

COMMUNION AND LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

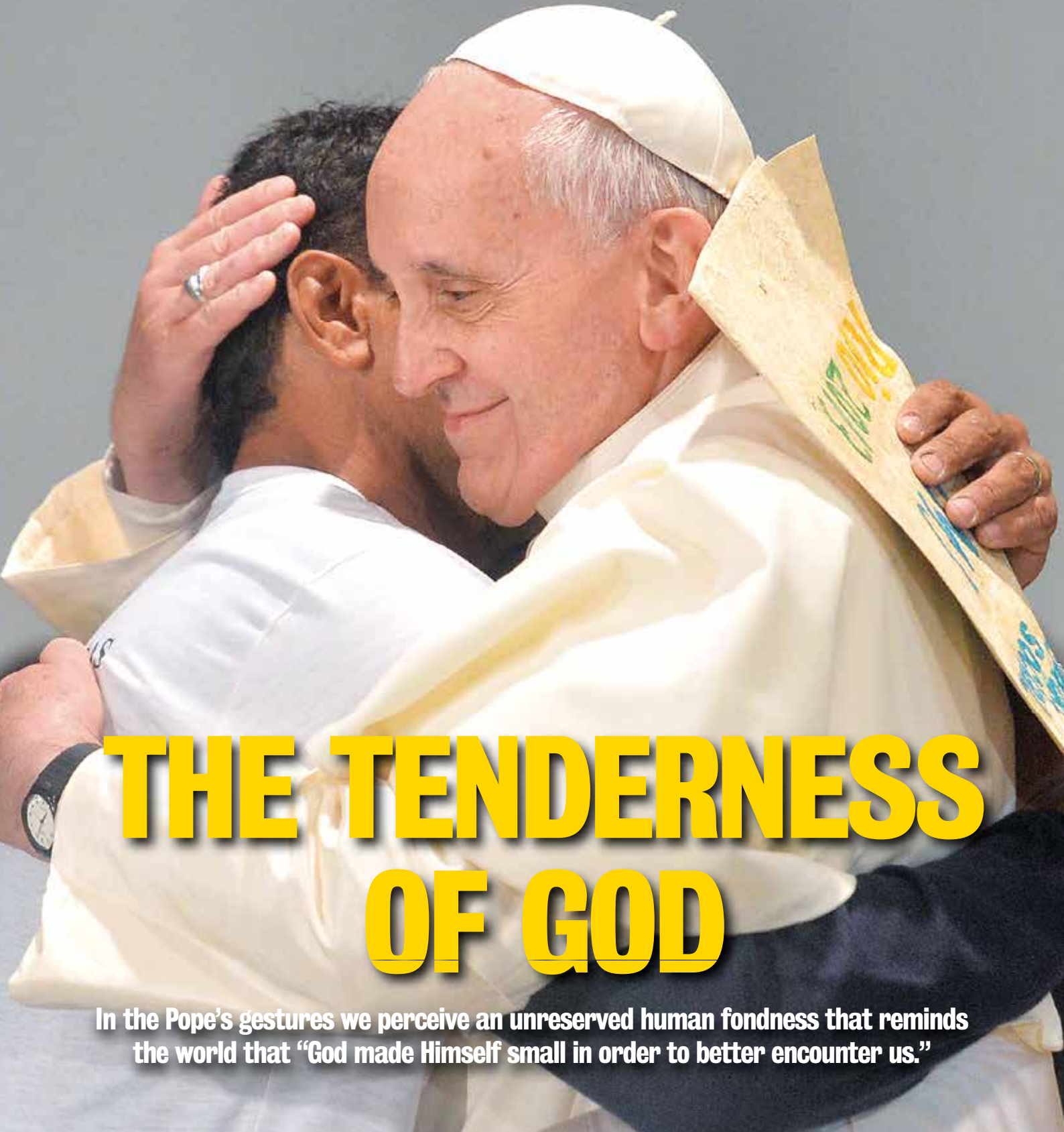
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TRACES

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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



THE TENDERNESS OF GOD

In the Pope's gestures we perceive an unreserved human fondness that reminds the world that "God made Himself small in order to better encounter us."

THE APPARENT FRAGILITY THAT CONTINUES TO CAUSE US TO REFLECT

This issue's editorial is an article written by the President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation published in the Italian daily Il Corriere della sera, on December 23, 2014

BY JULIÁN CARRÓN

Dear Editor,
Pope Francis never ceases to amaze us. Speaking at the December 17th General Audience, he said, “The Incarnation of the Son of God opens a new beginning in the universal history of man and woman [...] within a family, in Nazareth [...], in a remote village on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. Not in Rome, which was the capital of the Empire, not in a big city, but on its nearly invisible outskirts, indeed, of little renown. [...] Jesus dwelt there on that periphery for 30 years. The Evangelist Luke summarizes this period like this: Jesus ‘was obedient to them;’—that is, to Mary and Joseph. And someone might say: ‘But did this God, who comes to save us, waste 30 years there, in that suburban slum?’” The Lord always throws our plans into disarray, challenging our way of understanding what is truly useful for life, for history, and for the course of things already underway. Who among us would ever have chosen a man like Abraham, a simple shepherd, to change the world? Who would ever have imagined that it would have been enough?

Even though the people of Israel had seen the Lord’s way of acting many times—starting when Moses freed the Hebrews from slavery under the Egyptians—in the face of a new trial, that of exile, their scepticism re-emerged. Jeremiah echoes the murmurings of his time: Yes, God led the Israelites out of Egypt, but now? What about now?

Precisely in that moment the prophet issues a new challenge, in which the same method of God is repeated: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land.” His entire promise is centered on that shoot. In fact, “the days will come, says the Lord, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt’ but rather, ‘As the Lord lives, who brought the descendants of the house of Israel up from the land of the north’—and from all the lands to which I banished them; they shall live on their own land” (*Jer 23:7-8*). The Lord will show that He is still present by causing His people to return from exile.

God is unrelenting in making His people see that the method of the beginning also enables an impact on all the following processes of history. This is how He challenges the scepticism of the people and seeks to sustain their hope. But this seems too little to us, too weak, too lacking in impact, almost ridiculous and disproportionate given the dimensions of the problems we have to face every day. This is the reason the ancient people of Israel often yielded to the temptation to come to terms with those in power—whoever they might be, Egypt or Babylon, this is secondary—to seek a foundation for their own certainty.

God does not change His path, and to continue His design for changing the world, during the time of the Roman Empire, He entrusted Himself to the Son of a vir-



A TURNING POINT

A SURPRISE FOR HAVANA

On the island where (thanks to the Pope) dialogue with the U.S. has opened again, a new revolution has begun. What could change for the people and for the Church?

gin, Mary. Without her *yes*, and that of Joseph, which showed their trust in the promise of God, nothing would have happened, and today we would have nothing to celebrate. Instead, we can celebrate again this year, seeing how important the choice of Abraham was for the world, and how the prophecy of that shoot was fulfilled in Jesus. From century to century He has remained in history, and today reaches us in the life of the Church, as then, through a shoot: Pope Francis, who constantly embraces us without fearing all our fragility and unfaithfulness and without fearing the journey of our freedom, precisely like the father with the prodigal son. He renews the ancient prophecy: “The Word, who found a home in the virgin womb of Mary, comes in the celebration of Christmas to knock once again at the heart of every Christian. He comes and knocks. [...] How many times Jesus comes into our lives, [...] and how many times we don’t notice because we are so taken, immersed in our own thoughts, in our own affairs” (Francis, *Angelus*, December 21, 2014).

For this reason, Christmas invites us to convert first of all our view of the source of our salvation, that is, the solution to the problems that daily life presents us. It challenges each of us with the great question: From whence do we expect salvation? Is it from the alliances we form with each other and from our calculations to sort things out, or from this apparently powerless sign, a presence that is almost unobservable, but real, unrelenting, irreducible, that the Mystery sets before our eyes? Everything is played out there, from the first moment to every step of the development of that design: our *yes* to He who calls us and who made all that exists is the only way we can hope to have an impact on the processes of the world.

As Fr. Giussani said in the beginning of 1968: “We are truly able to be [...] the first ones of that profound change, of that profound revolution that will never—I say, never—consist in what we demand should happen as an exterior, social reality;” in fact, “it will never be in culture or in the life of society, if it is not first [...] in us. [...] Unless a revolution of self, in the way of conceiving of oneself [...], without prejudices or reserves, begins among us.”



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“YOU TURNED MY LIFE UPSIDE-DOWN”

Caterina studies in Kiev and shares an apartment with Irina. They have become friends and Caterina invited her to the Rimini Meeting in Italy. Irina went and has now begun attending School of Community. She has written to Caterina to explain what has happened to her over the past few months. This is her letter.

This summer Rimini became the center of my universe and seems to have settled into my life in a serious and lasting way. My past and present events form a tangled web of which I can now see the beginning and the end. Naively I thought this would be a vacation, like all the others, and that the adventure would end with my return home. But that was not the case! Before the trip, they told me many things about the Meeting and about the many interesting exhibits. However, these were not what struck me most. First observation: I was astonished by the way the participants and friends related to each other. Seeing the openness, the sincere joy expressed when

they saw each other I continually asked myself, “At home, do I express my feelings in this way when I see someone? Sure, there are one or two close friends whom I have not seen in a long time... but there are so many of you here.” My school years came to mind, when I couldn’t fit in and when, for a very long time, my only real wish was to have a true, close friend. Second observation: I witnessed absolutely incredible relationships within families. I am not saying that I was raised in a bad family: I have wonderful parents. Suddenly, I realized I couldn’t remember the last time I told my mother that I loved her. Before I arrived, I knew something about the Movement: its beginnings, its meaning, and its activities, but really, I knew very little. In Rimini, I understood that something unites all of you, that you have something that fills your life and gives it meaning. This something gives you great joy. It is this “center” which draws you. It was in Rimini where I understood that this “center” is Christ. Third observation: I realized how little I know about Christ

and orthodoxy. I was already aware of this, but did not give it any particular importance. There, something attracted me irresistibly to the Church. I became interested in discovering what it is that makes you the way I saw you, that holds such an incredible number of people together, and why you know and understand something that, as yet, I do not. The most interesting thing is that you did not tell me anything about all of this; you simply lived your life, but the Presence shines and is made evident in your life. Fourth observation: there are so many of you, of all ages, and social conditions. I did not see the typical “manager-subordinate” or “professor-student” relationships where interactions are official and formal. I saw instead interactions between “older friend/younger friend.” After this observation, I could not think of even one university professor with whom I could have had similar interactions. The conclusion is that you have turned my life upside down. But perhaps the opposite is true; you have turned my life right-side up. Much of what is happening I do not yet understand, nor do I know what the future holds. I feel that this “Something” is magnificent and important and I am filled with desire to see what comes next.

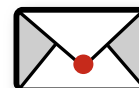
Irina, Kiev (Ukraine)

THE COMMUNIST AND THE SURPRISE DINNER

I wanted to tell about the unexpected and “impossible” friendship with Lorenzo, a professor from a department in my faculty, who is also Italian. We met in the elevator. At our first lunch together it was clear to me that he had all of the



An exhibition at the Rimini Meeting.



“IF I DO NOT RETURN HERE, WHERE DO I GO?”

Dear Fr. Carrón, I arrived at the CLU [University students] Spiritual Exercises—with no specific questions. My heart was hard and resistant; everything bothered me: myself, the others, the gestures, the silence. I had locked myself in a fortress of my own thoughts and convictions. Then Fr. Pino told us to pray so that, whatever our present position was, what had happened in that first instant, the first encounter, could happen again. I asked myself: three years ago, when I had no idea what the Exercises were because I had only met the Movement two months before, what happened? What struck me? A psychologist... a philosopher... a guru of life... Right now, as I am, what do I really need? The right recipe, or a father? To understand, or to be loved? From there, everything changed. Everything was new and amazing to me again. Where else can you find 5,000 young people in silence at 8:00 a.m.? Three years ago at that hour, I would have been returning home, exhausted from the chaos of the nightclubs, alcohol, and drugs. Now, volunteers of my age were standing there in the cold at 7:00 a.m., there for me. The chairs, the meeting room and the songs were perfectly prepared, and You, who never cease to wait for me, to love me, and to take me back, are there as always. Everything shouted that I am wanted, that I am loved. Like Peter in front of Jesus, I answered again, “Lord, I do not know why, I do not know anything, I may have missed so many words that were said, and once again I have not understood the method, but I love You and if I do not return here, where can I go?”

Luca, Milan (Italy)

characteristics of those who do not look kindly on the Movement: a militant participation in CGIL (a communist workers union) and his self-declared atheism. So I decided to hold off on telling him who I was. After a few weeks, he discovered that I do not have a girlfriend so he invited me to meet his girlfriend’s colleague over a beer. It turns out that the girlfriend’s colleague is also part of our community. He was astounded that I already knew her and I understood that the moment had come to tell him more about myself. It was actually rather funny. “Lorenzo, there are things you don’t know about me.” “Ale, it’s fine, I understand that you are Catholic—that’s no problem. Just don’t tell me that you are from CL!” “Lorenzo, not just me, she is, too!” And so he found out about the Movement and also my Memores Domini vocation. What could have been the end of our relationship unexpectedly became the beginning of a deeper friendship. For example, returning from a recent trip, he said, “Ale, you know, I really missed you!” (It was true for me,

too.) He also began to meet my friends. After the public viewing of the video, “La Strada Bella,” where he came because of my promise to attend one of his union’s events, we invited him to the Christmas concert. He said, half-seriously, half-face-tiously, “No way I’m coming again; you’ll start to believe that I’m thinking about converting!” One evening, at dinner with Mark, a member of our community, he saw us discuss how to pay the bill. He immediately asked us, “Do you put all of your money together?” “Yes.” So he began to ask a series of questions about how these things work in Memores Domini. On leaving the restaurant, he said, “Ale, for me, who is supposed to be the Communist, it is not a given that my girlfriend and I put our money together. And you do it for real!” Perhaps, if I had met Lorenzo during my days as a university student, fifteen years ago, I would easily have approached him ideologically as the “enemy” (we even admitted this to each other once).

Alessandro, Montreal (Canada)

SOCIETY
SIERRA LEONE



THE AFTERMATH OF EBOLA

To date, the virus has infected over 20,000 people and claimed almost 8,000 lives. We offer a look at the epidemic from the point of view of a man who stayed alongside his people, **FATHER MARUIZIO BOA**, a missionary in Freetown for almost 20 years.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

Certain villages are connected by small trails in the high grass, where people walk single file. Ten-year-old Aminata was standing in the middle of the trail as her father loaded wood on her head. He loaded, and loaded, and loaded still more. “Enough! Don’t you see that the girl can’t take any more?” the missionary blurted out, witnessing the scene. But under the heavy bundle, she responded, smiling, “He’s my father. He knows how much I can bear.” Fr. Maurizio Boa always thinks of the lesson of that girl when he sees his people accept a life that here, in Sierra Leone, spares nobody heavy burdens.

The Giuseppini del Murialdo missionary from Treviso, Italy, who has been in Freetown for 18 years, never expected something equally as terrible as a war would arrive. Today, Sierra Leone exceeds Liberia in the number of Ebola cases: with 9,772 people infected, it is the worst-hit country of Western Africa, according to the World Health Organization bulletin (the total number of cases is 20,747, with 8,235 deaths). “Now the situation is under control and improving; many centers to help the victims have been established,” says Fr. Maurizio. “The real problem will be the aftermath of Ebola. There was no work before. Now on the streets there are many more kids who surround cars trying to sell water or bananas.” In these months, mines and factories have ceased operations and prices have skyrocketed. In this land, so rich in resources, 75% >>

» of the people live on a dollar per day. The aftermath of Ebola also includes many orphans that must be cared for, the widows with children, and above all, the way the virus has traumatized relationships. “The epidemic changed the social fabric.” People look at friends and neighbors with suspicion and fear, and do not hug each other anymore. At the sign of peace during Mass, people hang their heads. “In these months, it was the continual cry of ambulances that told us that death was near us,” because the “enemy” is invisible, unheard and unseen when it arrives.

THE CRY OF JENKU. Fr. Maurizio’s community is in the town of Waterloo and the nearby villages, and 90 minutes from the capital. He has not failed to go there daily, even when, according to traditional rites, the bodies of the first to die from the virus were washed and the water sprayed on the relatives. This was the beginning of the disaster. The shock from September 21st is still vivid, when 45 cadavers were found in a day. Very soon, the beds in the few health centers that remained open became insufficient: the sick lay on the ground out in the open, under the rain. Even more died at home, for fear of being rejected and because of rumors that the doctors gave lethal injections.

Only now are the sick coming out in the open. They have begun to trust again, because they see that some people do recover and because the Church and many NGOs have never stopped being present, informing and supporting. Since that day in September, a volunteer task force was formed in the community to go into the homes. “Now, together with Emergency, we have prepared another 90 people who go from family to family in the villages of Kissy Town (22,500 people) and Morabie



One of the volunteers who travels house to house trying to prevent and identify the virus.

(12,000).” They evaluate the situation, reassure the people and do initial diagnoses, because there is confusion: often the symptoms of malaria and typhoid or simply the nausea due to a pregnancy are mistaken for Ebola. Many people are still confined to their homes in quarantine, and need someone to bring them the essentials for survival. For now, the schools are still closed. “The 11 years of war were terrible, but you more or less knew what to do. But with Ebola, no. When children jump up on you, what do you do? I hug them. They’re my children.”

He arrived in 1996, at the age of 52, but his heart and mind have been here since 1980, before the mission was even opened. His affection for Sierra Leone moved him as a parish priest in Padova and then Viterbo to involve the faithful and young people in fund-raising to send the first pick-up truck. “They were opportunities to become missionaries in our heart and to feel involved with our friends who were already in Sierra Leone.” When he landed there, he had no time to plan what to do and where to live: the war had already decided for him. “*Caritas Christi urget nos*. And if not now, when?” The first fierce question he had to answer came when Jenku Sessay entered the church, desperate. “I can’t pee by

myself,” Sessay said. Handless, he sought help to go to the bathroom.

Wherever he went, Fr. Maurizio found himself in front of youth and children mutilated by the machetes of the rebels, their stumps upraised to prevent pulsing of blood. “Their gaze was extinguished and imploring, asking me: Now what do we do?”

BRICK HOMES. Since then he has dedicated himself to them. During the war, with the help of many associations, he opened three care homes to welcome the children. Then he had wells built, and worked on projects for malnourished mothers and children, for the blind, those for adult literacy, and a school. In these years, he has seen his first boys go to university. He was kidnapped by rebels and beaten by Nigerian soldiers. He opened the San Giuseppe Community Health Center in Kissy Low Coast, on the outskirts of the capital, here where everything becomes mortal, even bronchitis or dehydration: one out of four children die before reaching the age of five. In the small village of Kent, a triangle of land on the sea, 24 young fishermen formed an association. Before, they had only pirogues as frail as nutshells, but now they have six boats, six motors and six nets, and a refrigerated room for the fish. He thinks of them with the same joy he has felt hundreds of times when he gave war amputees



Father Maurizio Boa.

the keys to brick homes of their own (throughout the country, there are 7,000 mutilated people).

SIDIMBA'S HOMEWORK. "I'll never stop thanking the Lord for having given me the companionship of these people. Every beatitude is in them and for them. They share it with you and make you feel in communion with God." He has nothing to add about his life here. When the epidemic exploded on the scene, the idea of returning to Italy did not even cross his mind. He stayed for the family of Nakama, reduced from ten members to two, and for the father of Usman, who continues to work hard for the community even after Ebola carried away his son. He stayed for Winnifred, a young woman who spent these months travelling everywhere to help, see, and treat, or for nine-year-old Sidimba, who has only one arm. "She's worth less than a goat," her father had said, leaving her in the priest's hands. "I've learned so much from her, a child who had never gone to school and began doing homework in my office." She kept her head bent over the paper to write. When she made a mistake, she tried to erase it but could not. She dropped the notebook to the floor, knelt on top, and erased it. If the page ripped, she would start again, crying. "Here we have a need: to live the presence of God. I see it in the people who give their own

life, like Jesus, not only in the doctors and nurses, or in those who die to treat the others. I see so many concrete gestures of love, every day. Not gestures done for money, or just out of professionalism. They always contain something religious." The people have never stopped coming to church to pray. "It is for ourselves that we do it: we need to feel God close, to ask that all of this may not pass in vain. Like the child who calls his mother: he knows well that she is there, but he calls her. He needs to feel her caress."

The Church of Christ the King in Waterloo is a small Catholic community in an area with a majority of Muslims. "I am most deeply moved when someone asks to be baptized. They do so because they have met Jesus." Above all in these recent months, he has gone through the dejection that becomes prayer and a powerlessness that he mines deeply. "I am a priest. I am not a priest only when I pray or preach. I am always a priest, and I feel the commitment of my consecration in allowing myself to be involved with my poor. I only have one announcement to offer: full life, the certainty of a love that does not disappoint. But offering it to those who have nothing, while failing to give them education or medicine, is empty. And I continually need com-

**Only now
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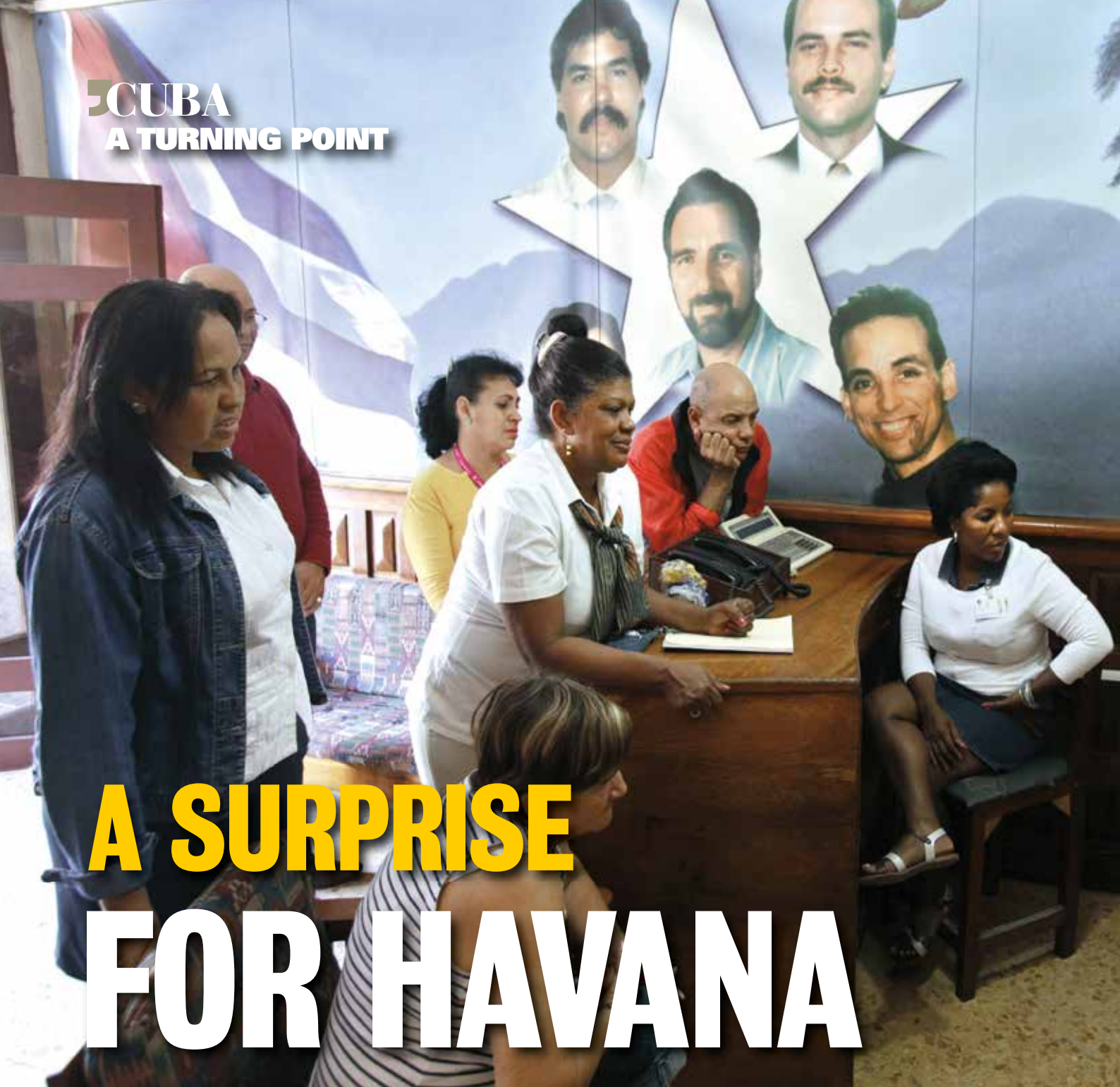
munion with Jesus: without Him, I would soon be fed up and would abandon everything." At times, he comes out saying, "Money isn't free for anyone." "It is the absurd attempt to put a distance between me and the need of the other. I can justify myself, saying that

some are just taking advantage of me. But their life tells me the truth. It is my heart in front of the last judgement: 'I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink...'"

THE SPOON. To his mind, without a poor person for a friend, life cannot be meaningful. "As a friend, it is very different to be told, 'You do a lot for me,' and to be told, 'You love me.'" One day, in the care home, they were eating the usual mix of rice and cassava leaves and fish. For the first time, there was only one plate in common; Fr. Maurizio did not have one for himself. The children ate with their hands, and only he had the spoon. "One at a time, they sat there with their mouths open so I would spoon-feed them. I did it for each and then there was a moment of expectation. Then I understood..." They watched him eat with the same spoon, and then one of them said, "He loves us." "It was not meant for my ears, but it made me understand that more than help and support, they seek the certainty of love." Every year, Fr. Maurizio waits for the U.N. report on human development. And regularly, Sierra Leone is at the bottom of the list. The same is true for the UNICEF report on children. Today, after the worst virus of the last forty years, the country is on its knees. "When fish cry, nobody sees their tears," says an African proverb that comes to mind with those rankings. "We are the last, in everything. It is true. But when we say the Our Father, we feel we are the first. For Someone, we are the first." **T**



A man dries his hands after washing them with water and chlorine, in front of a shop in the capital Freetown.



A SURPRISE FOR HAVANA

A historic announcement, rung in with bells and celebrations. On the island where (thanks to the Pope) dialogue with the U.S. has opened again, a new revolution has begun. What could change for the people and for the Church? We asked **ORLANDO MÁRQUEZ, the editor-in-chief of the local Catholic newspaper.**

BY LUCA FIORE

“What I experienced was a mixture of shock, surprise, and joy...” These were the words of Orlando Márquez, the editor of the *Palabra Nueva* newspaper of the Archdiocese of Havana, which was founded in 1992 and is the voice of the Catholic Church on the island. He is fully aware of the historic significance of the agreement to re-establish relations between Cuba and the U.S.; of Barack Obama and Raúl Castro’s simultaneous announcement of the end of a cold war that was begun 53 years ago, before Márquez was even born. The first outcome will be easier access for travelers and tourists, business deals,



Thousands of Cubans gather to hear President Raúl Castro's speech announcing the agreement with the U.S. on December 17th.

credit cards, the Internet and other communications. Soon there will be an American embassy in Havana, and Obama will ask Congress to permanently lift the embargo. "It was December 17th, the feast of St. Lazarus, a saint to whom many Cubans are devoted," the editor tells us. "The national shrine to him is in Havana, and thousands of people come each year to visit it, from all over the country and from abroad. That day, many Masses were celebrated and, in each, the priest spoke about the announcement, and the people broke out in applause and expressions of joy. Not just the faithful, even the guards. Many of the churches in Havana rang their bells in celebration."

So, you would say that people are happy?

Overall, people are happy, though some less so. It's understandable, because all these years of tense relations have caused a lot of pain on both sides of the Florida Straits. We are a people divided by water, by politics, and by the conflict between the two governments.

In your opinion, what is the significance of this decision?

It's a major event. It marks the end of decades of political tension, as well as suffering, fear, distrust, and even lives lost. Now, for the first time, both presidents are in agreement and have publically declared that they'd like to leave behind the policies that have failed. Undoubtedly, they both had to overcome strong resistance, because they have shifted a structure of policies that had been cemented by years of tense relations. However, the time was right, and they did what they had to. On top of it all was Pope Francis's intervention. I can't help but think of Divine Providence...



Orlando Márquez.

What impact will this have on Cuban society? And on the regime?

Obama announced the measures that will be put into place in the short term. We still do not know the response of the Cuban government to his proposals. Usually Havana is very careful before taking action, but even with this great caution, I think they will respond positively. If that's the case, as many of us hope, the impact will definitely be fruitful for our society. Our two countries are very close geographically, and we share a history, common interests, and threats from natural or other disasters. Around two million Cubans are currently living in the U.S. and their remittances have an impact, even if up to now unofficially, on the Cuban economy. Anything that opens up the flow of money, communication, or people will be positive for our country.

It's an agreement that comes at a unique moment in Cuban history. Is this part of the reforms promised by Raúl Castro?

Cuba is currently in a serious crisis; yes, economically, but also politically and socially. We have that in common with several other countries. It has affected our country even more deeply, because the Marxist-Leninist model that was imposed on society 50 years ago was presented as a permanent, infallible one. It's difficult to admit disappointment and accept that what was believed to be a perfect—or at least better—system was not so. It's complicated to >>>

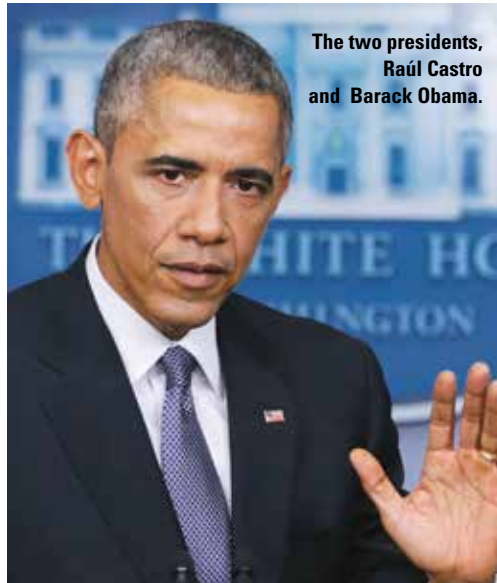
» admit that we need to resort to the foreign money of capitalists to maintain what we have. Amidst all that we do have, there are also social programs that have long deserved recognition from the Church, such as health care and education for all. This is the reason Raúl Castro initiated the reforms, but it is for the same reason that the reforms are moving forward very slowly, because bureaucracy resists anything that would change its structure. I don't think that the agreement with the United States is part of the reforms, but I do think that it will make a significant impact by removing some obstacles, thereby facilitating the enactment of the reforms.

The end of the embargo would certainly be a gift for the Cuban people. Will it be a benefit for the regime as well?

Lifting the embargo could take much more time than enacting the measures announced on December 17th. I'd prefer to wait to make a judgment on this point. In any case, as can be seen by Washington's recent sanctions on a number of European banks for doing business with Cuba, getting rid of the embargo could benefit many parties.

Why did the Holy Father decide to intervene personally? What impact could this have for the life of the Church in Cuba?

I don't know. It likely has to do with his Latin American roots, and his in-depth knowledge of this conflict: it has been going on for a long time, with an impact on the entire region, and has also affected relations between the United States and all of Latin America. Maybe this, together with the fact that he is a shepherd who is sensitive to the tragedies and needs suf-



The two presidents, Raúl Castro and Barack Obama.

“Remembering what Benedict XVI said, I think that we Catholics are a significant minority. Not for our numbers, but for the witness of faithfulness and the concern for the good of society. And for having maintained hope against all hope.”

brethren in other countries for many things. At the same time, remembering what Benedict XVI said, I think that we are a significant minority. Not for our numbers, but for the witness of faithfulness and the concern for the good of society. And for having maintained hope against all hope.

fered by people throughout the world, moved him to take action as he did. Honestly, we don't know in how many conflicts the Pope has intervened, just as other Popes have done before him. In this instance, he received a positive response from both presidents, and so it was made public. Certainly we are very grateful for his attention and his actions, as well as for having trusted in the good will of the leaders of both countries.

What are people saying about the Pope's taking action?

His involvement was a surprise. We've seen a positive response to seeing the Church making an effort to contribute to and facilitate resolutions to conflicts such as this one. Francis's role took on even greater notice because both presidents very openly gave him credit for influencing the decision. The day after the announcement, the *Granma*, the only national newspaper and official tool of the Communist party, published the press release from the Holy See alongside the speeches of Raúl Castro and Barack Obama. The Cuban people welcomed his action.

What are the needs of the Cuban church?

There are many, and it depends on how you look at it. Really, the Cuban church is small and poor, and we depend on the solidarity of our Catholic

PRODIGAL SONS

The search for self and the chance to rediscover the Father. On the other end, patience and waiting. Parents, teachers, and young people share their experiences of a love that says not "Get out," but "Go," just as in the parable.

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

ADOPTION

WHEN LIFE SUFFOCATES

Alexandra was five years old when she became a part of Angela and Roberto's life. After being married for almost 10 years, they decided to open their family to adoption. "Ale" is a bright girl with a strong will, as

her adoptive parents could see from the beginning. Angela remembers, "With her, we couldn't rely on nice words. She fixed her eyes on you, waiting for a response." Her arrival in the family was followed by that of Alfonso and Mario. Alfonso had a serious congenital heart condition, and died when he was only 22 months old. "We knew from the beginning that his chances of survival were low, but

he changed our family's life forever. We learned not to be afraid of death, and that's the only way you can educate your children to love life. It was possible because of the friends who were there for us, helping us to turn our gaze heavenward." The day of the funeral, Alexandra slid over to her mom and told her, "I'm not sad. Look at how many people loved him and love us."

At age sixteen, Ale decided she >>>

» was being suffocated in all areas of life, with school at the top of the list. She dropped out in her third year of high school, and began a nomadic period. She says of that time, “I was getting along all right with the family, but it was as if it were a sweater that was too warm. I wanted something else, so I went to look for it.” Her parents responded, “Okay, in that case you can’t live at home. You need to find a job.” She worked for six months in a factory. Then, she moved and went back to school, but dropped out yet again. “The freedom that my parents gave me wasn’t in what they allowed me to do,” Ale explains, “but in the way they looked at me. They respected me and the fact that I was looking for something in life, the same thing that they wanted for their lives, though we went about it in different ways.”

They were difficult years, full of conflicts, of running away and coming home. Angela tells us, “If you respect your freedom—in other words, if you adhere to the plan God has for you, then you can respect your children’s freedom. When they say to you, ‘Now I’m calling the shots for my life; I’m leaving,’ you can say ‘Go,’ and not ‘Get out.’ The father of the prodigal son didn’t run after him, but he did wait for him. You cannot chain them to the behaviors that you would like to see.”

It’s not always easy, Roberto reminds us. “Of course, you learn to nurture the capacity for empathy, and so not let yourself be overcome by fear. It becomes possible when you are surrounded by friends who share the journey with you; friends you can always call upon. And then... you learn to keep a healthy distance from dramatic situations, first and foremost to protect your relationship as husband and wife. Every so often, Angela and I went away for a couple of days. We asked relatives and friends



to help us with our kids, so that we, together, could form a safe harbor where our kids could always return.”

When she was 18, Ale decided to travel to the U.S. to work as a nanny. She was there for two months, and then returned. “My boyfriend was still in Italy, but that wasn’t the only reason I wanted to come back. Even there, life seemed suffocating, but I began to miss the friendship that I had always seen at home growing up. I didn’t remember any of the things they told me, but I remembered what they had done for me. One thing was clear: they never looked at me as just a problem to fix, and neither did their friends.”

When she got back to Italy, she went to work for Roberto’s company and continued studying independently to take the state exam for her high school diploma. One morning

at breakfast she told her parents, “Deep down, I only wanted to know if you loved me, or the idea you had of me.” Life no longer seems suffocating. She graduated from the European Institute of Design (IED), found a job, a husband, and had three children. Still, something was missing.

One evening, at the video link-up with Fr. Carrón’s School of Community, Angela saw her walk in the door. “I thought she must need help with her kids.” But then, Alexandra sat down and began to listen. “That summer, at the invitation of some friends, I had gone on a CL vacation. I saw something so beautiful that it overcame all my previous opinions. They lived with a depth that I wanted for my life, for my family. It was what I had seen before in my parents.” It was a safe harbor for life.

The prodigal son will always be the image of those who, having received everything, cannot resist the fascination of autonomy; everything seems like an obstacle to his anxious search for limitless freedom, as we see in ourselves and many times in our fellow citizens. We can all imagine the father's feeling about his son's freedom. Notwithstanding everything, the father runs the risk of his son's freedom. What love for the freedom of his son, that he might re-acquire through his own experience what he already knew!

*Julián Carrón
(From "Beginning Day 2014"
in Traces, October 2014)*



you engage their freedom within a relationship, without schemes to get them to do what you want. You have to love them, finding a thousand ways to meet their gaze, but always aware that the action is always God's; it's always His way, in His time. It's the only way not to constantly worry about what to do, though it's sometimes hard not to get angry. Enrico still had a place in my heart." Every so often, she called him and asked how he was doing, and relayed greetings from one friend or another.

Graduation came, and Enrico finished with excellent grades. He found a job in September, and at the same time he met a girl and began dating her. Everything seemed to be getting better; all the puzzle pieces were in place. "I finally seemed to have found peace." Then, overnight, the puzzle fell to pieces. "My girlfriend left me, and work didn't satisfy me. Maybe I didn't want to admit to myself that there was something else that wasn't right, but I decided to make a clean break with that life."

Enrico moved to Milan, looking for a new job. He was alone. One day, his sister, who studied in Milan, made him an offer: "I'd like you to meet Claudio Bottini [one of the CL responsables of the local community] and his friends. Why don't you come to School of Community with him?" Enrico responded, "I'll think about it."

"When the day came," he tells us, "I decided to go. I couldn't say why; I guess I was really at rock bottom. No friends, no girlfriend, no job. In the end, what did I have to lose? And then, I had always trusted my sister. I could see that she was happy." He went to the School of Community and met Claudio, along with Riccardo, >>

SCHOOL

"I'VE COME HOME"

Enrico is what you would call the "spirited" type, restless and just mischievous enough to still be endearing. He always had a hard time with school. He failed his first year of high school, and decided instead to go to a school specializing in technology. Marina, a teacher and the leader of the GS group in Genoa, always got along with him well, though the relationship was not without conflict. He attended meetings, vacations, outings, and worked for a month over the summer in a hotel where he met some CL friends. Life was fascinating, but not always easy. "In my third year

of high school, I failed again. I stuck with my friends, but it seemed like things had begun to come undone." At times he felt like certain questions about the meaning of life, made even more urgent by some difficult situations at home, might totally overwhelm him. "At one point, I couldn't take it anymore. I said 'enough.' It would be better not to think." He didn't slam the door on his friends, but he stopped showing up. All he told Marina is that he was able to study better with a few other classmates. It was an excuse, and both he and Marina knew it, but she didn't take time to lecture him or cook up a scheme to bring him back. "Working with young people,

"The father of the prodigal son didn't run after him. You cannot chain them to the behaviors that you would like to see."

» Matteo, Giacomo and others. The desire for fulfillment and the questions about life that seemed to be dormant in him burst back to life. This time, through his friends, he found a response. It brought back all his memories from GS, not as a ghost from the past, but as something even more solid than before. It was an unexpected new beginning. After a few months, he called Marina. "I have to tell you what happened to me. When I come home, I'm coming to visit you."

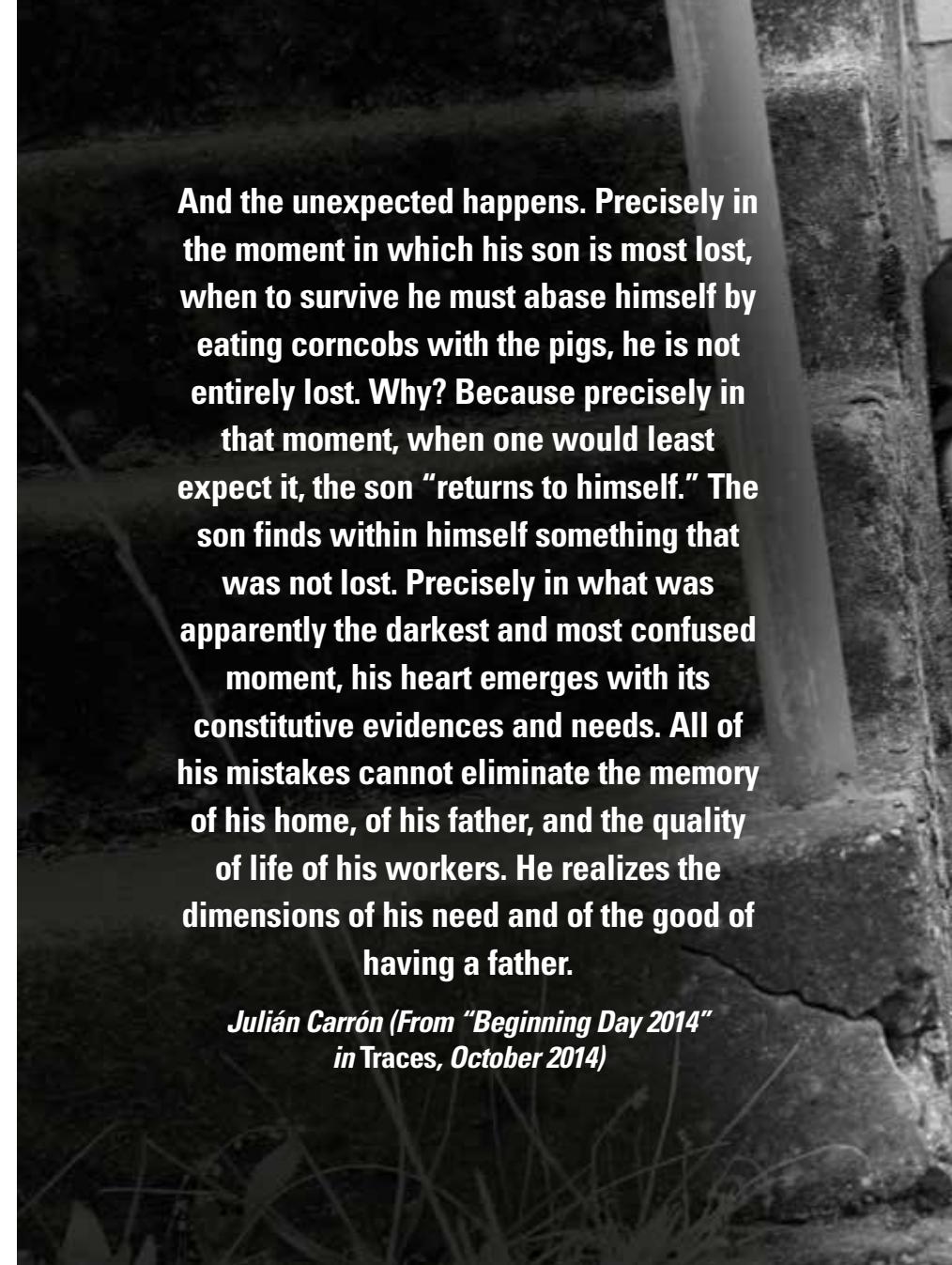
One summer evening, he rang her doorbell. "Hi, it's me." "Come on in, the GS kids are over for dinner." Enrico entered, and though by then he didn't know any of the students, he began to tell his story. "At the end I said to myself, 'I've come home.' Jesus, through the companionship of the Movement, never left me. He was always waiting."

FAMILY

LAURA'S DECISION

For Luigi and Fernanda, the first years of marriage were colored by the painful experience of four miscarriages in a row. For both, one thing became very clear: "Children are a gift. Something we wish for, yes, but always a gift. They carry with them a promise that doesn't depend on us." After the years of loss, Lucia, Laura, Caterina, and Giovanni all arrived, one after another.

Life went on, without major problems or rebellions from their kids. In Luigi's words, "We always tried to encourage them to follow what we hold most dear: the companionship of the Movement, which they could see in our daily relationships with our friends, but we never said, 'Go to GS; go on the vacation.'



And the unexpected happens. Precisely in the moment in which his son is most lost, when to survive he must abase himself by eating corncobs with the pigs, he is not entirely lost. Why? Because precisely in that moment, when one would least expect it, the son "returns to himself." The son finds within himself something that was not lost. Precisely in what was apparently the darkest and most confused moment, his heart emerges with its constitutive evidences and needs. All of his mistakes cannot eliminate the memory of his home, of his father, and the quality of life of his workers. He realizes the dimensions of his need and of the good of having a father.

Julián Carrón (From "Beginning Day 2014" in Traces, October 2014)

They met people who shared our experience, and they were fascinated." The temptation to tell them what to do, what the best choice is, is always lurking. Fernanda continues, "You always want something more for them, that they could struggle less, because you've gone through it before and you know how things will go. However, sometimes you have to just stop and be supportive. Bite your tongue. Stop lecturing. Of the four, probably the one who we struggled with the most was Laura, because she never accepted 'because you should' as a reason." But, of all their children, it was Laura who announced the decision, in May 2013,

that in September she would enter the novitiate at the Trappist cloistered convent of Vitorchiano, about an hour and a half outside of Rome. In July, she finished her degree in medicine. "In the months leading up to it, we had noticed a greater intensity and seriousness in facing life, in every respect," Fernanda said. She passed her exams with the highest scores possible. Even the professor who guided her thesis was amazed by her work. As Luigi recalls, "We watched her, intuiting something special was happening. Unexpectedly, our roles were reversed: we were following her. Of course, the radical form of life was a surprise to us."



The temptation could have been to say, “You’ve done so well in your studies, you like it so much, look how hard you’ve worked, you should at least take the State licensing exam, and then decide.” Fernanda tells us, “It really required our freedom to accompany her. We faced the sadness knowing that we wouldn’t be able to speak to her or see her whenever we wanted. There was the suffering of detachment, of letting go.” In mid-September, they took her to Vitorchiano. For Fernanda and Luigi, life

“It really required our freedom to accompany her. There was the suffering of letting go.”

was forever changed. The relationship between the two changed; they stopped taking things for granted. As they prayed every morning for Laura, as she did for them, Jesus became closer and closer as a companion. “We learn from our children,” Fernanda says. And so, one morning on the kitchen table she found a note: “I’m sorry for yesterday evening. Luigi.” It was the first time in 32 years of marriage that it had happened. The wrong he referred to had been nothing more than an argument about an insignif-

icant event, but they could no longer let anything slide by. Luigi adds, “I felt just like the ‘good’ brother in the parable of the prodigal son. I thought I already knew it all. Everything was fine. Then we had a new beginning.”

In November 2014, the professor who guided Laura’s thesis attended the ceremony for her investiture. Once again, she asked, “But how does what you studied have anything to do with the decision you are making?” Laura responded, “From the moment of my conception, everything that my parents have invested in me was for this, so that I could arrive here.” At home. **T**

ONE TO ONE

Personal encounter is the foundation of the Holy Father's missionary activity. One needs only to take a look at his daily life to realize his preference for the individual. How much time does he dedicate to direct contact? What motivates him?

BY GIUSEPPE FRANGI



How many hands has Pope Francis shaken in these 22 months? How many people has he listened to, person to person? How many children has he taken into his arms? How many disabled people has he caressed? And then, how many letters has he read? How many phone calls has he made, forgoing the mediation of his secretaries?

Francis is a one-to-one pope, someone who prefers direct contact not out of a sense of duty, but because he is authentically attracted to others. He is moved by unreserved human fondness that makes him care deeply about and pay close attention to each person. It should come as no wonder that *Evangelii Gaudium* has a chapter entitled, emblematically, "Person to Person." For him, it is the foundational form of missionary activity, which always starts from person-to-person dialogue, in which "the other person speaks and shares his or her joys." It is a "message [that] has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn."

One need only look at the Pope's daily life to understand how true this is for him. According to Andrea Tornielli, a Vatican correspondent, every day Francis reads about fifty of the many letters sent to him. Most of them are from simple people.

The numbers of this pontificate are impressive, starting from the almost 17.3 million followers of the Twitter account @Pontifex in various languages. It should not be forgotten that these numbers represent not only those of an affectionate and faithful mass, but the sum of a multitude of single individuals. "I manage to look at individual persons, one at a time, to enter into personal contact with whomever I have in front of me," he confessed in the famous interview published by the editor of *Civiltà Cattolica*, Fr. Antonio Spadaro. "I'm not used to the



masses." He looks at us this way, one by one. This is this way we look at him, too.

MORNING MASS. One of the most significant changes is that his daily Mass is no longer private, as it was for his predecessors, but public, albeit limited by the space available. About fifty people can find a place in the Saint Martha chapel. Multiplied by 290 Masses (as of December 30th) that means almost 15,000 personal encounters in 22 months, because at the end of each Mass the Pope reserves a bit of time to stop and greet those present one by one. He did so starting on his very first day when, catching his security detail off guard, he set himself at

the door of the church of Saint Anne, just inside the Vatican walls, to shake the hands of the faithful as they exited.

Audiences are another appointment in which Pope Francis' style has impressed people. First of all, he chose to always hold it in Saint Peter's Square, regardless of the weather. According to the data of the Prefecture of the Papal Household, based on the number of tickets to enter the Square they provided to those requesting them, in the 73 audiences he has held from the beginning of his pontificate to the end of 2014, there have been 2,739,000 participants. This does not count the participants gathered along the Via della Conciliazione, who in months like April or May

Wherever he goes, he always dedicates time to be with the sick or those in prison.



NUMBERS

17.3 million people follow him on Twitter @Pontifex in various languages.

290 Masses (as of December 30th), and the number of those he has greeted at the end of the celebrations approaches **15,000**.

73 audiences (as of December 30th): **2,739,000** people in Saint Peter's Square.

Speaking about the Pope's visit to Cassano Jonio, Bishop Galantino said, "The first rows were 'reserved' for the poor, the sick, the least ones. I am not referring to the first rows of the place where Mass was celebrated (obviously those were as well, within the limits of capacity), but to the Pope's consideration and the approach toward his visit, which was pastoral, and this also changed priorities."

In Cagliari, a group of young people held a banner that said, "Pope Checco, [a common abbreviation for Francesco] come up and have a coffee." Passing by, amused, he responded, miming the gesture of bringing a coffee cup up to his mouth. Perhaps they remembered the desire he had expressed during his visit to the favela of Varginha, Brazil, on July 25th: "I would have liked to knock on every door, to say 'good morning,' to ask for a glass of cold water, to have a *cafezinho* with each of you." The Pope's day is full of flashes of unexpected familiarity. At the pre-Christmas audience where he received the Tv2000 team members and their families, he made it a point to greet "Lucio, who is in the hospital," mentioning news director Lucio Brunelli by name.

This familiarity finds free expression particularly in his visits to Roman parishes. "*Bella Fra*" ("It's OK Francis"), it said on a banner made by youth of the parish of the Sacred Heart at Termini. "Howzit goin', Francesco?" said another by kids at the Saint Gregory the Great parish in the Magliana area. At the parish of Saint Joseph, on December 14th, when some little ones were making more noise than they should, he surprised everyone by saying, "It bothers me a lot when a child is crying in church and there are some >>>

number in the tens of thousands. The encounter rarely lasts less than three hours, given that the Pope always arrives a bit early, usually around 9:45, for a brief circuit of the Square, and that he generally remains until 1:00, sometimes until 1:30, even when the live coverage by Tv2000 has to stop because of time constraints. As is well-known, his speeches are always brief: his catechetical teachings average 70 lines, about half the length of those of his predecessors, and thus the "spoken" time, including all the greetings, is about 50 minutes.

What is striking, though, is that these times do not change, even in bad weather: everyone—especially the event management staff—remembers the audience of May 29, 2013, when fully 90,000 people crowded the Square under the pouring rain, and

the Pope chose to do the long circuit on the Popemobile without an umbrella because it got in the way of greeting the faithful.

TRAVELS. Pope Francis does not leave Rome very often, and when he does, he is away only for the time that is strictly necessary. Analyzing his Italian trips, some interesting aspects emerge, both in the choice of destinations and in the program organized for each trip. He prefers marginal destinations and these day trips were packed with encounters, but fairly short on speeches.

Wherever he goes, he always dedicates time to be with the sick or those in prison, and his speeches, if any, are reduced to a few brief comments, while the bulk of his time is reserved for direct encounters with people.

» who say he should be taken outside. The crying of a child is the voice of God: they should never be sent out of a church.”

This familiarity also emerges strongly in relationships one might think would be more formal. “We were already outside the main door of the Church of Saint Martha. We hugged again, and I confess I was moved. Francis caressed my cheek and the car moved off,” recounted Eugenio Scalfari in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. And Ferruccio De Bortoli wrote in another Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*: “The greatness of this Pope is measured in his relationships with others, in his determination to be a priest in person, on the phone, in every way.” Spadaro confirms: “Francis has a striking capacity for interpenetration of gesture and word; he manages to announce messages of great authoritativeness without giving the perception of any distance.”

TESTIMONY. One of the parish priests of Rome, Fr. Mauro Leonardi, told *il-sussidiario.net* about the surprising change Francis had caused. “Before, it was me, the priest, who told the people what the Pope had said. Now it is the people who tell me: ‘The Pope said...’ I am the parish priest and I discover that my parishioners feel he is more their parish priest than I am. When they say ‘my parish priest,’ I am afraid that they are thinking about Pope Francis instead of Fr. Mauro: this is the problem. At best, we have all been ‘promoted’ to assistant parish priest. I don’t know how he does it, but he is closer to my people than I am.”

He is also close to that Spanish girl who at the December 10th audience greeted him in the Square, crying out, “*Gracias!*” “*De nada, chica,*” he responded with absolute naturalness, thumbs up, in what has become the symbolic gesture of his unconditional fondness for others. **I**

WORDS FROM THE POPE

THAT WE MAY ENTER INTO THE MYSTERY

WE OFFER SOME EXCERPTS FROM THE HOLY FATHER’S SPEECHES OVER THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS. WE HOPE THEY ARE HELPFUL FOR OPENING UP A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEW YEAR AS IT BEGINS.

Through the course of history, the light that shatters the darkness reveals to us that God is Father and that his patient fidelity is stronger than darkness and corruption. This is the message of Christmas night. God does not know outbursts of anger or impatience; He is always there, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, waiting to catch from afar a glimpse of the lost son as he returns; and every day, with patience. The patience of God...

On this holy night, while we contemplate the Infant Jesus just born and placed in the manger, we are invited to reflect. How do we welcome the tenderness of God? Do I allow myself to be taken up by God, to be embraced by Him, or do I prevent him from drawing close? “But I am searching for the Lord”—we could respond. Nevertheless, what is most important is not seeking Him, but rather allowing Him to seek me, find me and caress me with tenderness. The question put to us simply by the Infant’s presence is: do I allow God to love me?

More so, do we have the courage to welcome with tenderness the difficulties and problems of those who are near to us, or do we prefer impersonal solutions, perhaps effective but devoid of the warmth of the Gospel? How much the world needs tenderness today! The patience of God, the closeness of God, the tenderness of God. The Christian response cannot be different from God’s response to our smallness. Life must be met with goodness, with meekness. When we realize that God is in love with our smallness, that He made Himself small in order to better encounter us, we cannot help but open our hearts to Him, and beseech Him: “Lord, help me to be like You, give me the grace of tenderness in the most difficult circumstances of life, give me the grace of closeness in the face of every need, of meekness in every conflict.”

(from the Homily Midnight Mass, December 24th)

Yes, brothers and sisters, Jesus is the salvation for every person and for every people! Today I ask Him, the Saviour of the world, to look upon our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria, who for too long now have suffered the effects of ongoing conflict, and who, together with those belonging to other ethnic and religious groups, are suffering a brutal persecution. May Christmas bring them hope, as indeed also to the many displaced persons, exiles and refugees, children, adults and elderly, from this region and from the whole world. May indifference be changed into closeness and rejection into hospitality, so that all who now are suffering may receive the necessary humanitarian help to overcome the rigours of winter, return to their countries and live with dignity. May the Lord open hearts to trust, and may he bestow his peace upon the whole Middle East, beginning with the land blessed by His birth, thereby sustaining the efforts of those committed effectively to dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. May Jesus, Saviour of the world, protect all who suffer in Ukraine, and grant that their beloved land may overcome tensions, conquer hatred and violence, and set out on a new journey of fraternity and reconciliation.

May Christ the Saviour give peace to Nigeria, where [even in these hours] more blood is being shed and too many people are unjustly deprived of their possessions, held as hostages or killed. I invoke peace also on the other parts of the African continent, thinking especially of Libya, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and various regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.... May Jesus save the vast numbers of children who are victims of violence, made objects of trade and trafficking, or forced to become soldiers; children, so many abused children.... Dear brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit today enlighten our hearts, that we may recognize in the Infant Jesus, born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary, the salvation



given by God to each one of us, to each man and woman and to all the peoples of the earth. May the power of Christ, which brings freedom and service, be felt in so many hearts afflicted by war, persecution and slavery. May this divine power, by its meekness, take away the hardness of heart of so many men and women immersed in worldliness and indifference, the globalization of indifference... Then we will be able to cry out with joy: "Our eyes have seen your salvation."

(from Urbi et Orbi message, December 25th)

Today the Word of God introduces us in a special way to the meaning of time, to understand that time is not a reality extrinsic to God, simply because He chose to reveal Himself and to save us in history. The meaning of time, temporality, is the atmosphere of God's epiphany, namely, of the manifestation of God's mystery and of his concrete love... The very gift for which we give thanks is also a reason for an examination of conscience, for a revision of our personal and communal life, to ask ourselves: what is our lifestyle? Do we live as children or as slaves? Do we live as people baptized in Christ, anointed by the Spirit, delivered and free? Or do we live according to the corrupt, worldly logic, doing what the devil makes us believe is in our interests? In our existential journey there is always a tendency to resist liberation; we are afraid of freedom and, paradoxically and somewhat unwittingly, we prefer slavery. Freedom frightens us because it causes us to confront time and to face our responsibility to live it well. Instead, slavery reduces time to a "moment" and thus we feel more secure, that is, it makes us live moments disconnected from their past and from our future. In other words, slavery impedes us from truly and fully living the present, because it empties it of the past and closes it to the future, to eternity. Slavery makes us believe that we cannot dream, fly, hope.

A few days ago a great Italian artist said that it was easier for the Lord to take the Israelites out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the heart of the Israelites. "Yes." They were "physically" freed from slavery, but during the wandering in the desert, with the various difficulties and the hunger, they began to feel nostalgia for Egypt and they remembered when they "ate the

onions, and the garlic" (cf. *Num* 11:5); they forgot, however, that they ate them at the table of slavery. Nostalgia for slavery is nestled in our heart, because it is seemingly more reassuring than freedom, which is far more risky. How we like being captivated by lots of fireworks, beautiful at first glance but which in reality last but a few seconds! This is the reign, this is the charm

of the moment!... Dear brothers and sisters, to conclude the year is to reaffirm that a "last hour" exists and that the "fullness of time" exists. In concluding this year, in giving thanks and in asking for forgiveness, it will be good for us to ask for the grace to be able to walk in freedom, to thus be able to repair all the harm done and to protect our-

selves against the nostalgia of slavery, to protect ourselves from feeling "nostalgia" for slavery.

May the Holy Virgin, the Holy Mother of God, who was at the very heart of the Temple of God, when the Word—who was in the beginning—made Himself one with us in time; may She who gave the Saviour to the world, help us to receive Him with an open heart, in order that we may truly be and live freely, as children of God.

(from Celebration of Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, December 31st)

Along the way, the wise men encountered many difficulties. Once they reached Jerusalem, they went to the palace of the king, for they thought it obvious that the new king would be born in the royal palace. There they lost sight of the star. How often sight of the star is lost! And, having lost sight of the star, they met with a temptation, placed there by the devil: it was the deception of Herod... In the palace the wise men experience a moment of obscurity, of desolation, which they manage to overcome thanks to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the prophecies of sacred Scripture. These indicate that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. At that point they resume their journey, and once more they see the star; the evangelist says that they "rejoiced exceedingly" (*Mt* 2:10). Coming to Beth-

lehem, they found "the child with Mary His mother" (*Mt* 2:11). After that of Jerusalem, this was their second great temptation: to reject this smallness. But instead, "they fell down and worshiped Him," offering him their precious symbolic gifts. Again, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit which assists them. That grace, which through the star had called them and led them along the way, now lets them enter into the mystery... God's love is great. God's love is powerful. But the love of God is humble, yes, very humble. The wise men are thus models of conversion to the true faith, since they believed more in the goodness of God than in the apparent splendor of power

And so we can ask ourselves: what is the mystery in which God is hidden? Where can I find Him? All around us we see wars... In all these realities, in these, the least of our brothers and sisters who are enduring these difficult situations, there is Jesus (cf. *Mt* 25:40,45). The crib points us to a different path from the one cherished by the thinking of this world: it is the path of God's self-abasement, that humility of God's love by which He abases Himself, He completely lowers Himself, His glory concealed in the manger of Bethlehem, on the cross upon Calvary, in each of our suffering brothers and sisters.

The wise men entered into the mystery. They passed from human calculations to the mystery: this was their conversion. And our own? Let us ask the Lord to let us undergo that same journey of conversion experienced by the wise men. Let us ask Him to protect us and to set us free from the temptations which hide the star. To let us always feel the troubling

question: "Where is the star?"; whenever—amid the deceptions of this world—we lose sight of it. To let us know ever anew God's mystery, and not to be scandalized by the "sign," that sign spoken of by the angels, which points to "a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" (*Lk* 2:12), and to have the humility to ask the Mother,

our Mother, to show Him to us. To find the courage to be liberated from our illusions, our presumptions, our "lights," and to seek this courage in the humility of faith and in this way to encounter the Light. May we enter into the mystery.

(from the Homily of the Epiphany of the Lord, January 6th)

When we realize that God is in love with our smallness, we cannot help but open our hearts.

Let us ask Him to let us feel the troubling question: "Where is the star?"

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Iraq



Courtesy Roberto Masi

Refugee Emergency in Iraq

AVSI's emergency campaign will raise funds to provide humanitarian aid to displaced Iraqis, the vast majority Christian, seeking refuge in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan.

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profughi In Iraq)

by bank transfer

Credito Valtellinese

Sede Milano Stelline, Corso Magenta, 59

IBAN: IT04D0521601614000000005000

Bank account: **AVSI FONDAZIONE**

Causal: EMERGENZA PROFUGHI IN IRAQ

For international bank transfer: Swift code (BIC): BPCVIT2S

for more information

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