

2018

COMMUNION AND LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

TRACES

3

VOL. 20

LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



FRANCIS'S WAY

How is the Pope asking each of us to change? On the 5th anniversary of his election, a recognition of the "Church that goes forth" and that grows only "by attraction."

Communion and Liberation
International Magazine - Vol. 19

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Graphic Design:

G&C, Milano

Photo:

Osservatore Romano: Cover; 6/7,
10-13; Gettyimages: 14/15, 20/21

Publishers (editore):

Editrice Nuovo Mondo srl

Iscrizione nel Registro
degli Operatori

di Comunicazione n. 26972

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e Liberazione for the texts

by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

CLOSE UP**THE CHURCH
WITH FRANCIS**

Five years after **JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO** was elected Pope, we offer a contribution so that we can understand how he is asking each of us to change. And the invitation he is extending to everyone. "No one is excluded."



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JULIÁN CARRÓN

Disarming Beauty

ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM

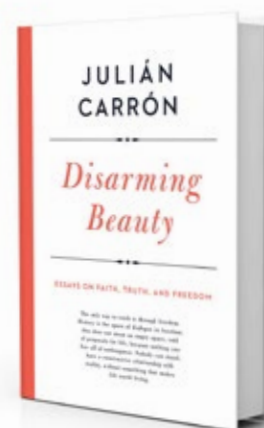


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WORDS AND GESTURES

Five years have passed since that evening. Just two days into the Conclave, on the heels of the major shock of the previous month when Pope Benedict XVI stepped down, came another exciting event: Francis, the first Pope from Latin America, whom the Cardinals “seemed to go to the ends of the earth” to get, stepped out onto the balcony of St. Peter’s.

It quickly became clear that the way he greeted the faithful for the first time—“brothers and sisters, good evening!”—and the equally unprecedented gesture of asking the people to offer a blessing “for their Bishop,” were just hints of many firsts to come.

Over the last years, Francis has made many proposals. Each is presented using the same method: words and gestures that are inseparable. His repeated calls, for example, for a “Church going forth,” are accompanied by his visits to unusual places to kick off his trips (to prisons, shelters, rough neighborhoods). His urgent call to treat migrants as *persons* came as he himself welcomed refugees in Lesbos. His condemnation of a “piecemeal third world war” goes hand in hand with initiatives that have helped build bridges where before there were only walls (between the U.S. and Cuba, in Central Africa, in Colombia, and in Syria, Russia, and China...). His “preference for the poor” is intertwined with real, symbolic gestures, from the outdoor lunch at the Vatican with the homeless to the washing of feet on Holy Thursday. And the list of examples goes on, shedding more and more light on what could be interpreted as mere “moral reprimands,” such as his words denouncing the crimes of a “throwaway culture” and insisting that politics should be in the service of the common good.

We can be resistant in the face of these gestures, stopping at the surface and playing down their significance by filing them into our usual categories. We find ourselves speaking in terms of sociology, pauperism, or even how close or far he is from Tradition. Alternatively, we can let that powerful unity of words and gestures—Francis’s *witness*—move us to seek its origin deep down. This origin is what he himself has called the “essentials,” the “heart of the Gospel,” and the “first announcement: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’” It’s an announcement directed to all people, as was decidedly clear during the Year of Mercy, capable of engaging (as were his predecessors, Ratzinger in particular) at an even more radical level with the chaos of the “epochal change” that, little by little, we are recognizing in our world.


Five years is a short time to begin to assess. Still, this can be an occasion to pause in order to answer a vital question: What does all of this ask of us; of *me*? Which road is Francis indicating? What is he proposing to us and offering for our lives?

These are the questions we attempted to answer in the “Close Up” section of this issue: through witnesses that “bring it to life” and through a review of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, that was released just a few months after Pope Francis’s election. Francis himself calls it his “programmatic document,” and it continues to be crucial to understanding this pontificate. The title speaks volumes: the joy of the Gospel. Not a random choice, as Cardinal Luis Tagle, one of the Pope’s closest advisors, notes: “Francis put the emphasis on joy. There’s a tendency in our contemporary world—not only in the Church—to feel tired and sad. Family life, one’s studies, and work are all perceived as a burden. Yet we have the one true reason to be joyful: Jesus who died and rose again is alive, and He is our hope.”

This is where the Pope is pointing us with his words and gestures. And our “one desire is to follow him,” as Fr. Julián Carrón wrote to the CL Fraternity after his audience with the Pope on February 2nd, in which he also asked that “the Spirit of the Risen Christ help him to carry the weight of the entire Church!” Happy reading, and a Happy Easter! **T**

LETTERS

THE GREAT THINGS BEING BORN IN TALLAHASSEE

 I was just at School of Community with some friends from Tallahassee (see page 16). I am truly moved by what I saw and by the great things the Mystery is generating. They told me about their Charitable Work. Attracted by Fr. Carrón's proposal at the Fraternity Exercises, they have breakfast with the homeless in their area one Saturday a month. I was struck because they have discovered something way beyond the food they offer: the people they eat with are happy and grateful that someone would spend time with them, listen to them and share



their needs. The discovery of the Movement by these young people involves something more than just their humanity and a gladness in

their lives. From a certain point of view, what they are doing on their own initiative is unique—parishes usually offer food to the homeless but the people in the parish don't spend time with them. Instead, following their own experience and the proposal of a priest friend (who is discovering the Movement along with them) they are living the Charitable Work as proposed by Fr. Giussani. Then at this evening's School of Community there were 30 people (including young people and couples). I knew some of them, but others were new to me. And because, little by little, they are experiencing a correspondence and human growth, each one invites his friends. I am moved by the steps they are taking, the friendships that are being born, and the desire they have to know Fr. Giussani and the Movement. Many times, they don't really grasp the content, yet this desire supersedes everything and opens each person to following a path that leads to knowing. I feel small and undeserving of what Je-

THE LETTER TO THE FRATERNITY

THAT SAME ACCENT TODAY

Fr. Carrón: On Palm Sunday in 1975, I was at the back of Nervi Hall, the place for a our meeting with the Pope after Mass in St. Peter's Square. I wasn't yet seventeen and there, sitting on the floor, I heard Fr. Giussani's voice resound as he said, "His Holiness told me, 'Take heart, you and your young people, because this is the right path; keep following it.'" Of that day, I remember only this, along with the half-empty square and the Pope in the distance entering on his ceremonial chair. For the first time, as I was preparing myself to participate, I was shown the value of Peter in the Church. "Take heart, you and your young people." I heard this same accent reverberate in my heart when I read your letter after your audience with Pope Francis. I sensed the echo of that deep emotion and of Fr. Giussani's passion, which continue and are renewed in following his charism. For this reason, in spite of my indecision and dejection, as soon as I finished reading your letter, I rushed to call my friends in Portofranco di Rimini to tell them about my availability. Because, I too, want to take part in "the fever of life" that Fr. Giussani communicated to us and that I feel vibrating in you.

Letizia, Rimini (Italy)



AFTER THE GS VACATION

TO THE HEART OF THINGS, WITHOUT MASKS

What I noticed at the GS vacation is that I truly needed it, seeing as it gave me a real jump start. Since I've been here in London, I have in my heart all the questions I brought with me from Italy that were born mainly during some days in Assisi. The extraordinary thing is that these questions have not abandoned me. Each day, I discover that I mostly have a desire to be His servant: in prayer I ask that my life be guided by Him and that I might be a means by which people might encounter Him. The beauty of this desire is that it makes me free and not a slave; free because if my living is following Him, I know that all is for a good. At the same time, I don't feel that I am a slave to this desire and to its outcomes: I don't know if my classmates, seeing how I




live, say "she lives for Christ," but I know that to live in this way, for Him, makes me happier. Another thing I'm discovering is that I have an immeasurable need to be looked at and accepted as I am. I am aware of this when I go to Student Youth because there it is very clear what it means that each one of us is good just the way we are. So, my preoccupation is no longer to appear "just right." Often, I am a slave to a vision of people that says that if you are not a certain way, you are somehow less. Once I free myself from all of these expectations (to appear a certain way, to behave in a certain way), I can get to the heart of things in a truer way, without masks or anything else.

Maria, London (Great Britain)

sus is allowing me to be part of. But at the same time, I have a need; a need to see Him at work, to return to the origin of what fascinates my heart.

Luca, Gainesville (USA)

"BREAKFAST WITH FR. GIUSSANI" IN NEBRASKA

 After the New York Encounter, I began reading *The Life of Luigi Giussani* again, for a half hour each morning while I eat breakfast. Since I've started to read the book again, I am so amazed that even



though I never met Fr. Giussani, in these weeks he is becoming my most faithful and present companion here in Nebraska, in the middle of nowhere. So often during the day, something happens and I

remember a phrase or an episode I read that morning, telling me in this or that circumstance, "You see, Martina, I would do it this way." It often happens that I wake up with something on my mind, with some worry, and the pages I read respond to that point exactly. It's like having a friend sitting across from me, someone I can talk to about what's happening and the questions I have. I have started to call that moment in the morning "my breakfast with Fr. Giussani."

Martina, Omaha (USA)

➤ CLOSE UP

THE CHURCH WITH FRANCIS

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was elected Pope,
we offer a contribution
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how he is asking each
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And the invitation
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everyone. “No one
is excluded.”

Jorge Mario
Bergoglio, 81:
he was elected
on March 13, 2013.





“HOW HE IS CHANGING ME”

A young Cardinal the Holy Father relies on. LUIS ANTONIO TAGLE tells us what it means to follow what Pope Francis is proposing and “the signs of what God is doing.”

BY LUCA FIORE

“Holy Father, you arrived in the Philippines. Tomorrow you will go. Every Filipino wants to go with you—not to Rome—but to the peripheries!” These words of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, at the end of the Pope’s visit to the Philippines in 2015 reveal his affection and sincere efforts to emulate Francis. That affection is shared by his flock, who express it by following that man who came along five years ago from “the ends of the earth” with great simplicity.

Tagle is young for a Cardinal (he turns 61 in June), but his experience of the Church and of the world has been rich. He studied theology in the U.S., where he lived for seven years. In 1997, he became part of the International Theological Commission, presided over at the time by Joseph Ratzinger. Later, as Pope, Ratzinger entrusted the Archdiocese of Manila to his care with its 2.7 million baptized Catholics, 85 parishes, and 475 priests. Pope Francis relies on him; he named him president of the extraordinary Synod on the Family in 2014

and made him the head of Caritas Internationalis in 2015.

He shares Bergoglio’s affable nature and gift for saying profound things in a simple way. The warm smile with which he welcomed us could be mistaken for a mere cultural courtesy, but it’s much deeper. Perhaps we could say it’s the mark of what the Pope calls “the joy of the Gospel.” We asked him how he is being moved by what Pope Francis is proposing to the entire Church.



Luis Antonio Tagle.

Your Eminence, how is Pope Francis’s presence changing your life as a believer and a shepherd?

I first met Cardinal Bergoglio in 2005 during the Synod on the Eucharist. On that occasion, we worked together for three years, so I got to know him well. When he became Pope, I realized that his election didn’t change him; he’s still the same person: simple, always concentrating his mind and heart on evangelization. The question he asks is: “How can we propose the Gospel to our time?” Not to an abstract world, but the concrete one, with all its light and shadows. This is really striking to me. You would think that when >>

» someone becomes Pope, his attitude would change. My recognition that this didn't happen in Francis was, in a way, the first change I saw in myself thanks to his person.

How did this change you?

It reminded me that the ministry entrusted to us is not an office of honor or privilege; instead, it is always a call and a mission. We always remain servants. This is something that really makes me think. Then, I saw a second change in me.

What was that?

Pope Francis isn't teaching anything new; everything he says is already written in the Gospels: Jesus's love for the poor, the call for conversion, and all the rest. Francis told me that he really admires Paul VI, especially his *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; in my mind that may be the most important document since Vatican II. But Francis put the emphasis on joy, on *gaudium*, because there's a tendency in our contemporary world—not only in the Church—to feel tired and sad. Family life, studies, and work are all perceived as a burden. Yet we have the one true reason to be joyful: Jesus who died and rose again is alive, and He is our hope. This is what strengthens and cheers us. Still, this is a joy that doesn't ignore reality and the shadows cast over our daily lives. We are joyful because the Lord is Emmanuel: God-with-us, a victorious God. Then there's one last change, which I would call a "pastoral conversion."

Could you explain that?

The call to be a shepherd is not limited to proclaiming the Gospel; we are called to point out the signs of



God's presence in daily life to all people. This is what allows people to breathe freely and reawakens their hope. Newspapers and TV focus on everything that's not working. The

“He put the emphasis on joy, because there's a tendency in our world to feel tired and sad.”

Church, instead, needs to look for the signs of what God is doing. I, for example, tell the Caritas Internationalis volunteers who work in refugee camps not to see only the suffering and misery, but also the gestures of love and witnesses of the strength of the human spirit that perseveres. Because those are the signs of God's presence.

What helps you to follow in this path of conversion?

The first thing is prayer, listening to God. That is what restores my joy. I often feel overwhelmed by the difficulties and dilemmas I have to face as the shepherd of a large Diocese. I find myself facing things much greater

than my own ability to respond. But when I stop to pray, to listen to God's word in an effort to sense the impulse of the Holy Spirit, I discover a joy that encourages me. The world is looking for satisfaction in shopping, possessing things, fancy food. But I, as a person and a pastor, know that joy is found in the personal encounter with Jesus in prayer. I wait for evening to come so I can have that time of silence, to sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament and say to Him, "Lord, I am here." I tell him all that's weighing on my heart and afterward, in silence, I feel His presence; this gives me a direction and a vision for my life and for my task as shepherd. The other thing that helps me is going out to the poor, toward the existential peripheries the Pope speaks about. It's going to the peripheries to make them become the center. The risk is continuing to think that we are at the center. It's a hidden form of pride.

Do you feel this is also a risk for you?

Well, of course! And I always have



to remind myself again. We go out to the peripheries, ready to learn the Gospel from those who are poor.

How can they teach you, who are a theologian?

Not through their words, but through their attitudes toward life. With their joy, which I consider a grace from the Lord.

Could you give an example?

In the Philippines, we have at least 20 typhoons every year. It's one of the reasons the country is still so poor. The fishermen and the farmers work themselves ragged, but every time a typhoon comes, they have to start all over again. I remember one time I visited a place that had been devastated. I was deeply saddened, seeing all the houses destroyed and dead bodies along the road. Long lines of people stood waiting for water, food, and medicine. A shocking tragedy. But what was even more shocking were the words I heard coming from their

mouths: "Thank God the sun is shining," "Thanks be to God; I met the Cardinal," "Thank God, I found my son again" [*tears well in his eyes*]. Simple things become miracles. If I think of myself... who complains if the water isn't warm enough, if the food doesn't have enough salt... The poor teach me to rediscover the true meaning of life, which is the level of life as gift.

The Pope says that poverty is a theological category. What does that mean for you?

This is a uniquely Christian concept. In the rest of the world, poverty is a social, cultural, or economic phenomenon, but the Bible, the word of God, makes poverty a choice. This is not the poverty imposed by a law, but is rather a decision, like the one that religious brothers and sisters make. The road to be like children in the Kingdom

of God. Then there is Jesus Christ, the son of God, who became flesh, became part of creation. A brother to many poor people and sinners. He told us that what you do or neglect to do for a poor person, you do or neglect to do for Him. This is a theological discussion. The Lord's presence is something you see with the eyes of faith; this is why the poor are a theological topic.

Pope Francis is often misinterpreted or misunderstood. Is he a Pope that is difficult to follow?

Not for us! Maybe because he's from South America, and the Philippines were under Spanish rule for 300 years... It must be his mode of operating, his respect for popular piety... When people here saw the first picture of him praying in front of the image of *Salus Populi Romani* at St. Mary Major, they all said, "It's a Pope who's just like us!" It's a common sentiment among both the priests and the laypeople.

On certain topics, however, there is a lot of disagreement.

Yes, there are the teachings of the Bible and of the tradition, but also people's human circumstances. The relationship between them is not always so clear. There's an approach that begins with doctrine and seeks to apply doctrine to life. Then there's another tradition, specifically a moral one, that begins with a concrete situation and, from there, tries to accompany people. The Pope is very tied to this latter approach.

He also reminds us not to give in to elitism. The danger, he says, is for Christians to think they're better than other people. How do you try to overcome that temptation?

There is that temptation. Honestly, though, it is a lesser temptation for us in Asia, where the Church has >>

PROFILE

Louis Antonio Gokim Tagle was born in Manila in 1957. He became the Archbishop of the capital of the Philippines in 2011. The following year, he was elevated to Cardinal by Benedict XVI.

In 2015, Pope Francis named him the **President of Caritas Internationalis**. He is considered one of the foremost theologians from East Asia and has served on the International Theological Commission. In 2005, he was the youngest Bishop to take part in the Synod on the Eucharist, and was elected to the Post-Synodal Council.

A number of his books have been published in English: *Easter People* (2005), *Telling the Story of Jesus* (2015), and his autobiography *I Have Learned From the Least* (2017). The latest is *The Risk of Hope* (2018).



» always been a small minority. A student I once taught in seminary, who has now been ordained for a few years, had his first assignment in Cambodia: he was pastor in a parish with only one member. In many places, even at the level of numbers, there's no room for pride. It's sad to see, for example, that the number of Christians is in such drastic decline. But maybe it's also an opportunity: feeling like a minority preserves you from the temptation of elitism.

What advice would you give to European Christians at this time of transition?

You can't measure the Church's presence by the numbers, you have to look at the quality of its witness. I asked my former student who is pastor in Cambodia if he was discouraged by the fact that, after 10 years studying philosophy and theology, he found himself leading a community with just one member. And he answered me [*the tears well up again*], "I want to give all the energy I have for this parishioner: he is the presence of the Church, the presence of Jesus Christ; He is His mystical body in this place in Cambodia." **T**

THE PRIMACY OF JOY

An introduction of *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* to help us grasp the essence of Francis's "programmatic text." And the task today for all men and women.

DI STEFANO ALBERTO

Pope Francis has often described *Evangelii Gaudium* as the "programmatic text" of his pontificate, asking all of the faithful to read, meditate on, and assimilate its content. Therefore, now that five years have passed since his election, as we seek to understand how he is changing the Church and how is asking each of us to change, it's worth reviewing the key points of the text. Looking at all its components will allow us to appreciate the Pope's outlook of deep faith, his fidelity to Church teaching and Tradition and, at the same time, the novelty of an ap-

proach that is able to account for the seriousness of the challenges we face in this time of "epochal change." This is the best response both to those who have expressed difficulties with what they see as a doctrinal "weakness" in the Pope's teachings as well as those who downplay their significance, limiting their impact to a few sociological or political consequences.

The Apostolic Exhortation, which was published on November 24, 2013, was the fruit of the work at the XIII Ordinary Synod of Bishops convened by Benedict XVI, which took place in Rome in October »

"IT'S TOO EARLY TO GET OLD"

**A couple whose retirement was changed by a visit from their pastor...
An encounter with the Christian community that opened their lives
once more, bearing fruit for others.**

Maria Pia and Roberto live in a beautiful home in Cantalupo, a town of 3,000 between Milan and Varese in Italy. They are both retired, in that time of life when things begin to simplify: those who have a big house like theirs look for a smaller one, stop to enjoy their grandchildren and catch their breath a bit... But their life has been exactly the opposite: everything has broadened, in every sense of the word. They even just bought the house next to theirs.

It all happened over the last three years, starting with the evening in December 2014 when their new pastor came by on his rounds to bless homes before Christmas. "His arrival on the scene shook up everything," Roberto said. "It was a bit of a solitary time. We were starting to close in a bit." Elena, their oldest daughter, was already married with kids, and their second-born, "our Mario," had always lived with them. The 36-year-old is in a wheelchair. He cannot walk and has been blind since birth.

Maria Pia describes their life as fairly average for "practicing Catholics": Mass on Sunday, an all-encompassing dedication to caring for their son and the slowly mounting fear about his future "after us." An oppressive concern, as they describe: "The only thing we knew for sure was that Mario would never end up in a hospice." They were looking for a solution but hadn't found the right path.

"From the moment Fr. Roberto set foot in our house, we intuited a life of communion previously unfamiliar to us." He hadn't said anything extraordinary; he simply invited them on a trip to the mountains. "And we started to say yes to everything. To get to know his friends in CL. They had a different way of spending time together."



Roberto added, "It was an encounter that brought us back to that faith that is life. For us, they had been two separate tracks." As Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life... the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters."

Maria Pia and her husband had a vacation home in the mountains but found it too difficult to go there. "We always went where Mario could come along," Roberto explained, with a frank, loving tone. "We never did anything without him!" And that hasn't changed, it's just that, over the last three years, they've done things they thought were impossible. For example, going hiking. Or to World Youth Day in Poland. And, last September, they did the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*. A few of their new friends joined in with a special van and they were off: taking turns pushing the wheelchair bit by bit, going a

little further each day. "It was a powerful experience, full of hard work and so beautiful that we made the decision when we returned home."

"The decision" was to buy the villa next to theirs. For some time, their neighbor had been asking if they would like to buy it. "We told him no, 'What would we do with it?' But by the third time he came knocking, things had changed. Our encounter with the community gave rise to an idea we'd never before considered: opening a home for Mario that could also welcome others with the same kinds of needs." So they bought it. "Before, we were overwhelmed with 'one' need; now we have the desire to carry the needs of others, too."

Maria Pia admits the fears that still linger and the sense of disproportion between her abilities and such a daunting task. Roberto immediately corrects her: "We're not alone! And anyway, what are we supposed to do: stay here wringing our hands?" Of course, it's normal to be intimidated. "Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus," *Evangelii Gaudium* tells us, "let us never give up, come what will." Roberto says it in his own words: "It's too early to get old!" Maria Pia smiles, saying, "My husband is always the one with a positive attitude." Then she corrects herself, "Actually, the most beautiful disposition in the family belongs to Mario. For him, the glass is always full." Their son, totally a gift and totally mysterious. As she says, summing up the heart of it all: "I always think, 'Who knows what kind of dull life I would've had without him. I would have worried about insignificant things...'" Mario works as a telephone operator at the city offices. He, too, is happy about their encounter with the Christian community. "He wants to be there, he even participates in catechism classes as much as he can, and we see he's making progress." The idea of a group home, then, is simply creating a place where there is "a life." "Sometimes I ask myself, 'Why now and not before?'" Maria Pia says. "Why at our age, and not earlier? I think we needed to experience solitude in order to appreciate the answer to our searching."

Alessandra Stoppa

» 2012 on the theme “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.” The text incorporates many of the contributions of the synod fathers, interpreting them in the light of the Council—especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum*—and the teachings of Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI.

The real heart of the document is contained right in the opening sentence: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”

From the beginning, there is a clear invitation to every Christian, “everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’ [...]. God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.”

Joy flows forth from the encounter with Christ, who manifests God’s infinite love for us. This is the true nature of Christianity. In a rather significant statement, Francis cites the opening of Pope Benedict XVI’s first Encyclical in the opening paragraphs: “I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life



a new horizon and a decisive direction’ (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1).”

“Thanks solely to this encounter—or renewed encounter—with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love

which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?”

It would be a mistake to consider a Christian’s mission a heroic personal responsibility, “For it is first and foremost the Lord’s work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is ‘the first and greatest evangelizer’ (Paul VI,

Evangelii Nuntiandi, 7). In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God.”

And if everyone “has the right to receive the Gospel,” then Christians have “the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction,’” Francis reminds us, citing Benedict XVI’s famous speech in Aparecida in 2007. John Paul II, too, “asked us to recognize that ‘there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel’ to those who are far from Christ, ‘because this is the first task of the Church’ (*Redemptoris Missio*, 34).”

Following this, Francis proposes a few directives for the missionary activities of the Church, divided into five chapters. **T**

Go on reading the whole article at www.tracesonline.org

“Christians should appear as people who share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty.”

DOORS OPEN FOR JOY

**“Jesus doesn’t separate the terrible things from the beautiful ones.”
The story of a single mother in Nigeria, from shame to an embrace.**

Her name is Joy, and that’s not a fabricated name to put in print, even though her story has a lot to do with certain aspects of *Evangelii Gaudium*. Especially with the part the Pope dedicated to a “Church whose doors are open,” that “is not a toll-house,” but the house of a Father “where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.”

Joy is a Nigerian woman from Lagos, and she met CL when she was 16. Now she’s 38. Three years ago, she found herself pregnant and unmarried. The world was caving in around her. “In the African culture, having children outside of marriage is shameful, especially for a girl who comes from a Christian family. I was paralyzed and confused. I did all I could to hide what was happening, but I couldn’t hide it forever. People started to talk, to judge me. One day, I gathered my courage and went to talk about it with Barbara.”

She would never have expected the answer her friend from the Movement gave. “She immediately gave me a long hug. Then she congratulated me saying, ‘This is a sign of Jesus’s love; He wants to show that He loves you and, through you, He wants to bring another human being into the world.’” This opened a window full of light into the darkness that had consumed Joy. “She didn’t say to me, ‘you’re a bad person’; she showed me that what was happening to me, even if it originated with a mistake, was something good. I immediately felt alive again. I got moving, taking initiative, and not caring what other people were saying.”

She started wearing maternity clothing and decided to go and tell



Joy with Jigh-Jigh.

her parents. They took it hard, “but when they saw that I was happy and full of life, they too accepted what was happening.”

And so a baby girl, Jigh-Jigh, was born. This may also seem like a made-up name, but it’s real (it’s pronounced Gigi, from French fashion). She became the mascot of the CL community in Lagos. “They poured out all the affection they had for me onto my daughter as well.” When her pastor was somewhat resistant to baptizing her (he wanted the assent of the father), another friend from the community, Francis, went with her and helped convince him, vouching

for her. “My friends have offered a true embrace of my life.”

A few years later, Joy ran into an old schoolmate again in her village in northern Nigeria. They started to date, even though she lived ten hours away. After a year, he asked her to marry him. At first, she was very hesitant, but then she said yes. They were engaged, and after a few months Joy found out that she was pregnant again. In the meantime, however, things were getting worse up north because of the conflicts between Muslims raising livestock and Christian farmers. Her fiancé’s visits came less often. When it was time to give birth, he wasn’t there to take Joy to the hospital. But Luisa, a friend from CL, was. At the hospital, they asked for her husband’s signature that he would help with her recovery. Luisa took care of it, and Joy went to the delivery room. The doctors thought the father was at work, but would come later. When she came out of the delivery room, it pained Joy to hear, once again, “When is your husband coming?” All the history of frustration and sense of abandonment came flooding back to her. “But when I heard how confidently Luisa answered, ‘I’m here, what’s the problem?’ I understood that there was someone there with us, who was taking care of us. And I was joyful again.”

Still now, a number of weeks after the baby was born, people ask Joy why the father hasn’t come to see her and his new daughter. “In their words, I hear that judgment about me and my life once again.” The doors of the Christian community, of the Church, however, are always open to Joy, who is embraced time and time again by the gaze of her friends in the Movement. “They continue to remind me that Christ’s face is there in every aspect of life. Jesus doesn’t separate the terrible things that we do, that I have done, from the beautiful ones. He is in all things. He is always there with us. Reality is truly beautiful, even with all the difficulties we are asked to go through.” Fittingly, her second daughter is named Miracle. And this also is not a made-up name.

Luca Fiore

Faith and Reason

“In the midst of the deterioration of values and vicious conflicts that assail humankind, I think that the presence of believers is indispensable for society.” A commentary by Spanish journalist **PILAR RAHOLA, who presented *Disarming Beauty* with Julián Carrón in Barcelona last May (from *La Vanguardia*, February 25, 2018)**

by Pilar Rahola



We were gathered below the banner of the YPO (Young President’s Organization), which convened thousands of administrative delegates from around the world at the Real Club de Tennis of Barcelona. We were a small group seeking the impossible. The topics discussed were religion, God, the clash of faith and reason... Taking turns at the microphone, our eclectic group, cordially moderated by Helena Garcia Molero, included representatives of Christianity (Roser Farrús), Islam (Zouhair el Hairan), Buddhism (Thubten Wangchen), and Judaism (Marcel Odina). There were even two “provisional” agnostic-atheists (as they are described by sociologist Maite Soto-Sanfiel) seated next to me, who completed the panel of speakers. What flowed forth was a free and open conversation that never strayed outside the bounds of mutual respect for all.

Our group discussed God and the advantages of belief, or, as it was put by an audience member: Why have religions? It is odd for me to be answering this question from the point of view of a non-believer, which is, inevitably, what I am. I add this adverb because I realize that it would be easier to avoid this question, and because I am convinced that faith in God soothes human fears. But because of the fact that faith does not originate from divine inspiration, but from a human initiative, for now I’m an outsider. In spite of this, in this uncertain world, amidst the ever-present deterioration of values and vicious conflicts that assail humankind, I believe that the presence of believers is a moral imperative, in fact indispensable for society. Of course, when I speak





Faith—the inner strength that is thought to encourage the human soul to live life with greater awareness—is that other missing piece, the complement to reason.

of believers, I am referring to those who have undergone a profound interior journey, who have arrived at spiritual transcendence, and, as a result, experience a fuller humanity. These are people who understand faith as personal enrichment and openness towards others. These are not the fanatics who use God to justify evil; people for whom transcendence ends where intolerance begins. But beyond totalitarian ideologies and the use of religion for political gain, the religious factor is a vehicle for the moral values that we find most urgently needed in these turbulent times.

It is true that, as Westerners, we tend to draw on the Enlightenment and rationalism, and it is through this lens that we look at the world. However, now that we know that the Enlightenment has failed in its attempt to explain everything through reason, perhaps we should open the door to the light faith brings to many people. It is not an insignificant, simplistic, or superficial phenomenon, and we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of not taking it into account. Faith—the inner strength that is thought to encourage the human soul to live life with greater awareness—is that other missing piece, the complement to reason, not its antithesis. This is the historic mistake of an arrogant Enlightenment mentality that believes reason is superior to faith. What if they were equal, and only needed to be integrated? The answer to that question completely transforms one's outlook.

(courtesy of La Vanguardia) T



JCL LIFE

ONE BY ONE

There's Carie, a pilot in the U.S. Navy, who has the Easter poster hanging in her cabin. There's Whitney, who after noticing a change in a friend, decided to follow her. And Alberto, who thought he had come here "on a mission," but then... A journey to Florida, to witness the origin (and growth) of a community no one planned.

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

August 2012. At a rooftop table with a view of the Miami River, the waiter had just served *spaghetti allo scoglio*. Enrico, who until then had remained silent, said, "The moment of departure is beautiful, because it is an experience of purification." Alberto, holding his fork, looked up at Joep and Pepe, who had not answered. He thought to himself: "He's crazy. 'Purification,' why does he use that word?" It was

his first night in Miami: as he sat with his friends who were also *Memores Domini*, he thought he would be sharing the "ideal" of his mission in the coming years. He left Italy so that the entire world could meet Christ. "Other people" need Him. But Enrico's words puzzled him. "In my own arrogance, I didn't understand that the one thing I need is for Christ to be present in an event before my eyes." His story would become intertwined

with those of Carie, Rachel, Luca, and many others who lived in Gainesville, Jacksonville, and Tallahassee, cities in northern Florida, names that that night were still unknown to him.

Thinking back on it today, seeing their faces during the vacation near the Blue Ridge Mountains in Georgia, it seems incredible. And yet, here they are. They were introduced into the story one by one, one friendship at a time. A myriad of faces that, for him,



are “delicate possibilities,” as Giussani would call them, through which the Mystery has become present over the years. It is something unimaginable, unplanned. An itinerary brimming with encounters, circumstances, and life, all of which make it worth re-living, in order to understand how a community is born.

BEGINNINGS. Monsignor Felipe Estévez first met the CL community in Miami, where he was formerly an Auxiliary Bishop. In July 2013, while in Jacksonville, he asked if it would be possible to establish a *Memores Domini* house in Gainesville, in his Diocese, which is also the location of one of the most prestigious universities in Florida. In November, Alberto, who had been teaching Italian to Latino students at Saint Brendan in Miami, not literature as he had hoped, wanted a change of scenery and made himself available. So far, the “missionary encounters” had been slim to none. He contacted the Bishop to get a sense of work opportunities for himself and for Luca, a friend he has known since college, who would be joining him in Gainesville. Monsignor Estévez proposed two teaching positions, Latin and History, at Saint Francis, a Catholic high school in the Diocese. In August 2014, Alberto received a forwarded email from friends

of a friend asking if there was anyone in the Movement living in Gainesville, since they had just moved there. Alberto himself was days away from moving there. He looked for a house near the couple while he waited for Luca to come. At the last minute, Luca was denied a visa for bureaucratic reasons. For the time being, it would not be possible for him to join Alberto. Alberto was alone. “It was a turning point. I wanted to give up. Then, there was a transition: from feeling incapable to realizing that I cannot live without my vocation. I could forget to recite Lauds, to take a moment of silence for one, two, or three days, only to realize that in fact I need these things. I went from being anxious about ‘what to do’ to discovering that I can call Enrico in Miami, to ask his

advice about any decision.” And he was not alone. There were James and Sandi, the couple he had heard from. She was Baptist, and wanted to know more about the experience her husband had recently encountered. They began to do School of Community and, before having dinner together, they always read questions provoked in them by the text. “I had deluded myself into thinking that I was there to accompany them, since ‘I already knew,’ instead I was learning from them” recalled Alberto.

Two months later, Carie (see *Traces*, n. 2/2016) and Rachel arrived. They were both introduced to the Movement in Pensacola by Father Jimmy and now they lived to Jacksonville. Carie had moved for work; Rachel to move back to her family. Carie, a helicopter pilot in the U.S. Navy, had spent a year traveling five hours to Pensacola to attend School of Community. She would return home very late, sleep a few hours, and then report for a helicopter mission. The hour-and-a-half drive to Gainesville seemed like a walk in the park. In time, more people joined: one of Alberto’s coworkers, friends of James and Sandi, people who came once. Toward the end of the year, Bryan came. He had been a student at Notre Dame, where he met the Movement, and through a friend of a friend, »»



“CL HERE.” Some moments from the Beginning Day this past year in Tallahassee and from the Summer Vacation in Georgia attended by the communities of Florida.





» was put in touch with Carie. For him, though, an hour-and-a-half seemed too much. “But it is impossible say no to Carie,” he said. He never missed a meeting.

In January 2015, Alberto was admitted to a Master’s program. He asked the high school principal: “Could Luca take my place?” The principal replied: “If we hire him, does that mean that you’re no longer by yourself?” “Yes.” “Let’s do it!” Around the same time, James and Sandi moved to South Carolina. Then Luca arrived. On his first night there, at dinner, Monsignor Estévez said: “Lord, bless this little house of Nazareth, so that these two friends may live their ‘yes’ to their vocation.”

NEW FRIENDS. Alberto and Luca were complete opposites. At first, Alberto wanted to help Luca by listing all the problems he would run into, and then the potential solutions. Life became really difficult. For Alberto, who did not see that his friend did not understand; and for Luca, overwhelmed by advice for problems he had yet to encounter. Then there was the Bishop, who had sent for them so that the Movement could grow there and invited them to parish events, to pastoral meetings... All good things, good things “to do.” At night, they would spend dinner in silence, so as not to argue. In the back of his mind Alberto was thinking, “I still have a lot to give, and if worse comes to worst, there is always Plan B: return to Italy.” Until one day when he realized that the benevolent Mystery was knocking on the door of his heart through these faces he had encountered. And that, “It is enough to be in front of Christ present. This is the only thing that saves our vocation.” That word, “purification,” had become flesh for him.

One night, after School of Community, Rachel said: “Father Jimmy

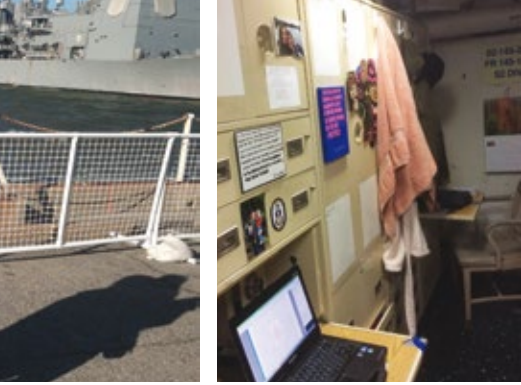


AIRCRAFT CARRIERS. Above, Carie’s cabin and her friends waiting for her upon her return from a mission. Below, the Beginning Day in Tallahassee. Right, people participating in the Charitable Work in Gainesville.

called me. He has been transferred to Tallahassee, where I went to college. I want to visit him and introduce him to my friends at the Catholic center. There are a few I am still in touch with. What do you think?” Luca and Alberto offered to go with her. On December 3, 2016, the three of them had dinner at Fr. Jimmy’s house along with twenty other guests. Before dessert, Rachel said, “I grew up in a Catholic family, and as you may know, I have always enjoyed going to retreats and remaining hours in adoration before the Eucharist. In Pensacola, Father Jimmy invited me to School of Community. One thing he said there struck me, ‘We want to know the truth of our experience.’ I went more than a year without understanding much, but I kept following and at a certain point, I discovered that I could live my faith in my everyday life; I didn’t have to wait for when I’d go on spiritual retreats or for adoration. That...” Her friend Rachael had interrupted her: “OK, when do we start this CL thing?” The

next day, they met up for School of Community. Two weeks later, some new friends came to Gainesville. Luca asked them: “Why did you want to start right away?” Whitney answered, “We have known Rachel since we were in college, and we were involved in youth ministry. When we graduated, we didn’t know what to do; we felt lost. Instead, she had changed, she kept growing. We wanted to know what had happened to her, so we followed her.” The following summer, Whitney entered a convent in Connecticut. In her suitcase, she carried the book of School of Community.

The Tallahassee group was small and diverse and slowly grew because those participating could not help inviting their friends. Some were able to attend the New York Encounter, and five went to the Summer Vacation for the Florida communities. In June, Father Jimmy returned to Pensacola, and they continued this experience of friendship that was so different from the parish groups they were used to. This experience was important for



everything in life. Luca went to visit whenever he got the chance, not with the intent to participate in “meetings,” but because he was captivated by what was happening. He barely discussed this group with Alberto and didn’t ask his opinion about it. Alberto would get mad at him, but then he “saw” that this was a simple way Luca was being called into a relationship with Christ. Not long after his arrival in Gainesville, Maurizio, another *Memores Domini* already living in the U.S. for several years, told him: “Your greatest challenge will be to let what you see prevail over what you think.”

ORDERS AND THE QUESTION. On December 30, 2016, at the pier in Norfolk, Virginia where aircraft carriers were docked, Luca and Rachel held up a sign reading “Welcome Home.” Joined by Vincent, who had come from Tampa, and Alberto, they waited for Carie, who had left seven months prior for a mission in the Persian Gulf. In her cabin hung the Easter poster, a

photo of her friends, and there was also the book for School of Community. Her job is to obey orders. Always. For her, during those months, the question had been: “What does my experience in the Movement have to do with the Navy? Or with the fact that I will be serving my country on active duty for the next four years?” She finds the only answer: “It is here that I meet Christ. I have been called to this life, and I wake up every morning praying to be able to say yes to Him.”

After ten months of being home, in November 2017 she was given a new assignment: Corpus Christi, Texas, near the border with Mexico. Carie was in tears. Alberto told her: “We will take you there. In fact, we will begin the trip early and we will make it a road trip. We will stop in the places life has taken you and meet all your friends.” A week later, Rachel entered as a novice in the Missionary Sisters of Saint Charles Borromeo.

One night, Alberto and Luca received a phone call from Monsignor Estévez: “Our Diocese is receiving a new seminarian, Clay. He will be here for one year serving in campus ministry. He has spent two years studying in Rome and I would like for him to practice speaking Italian. So I thought of you.” They met a few days later at a Starbucks for coffee. Clay told them that he had actually met the Movement in Rome, through Ralph, an American seminarian. He began to go to School of Community. He expected

to be very busy with the activities of the campus ministry. He had a generous heart; he never held back. Then, after a School of Community, to which he had arrived late again

from another commitment, he told Alberto: “I am about to burst. I cannot go on like this and I am not happy living this way.” “Who did the Bishop instruct you to follow?” “Father David, the university chaplain.” “Why don’t you go tell him?” Clay thought it over: to admit that he is “not up

to the task” meant that this might not be his path. The next morning, he took courage and after the chaplain had reviewed with him his tasks for the day, he said: “This isn’t working for me. I do a lot, but I accomplish nothing.” “Tell me what you need.” “I need School of Community.” “OK. Make sure everything gets done, but you may keep your Thursdays open.”

Among those who *need* that group of friends are Ashil, whom Alberto accompanied as a catechist until becoming his godfather at his Baptism; Richard, who is also in the U.S. Navy; and Mary Alice, a university student who in 2016 bought a ticket to the New York Encounter the day before it began because her friend Rachel had suggested to her: “Come.” And

then Sonya and Kelsey... All of them personal encounters that have generated a new life. As he reflects back on this story today, Alberto smiles: “Look what I would have missed had I chosen plan B!”

Those faces are the “delicate possibilities” through which the Mystery has become present.

“I had deluded myself into thinking that I was there to accompany them, since ‘I already knew.’”

FAITH TOUCHES LIVES

A rectangular stone sign with a rough, natural edge. The top half of the sign has the Arabic word 'نهر الأردن' (Nahr al-Urdun) written in black ink. The bottom half has the words 'Jordan River' written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The sign is set against a background of a wooden fence and some greenery.

نهر الأردن
Jordan River

In Jordan, close to the place Jesus was baptized, a gathering of CL communities from the Arab world. At times they are called to live out their faith in a society that is hostile, but where the true enemy is “thinking like everyone else.”

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

In this place, Jesus lined up to be baptized along with sinners. To renew our lives.” Just a few miles north of the Red Sea, which is the lowest point of dry land on the earth. In total silence, Archbishop Alberto Ortega, apostolic nuncio to Jordan and Iraq, distributes Holy Communion to those gathered. Forty people have come from the various CL communities in the Middle East to celebrate Mass under a wooden shelter. A place intentionally chosen. Not far from here, John and Andrew met Jesus long ago.

“We have also experienced the grace of the encounter with that man, which changes our entire lives,” Orte-

ga said. “We are spending these days together to get to know Him even better.” The Diakonia for the Middle East lasted only a couple of days, but it was intense. It took place February 2–4 about an hour from Amman, Jordan. People came from about a dozen countries, from Tunisia to the UAE, from Israel to Qatar. Most come from societies where religious liberty is limited and they are called to live their faith amid restrictions and difficulties. Some are European expats living abroad for work; others are Arabs. Each of them met Fr. Giussani’s charism his or her own unique way, and the same is true for the way they continue to follow.

Fr. Bonaventure N'tontas was born in Congo-Brazzaville and now lives in Jerusalem. When he was 18, he was sent off to Russia to study engineering, not long before the Berlin Wall fell. One day he was studying for an exam, all alone in one of the vast Vladimir campus's classrooms, when a man suddenly opened the door and yelled, "Are you Catholic? They've opened a church! Here's the address!" and walked out. The African student visited the church that same day. He met an Italian priest there and they became friends. That is how he began to follow Christ through the Movement, a road that carried him to the priesthood. "Why me? With 15,000 students, why that moment and that classroom?" he says, laughing for joy 20 years later.

Aisha has the same question: "Why me?" A Palestinian, she grew up in an orphanage. As a girl, she was fascinated by the appearance of a Christian woman and followed her through the streets until she walked into the Holy Sepulcher. She watched her as she entered, prayed, and wept, the girl's first encounter with Jesus and her first step in following Him. At the Diakonia assembly, she expressed her gratitude with emotion. "I'm not worthy to be here, but I am among those who have been chosen. Not by the people who invited me, but by Him. Lately, I've been feeling distant from God, forgetful. But He calls me to be with you and says, 'You are still on my mind; I still love you.'" When times are difficult, she says, what helps the most is remembering what a grace it is to belong to Jesus.

That morning, along the Jordan River, the nuncio invited them all to



renew their gratitude for having been baptized with the sign of the cross, repeating the words of St. Matthew's Gospel: "You are my chosen son, with whom I am well pleased." "Our usefulness to the world flows from the preference we have been shown," said Davide Prosperi, Vice-President of the Fraternity of CL, who came to spend time with this group of friends.

“This place makes everything like a desert, but you all remind me of my encounter with Jesus.”

"All our difficulties begin when we think we no longer need to be preferred. If we forget, then we become like everyone else." Fiorenza, an architect who lives in Oman, described the signs of that predilection which opens you up, starting with the fact that, "I am here with all of you because it reminds me of who I am." She related that when she had seen the struggles of a colleague, she had remembered how she had been in the same situation right after she moved there. "There were a set of eyes looking at me: those of a friend. So, I started to be attentive to this colleague, and I assigned him a project." It's the last thing you'd expect, but it's still possible in every situation: instead of complaining, ask a question: "What are You asking of me?" I prayed to God for daily com-

panionship right where I am, and he gave me a friend who is far from what I had in mind, but I set off walking alongside him."

SKYPE AND THE T-SHIRTS. One of the distinctive characteristics of these countries and their small CL communities is turnover. In Dubai, Roberto sees his friends, colleagues, and his daughters' classmates constantly changing. In himself, he sees a growing desire to love them all with sincerity. "There's an awareness that the other person is 'given' to me; but it's not easy for affection to grow." "Acknowledgment of a person is never cold," Davide responded. "Affection springs up along with a judgment, and this is not empty sentimentality; it's a bond that carries within it the awareness of a task. I sense the other is important for my destiny." This is the affection you can see among the attendees; even those who had never met treat each other like brothers and sisters. "I'm grateful for the loyalty with which everyone has shared his or her person," said Riccardo Ardito, who lives in Italy but accompanies all the Middle Eastern communities throughout the year. "This sharing isn't forced. It's the evidence of an experience that overwhelms us, because all that 'we do ourselves' falls apart in our hands."

At the assembly, attendees >>

» spoke about their relationships at work and home, including living the dramas of pain, the illness of children, rejections, and the lack of hope. That hope can be anchored in our own “doing,” but then along comes a circumstance in front of which we can do nothing, and we despair. “Instead, for Jesus, the first action is being moved,” Davide said. “He cries, consenting to a heart torn open, which is the human condition. Being moved this way, He makes Himself seem so close to me, so totally *for* me. So, maybe the point is not in ‘doing,’ but in ‘becoming’: in placing ourselves within the heart of Jesus.” Suffering, then, becomes the “mysterious place” in which we are given a deeper humanity that we can share with those suffering around us.

At the beginning of the three days together, Riccardo had said that, “in the circumstances we are called to live, we are not alone. The Lord is active, stirring up people who are the signs of His presence. We are here together to look again at the light.” Luca has been working in Saudi Arabia for three years. His children are now all grown up and his wife is far away, living alone. They have breakfast and dinner together by Skype. “The question of why Christ wants me to be in Riyadh is one that’s still open, every day.” It intersects with all that happens to him. His mother died suddenly, and he found himself surrounded by the prayers of others and consolation from friends. Above all, he discovered how much he needed others. “It’s really true,” he says, “that a Presence is the most pertinent response to life’s needs.” An Egyptian colleague confided in him how he’d like to par-



ticipate more fully in the life around the office. Just for him, Luca instituted weekly meetings, which had a domino effect on the entire office. One evening, he came to School of Community annoyed at what a small group they were and angry at how hard it was to meet up, only to hear his friend Marco say, “This place makes everything like a desert, but you all remind me of my encounter with Jesus. I’ve never enrolled in the Fraternity, but if this is it, then I’m already part of the Fraternity.” Relating one fact after another, Luca speaks about his mission.

“My mission is to myself, that I find myself converting.” At the end of the evening, he took out 40 T-shirts from a fundraiser for the building campaign of the Bahrain cathedral. “I bought them to give as gifts. For all of you, that you might remember us in your prayers, and for us, to remind

She graduated, got married, had kids, and found herself tired of everything. “I was without joy.”

us of you and of the Church.”

Marco has been in Dubai for two years. He described how life there was a continual provocation, and how stubbornly he resists things. “If I approach people and things based on how I want them to be, there’s always some problem. If I accept them, looking to see, something always opens up.” What, then, helps us not to resist? To respond, Davide simply looks to a fact, thinking of the morning they spent by the Jordan. “It really makes a deep impression seeing that everything happened in a moment of time and space. John and Andrew had to decide everything as it was happening: they had very little to go on in choosing whether to follow that man, but they did it because they were expectant and open. We are waiting for the expectations we have set, yet we don’t even know what we truly need.”

HIBA’S INVITATION. Ettore, who lives in Jerusalem, recently quit the job he has always loved. It was a painful decision, after 20 years in the Holy Land. “And yet, the whole time I’ve never lost the one thing that was always the easiest to love: my ‘I.’ An ‘I’ full of gratitude, because the beauty that You, O Christ, bring here is even greater now.” He was asked to do School of Community with five women in Bethlehem whom he’d never met. He went reluctantly and was blown away. “In them, I see what it means to discover life’s treasures. They simply desire to see it again and again.” One of them, Hiba, is at the Diakonia. Visibly moved but still elegant, she read what she had prepared in Arabic. She’s a social worker and mother of three-year-old twins. “I grew up in a Catholic family and was very active at the parish. Until I went to college, when I got involved in others things and drifted away from the life of faith.” She graduated, got married, had kids, and suddenly

found herself exhausted, tired of everything. “I was without joy.”

One of her colleagues was always telling her about these Italian friends, so one day she accepted an invitation. “I immediately felt a strange attraction to these people. I wanted to go back a second time. Then a third, and a fourth... They were serious, interested in our lives. They didn’t worry about external things the way that we did. This companionship helped me to find Jesus, who I’d lost along the way. Everything changed, including my relationship with my husband, my kids, and with the people I meet at work from other religions.”

THE MOVE. A few of them described how this path had helped break down their hostility toward a world that often makes people violent or reactionary. Life in these societies isn’t easy. “It’s true we’re at war,” Davide said, listening to their stories, “But the real war is against nihilism: giving in to thinking like everyone else, to the dominant mentality. Not letting our lives be entirely defined by the encounter with Christ. Our enemies are not unfavorable circumstances, or the fact we can’t openly express what we believe. These are mortifications, but nothing can block the freedom and truth of an experience that mysteriously offers us a possibility for everything to be fulfilled as God desires, through the openness we exhibit.”

On the last day, Simon coordinated schedules, departures, and rides to the airport. He is from Amman, and he and his wife Alessandra were the hands and heart behind the time they had all spent together. They give of themselves for these friends as they do for Iraqi refugees in Jordan. With money donated by the Fraternity, they manage two initiatives to teach leatherworking and installation of decorative tile. “I can’t change the whole situation,” he said, “but I my-



Here and on the previous pages, a few moments from the Middle East Diakonia in Amman, Jordan, including a visit to the place of Jesus’s Baptism (left) and the worksite for the Latin Rite Catholic Church across the Jordan River in Bethany (above).

self change because Christ comes to meet me in the needs of the people.”

“If I think back on all that I’ve heard here, it’s unthinkable. Maybe a fiction writer could imagine it... Yet, it has all happened.” Davide is in a state of wonder at all the facts and stories told over the three days, at what was said and what went unsaid, and what was communicated by people’s lives, which shed even more light than the words. Said was among the group dedicated to translating everything into Arabic. He is a teacher in Alexandria, Egypt and has been in the Movement for over 20 years. “Right away, I sensed that I’d have to take a long time to understand just a little bit. Now I’ve ‘understood’ but in a surprising way. What helps you understand are the things that happen.” A month ago, he and his family had to move. “The people in our build-

ing were so sad. They’re Muslim, and we weren’t all that connected to them, but as I left, my neighbor Ahmed was crying, asking me to change my mind. I asked myself: How did we treat them? What kind of relationship did we have? Living out the faith ‘touches’ the lives of others without you even realizing it. There, I understood that the issue is not our numbers, and that you can’t judge things from the outside. I’m on a journey because I encounter Christ at every step.”

RETURNING HOME. Jesus, after spending time with His disciples, sent them out. “So as not to lose what you have received, go out. Don’t be content keeping it amongst yourselves; let what you’ve seen be poured out for the world,” Davide said by way of conclusion on the last morning. “This filled the disciples—and fills us—with even greater affection. It makes us feel even more together than if we were actually able to stay together, because we are called to this: to contribute to the fulfillment of history that Christ brings to the world.”

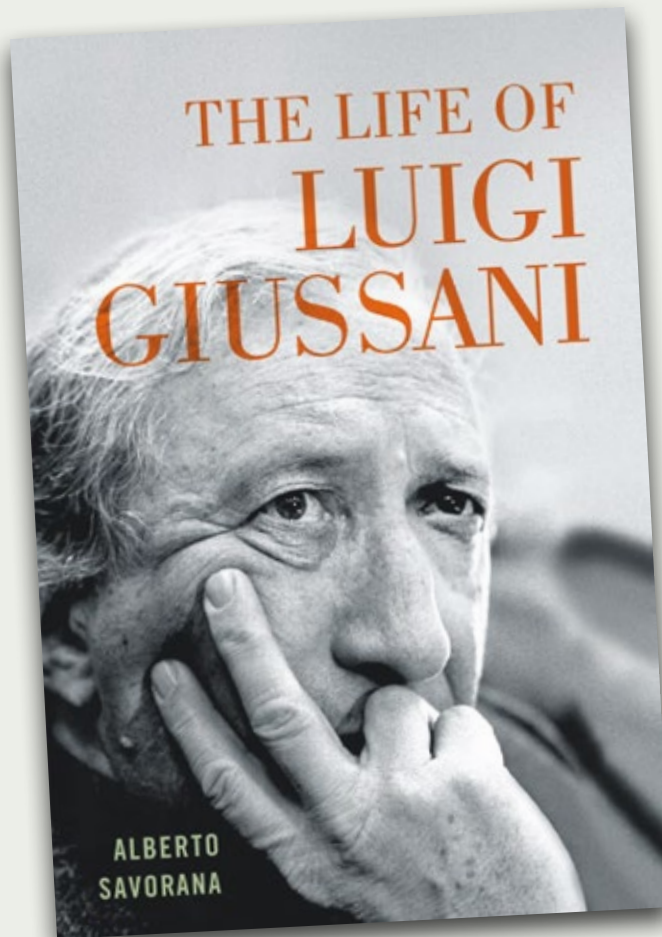
“Our enemies are not unfavorable circumstances: Nothing can block the truth of an experience.”

They had their last Mass together, singing in Arabic, Spanish, and Italian, and then said their goodbyes. The scene brought to mind the words of Fr. Giussani about the day by the Jordan River, about John and Andrew after their first encounter with Jesus. “Then they separate.

Each goes to his own house. They don’t say goodbye, but they bid each other farewell without saying goodbye, because they are both full of the same thing; the two of them are one, so full are they of the same thing.” Davide concludes: “My friends, without mincing too many words, this has happened.”

THE LIFE OF LUIGI GIUSSANI

by Alberto Savorana. Translated by Chris Bacich and Mariangela Sullivan



A detailed account of the life and legacy of the founder of the Communion and Liberation movement.

1,416 Pages, December 2017

Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy, which has hundreds of thousands of adherents around the globe. In *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Alberto Savorana, who spent an important part of his life working and studying with Giussani, draws on many unpublished documents to recount who the priest was and how he lived. Giussani's life story is particularly significant because it shares many of the same challenges, risks, and paths toward enlightenment that are described in his numerous and influential publications.

In addition to providing the first chronological reconstruction of the life of the founder of Communion and Liberation, *The Life of Luigi Giussani* provides a detailed account of his legacy and what his life's work meant to individual people and the Church.

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