they may take you.” When he looks out the window, Cardinal Jaime Ortega y Alamino, who spent almost 34 of his 80 years as Archbishop of Havana (up to 2016), sees Parque José de

la Luz y Caballero. That’s the same square where Pope Francis spoke to the youth in one of the most beautiful speeches he gave during his September 2015 visit. Across the square stands the Centro Félix Varela, a cultural center located in the former seminary that, gradually, has become a point of reference for the broader intellectual life of the island.

It hosts performances, conferences, and expositions like the one that just ended—*Cuba Emprende*, a small trade fair for artisans and small business owners that would have been unthinkable up to very recently, and also book presentations (including the presentation of the biography of Fr. Giussani). It is a place of dialogue and encounter—both weighty words in a closed-off land where for decades the prevailing logic was one of walls opposed to walls, a reality which seemed destined to last forever. And instead...

“Let me give an example: a while back a priest, a professor from the Varela Institute, while he was abroad met up with a Cuban ambassador. The latter was really curious. He’d just been to a Baptism, and was disconcerted because the celebrant had given a homily in which, the ambassador said, ‘he wanted to demonstrate the existence of God. But how could that be? He was talking to people who didn’t need that; he should have rather spoken about faith...’ They spent the night discussing religion, God, the Pope...”

**About the Pope: how important for Cuba was his visit?**

Very important. First of all, there was great continuity with the previous papal visits. Of course, John Paul II’s visit was the most historic: it was a turning point in the relationship between Church and State here. But Benedict XVI’s visit was also a step forward: he spoke beautiful words that struck everyone. Pope Francis’s visit allowed for another step at a crucial moment.

**How, specifically?**

He spoke about “social friendship,” which is a key concept in a situation like ours. I was also very struck by what he said about hope. He didn’t mean simply psychological >>

» optimism; it's not waiting for something to just fall from the sky. Hope is fixing your gaze on the horizon and walking. Hope is built. You see what it is we want and must build, even through suffering, and always in relationship with other people. And in this journey, the Lord is walking with us. The meeting with youth was also really beautiful. The Holy Father spoke to us again about it just recently, when we bishops from Cuba went to Rome for our *ad limina* visit.

**What did he say to you?**

He told us that, before his meeting with Cuban youth, many people had told him, "Look, half of those kids will be there just to get the numbers up, the Government will get them there so they don't look bad...." Some people still have that kind of mind-set here. But the Pope said, "I don't know about that, but one thing I can surely say is that after five minutes, they were all listening attentively. Their faces were welcoming." He recognized that, and so he went on, speaking off the cuff about social friendship, encouraging them to dream big.... The students from the diplomatic school were also there in the square. Later, the Minister told me, "They were struck, and very happy." Organizing that event wasn't easy, but it was important. It was a great opportunity to help us understand that it's possible to encounter others. It happens; therefore, it's possible. Like the dialogue with that ambassador.

**Could an event like that have taken place five or 10 years ago?**

Five years ago, yes; 10, I don't know, but 15 years ago, definitely not.

**So what is changing?**

Time is passing. People are getting old. Many young people are leaving Cuba because there aren't many opportunities for them. They go to the U.S., to Europe, or Australia... and the government knows this; the really perceptive ones see something needs to change. Changes at the economic level are slow, perhaps out of fear. But some things are happening. Ten years ago, a trade fair like the one they had at Centro Varela would've been inconceivable. Now it happened.

**How did you come to recognize that there was a need for a place like the Centro?**

I'd always thought that a center like this could be really important. When we build the new seminary, one of the staff at the office for religious affairs asked me, "What will you do with the old one?" I answered that we would have a cultural center, a center for study. The man

nodded in agreement. People accept that the Church has this role, that it should be able to offer formation, that Catholics should have their own way of thinking, and even that non-Catholics might want to know more and participate. We can do it. Space is being created for these things. Of course, then, it's up to the Church to grow, including in its attitude.

**What do you mean by that?**

I'll give you an example. When I became bishop, many years ago, the preparation for Baptism was really demanding. The people were told, "First the parents have to come and go to a meeting every week, and face extensi-

**┌ One time a woman said to me, "Father, why do you, too, want to make life difficult for us?" ┐**



**ENCOUNTERS.** The Pope with Fidel and with Patriarch Kirill; Obama with Raúl Castro.

ve questioning: "Were you married in a church or civilly? Were you living together? Why do you want to baptize your child?" Many felt overwhelmed, saying, "But, our family has always been baptized...." One time a woman said to me, "Father, why do you, too, want to make life difficult for us? I spent three nights sleeping outside to get a mattress for my son: three days waiting to get a number, and now you want to complicate things for us even more?" When I traveled to Pinar del Rio as bishop, I said to the clergy, "You can baptize children every Sunday. The priests were shocked, 'But what about their preparation?' Talk to them a little before, explain things well during the Baptism... but welcome the people who come." It was the one door that was open for people, and we put up obstacles.... The Cuban people lived for years with the awareness that they could look to the Catholic Church as something that was theirs, something familiar.



**What was it like for you growing up?**

Look, I ended up in the Church when I was 15. I was baptized, but my family didn't go to church. My friends, however, were Catholic and invited me. At one point they said to me, "Okay, you need to prepare for First Communion." Close to our house, there was a church run by the Carmelites. They asked me, "You don't have a scapular for Our Lady of Mount Carmel?" "No." "Then, come with me, and father will give you one." I kneeled down, the friar came over, he blessed me... but this is a gift the Church gives, it's not a question of classes and studying. For me, it was extraordinary. A young man helped prepare me, not a pastoral expert; he was a factory worker. Very devout; a good man. With a Franciscan spirituality. I don't remember the things he said, but he believed. His faith was alive. I had my First Communion, then I started going to Mass... and

I continued, for the rest of my life. Look, we really have to "go out" into the world, as the Pope tells us.

**In your opinion, what is the most significant point of newness that Francis brought?**

Perhaps it was his vision of human gestures that are always accompanied by a friendship, by a dialogue. The Pope is merciful in his consideration of others and of the world. This is very important. The Year of Mercy made a big difference. Over these weeks, by reading the Acts of the Apostles at Mass, we are in a way revisiting this Church being born through encounters, without preparations. This is how the Pope lives. And those who meet him tune in to his way of doing things.

**The same thing happened in another defining moment for Cuba: the meeting between Obama and Raúl...**

At some level, it was the Pope who made this meeting possible. He didn't act as a mediator; instead, he was the person who helped the two men encounter each other. From that beginning came a dialogue and the agreement. It's interesting how it all came about. The Pope had been invited to speak as part of mediating an exchange of prisoners. He said, "No, that's not for me." But he called me to ask, "What *could* we do?" We came up with the idea of a letter personally delivered to the two Presidents. The Pope told me, "I want you to take it to them. You can get to Raúl easily, for Obama you'll have to find a way...." It was a little more difficult getting there, because Obama was afraid of Congress's reaction. But he liked the Pope. When he read the letter I brought him, he said, "This is a big help for me. That the Holy Father, with all the concerns he has as supreme shepherd of the Church, would concern himself with an issue that's so important for my country is really extraordinary." What came out in the end was something that left me speechless. It was an important turning point for Cuba as well. Dialogue makes a real difference. I just published a book about these significant moments with the title *Encuentro, dialogo y acuerdo (Encounter, Dialogue, and Agreement)*. This is how things change. Gradually, but they do change.

**What contribution can an entity like CL offer in Cuba?**

What you are doing now: continue to develop this capacity for dialogue, at every level. Help to build a mentality of friendship and encounter. Like what happened with the presentation of the book about Fr. Giussani, who would have said to go deeply into these tasks. **T**



# THE GOOD THAT AWAITS

There is only one alternative to the incendiary logic of evil: a dialogue, “without strategy, simply a path.” Cardinal **JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN**, who worked behind the scenes of the courageous trip of the Pope to Egypt, retraces the sequence of gestures and events.

BY LUCA FIORE



It is hard to tell what must have been going through the Pope's mind as he walked out of the plane in Cairo. He must have been reflecting on the reasons for his trip. He must have been thinking about the faces of the people awaiting him—the political and religious authorities, the smiling crowds of the Egyptian people. Or perhaps, as one does before carrying out acts of great courage, he was clearing his mind and concentrating his efforts on the delivery of his message.

It required courage, not just in the face of the massacre of Coptic Christians in the name of Islamist terrorism only days before but also courage to part the curtains of prejudice between Muslims and Christians by embracing Ahmad al-Tayyib, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, the highest authority in Sunni Islam.

Behind the scenes of this coura-

geous feat was the wisdom and work of French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The Cardinal is a man of sophisticated intelligence. A reserved man, known to the world as the one who announced *Habermus Papam* upon the election of Benedict XVI. Today he will try to review and trace a common thread in the words and the events of the trip to Cairo this past April 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>.

**The Pope met with several people: President al-Sisi, Imam al-Tayyib, the Patriarch of the Coptic Catholic Church, Pope Tawadros II, and the people of Egypt. What message did he deliver to each of these interlocutors, and, from what you were able to gather, what was the response?**

The Pope, a pilgrim of peace, was the bearer of a message of brother- >>

Pope Francis greets Abbas Shuman, the Al Azhar Grand Imam's deputy. Behind them, Cardinal Tauran together with Ahmad al Tayyib, the Grand Imam.

» hood. More specifically, his message to the political interlocutors can be summed up in a few words: take a stand against the wars that are ravaging this part of the world. To the Muslim interlocutors: a re-assertion of the desire to continue in dialogue, opposition to the instrumentalization of religion, and a persistent “no” to violence. To the Coptic Orthodox interlocutors: there is no turning back on the path of ecumenism in spite of, but also because of, the painful and tragic persecution and martyrdom of many Christians, regardless of denomination, murdered out of the fanaticism of fundamentalists just for being Christian. All in all, three messages: denounce wars and terrorism; have the will to pursue dialogue; and witness to the faith in the face of suffering and martyrdom.

**How would you describe the progression of the dialogue with Muslims since the misunderstandings following the Regensburg Address by Pope Benedict XVI and leading up to Pope Francis’s visit to al-Azhar? What have been the steps taken?**

Al-Azhar made its public statement in response to the Regensburg Address, and we organized an annual meeting after this. These events I am referring to took place toward the end of the mourning period for Grand Imam Tantawi. Then, in January 2008, the current Grand Imam al-Tayyib decided to suspend any further contact with our Pontifical Council in response to Pope Benedict XVI’s address to the diplomatic body. Since then, steps have been taken leading to the decision to turn the page and to resume dialogue. This took place on May 23, 2016, when the Grand Imam visited the Vatican and invited the Pope to come to al-Azhar.



Jean-Louis Tauran.

**During his speech in Cairo, Francis pointed out three aspects of dialogue: “the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions.” Why are these three aspects so essential in engaging with Sunni Islam?**

The duty to respect one’s own identity: when participating in interreligious dialogue, the profession of one’s faith comes first. In some ways, interreligious dialogue is an antidote to relativism. Accepting differences: the acknowledgement that a person who is not of the same race, the same religion, or the same culture, is not an enemy, but a brother walking with me toward the infinite, toward God. Sincerity of intentions: the dialogue that we have is not strategically plotted out; it is a religious journey. The Pope said it perfectly: “For the only alternative to the civility of encounter is the incivility of conflict; there is no other way. To counter effectively the barbarity of those who foment hatred and violence, we need to

accompany young people, helping them on the path to maturity and teaching them to respond to the incendiary logic of evil by patiently working for the growth of goodness.”

**The Pope often repeats that Islam is a peaceful religion. For this he is criticized by many. In Cairo, once again he said, “Violence is the negation of every authentic religious expression,” and he requested that everyone pray for each other asking for the gift of peace. Why insist on this point, when today for many it is easy to associate the word “Islam” with the word “violence”? What is the basis for his judgment?**

In comparison to the small fraction of those that believe in and enact vio-



**THE EMBRACE.** Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyib, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, on April 28<sup>th</sup>.

lence in the name of their religion, the vast majority of Muslims live in peace and try to lead normal lives. Furthermore, the acts of violence committed by the few are condemned by most Muslims. At the same time, there are passages from the Qu’ran and other Islamic texts that could be interpreted in a way that would make violence acceptable. It is up to religious leaders and intellectuals to knowledgeably interpret these texts so that a respectful understanding of the dignity of the rights of people, starting with the right to life, may prevail. There is one phrase he spoke that stands out to me: “Peace alone, therefore, is holy and no act of violence can be perpetrated in the name of God, for it would profane his Name.”

**In Egypt, Francis also spoke about an “ecumenism of blood.” It is a path that no one dares pursue in order to**



have answered this call. The temptation to betray one's first love is always there, and one compromises instead of walking along the exhausting and glorious *sequela Christi*. Careerism, individualism, the climb to become masters instead of servants, nepotism, and the hunger for money, though they are not maladies affecting the clergy and those in the Christian environment alone, are unfortunately often present, and for this reason everyone is in need of conversion, everywhere and always.

**Could you sum up in a few words what “dialogue” means for Pope Francis?**

To greet one another as brothers, and when possible, with a caress and an embrace. It is what he did when he met with Muslims. On that historic day, his embrace seemed to never end. He used very simple words and, in the end, his gaze “touched” people's hearts. This is not merely love, but a passion for others.

**After this trip, have you come to a deeper understanding about the way the Pope approaches the reality of these countries?**

I would say he has a great respect for and attentiveness to them, due to their cultural heritage, ancient history, and glorious civilizations, but also because of the complexity of the current situation and the grave threats to peace. It is a precarious situation, especially for Christians in the Middle East, whose very lives are in danger, in the land of their forefathers, the cradle of Christianity.

(with the contribution of Roberto Fontolan)

**attain unity among Christians: most choose to save themselves from martyrdom, even if it means perpetuating relationships of mistrust among the churches... are the persecutions currently taking place bearing fruit from an ecumenical standpoint? And we, who live in countries where ecumenism is rarely discussed, what can we draw from this?**

Certainly, martyrdom is both glorious and dramatic. The Eucharist can also be described in this way. It is true that no one wants it for herself, but sometimes one must choose between rejecting Christ and giving the greatest witness of faith and love for His sake. The martyrs of our time—among them have been several youths and children—accept this challenge. A bishop in the Middle East said to me, “We have been formed to dialogue, now we must be formed to become martyrs.”

**In his speech to clergy and religious, Pope Francis spoke in a paternal manner, but also with tenacity when addressing the temptations of pastors (From “Pharaohism” to incessant complaining, from individualism to gossiping to jealousy). It is as if the Pope, while pointing out the witness of the Church in the Middle East as it faces persecution, also sees its need for profound conversion. Is that so?**

Pope Francis often emphasizes the “mundaneness of faith.” Through his example and his words, he offers a challenge to all Christians, in particular those who have been called to follow him more closely and who

**On that historic day, his embrace seemed to never end. His gaze “touched” people's hearts.**

# THE KNIGHT'S QUEST



**They arrived from all parts of Italy and the world for an audience with the Pope. Here is the account of a day that gathered more than 5,000 middle school kids to learn that “the world is changed by opening the heart.”**

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

**P**iazza del Sant’Uffizio in Rome, 6:45 a.m. on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Giovanni’s voice breaks the silence: “Everyone gather around. Take up your instruments. We will enter in a few minutes, so we can begin rehearsal.” Then 30 or so musicians, between the ages of 11 and 14, huddled around the director of the “Mario Moruzzi Juniorband.” They had traveled from Cremona on an overnight bus. The rehearsal is not for just any concert. In the Paul VI Audience Hall, they will accompany the singing of 5,000 other Knights of

the Grail (a group for the Christian formation of middle-schoolers). The Knights had come from across Italy and from abroad to attend an audience with Pope Francis.

These kids are not the only ones who had traveled all night: those from Palermo had the longest journey, a 14-hour trip to the capital. Many others also arrived very early in the day.

At 8:00 a.m. it was time to go inside. From a barricade under the portico of Bernini, Vera, in the fluorescent green sweatshirt of the six people of the secretariat, waved her



ment that Christ was present in history, just as He is now.” Five thousand middle-schoolers, who up until then had been laughing, talking, and jostling, immediately fell silent. It was not necessary to instruct them to quiet down. “Now grow in awareness of Christ’s presence while reciting Morning Prayer. Take up your books. We will teach you the *recto tono*, so that we will all sing the same note together. In this way, we will harmonize our voices and our hearts.” The explanation may not have been clear, but what is more likely is that most had never prayed Morning Prayer before, especially not in *recto tono*. The first attempt was a failure. The choir director chanted alone. They started over. “Keep in mind one verse from the psalm. It will accompany you throughout your day. It is Christ’s gift to each one of you.” The prayers permeated the hall.

**“I AM NO LONGER ALONE.”** After that, there was not a sound—all were preparing for the meeting with the Pope. Preparing their hearts. The singing was punctuated by a few comments made to introduce each song so that everyone could have a fuller experience. They sang “Al Mattino” and “You.” During the melancholic “Il Giovane Ricco” (“The Young Rich Man”), all were standing and following the gestures of seven of their friends leading the song on stage. After the singing, the first video about the life of the Knights in Catania, Udine, Termini Imerese, Asunción, Milan and elsewhere began to play on the big screen. The youth talked about what they do together, how they came to know about this fascinating companionship. When Mustafa appeared on the screen and stated, “I am no longer alone,” the crowd of 5,000 began to cheer. At the end of the video, they sang >>

hands in the air to tell her peers to show their white rubber bracelets that said “Cavalieri 2017” (Knights 2017): these bracelets were their entrance passes that allowed them past the police. It would be the only slow moment of the day. Then they rushed toward the hall.

Onstage, the musicians tuned their instruments. Fr. Marcello Brambilla, the leader of the Knights, approached them and said: “Today, you can be a sign if you believe that Christ is with you. This goes for you and for me. There is the temptation to think that you are better than

the others because you look down at them from the stage, but actually you are serving your friends. Be united as you play, and follow. Any mistake you make will be in front of Christ. And He will smile, rest assured. So do not worry.” At this, a boy let out a sigh of relief.

As the rows filled up, the large screen next to the orchestra displayed images from the life of the Knights: praying, playing, studying, and hiking.

At 9:30, Fr. Marcello spoke into the microphone on stage: “Let us say the Angelus. It is the first mo-

## MIDDLE-SCHOOLERS

» the hymn which Giovanni had composed the previous year for the general audience the Knights had attended in St. Peter's Square.

Then there was more video. Fr. Marcello explained: "Imagine your face on that screen. Because the same thing happened to you. You had an encounter and life became beautiful." Frank and Uwa, two Nigerians, climbed up on the stage to read their story. They recounted how they had lost their parents, how they had feared for their lives as they crossed the sea, and how they had arrived in Sicily and had been introduced to the Knights by a teacher. "These friends are our family. God has saved us. I am not afraid anymore." Life had become beautiful for them as well. The youth listened attentively and then applauded enthusiastically.

As the youth finished singing "Quando uno ha il cuore buono" ("When One is Good-Hearted"), suddenly everyone crowded toward the central aisle. Rumors had spread that the Pope was about to arrive. False alarm. Fr. Marcello said: "You see, it is the same way with Christ. All it takes is a sign to mobilize everyone. But the moment has not yet arrived. Please go back to your seats so that we can finish watching the video."

There was time for a few more songs. The Knights groups were announced by their region in Italy, so that each could stand and participate in singing "When the Saints Go Marchin' In." Then the youth from other countries were called on: France, Spain, Portugal, and Switzerland. By that time, it was

11:30. The exhaustion and tension made them distracted. Fr. Marcello exclaimed, "This will not do. Let us sing 'Ojos de Cielo.' Always look for someone with that gaze, full of Him."

At 11:50, loud cheering erupted. This was no false alarm—Pope Francis had arrived. The hymn began to sound again and everyone was calling out his name, waving their scarves. Those in the far back stood on their chairs. Along the aisle, everyone stretched out his hands, to touch him even briefly. It evoked the scene from the Gospel of the crowd of people wanting to merely touch the cloak of Christ.

The voices quieted down when Fr. Marcello was greeting the Pope: "Holy Father, we are happy to be here and to be able to meet you, to see you, and to listen to you. You are in the presence of middle-schoolers, accompanied by adults along a path that serves simply to reveal that life is beautiful because Christ loves us. We are here because Your Holiness continually demonstrates the joy of someone who follows Christ. We want to follow you and we are anxious to hear your response to the questions that three of the youth will pose to you."

The first to approach the microphone was Marta, an eighth-grader. She will be making the jump to high school next year. "Why must everything change? Why is it so scary to grow up?"

"Life is a continuous 'hello' and 'goodbye,'" said the Pope to start. "What you say here is a challenge, it is the challenge of life." The Pope thus commenced the dialogue with Marta on fear: "We must learn to

**"We must learn to look at life, looking at horizons, always more, always more, always ahead."**



look at life, looking at horizons, always more, always more, always ahead. And this is the choice you must make." Fear gives way to the challenge.

Giulia asked, "I would like to ask you what we young people can do in a concrete way to change the world around us."

**WITH OPEN HANDS.** Francis called on all of the youth to grapple with these questions. He began from the reality of their lives, relating an example of an unkind friend. He opened and closed his hand to show how one can stay in front of reality: open or closed off. The youth followed his example, raising their arms and opening their hands. "The world is changed by opening the heart, listening to others, accepting others, sharing things." "Changing the world with little everyday things."



**FULL OF LIFE** Pope Francis at the end of audience. Left, from the top, the entrance into the Paul VI Audience Hall; the three kids appointed to pose their questions; Fr. Marcello on the stage with the two Nigerian boys who told their stories before the Pope's arrival.



“And what did Jesus teach us about this? Pray for everyone.” The Pope made a proposal: “In a group, for about half an hour, speak about this. If they do this to me, what must I do?”

The last question was also the most dramatic one, resonating with everyone’s heart. Tanio, from Bulgaria, after spending five years in an orphanage, was adopted by an Italian family. A year later, his mother passed away, followed by his grandparents. “The Knights are a gift, a great gift, for me because they are close to me and support me in every moment of my life. However, this question comes to me: how can you believe that the Lord loves you when He makes you lose people or makes things happen that you would never want?” Not even the Pope knew how to explain suffering. “I look only to the Crucified Jesus. If God let His

only Son suffer so for us, there must be something that has a meaning.” God’s love can always be found beneath suffering. “Only those who support you, who accompany you and help you grow, will make you feel God’s love.” We can entrust all of our suffering to the Virgin Mary. “She understands pain, like all mothers.”

As they stood up, the youth recited the Knights’ prayer of consecration. After the blessing, the Pope once again addressed the middle-schoolers. He asked how generous a heart must be to face life. He wanted them respond with a gesture, the one they had performed earlier. Five thousand open hands were raised high. But that was not all: Francis asked if everything in life can be explained. The resounding “no” was not loud enough. He repeated the question. This time,

the walls of the Paul VI Audience Hall shook.

Before leaving the stage, he approached the kids in the band. He received one of the matching shirts they were wearing as a gift. “I want to hear you play again.” They ran to their instruments to play to “I Cieli” (“The Heavens”). As he was leaving, he gave a thumbs up. He did not forget anyone—he hugged each of the Knights with special needs in the first row. Meanwhile, the arms stretched out from behind to touch him. Then came the turn of those who asked the questions. For each one, he offered a phrase to affirm what they had said. To Marta, “Remember to grow”; to Giulia, “It is possible to change the world”; to Tanio, “do not get angry with Christ,” and he blessed him on the forehead.

**ON THE TRAIN BACK.** Then there was a farewell to Fr. Marcello, Fr. Julián Carrón (the President of the Fraternity of CL), Gloria, Lucio, and Franca, who along with Fr. Giorgio Pontiggia were the first to give life to this endeavor. And a last farewell also to the youth. To the two Nigerians who gave their witness and to 54 Knights who represented the 5,000 present. A hug, a kiss, a gaze, even a selfie, to capture the moment. Many people held out an envelope or a slip of paper with their intentions, their questions, their lives. The doors to the Paul VI Audience Hall shut at 1:00 p.m. The youth ate lunch beneath the Bernini colonnade.

In the afternoon, some of them headed home, while others remained one more day to make the Knights’ Promise. While on the train back to Milan, Mattia, a seventh-grader, said to his friends: “There were three people on the stage today: Fr. Marcello, the Pope, and Jesus.” Christianity, simply put, is a companionship among friends. **T**

# JULIÁN CARRÓN

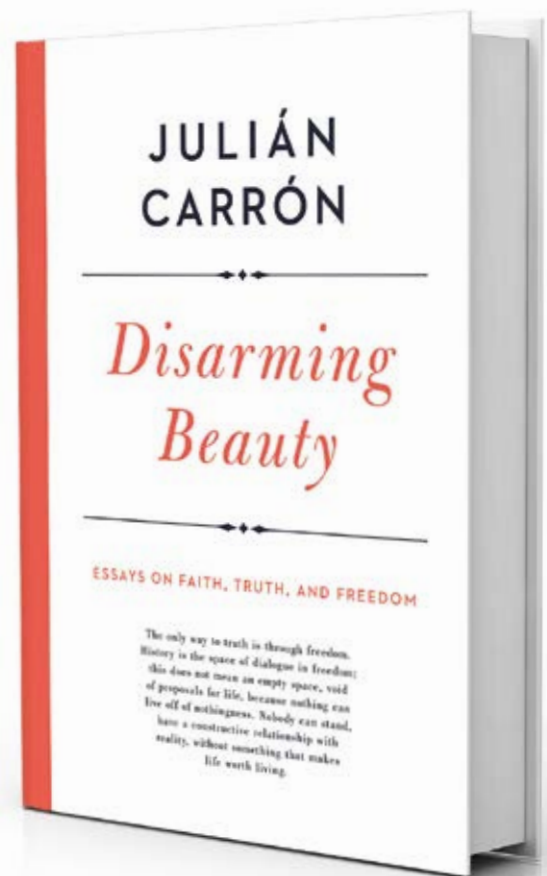
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