

COMMUNION AND LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



BEFORE OUR EYES

In St. Peter's square we have been caught by a presence that burst in and brought everyone on a path that starts anew.

AFTER THE AUDIENCE

OPEN SQUARE

The aftermath of meeting with Pope Francis through the reflections of some friends that reached Rome from very different contexts and returned home with a new and never-ending story in their eyes.

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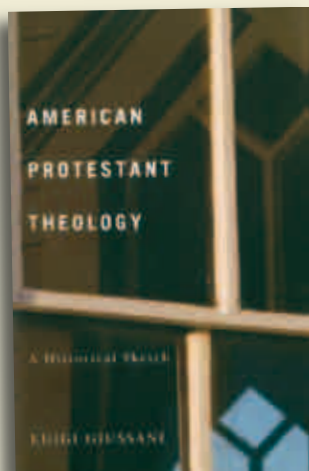
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LUIGI GIUSSANI

276 pages – format 6 x 9 inches
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In *American Protestant Theology*, Luigi Giussani traces the history of the most meaningful theological expressions and the cultural significance of American Protestantism, from its origins in seventeenth-century Puritanism to the 1950s.

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

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

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

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

THROUGH OUR SMALL “YES”

This issue’s editorial is an excerpt from the dialogue with Fr. Julián Carrón, conducted by the Mexican news agency Notimex and then published in Vatican Insider. For the whole text, go to: www.english.clonline.org

The Movement’s expansion presents challenges. In many environments, the Movement represents the “visible face” of the Church. How do you respond to this responsibility?

With humility. We are perfectly aware of how small we are, we know our limits and our disproportion. At the same time we are pleased when we see that the Lord manages through our small “yes” to do things that leave us in awe and strengthen our faith. At this moment in history when everything is crumbling down, to see that certainty in the faith of Jesus Christ is growing—not because we are imagining it, but because we see people who find it and live better, they feel more content and are better prepared to deal with life’s challenges—fills us with joy and gratitude.

The Pope warned you about temptations such as “self-referentiality” and seeing Christianity as a “label.” What do you think about these warnings?

We see it as a very wise call because we feel called to the truth of our charism. Fr. Giussani has always encouraged us to go out, to see the value in everything we come across, in all people we meet and in all circumstances. Hence the call to us not to be closed is in tune with the advice he has given us so that we don’t miss all the good, beautiful and wonderful things we may experience in our relations with people and in various situations.


The Pope also asked you not to lose “the freshness of your charism.” How do you deal with questions that arise when the movement comes under severe public scrutiny, without losing that freshness?

We went to Rome for the audience with the Pope not just because we wanted to celebrate an anniversary but because we wanted to learn, to ask him sincerely how we can preserve the freshness of the charism 10 years after Fr. Giussani’s death. The Pope gave us clear answers; the key is for Christ to always be at the center and he told us this not just with words, he actually made it happen. In St. Peter’s Square we heard him talk about Christianity just as Giussani bore testimony to it. Pope Francis revived the freshness of the charism within us once again, hence we feel the urgent need to preserve it and that the tradition keeps the fire alive.

But there have also been difficulties and crises over these past years, haven’t there?

Naturally the size of this movement means we are always under the spotlight. Sometimes this gives us the chance to give a contribution to others, but sometimes it brings humiliation because we have shortcomings too, just of the whole of the Church sometimes has. We treat them as a constant wish to take stock of important things we are told, leaving aside exaggerations and journalistic interpretations, which we overlook because we are concerned in learning from our limits, too. **T**

HE AND I AND A HEART THAT WORKS

 Dear Fr. Carrón: Thank you for the work you have had us do in these past few months. Along with you, I also thank Pope Francis, because in his words, spoken during the Movement’s audience with him, I hear your same invitation for my conversion. I would like to tell you about an event that marked a turning point for me in my everyday life. I found myself discussing God and marriage with my fiancé, who is not Christian; and like so many times, the difference in our positions surfaced. But this time, something happened when he pressed me with his provocations about God not existing. I realized that I often look at him, not for who he is, but for who I would like him to be, and in the end, I miss out on the best. Because of his provocations, I began to ask myself, “What am I defending: a beautiful discourse or a real fact?” I know that God exists because of faces and facts, and in that moment




I could list them one by one; so why should I change the method and try to convince him with a dialectic? I realized that the fact of being with this man without misleading him, but looking at him for who he is, with my well-functioning heart, with all of its thirst for truth and fulfillment that no discourse can satisfy, is a privileged opportunity for me to redo this work over and over again, and to know better Him who hap-

pened and who never tires of happening again, not even when I reduce Him to a “beautiful discourse.” This is why I see this continual conversion as the only hope for me and for those around me: this continuous allowing Him to knock us off-center. He has made our hearts so well that we cannot be content with anything less than Him.

Cecilia, Shanghai (China)

“I THOUGHT OF HIM WHO TOLD US, ‘BE FREE!’”

 Dear Julián: I was not able to come to Rome so I followed you on television. I was impressed by the Pope’s freedom, by his ability to admonish us with immense tenderness. As Rose said, we were at home. Not, I must add, because we were all there, not because of the event itself, but because of the evident presence of a person who sets the spirit on fire, who makes us breathe deeply, at home again with Him. This week at the office, there was a heavy mood of foolish, useless pettiness. I thought of the

FROM THE CLOISTER

WE ARE PRESENT WITH THE SAME LOVE

Many like myself will not be in Rome on March 7th because the fulfillment of God’s will, matured in the Movement, is the cloister. We will not be less present—quite the contrary. In silence, we will talk to God about each one of you; to you we leave the singing and the applause, to us the whisper of gratitude, but it is all the same love.

Sister Maria Teresa, Milan (Italy)



THE ATTACK IN GARISSA

OUR CERTAINTY IS BECOMING CLEARER NOW

Dear friends: Like everyone here, I've been very shaken by what happened. I look at my kids at school, my friends' children who I've grown so attached to, and I think, "What kind of world awaits them? Where are they going to have to live?" I shudder to think about it. All the newspapers—after initially censoring the story, in part to prevent widespread panic—added horrifying details about what took place. It's enough to make you want to give in to despair, but instead it has made our certainty clearer, that only what



we have met can give an adequate response to all that happens. This makes me go to work with even greater enthusiasm, certain that I am building something good for myself, my kids at school, and my friends' children. Now security is getting tighter at the entrances of shopping malls and wherever you go. They've warned us that the next targets will be schools, but really, what can we do? Of course, we feel that our lives are threatened, and we can't take the fact that we are here for granted; that we have another day in front of us, that we know our friends are here and that they're okay, and we ask that they will always be here. It makes you rediscover that our existence is pure gift. This cruelty makes me more grateful and certain of the encounter that I had, and that I hope my kids will have. Because of this hope, I know that something good awaits them.

Porzia, Nairobi (Kenya)

Pope who told us, "Be free!" I even began to walk in a new way because I was certain of being loved and therefore free. I examined more closely certain situations, such as with my children and my ex-husband. I even told my beloved anticlerical colleagues about Rome as if I had really been there. I believe that life is worth living only at this level, in love with Jesus.

Marcella, Italy

FROM THE PERIPHERIES WITH A JOY IN THE FLESH

Gabriel was supposed to come to the audience with the Pope. Unfortunately, in the end, due to a series of obstacles, he was not given a visa for Italy. Here is what he wrote to us.



Dear Friends: We followed the audience on television. How beautiful! Listening to Pope

Francis's beautiful words of invitation to mission, suddenly the question came to me, "What will separate us from the love of Christ?" To live this joy in the flesh is liberating and encouraging here in the peripheries. I am always grateful and amazed by the friendship and the embrace of the Movement.

Gabriel, Cebu (Philippines)

OPEN SQUARE



The aftermath of the Movement's Audience with Pope Francis through the reflections of some friends that reached Rome from very different contexts and returned home with a new and never-ending story in their eyes.



WHAT DOES THAT MAN ASK OF ME?

At Saint Peter's Square was **ROWAN WILLIAMS**, the former Anglican Primate of England. He was there out of friendship, and because "it is the moment of encounter."

BY LUCA FIORE

How does one address a former Archbishop of Canterbury? In the case of Rowan Williams, who is the Baron of Oystermouth, director of the Magdalene College of Cambridge, and member of the House of Lords, the right way would be "Sir." Those who know him, however, understand this would not please him; it is better to use the less formal "Father." This small sign indicates a lot. Theologian, poet, a man keenly interested in English and Russian literature, one who served for ten years as the Primate of the Anglican Church, he is considered one of the foremost thinkers of the Anglo-Saxon world. With his white beard and deep voice, he has the *physique du rôle* of the great sage.

He was seen sitting next to Fr. Julián Carrón during the audience on March 7th. The extraordinary thing about his encounter with some students of the Movement is its normality: a question asked at the end of a conference, a friend in common, John Milbank, who invited himself to dinner unannounced, and a few afternoon teas. Thus, when it was pro-

posed that he come to Rome, he, the first successor of Augustine of Canterbury since the time of Henry VIII to participate in the funeral of a Pope, cleared his calendar and replied, "All right, I'll come."

Father, why did you accept the invitation?

First, I wanted to hear Pope Francis in person. I had never done so. I wanted to get some sense of his humanity and what he wants as a teacher. And then, out of friendship with those who invited me. I felt very much enriched and inspired by the company of my friends in CL. These

young people strike me with their joy, generosity, and certainty in the faith, which is free of arrogance.

What was your impression of the Pope?

It seems to me he's a man who is, as we say in English, very at home with himself. He has a spontaneity and a natural style. He speaks from his center, and it was very clear in what he said that that center was Christ. That was the center to which he directed all of us. >>



Rowan Williams.

» And the people in the Square?

I was struck by the appeal of his vision and teachings to so many young people, and by the capacity of a meeting like that to draw together many cultures but also many styles of beliefs and worship in the Church. It was interesting to me that the music, for example, represented both the traditional and modern. It was a very unself-conscious blend of the old and the new. You come away feeling a very rootedness in tradition, but no simple looking backwards.

Do you have any questions about what you heard and saw in Rome?

I'm still thinking about the experience and also, I suppose, thinking about how in such a very rapidly changing political world, this vision of Christ's centrality in human life is expressed in the choices we make. We have an election coming up in England. The Pope sends us back to our encounter with Christ and we are all first of all asked to bring ourselves to His light and receive His judgment and mercy. So I'm not losing any sleep by the fact that there are not nice lists of things to do, but just an invitation back to the fundamentals of faith.

Is there anything that astonished you in Francis's words?

The fact that he talked about Caravaggio's Saint Matthew, very vividly and immediately. And the imagery of the bottle of still water, that was wonderful. If you are deeply rooted in the tradition you don't have to worry about that alone. Both the Pope's words and the whole atmosphere reminded me that there is a big difference between living in a tradition and being a traditionalist. That's what I read in Fr. Giussani, and what I sense in so many friends of CL, and in the Pope.



The popemobile moves amidst the outstretched hands of the crowd.

What does it mean for you to be faithful to tradition?

First of all, as the Bible says, continuing to follow the Apostles in the Sacraments, in the reading of the Scriptures, in prayer with fellow Christians. But also the desire to listen intensely to the spiritual profundity of all those who have come before me. Tradition is not an external way of acting, but something interior: listening and receiving what the brothers and sisters in the body of Christ have discovered through the centuries. It is not a burden, but an enormous gift. But at the heart of this, there is sacramental life. Francis said that everything begins with the encounter with the carpenter of Nazareth.

There are not nice lists of things to do, but just an invitation back to the fundamentals of faith.

How did you encounter Him?

I was brought up in an environment where the reading of the Bible was a very regular thing. I could point to a couple of occasions when I was a teenager, particularly the Eucharist, where the sense of that immediacy of encounter came through. And then, the reading of Saint John's Gospel has always been for me the point where I felt most addressed. The words that Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, to the Samaritan woman, to Lazarus, always

sound addressed to me. And of course the words to Mary Magdalene when He speaks her name. When I think of encountering Jesus, it's those moments from Saint John that have been for me the moments and the words that most expressed that reality. That's where he speaks. In Saint John's Gospel, Jesus speaks to individuals more than in any other gospel. We actually hear His voice to particular persons, particular names spoken. He says "Lazarus," He says "Mary," He says "Simon, do you love Me?"

The Pope said that "the special place of the encounter is the caress of mercy of Jesus Christ on my sin." What does that mean for you, existentially?

Let's go back to Saint John's Gospel and the incident of the woman taken in adultery. When all the accusing voices have gone away, the woman is left simply looking into the face of Jesus. She knows in that moment that she is a sinner and she is loved. In Jesus, we encounter the complete truthfulness which shows us what we are. It's a merciless kind of truth, and yet we know that it's inseparable from love. We discover who we are and also who He is. Judgment and mercy belong absolutely together. We know that if He is who He is, then I am a sinner, but also that if He is who He is, I'm forgiven.

HE RE-CENTERED US ON THE CHARISM

Fr. MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI, the Abbot General of the Cistercians, reflects on the Pope's words. "When I become fossilized, I lose my peace."

BY LUCA FIORE

Is there anything in particular that helps you put Jesus in the center?

For me it's mostly the daily practice of the Jesus Prayer of the Orthodox tradition, saying that prayer for 30-40 minutes every morning, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy." During the day, when I'm walking or doing nothing in particular, turning to it reminds me where my anchorage is. I carry a little wooden cross in my pocket. Simply something very concrete I can lay hold of, whether it's words, a picture, or a cross, to remind me of Him.

What did it mean for you, as an Anglican, to be at the Audience?

I don't know if I would say I was truly conscious of being there as an Anglican. I was there with people who shared with me the reality of Baptism and who, like me, belong to the Body of Christ. In the Scriptures it says that Christ is "the desire of all peoples." We should not be surprised that the heart of all peoples turns to Him. As an Anglican, I was simply grateful for the testimony, prayer, friendship, and celebration. I pray that one day the historical barriers will end and a way will be found to truly be together and share the Eucharist. I don't know how or when, but I certainly pray that one day it will be possible.

What did you discover about Fr. Giussani and CL on this occasion?

That for Fr. Giussani every moment is the moment of the encounter. For him, Christ has no free time. Jesus is there awaiting us in every moment, which means that every occasion bears an invitation from Him. When I have to deal with a practical problem, a difficult person, a moment of frustration or temptation, it is a sign that Christ is inviting me to a deeper friendship. This theme was very strong in everything that I heard, not only in the public moment, but also in the conversations I had in those hours. **T**

At 19 Rue de Gambach, a short walk from the University of Friburg, the students sharing a beautiful house in Jugendstil with Fr. Eugenio Corecco had a special name for Corecco's friend, Mauro Giuseppe Lepori: "Palestina." Lepori himself says the nickname was "because of my avarice, which is the tip of the iceberg of my fear of giving my life, which undermined my joy in living." He met CL in 1976. The following year he discerned his vocation to the consecrated life. Forty years later, Swiss-born Fr. Lepori, from the Canton of Ticino, is now the Abbot General of the Cistercians and occupies the seat once held, in a certain sense, by Robert, Alberic, and Stephen—the *Three Rebellious Monks* [as the founder and first leaders of the Cistercians were called in Marcel Raymond's history of the order's early years]. A couple of years ago at the Meeting of Rimini, Lepori spoke of himself as a "little monster," one he can now look upon with mercy, "not so much because he is entirely dead in me, but rather, because it is

precisely he who enables me to measure and understand the charity I ran up against when I met Fr. Corecco," and with him, the Movement of CL.

You, too, were in Saint Peter's Square on March 7th. What are your thoughts after that day?

The Pope asked us questions, provoked us. Speaking of mercy, he said that Christ loves me, esteems me, embraces me, calls me anew, hopes in me, awaits my response. These statements must help us to understand the Pope's attitude toward us, toward the Movement. Through his words Francis, too, esteems us, embraces us, and calls us anew.

Did his words raise any questions for you?

The most surprising thing was his asking us to de-center the charism, and so it raises the most questions. It called to mind the various passages of the journey of the Movement when I was in the CLU: "Hold nothing dearer than Christ," "Give your life for the work of an Other," "Be without a homeland." It was always an invi- **>>**



Fr. Mauro Lepori.

» tation to place Christ at the center. So I said to myself that deep down, in calling us to de-center from the charism in order to center on Christ, he is actually re-centering us on the charism. I don't know if this was his intention, but it had this effect on me.

The Cistercians have a glorious past. What is the meaning for you of Mahler's line, "Faithfulness to tradition means keeping the flame alive, not worshipping the ashes"?

If in Saint Benedict's charism the reference to the centrality of Christ is lost, then yes, it is true, we become museum guides, in the sense that the formal inheritance is no longer supported by a vitality. Monasteries, doctrine, liturgy: all that this great tradition transmits to us falls into decline if there lacks within the fire of a vitality produced by the personal relationship with Christ. Fr. Giussani and Saint Benedict both were aware that life must always be in conversion, that you can never feel that everything is in place. I liked it that the title of the encounter with the Pope was: "On the journey."

When it happens, if it happens, how do you realize that the charism is becoming "fossilized"?

I realize because I am not happy. I lose my peace. Fossilizing means saying that who I am or what I do, or who the communities are and what they do, becomes more important than the One who calls us. You turn in on yourself, maybe proud of what you do or what you are, and you no longer follow Christ, and you no longer make this journey that is always new. Following Christ means following One who is the Mystery. If you lose this, you become fossilized. Even the mere awareness of this is a call to adhere to

Christ. It is the call of mercy, like the Pope's, because you are regenerated by that love. Saint Benedict spoke of the humility of acknowledging we are sinners, and of resuming anew a journey in the footsteps of Christ's mercy.

What helps you to find this humility?

Life itself: not closing in on my own thoughts and feelings, but remaining open to encounters, to what reality asks of me. Never settling for self-love. A Father of the Church said that we must immerse any search for self-love in the love of God. That is de-centering from yourself: you can find yourself in full only if you immerse yourself in the love of God.

"Keep alive the flame of the memory of that first encounter, and be free!" The Pope pronounced with particular force that "be free!"

In the monastic world, all the abuses of freedom come from asking members

to follow some forms instead of educating them to prefer Christ. I often provoke the communities I visit by asking: Are we in the monastery for Christ or for another reason? Because in the final analysis, only Christ saves our freedom. Following Him and obeying Him is the greatest road of freedom. Christ must be proposed

not as a form, a message, a morality, but as a person, as the Mystery of a presence that nobody possesses, One who gave Himself first, who loved us first, as the Pope said.

Francis asks us to be an outward-bound Church. Can a monk feel challenged by this, too?

The Pope himself told us superior generals of religious orders that the peripheries are defined by each person's vocation. If we think of Therese of



The Argentineans sang *Zamba de mi Esperanza* in honor of the Holy Father.

Lisieux, the peripheries for her were the universe of the human heart. The peripheries are the person sought by Christ, the human heart begged by the love of Christ who wants to reach every person. If you do not have the consciousness of how much Christ wants to save even the last person of history, you cannot truly be a father or a mother. Fruitfulness comes through participating in the charity of God that has reached us. If you go deeply into the charity by which and for which you are called, you surely go to the peripheries: you are missionary. If you lack the awareness that without Christ you can do nothing, you are sterile even if you do everything and go everywhere. But if you have this consciousness, you are surely fruitful, even if to outward appearances you can do nothing.

Recently, presenting the new edition of *Simon, Called Peter* (Cantagalli), you said that for you, following the Pope means following your personal relationship with Christ.

It did me a lot of good to reflect in preparation for that conference. For the first time, I realized how the end

ON HIS JOURNEY

People of all ages and homelands reflect on the Pope's proposal, starting with what happened in front of them.

BY P. BERGAMINI, L. FIORE, A. LEONARDI, P. PEREGO, A. STOPPA



of John's Gospel describes precisely John's following of Peter, who follows Jesus. I had never realized that John, who understood everything better than Peter, who was united with Christ perhaps more than was Peter, understood that he had to follow both of them immediately after they publicly exchanged that "Do you love Me?" "Yes, I love You," "Feed My sheep." Clarifying this aspect for myself gave me the right prayerful attitude of asking that I needed as I came to the audience. I'm not just referring to the Pope's talk, but to the entire moment: the beauty of this great people that was present there, the familiarity that you could feel. So now, I'm mulling over that day in the context of a clarity that I had already received. Focusing on the objective relationship between Jesus and the Pope produces a light that disperses the fog of various interpretations. I don't want to lose this clarity, because I care about myself and my friends. John who follows Peter who follows the Risen One, in order not to lose the traces of the Risen One... It is the last scene of the Gospel, an experience that began then and will never end. **T**

**JIANQING ZHANG,
Padua (Italy)**

Being at the gathering with the Pope was a true grace for me. I have been in prison for ten years, and have never slept a night outside. Just leaving [prison] gave me an immense joy, but finding the Pope in front of me and being able to tell him that in a month I would be baptized (receiving the name Augustine) was almost too much. I keep thinking of that gaze, of that smile he gave me, full of mercy and love. I had the sensation of being purified of my sins. A new life is being born again: the Lord is always with our companionship and He never abandons us. I've begun to pray more, above all for the people who still suffer today because of me. It is a need that springs from the depths of my heart, something that has miraculously opened through Pope Francis's handshake. This experience is calling me to do something for the Lord, that is, to transmit His love to my neighbor and to announce that the mercy of God is for everyone. Now I am living this mission intensely. Finally, in my small way, I can be useful to the Lord.

**JOHN KINDER,
Perth (Australia)**

Since he has returned to Perth, John has done nothing other than talk about the experience. Even his colleagues at the very secular University of Western Australia stop him in the hallways of the Languages Department to ask him about meeting the Pope face to face. "After the audience, I got in line to greet him. I was trying to put my thoughts and words in order too, but then his gaze arrived. Those ten seconds were the simplest thing in my life: letting myself look and desiring just to follow a man who is following Christ."

In Saint Peter's Square he was with his New Zealand friend, Fr. John O'Connor, but he also wanted at all costs to meet up with his friends from way back when, those he had met in 1977 as a young student in Milan. "Deep down, my story has been one of a gaze that in every circumstance has brought me closer to Christ. For this reason, I am not afraid of 'de-centering' myself, because it coincides with the certainty that at the center of life, He is **>>**

▶▶ present.” This is the same point from which the communities of Melbourne and Sydney have started again: “We are very small realities,” recounts John, “but we, too, are tempted to publicize the Movement. Instead, the Pope freed us from the desire to ‘make an impression’ and made us see that the one thing that counts is to live the encounter that makes us feel loved.” This is the freshness with which the friends of Sydney are now preparing the exhibit on Giussani. “I felt that the Pope treated me like an adult, and for the first time I was not afraid to return to the usual things. Christ *primerea* with me, He comes first. So He is already there at home, waiting for me.”

ANJA STROTSEVA, **Minsk (Belarus)**

Anja belongs to the Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Moscow. She received the invitation to go to the audience with the Pope around Christmastime, during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. “It was a somewhat strange proposal for us Orthodox. I didn’t think I would be able to organize it, but then, in February, I read Pope Francis’s appeal for the war in Ukraine, and I decided.” Before then, she had never heard what was happening in eastern Ukraine referred to as a fratricidal war among Christians. “Then I understood that I wanted to go to him, because the Pope prays for and feels the drama of this war the way I do.”

For her, the war in Ukraine is not just a political question, but is the manifestation of a deeper malaise that affects society and the Church. “One of the reasons we came was that we wonder what voice Christians can have in the world today, how it is possible to witness to Christianity.” The thing that most struck Anja and the group of Orthodox sitting on the parvis was the lack of for-



Yuan Pei sang the *Hail Mary* in Chinese in Saint Peter’s Square (read her story below).

mality in the way the audience was run. “I saw a great freedom that left space for the personal encounter. It is something we are absolutely unused to in similar circumstances. For this reason, the question I have is how you Catholics have managed to free yourselves from formalism.”

YUAN PEI, **Berkeley (USA)**

She is the one who sang the *Ave Maria* in Saint Peter’s Square. She met the Movement in an engineering firm in Shanghai, but now she is a full-time mother in Berkeley, California. Unaccustomed to singing in public, she felt immense emotion at performing in front of over 80,000 people. And yet, if you ask her what is echoing in her mind about that day, she goes straight to the Pope’s words. “My heart leapt when he said that the privileged place of the encounter with Christ was his sin. I have always been ashamed of my weaknesses. Instead,

the Pope’s humble and honest expression freed me to accept who I am and what I am called to do. This is the true freedom that Christ promised us. So I pray for a wounded heart, a beggar’s heart, so I will always desire His gaze.”

Adele, translating for Yuan Pei, says, “Words that would not have made sense to me became familiar. This is how I came to truly understand Christianity. I come from a Protestant background and attended Bible studies in which we analyzed the Gospel line by line. I always left having understood everything, but with nothing that remained for me. Instead, the first time I read Giussani, I understood little to nothing. The one thing I sensed was that he recognized a desire that I was afraid to even evoke.” So she continued spending time with those friends. “They were so different from anyone else. I felt so at home with them! I stayed close to them, and, as in Saint Peter’s Square, words that were foreign to



The CL Brazil community in St. Peter's square.

me became full of meaning. Recognizing the presence of Christ in real life was transmitted to me by people who considered me their friend. As the Pope told us, 'the encounter is not with an idea, but with the person of Christ.' This is exactly what happened to me and continues to happen to me."

**BRIGHT LUMANYIKA,
Kampala (Uganda)**

This was the first time that 25-year-old Bright had been to see the Pope. "I listened while someone next to me tried to translate what he was saying, and what Carrón said." Just a few sentences, he says, smiling. "In other words, the essential to which both continue to call us." He works at the Meeting Point International, and met the Movement "a few years ago, in my school." He is one of Rose's kids, those who grew up around the group of women with AIDS who have been reborn in the friendship with the Kampala nurse.

"It was the encounter with a father. Without a father, a son cannot exist. I don't know a lot about the Pope. I have read about him, often on the Internet, and then I heard Carrón speak about him, when he said that we have in front of us a father who regenerates us every day. This is why I felt 'at home' in Rome."

He is returning to Uganda with a great desire to start again from what he saw happen in Saint Peter's Square. "Hearing those words reminded me of something of Fr. Giussani's that I read, in which he spoke about the responsibility of the charism," a responsibility to the world, just like Francis's invitation to "go out." "Looking at the essential, at Christ, because this is the one way for me, for everyone, to live and be happy."

**TIMOTHY FORSE,
Cambridge (Great Britain)**

Timothy Forse is an Englishman through and through, proudly Anglican, with all the questions,

doubts, and pain of a member of the High Church raised in the school of Michael Ramsey, the unforgotten Archbishop of Canterbury in the sixties and seventies. Timothy was invited to the audience by Carlo, whom he had gotten to know a few years before when Carlo and some friends lived in Tim's home in the center of Cambridge for a period of study. "One of them got up early every morning to go to Mass. He took his faith very seriously and had no problem talking about it with me." What struck him, in particular? "It's hard to explain, but to use Newman's words, 'Cor ad cor loquitur,' heart speaks to heart. Over time, Carlo gave me some books of Giussani's and introduced me to some other friends in the Movement. They entered the front door of my home and came into my life to stay. Carlo, Giussani, and Christ."

The invitation came a few days before the audience. "My decision to come is part of a Yes with a capital Y, born of our deep friendship. Just one word describes what I saw: extraordinary." His initial reaction was the perception of Francis's humility. He felt a sense of grace, felt that he had received a moving answer to his "incapacity to set aside my 'I,' what the Pope called self-referentiality." At the same time he felt conscious of his own shortcomings, the place where Francis said the Church can pour the balsam of God's mercy.

Once back home, unable to express in normal words what is now moving in his heart, he took up paper and pen and wrote a poetic reflection dedicated to his friends of CL. Entitled *Lenten Rose*, it is the first flower to blossom in his Cambridge garden. "You are there / The metaphor tells / The sign of appearing / First you, Our Lord." **T**



OUR TRUE “SUERTE”

One week after the Audience, the Assembly of Responsibles of CL in Brazil brought together three hundred people from all over Latin America. Three days to bear witness to the year gone by.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

Focus again on “our luck.” The life of a people who, from St. Peter’s Square, continue back here. “Everything in our life,” the Pope said, “begins with an encounter.” Not before, not later: right now. It’s a week after the Audience and Alexandre, a doctor from São Paulo, is discussing his encounter with some of his students. “We can all go home now,” says Fr. Julián Carrón after having listened

to his story, thus challenging the 300 people gathered for the Assembly of Responsibles of Latin America (ARAL). They came from 20 countries, traveling in the torrential rain of the Brazilian summer. Of course, no one gets up to go; it’s clear that the most beautiful part is just beginning.

Alexandre teaches in the School of Medicine at the Paulist University, where Brazil’s elite study. The atmos-

phere at the school is tense: the number of student collectives is multiplying along with the battles for every kind of right. It’s gotten so bad that two professors must always be present during classes to “guarantee objectivity.” “A question grew in me,” he says: “How can I announce the newness of Christ through what I teach?” At the end of the course, a student came to see him. “I want to stay with you.” A few days later, two



more students came, both liberal atheists just like the first. “We want to be doctors that are more human, like you are. Is it something you’re born with, or can you learn?”

THE INVISIBLE BATTLE. They began to meet once a week, without ever even mentioning the topic of faith. Their friendship continued to grow until one day, on a hike in the mountains, Alexandre talked to them about him-

self. The students were shocked that the response to their many questions was the Church. The next day they looked up CL online and went back to see him, saying: “We want to do School of Community, even though we’re atheists.” They began working on *The Religious Sense*. “One of them told me, ‘The path that we’re walking together is opening my heart,’” Alexandre continues. “They invited other classmates and they asked me if they could give to the common fund and do charitable work.” The story isn’t over, but Carrón goes deeper: “Do we really believe that faith is attractive? Two thousand years later, the same thing happens again. The last person to arrive recognizes the newness that has overtaken our lives, the difference in the way that we do things. We get nervous in front of challenges; we think that our options are either a frontal attack or that it’s impossible to be ourselves in the world. We respond to appearances, when instead we merely need to live the treasure that has been given to us.” This is how a battle opens up in those around us, just as in the heart of that student. It’s a battle that the world doesn’t see but that suddenly explodes in begging: “I want to stay with you.”

It’s “God’s method.” It was a recurring theme in the 3-day Assembly, which began with the video of the Audience and was dominated by that event which continues in Brazil. “This is our starting point: what happened to us in Rome?” Or what happened 6,000 miles away? It was 4:30 in the morning on March 7th and Silvia was watching the event live in her living room in Lima, Perú. When the transmission ended, her big and strong husband Ivan was in tears. All he said to her was, “My heart is bursting because of the way Christ loves me.”

“We went to Rome to be embraced by His Presence in whatever situation that we find ourselves in,” Carrón

says. “This is how God changes the world, even if we think that it doesn’t make a difference. The only thing that we need to do is to convert: to live with the awareness that we are loved is the most important political, cultural or social action that there is.” In many of the countries represented at the Assembly, daily life is made up of great challenges, but God’s action is as disarming as a hug in the midst of violence, and seems just as disproportionate, as such a small “people”—made up of young people, mothers, fathers, and missionaries—spread out across the expanse of Latin America.

FAITH AND ROCK. The group of friends from Venezuela have found themselves thrown into the food shortage. Fr. Leonardo is from Caracas: “It’s reality that makes me ‘decentralize.’ Everything that is happening pushes me to recognize the caress of mercy in my life even more.” The fruits are the renewed unity of the community, to the point of keeping everyone’s needs in mind even while waiting in line at the pharmacy; the tenderness which one discovers in himself, watching the police chief in a conflict with a group of students; and the friends who don’t have money, but give to the common fund “because in return the Movement gives me life.” Then, here at the ARAL there is the delivery of bags and suitcases full of food or medicine from other countries. “We feel like the early Christians,” says Alejandro, moved. He had just received a new pair of jeans from a Colombian friend.

Oliverio is 39 and lives in Coatzacoalcos in Vera Cruz, one of the most violent states in Mexico. He works in the shop that belonged to his father who, several years ago, was kidnapped and killed. Listening to the Holy Father, he was brought back to vivid memories from his past. >>

▶AFTER THE AUDIENCE

» “I played in a band; I did drugs and I drank. My dad’s death saved my life, because it was then that I met the Movement. Everything that I have now was because of this mercy.” Now he is a father, too, of three sons. With some other businessmen who were struck by his willingness to risk, he initiated a project for local development in the city, and even in such a devastated place he hasn’t lost his passion for life (or for music: he just recorded an album of rock ‘n roll). Fr. Julián de la Morena, the responsible of CL in Latin America, is struck by these friends who continue to be more engaged in the situations in their countries, “Along this path, we become more aware that our contribution is summed up in the building of a people, a people who take after John and Andrew.”

PALMADITA. Over the three days, they enter together along the road that the Pope proposed, doing it in the light of “the Mystery’s preference,” which, as Carrón says, reaches each person “not like a *palmadita*, a pat on the back, but through those who speak of Christ and His mercy, who speak of that which we need to live. We confuse the idea of preference, because we don’t know our own need: we are preferred because we have met Him! All of our luck is in this.”

Santiago, a 33-year-old Argentinian in Uruguay, asks what the phrase “Be free!” means. “I’m about to lose my job,” he says, and I’m not free at all. What does it mean to be free?” Carrón answers, “The Pope says, ‘Be free!’ so it begins now: be free starting right now. It’s better to make a mistake than to not be free. So, you tell me, what

We confuse the idea of preference, because we don’t know our own need: we are preferred because we have met Him!

does his reminder say to you and your situation? Where do you find freedom?” Santiago tells about how he began looking for another job, but that didn’t make him free. He

tells how he prayed a lot, which made him “a little free...” “We get ourselves doubly trapped,” Carrón interjects. “Beyond losing a job, we have the additional problem of not being able to be free. So let’s read what the Pope says about freedom: ‘Giussani educated to freedom, leading

to the encounter with Christ, because Christ gives us true freedom.’ Is it the fruit of our effort? No. So then, what gives us freedom?” He begins to retell John and Andrew’s encounter with Jesus: the wonder that leaves

them in silence, and their greeting each other without speaking because they’ve become one thing; and then how Andrew, arriving at home, embraces his wife crying and hears her question, “What did you do?” He was himself, but he was a new man. With this example Carrón showed everyone that we are not free, but freed; freedom is always given. “You have to verify it in your experience,” he tells Santiago. “You can see for yourself if you discover that you are free, not theoretically but in reality, and see where freedom comes from. I can’t give you the answer. I can’t save you the work. This is an example of the work we have to do following the Pope’s proposal.”

The day of the audience, Cleuza and Marcos Zerbini were there, close to the Pope. “It moved me to see a people there.” As soon as she begins to speak, Marcos’s face be-



FROM MEXICO TO ARGENTINA. A few moments from the three days of the Assembly in Mariapolis, close to Sao Paulo, Brazil. The theme was, “I am nothing when You are not present.”





comes lined with tears. He who is familiar with big crowds, with the thousands of people in the Tralbahadores Sem Terra (“Workers without Land”). “From every corner of the world, we were all one thing. The problem is not in belonging to a people, but it’s being aware of it. Not taking it for granted.”

THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER. “The beauty of what happened to me needs time,” Cleuza says. “Now, I can only say that I live with another heart, wherever I am.” The day after Rome, she was already immersed in work meetings. “But it was the same thing as being in the Square. It’s whether Christ is my center or not, this makes the difference.” She gives an example that is as direct as she is: “We had gone to the Amalfi Coast, hosted in a hotel owned by friends who were out of the country. They had prepared everything for us,

with a balcony in that beautiful place...yet it was not as beautiful as the other times, because they weren’t there. It’s the same with Christ.”

“Let’s let ourselves be challenged by the beautiful things that happen, but God’s action” is the invitation that keeps coming back throughout the assemblies, which also unveils questions, problems, and the growing desire not to feel safe and autonomous, but rather turned outward from oneself. Jovana, a Brazilian who just graduated, finds that the friendship “decentralizes” her because “it doesn’t solve my problems like I expected, but it does sustain me.” And Horacio, who is writing a depressing commentary on the political situation in Argentina, stops himself and deletes it: “Is this analysis helping me in my relationship with my wife? Is it helping me to live?” The person is more valuable than the entire world, and the

active presence of God is in the tiny details of the lives that are shared over breakfasts, lunch, and dinner. A group of young Chileans is there for the first time, and Fr. Marco, who has been with them as a missionary for years, looks at them with gratitude. “The beauty of their presence makes it all worthwhile. This is what helps me and makes me want to give my life, just like the witnesses that I see here: it’s a chain of *yeses* that makes mine possible.”

Claudia from Macapà, at the mouth of the Amazon River, is also at the ARAL for the first time. After the screening of the movie about Fr. Giusani on the last night, she feels just as she did when she first met the Movement. “Everything that this man said, up to the end of his days, is for me: he wanted to give it to me. It helped me to understand the dimension of Christ’s sacrifice for my life.” **T**



A WORLD OF CONTRASTS

After the attack at the Bardo Museum, the country tries to begin again. Fr. RAMÓN ECHEVERRÍA, vicar of the Archdiocese of Tunis, describes the society that gave the world the greatest numbers of both reformist thinkers and jihadists, and where it is possible to discover the marvels of *mixité*.

BY LUCA FIORE

“**M**r. President, please allow our Catholic community to accompany you in this moment of great suffering for the Tunisian people.” Fr. Ramón Echeverría, a Basque by birth, is the vicar of the Archdiocese of Tunis and pastor of St. Cyprian of Carthage Church in La Marga, an upscale suburb of the capital city that borders the coast. He is reading the letter from the Archbishop Ilario Antoniazzi to the Tunisian head of state, Beji Caid Essebi, written the day after the slaughter in the Bardo Museum.

Three men and three Kalashnikov rifles amidst busloads of tourists. Hostages taken in the shadows of statues and Roman mosaics. At the end of the day, 22 were killed and 42 wounded. Those who claimed responsibility referred to the attackers as “Knights of the Caliphate.”

“The terrorist barbarians wanted to humiliate Tunisia by attacking the values at the foundation of your society, which are hospitality and culture,” the letter continues. “Our Catholic community is made up of many nationalities, but in daily life the Tunisian people have made us feel truly at

home. We would like to thank you and to proclaim to the world that no criminal act could ever destroy this reciprocal communion.” Tunisia has changed and this has made it a target for violence: “We appreciate the efforts that the country is making toward economic, social, and educational development to build a free and democratic society where all political, cultural, and religious views can live together in peace. In this effort, you can always count on our full collaboration.”

How have the people reacted?

The night of the attack people filled the square, protesting against terrorism. On March 20th, two days later, I went into the city with some friends. We went to Medina, where you find the stores where tourists shop. I witnessed a lot of anger, people saying, “These people want us dead; we haven’t seen a tourist here since Wednesday.” At the same time, it was also Tunisian Independence Day.



Avenue de Bourguiba, the capital's main street, was packed with young people for a concert. There were hundreds of Tunisian flags; the atmosphere was joyful.

Had you never seen that before? Not even after the revolution?

After the revolution, the consumption of beer definitely increased, at least by 50 percent. I know because one of my parishioners produces bottles and said that demand has increased. The number of tourists has shrunk, but more beer has been sold. The Ennahda government maintained the policy from the time of Ben Ali, in which alcohol could only be sold in certain places and never on Fridays. Now it's no longer that way, and I think it's a sign of openness. But it's not the only one. A nun who works in Manouba in an orphanage told me that the new government has lifted the ban on international adoptions put into place by Islamists.

This attack is a harsh blow to the government, though...

Yes, right now all of their energy is concentrated on the question of security. Just like in Europe, the government here is tied up responding to emergencies, but can't manage to focus energy on long-term problems, which are actually more important. Tunisian society, made up of a little more than 10 million people, gave two things to the world: the highest number of Reformist Muslim thinkers and the highest percentage of jihadists in Iraq and Syria. This shows that it is a society that is split down the middle. Our hope is that, in time, those who will prevail will be not what I would call "secular" but "Muslims of goodwill." Today's young people have a cultural and religious formation that is much poorer than that of their parents. There are many reasons for this, but one is because of the way that the regime controlled everything during the Ben Ali years, even religion. Young people were discouraged from going to the mosque. This meant that they never spent time with peaceful Muslims. Today, we have the arrival of the fundamentalists who guarantee an easy way to respond to questions of certainty. The risk that I see is that those calls secularists could become too "secularist" at the same time that the Islamists become too Islamist.



Ramón Echeverría.

Do you worry about your presence as Christians?

Over the last few years, the general situation has improved. In general we as Christians have not had any problems and I don't think that we will. Then, of course, all it takes are two crazy people on their own... but who can control everyone?

You have lived in Tunisia for over 20 years. What have you learned?

One thing has struck me more than

anything else: the *mixité*, the intermingling among cultures. European women married to Tunisians build the basis of the Catholic presence in Tunisia—at least the most stable part, because the rest are tourists or businessmen who are more or less here in passing. The women who are in interfaith marriages stay, they have married Tunisia. Often these marriages don't work out, but it's hard to say if it's because of the mix of cultures or because of individual circumstances... But I am struck to see those [marriages] that do work, and there are many in my parish. They are a grace from God.

What is it that strikes you?

In an interfaith couple, we find two people who, if we asked them what they believe in most deeply, would give two differing answers, and wouldn't be able to come to agreement. Yet, they know that there is a mystery that unites them that is so deep that it permits them to journey together. In this country, intermingling has always been important. It has been the key I have used to understand my work here. I see that when there is a funeral for the Christian mother of a Tunisian, the church fills up with Muslims in fervent prayer. I think that this "mixité," this intermingling of cultures, is the greatest thing that I have discovered in Tunisia.

In Westner societis, it's a dynamic that causes worry.

Of course, when it doesn't work it's a source of fear. Divorce happens when two people can't live with each other's differences. In contrast, in a true intermingling, the impossible happens, and it's amazing. For us Christians the ultimate intermingling, which could never work according to our own logic, is that of God with humankind in Jesus. And yet, it works. **T**

FROM HOLLYWOOD TO GOD

Behind the well-known face on the big screen hides a man in love with the Gospel. After donning the robes of the Trappist monks of Tibhirine, **MICHAEL LONSDALE** gives us a “preview” of the story of his conversion.

BY CARLO DIGNOLA

“**Y**ou can find many beautiful things in the Upanishads. There are wonderful Buddhists, Hindus who strike you with their wisdom, and Sufi masters. I found great joy in reading Lao-Tse and Confucius—man never stops seeking. The truest thing that I have read in my life, however, is the Gospel. The most perfect word, that which generates the most life, is the word of Jesus.” Michael Lonsdale is an 83-year-old French actor with an impressive filmography. He has acted

in about 150 movies, including major Hollywood productions as varied as Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* and the James Bond film *Moonraker*. He has worked with such acclaimed directors as Orson Welles, Truffaut, Malle, Godard, De Oliveira, Ivory, Buñuel, and Olmi (*The Cardboard Village*, 2011). His most recent blockbuster was *Of Gods and Men*, the 2010 film that told the true story of the monks who were massacred by the Armed Islamic Group in Tibhirine, Algeria, in 1996.

“The time has come in which, as Christians,
we have to take up our task again: To promote humanity.”



Lonsdale has appeared on television since the 1950s, and has also had a varied stage career: he has performed Sophocles and stories from the Bible, Shakespeare and Proust, Beckett and Camus, Ionesco and Pavese.

His latest work is a brief book about his life, soon to be released in Italian under the title *Dare un volto all'amore: La mia fede da Spielberg a Tihhirine* [Give Love a Face: My Faith from Spielberg to Tihhirine]. It is not the story of his professional success,

BIOGRAPHY

Michael Lonsdale was born in Paris on **May 24, 1931**. His mother was French and his father was English. From 1939-1947 he lived in Morocco.

In the course of his career he has acted under many acclaimed directors, including **Spielberg, Truffaut, Malle, Buñuel and Olmi**. In 2011 he won the César Award for Best Supporting Actor in 2011 for his performance in *Of Gods and Men*.

but of his relationship with God. His journey to Christianity was a winding one; Jesus drew him in “sweetly” as he tells Traces. “My father was an English Protestant; my mother, a French Catholic; but we didn’t go to church. My parents decided not to baptize me, which was very uncommon at the time. Still, mom loved Jesus very much. She was the first person who taught me about Him.”

SEEKING. When Michael was seven years old, his family moved to Rabat, Morocco. I believe the first religious book that you read was the Qur’an, right? “That’s right. When I was 15 I became friends with a Muslim, an antique dealer in Fes,” he replies. “In the evenings we met in the city’s cafes and he spoke to me about God. I was fascinated, but I never became Muslim.”

He was not converted by books; it was a series of encounters that changed his life. His autobiography is in large part a list of names, places, instants, and faces that had a profound effect on him. “For me, Jesus is a real man, in flesh and blood.” And how did he learn this? “I was looking for something, and I found it in a fantastic Dominican, Father Raymond Régamey. I met him shortly after I returned to Paris. I went to hear him speak because of his passionate way of explaining the relationship between art and faith. I made an appointment with him at Saint-Jacques convent. ‘What are you looking for?’ he asked me. ‘I don’t know. I’m looking for something true, something good, something great...’ ‘Maybe you’re simply looking for God,’ he answered.” The person who really changed his life was not a religious, but a >>>

» blind woman named Denise Robert. “She was a delightful person: always smiling, joyful, and glowing. We spent entire afternoons together, speaking of anything and everything. I didn’t always understand Father Régamey; sometimes he used words that I didn’t even know. It was Denise who really helped me to become a Christian. She liked walking throughout Paris, and she knew the city well. She often took me to the Miraculous Medal chapel on Rue de Bac. We laughed a lot, and along the way she spoke to me about the Gospel, she taught me all about Jesus.”

A HAPPY MAN. At age 22, Michael decided to get baptized right at Saint-Jacques Convent. His sponsor was, of course, Denise. “That day I cried, I kept crying!” he remembers. It was not just any place; in the 1950s and 1960s it was a place of great intellectual influence in France. “I met great theologians and extraordinary priests, like Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar, there.”

Another major step came in the 1980s, when in the span of a few months he lost his mother (“She was very sick for a long time before that, but it was still hard to lose her”), Denise, and other people who were dear to him. What happened to him? “I no longer had the will to live. I didn’t see anyone. I didn’t feel anything anymore.” It was at that time that he met the Charismatic Renewal movement and became close with the Emmanuel Community. Why? “I go regularly to Paray-le-Monial. I like the town and its pretty Romanesque church. To my delight, I met Catholics who were warm, open and welcoming there. I also met Father Dominique Rey, who is now bishop of Toulon. He became a close friend; he helped me a lot.”

Over the last few years, Lonsdale wanted to dedicate his work as an



MONK AND PHYSICIAN. Above a scene from the 2010 film by Xavier Beauvois. In *Of Gods and Men* Lonsdale played the monk and physician Luc.

actor “only to works that are in some way spiritual. These days, it’s not a job for me, but the way that I respond to Christ’s call.” He’s ended up in the garb of priests, monks, and cardinals; he has played the Rector of the Great Mosque of Paris and the archangel Gabriel. “But,” he adds, “I have also played bad guys: for example, the devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*.”

It seems to me that you, for the most part, have brought to life “normal” Catholics, like Bernanos’s country priest, Thérèse of Lisieux or Madeleine Delbrêl. Why is that? “They are all people who have something to say to today’s world, which is waiting for a sign of hope. I also acted out *The Little Flowers*” of St. Francis of Assisi, my favorite saint. I’ve met Guy Gilbert, who goes out to find children living in the streets, several times.”

My impression is that you like Christians who are simple and direct, who have a more “affective” than intellectual understanding of faith. Is that true? “Yes,” he says, smiling. “And that’s why I think this new Pope, Francis, is extraordinary. He’s changing things in Rome. His attention to the poor is amazing.” His greatest moment, though, was to put on the habit of Frère Luc for *Of Gods and Men*. “He is such a simple, true person, so familiar with holiness. For me, he’s the picture

of a happy man: love for your neighbor makes you happy.”

PÉGUY’S PROPHECY. Now Lonsdale has found a new Catholic thinker who fascinates him: “Charles Péguy. With another actor, I have been reading his writings from the stage. He’s a man who lived great beauty; I see that people are very interested in him. What’s incredible is that what he said 50 years ago is coming true today; he’s a kind of prophet. I see that the question of hope was crucial for him as well... When we leave Mass on Sunday, you should be able to see faith shining in our faces, but we are often too fearful.”

You write that inside today’s man, “something is broken.” What do you mean by that? “I see what is happening in France, and in Libya, with terrorism. It distresses me. When I was young, I lived surrounded by Muslims in Morocco. I had dear friends; they were in no way fanatics. True Muslims were shocked by ISIS’s January 7 attacks. Nowhere in the Qur’an is it written that you need to go around killing people like that. Terrorists are fanatics. This is a very difficult time.” But evil has always existed... “Yes, of course. But the time has come in which, as Christians, we have to take up our task again.” And what is that task? “To promote humanity.” **T**

COFFEE BREAK

Giacomo had been trying, for over 10 days he'd been trying. But it just wasn't working. They'd asked him to take on a little extra work: overseeing another office in addition to his own. They wanted him to turn around this other section while, at the same time, keeping an eye on everyday operations, that which he was already doing and which, thanks be to God, was growing despite the crisis. Yes, it was a sign of his bosses' esteem—he had been chosen for such an important task—but it also meant more work to oversee, more things to learn, and more problems to deal with. He had been trying, giving his all, and things were going all right, for now. “But I felt suffocated: what if I make a mistake? What would I do then? How will I manage to do everything well?”

These were the thoughts that came to him once again on Monday, when he returned to work after the audience with the Pope in Rome. Only, now, he was also filled with a great and joyful sense of wonder, and a clear question: okay, so what does everything that happened in Rome have to do with this new responsibility at work?

AROUND THE ESPRESSO MACHINE he finds three coworkers, a lot of talk and that atmosphere of complaining that you often find in the hallways of an office, even when things are going well enough. The colleague who messed up, the boss who doesn't understand, the problem that should have been handled in another way... Giulia tries to pull him in asking, “What do you think, Giacomo?” He's direct, saying, “Look, I don't know what to say right now. I'll think about it. We'll see.” Those complaints, however, get to him, because deep down he feels the same way. The complaints are his as much as the urgent question about work is his. “It made me pick up the Pope's speech, to read one more time.” The next day, he gave it to his colleagues.

THE WEEK FLIES BY, and Friday arrives quickly. He runs into his colleagues again. This time it's he who asks the question: “Did you read it?” “Yes, I did”. “And what do you think?” Giulia looks at him, and smiles. “That the most important thing is mercy. Only it can save the world, and me.” Period.

The coffee break is over, and it's time to get back to work. “After that, though, everything changed,” Giacomo tells his friends. “Now I can breathe.” Why? “I saw what the Pope described, do you remember? ‘Christian morality is not a titanic, voluntary effort... a sort of isolated challenge before the world,’ etc. It's ‘One who knows me... appreciates me... hopes in me, has expectations for me.’” He pauses; “and just think, if this new project at work could be the chance to discover this?”



ARTIMONDO

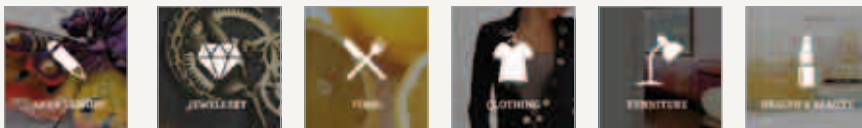
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