

A LIVING REALITY

At the Synod, the Pope shows us that only on an open journey can the Church fulfill her mission. How else can she reach our lost humanity with the novelty of Christ?



KURDISTAN

FROM THEIR PIERCED HEARTS

A visit to the tent cities of Erbil introduces us to stories of forced conversions, kidnappings, destroyed monasteries, and crucifixes riddled with bullets. We meet people who have nothing, but who are not despairing, and they tell us why.



12

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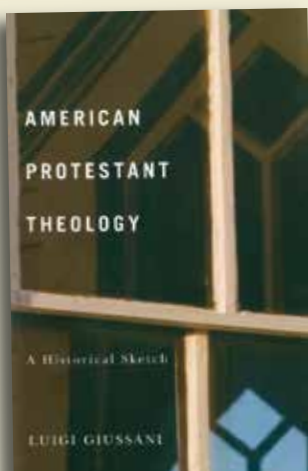
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LUIGI GIUSSANI



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

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

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

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

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE TREASURE ON OUR JOURNEY

Strange attitudes are emerging in certain sectors of the Catholic world. This phenomenon was clearly seen, for example, during the Synod on the Family, not so much in the debate among the Synod Fathers on the “new challenges” confronting family life today (a debate that was much richer than the various interpretations of it imply), but in the many commentaries responding to the Synod that circulated in newspapers, blogs, and on various websites. They are comments that cannot be framed within the “conservative-progressive” mindset. In a more or less explicit—sometimes even vulgar—way those comments are a sign of feeling lost, of finding oneself disoriented. This happens a lot now when topics touch upon ethics or the so-called “new rights.” It is as if, because certain issues are being discussed openly, the Church risks losing its course; as if accompanying today’s wounded and lost humanity were synonymous with losing oneself in the chaos.

Today, despite the fact that two thousand years of Christian history are full of moments of confrontation even more tense than what we see now (and recognizing that if this “feeling lost” gives in to fear, then it should force us to ask ourselves Who we really think is at the helm of history) this disorientation is understandable. Reality puts us in front of challenges that were unthinkable only a few years ago—and here “unthinkable” really means unimagined, unexpected, and not immediately reducible to pre-conceived categories. It is even more true that “a world that is changing so rapidly asks Christians to be available for finding ways to communicate, with a language that is comprehensible, the perennial novelty of Christianity,” as the Pope reminded us at the Meeting of Rimini.

When you read it, it seems clear. Why then, when we hear it talked about or see in action the search for “new ways” (like at the Synod), is our conditioned reflex of resistance, concern, and fear of losing that treasure triggered?

In one of his principal texts, *Why the Church?*, Fr. Giussani, speaking about the magisterium and the “communication of truth,” points out the way in which the Church gains awareness of herself and of this treasure. “All that happens in each of our lives, as our self-awareness matures with the passage of time, also occurs in the life of the Church,” he writes, “Therefore it is important to remember that this maturing process follows a certain course... the Church lives and operates in the realms of time and space. It charts its itinerary of self-awareness and in this, so that it may fulfill its mission and therefore avoid the trap of ever *defining* an error, it is assisted by the indefatigable Spirit of Christ. This assistance, however, does not spare the Church the fatigue and work of evolutive research for the precise reason that the Church’s nature as a ‘body’ that is certainly divine but also human is incarnated in time and space.”

We are not exempt from the fatigue and the labor of this development, of this growth; but, neither is the Church, precisely because she is a *living* reality. And, doing this work, finding new ways to communicate the eternal, is not “something less.” It is not a loss of certainty or a leap into the darkness. It is an enormous richness, the possibility of discovering oneself and reality more and more. It can be a beautiful path (which is, not by chance, the title of the recently produced video commemorating 60 years of Communion and liberation, “*La strada bella*”). It will always be a journey. It is a journey for everyone, at any age, and in every part of the world, which is possible with only one very simple condition, which the Pope reminded us of in the same message, in lines that we should commit to memory: “The Christian is not afraid to decentralize... because his center is in Jesus Christ.” What is our center? T

SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY: A CONTINUOUS DISCOVERY

What I see in front of my eyes at the School of Community (perhaps because now I live this moment as an urgent necessity) is a continuous pushing of the limits of human possibility, which is a sign of His Presence, as some of us shared at the last School of Community. M. discovers that her 14-year-old nephew is using drugs with a group of his friends and takes the initiative to speak with the families, telling them that what is missing is an education and journey to faith. Normally at the school the only solution to this situation is the expulsion of the student. Instead, she proposes to the school principal that these kids do charitable work together with her. The principal is enthusiastic. C. publicly declares that the mechanical application of school rules crushes the person, since these rules do not take into account the needs of the person. She asks herself, confronted by the reaction of her colleagues, why she is so sure that they are wrong, that there is another way to help the person grow. She discovers that this certainty is the result of the continual experience of a gaze for what is truly necessary for her in life. In another witness, C. tells us of a friend she's had since school. This friend calls her all the time, is always sad and depressed, and always complains about everything—to the point that C. does not answer her calls anymore. Then, a couple of weeks ago, while C. was reading a passage about experience, the friend calls and she decides to answer. The friend is the same as always, but C. is not. The only difference between them, C. tells her friend, is the journey she is making,



where she is being educated to the faith, which is the only thing that makes her happy. It is not a “therapeutic community”; rather, her whole life is engaged. Now, every day when the friend calls, they do School of Community. Then D. tells us that in the traffic jams there are a lot of angry and violent people; when one of them insults him, now he can look at the driver in a new way, look at his humanity and his destiny. This new thing is also happening to me at work, in my relationships with colleagues; and with one colleague in particular where my heart aches for the cry of his heart, that he might encounter Him.

Daniela, Lima (Peru)

LEARNING HOW TO LOVE MATH

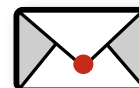
Dear Fr. Carrón, I am separated and have three children, one of whom is handicapped; I work taking care of an elderly person, a job that, along with Providence, allows me to make a living. For the past few years, I have been doing charitable work

with a few friends in an institution managed by nuns who care for children sent there through the legal system. At the beginning of the summer, two of these children asked if they could stay with me. With the agreement of the parents, the nuns, and the social worker, along with the support of friends, I accepted their request. Having these children has changed me, changed them, and changed my children as well. When the school year started, even the teachers noticed that the children seemed more serene, more beautiful, and more content. All of this happened because being embraced in my own life made it natural for me to embrace them. The other day, while doing his homework, my oldest son told me, “I don’t want to do math, I don’t like it.” I asked him, “Do you want to love Jesus?” and he answered, “What does math have to do with Jesus?” I responded: “Jesus has to do with everything and everyone, because He is the meaning of life and because you have been born out of His love.” “Then teach me how to love Jesus, so I can also love math.” Three days later he returned from school happy, and proudly showed me the math notebook with a nice A+.

Francesca, Italy

“I THOUGHT I HAD LOST EVERYTHING”

Each time I came across the three foundational questions asked by Fr. Carrón—What are you looking for? What fulfills the heart? How can one live?—they seemed too difficult to answer and I would give up. Until my father, who had abandoned me and my mother, suddenly came back. Because he had left us when I was still young, I thought he was



dead; consequently, I didn't care about his existence. But the Mystery brought him back to me, right back to me and my mother. One Sunday, he came home and asked me to forgive him. I felt sad in that moment, but still could not accept him because I let annoyance overtake me. So I told him I was forgiving him, though I kept seeing in him only the mistakes he had made. The following Sunday morning, when I was cleaning the kitchen, one of my fellow students came and told me that my father wanted to speak to me. I was surprised. When I reached my father's home I found many people, some who were crying. They all looked sad. Entering the house I saw a body stretched out and still. My mother told me, "It's your father, Grace. He is dead." In that moment I looked so confused. I couldn't believe that my father was no longer breathing. I asked myself what the Mystery was trying to reveal to me in that moment. I felt sad and asked Christ why he had brought my father to me only to immediately take him away. What the Mystery brought right to my eyes was unbelievable. I called Aunt Rose, who said that my father was with Christ, face to face, and that his sins had been forgiven. I moved away from home and went to a quiet place. Silence. Everything became clear to me in that moment. I realized that the breath Christ had given me and my father, who was at one point useless, had become so meaningful. Now the presence of the Mystery allowed me to look at my father as being more present than before. Now I could look at him not merely as a body, or judge him for the mistakes he had made. And I could do this only because Christ had made me

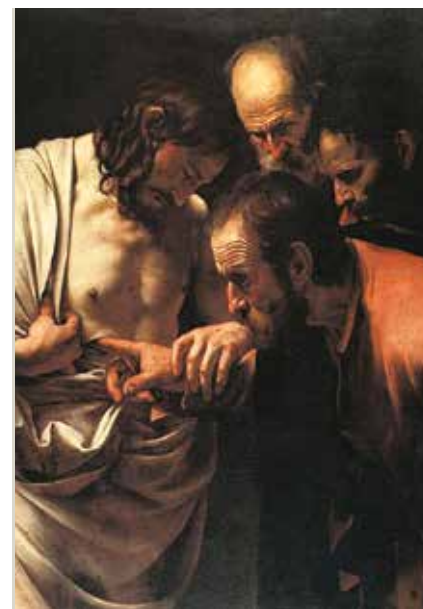
realize how valuable my father is. My relationship with the Mystery has become strong because what I am looking for was rightfully brought to me. With this I could now attend the burial without fearing anyone, not even those who were saying I was responsible for my father's death. The gossip and accusations became less important than the relationship between me and my father and Christ. When I lost my father, I thought I had lost everything; instead, I found myself. I was fully reawakened and now look at myself as a given. I feel glad because Christ loves me so much that He allowed reality to reawaken me, so that I may not be lost completely.

Aciro Grace, Kampala (Uganda)

I AM MORE FORTUNATE THAN ST. THOMAS

For the second year, some Taiwanese friends have taken a vacation together—42 people between the ages of 4 and 89. Here is what a friend wrote.

Dear friends, after our vacation to the Mount of the Beatitudes, we returned to our daily lives, bringing with us so much grace. Once again I felt the love of God. In those three days, I found the enthusiasm of faith and was moved. I saw the young people prepare the games with seriousness, and the priests and all of the friends put their heart into what they were doing. I also became familiar with the Mount of the Beatitudes, fruit of the lifelong dedication of Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi. The second day, we saw a video in which Ferenc Fricsey directed a performance of *The Moldova*. We could almost feel the spray of the river. I encountered



the Movement in 2000. In this great family, I have met many people with whom a strong and profound friendship has been formed, and even though we do not speak the same language, the authenticity that I feel is truly profound. In this utilitarian society, in a world filled with suspicion and jealousy, this friendship is even more precious. If all of this does not come from God's love, how could it happen? The charism of Fr. Giussani is always with us. My faith comes from his idea of education, and his words are rooted in my heart and help me to believe even more in the presence of Jesus. I think I am luckier than Thomas. Thomas believed only after seeing Jesus' wounds, while I, even though I have never seen Christ, know that He has given me CL. I thank you for the constant companionship and teaching. Your experiences strengthen my faith, helping me to see beauty and understand that I am not alone.

Julie, Taiwan



AN OPEN ROAD

While the debate on the various pastoral challenges is a work in progress that will continue at least through next year, **Fr. ANTONIO SPADARO**, editor of the Italian Jesuit magazine, describes the newness that emerged from the discussions in which he participated, as well as his take on what the Pope wanted to communicate.

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

Parrhesia. In other words, “to speak clearly, to say everything that is felt.” It was not exactly a common word before, but then came the Synod on the Family. That word, chosen by Pope Francis for his opening

remarks to the 191 Synod Fathers as they began their work, slowly came to life in front of our eyes. This approach had a singular effect. Of the two weeks of discussions, the most striking element—besides the themes discussed (which, by the way, went far beyond

the questions of communion for divorced-and-remarried Catholics and openness to those with same-sex attraction which dominated newspaper reports and will continue to be works in progress)—was the method. The discussions were very open, to a degree that disoriented several observers and, likely, some of the participants. This openness indicated a new perspective on the question of method.

“I think the dynamic of the Synod will not remain confined to those days: it has given a new rhythm of movement for the work of the Church in general,” says Fr. Antonio Spadaro, S.J., Editor-in-chief of the Italian Jesuit magazine *Civiltà Cattolica*, who authored the famous interview with



The Fathers at work in the Synod Hall. The Extraordinary General Assembly of Bishops was held on October 5-19, 2014.

Pope Francis in *America* magazine that spread throughout the world in the summer of 2013, and a papal appointee for the Synod. “In a way we can say that, there, a journey was opened up.”



Antonio Spadaro.

What do you mean by that?

The Pope wanted everyone to express him- or herself freely, and at the same time to “listen with humility,” as he framed his request at the beginning of their work. The Synod responded to this appeal. The first major result was demonstrating that we have a Church that can dialogue and express different views within herself, without the need

to appear monolithic, and without having to immediately publish a painstakingly measured final document. Looking at the content discussed and the texts—the speeches, reports, and summaries of the working groups—we see the stages of a journey that is just at the beginning. It was the method that was significant.

However, many were taken aback when they saw this kind of open discussion...

I would say that likely neither the Church nor the media were expecting this format. Of course, I consider all these reactions to be legitimate responses, but

the one thing I would be very cautious about is to mistake freedom of expression for utter confusion, as some have written. This reading is in fact only possible if we view the Church as monolithic. That is not what we find, for example, already in the *Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter 15, when the apostles and elders debate amongst themselves in the Council of Jerusalem...The element of dialogue and discussion is something that has always characterized the Church. Reducing freedom of expression to “confusion” is a dangerous risk.

Why, then, has this topic generated resistance, or even fear, as if it were something to worry about?

It is feared that doctrine is somehow being undermined; however, the Synod has actually not called any doctrine into question. If anything, there was a positive tilt in the attention given to the challenges which the Church is called to live. If we accept these challenges in an authentic way, we realize that it is not enough simply to repeat the truth. It should be clear that what the reality of our world today requires from us is to proclaim the Gospel: in our lifestyle, language, and attitude. The resistance is, at the bottom, a fear regarding doctrine, which, in the end, is likely to promote the image of a besieged fortress. It is a defensive response, rather than openness to the world. From this point of view, the Synod was almost like a Council, both for its freedom of expression, and for the way that distinct visions and models of the Church have emerged out of the discussions on the family and its struggles.

During the Synod, you used symbols of a lighthouse and a torch, just as you did when you spoke at the Rimini Meeting in Italy...

Yes, exactly. The torch gives the idea of a Church that knows how to bring light to people wherever they are. The lighthouse casts light, and it shows where the port is, but it cannot move. If hu- ➤➤

» manity, for a variety of reasons, begins to distance itself, then the beacon can no longer reach it. I know that some people have problems with this image. I've received many questions and criticisms. But I think it is interesting, because it shows that the model of the Church expressed in the Council, for example in *Gaudium et Spes*, has not been universally accepted. What lingers is the image from *Dei Filius*, of Vatican I: the banner of an unshakable foundation.

Does the classic “conservative-liberal” polarization, painted by the media, adequately explain what happened? I would say no. What has been made evident, if anything, is the difference between those who have the heart of a pastor, who is always adjusting based on the lives of the people he meets, and that of someone who is more attached to ideas and formulas. This is not necessarily related to being on one side or another. What makes the difference is the attitude of the pastor, not so much whether they are conservative or liberal.

In one of his books, Fr. Giussani emphasizes that the Church, as a living reality, becomes increasingly aware of herself in history, by living, just as a person does. Thus, “she is not spared from the effort and the work of evolutive research...” In the end, doesn't this seem to summarize what became clear during the Synod?

One of the Synod Fathers used similar words. He said that our task is to safeguard the doctrine of the faith and the tradition we have received, but the question is: have we really understood everything yet? I'd say the Pope himself insists upon this point when he quotes St. Vincent of Lérins in the interview from *America* magazine: “Thus even the dogma of the Chris-



St. Peter's Square with the image of Blessed Pope Paul VI.

tian religion must proceed from these laws. It progresses, solidifying with years, growing over time, deepening with age.” This dimension is part of the life of the Church. Like Christ, the Church lives within the logic of the Incarnation. It is therefore best understood looking at her as she is, traveling through history.

If not, in any case, you deprive the Church of her humanity.

“The Pope thinks of himself as the rock, but not in the sense of a barrier that blocks deviations. Rather, he is the firm rock and sure foundation.”

If you think of evangelizing without opening a dialogue with the humanity of men and women—both inside and outside of the Church—you are likely to turn the Gospel into an ideology. Look, the conciliar dimension

which emerged in the Synod relates, deep down, to the broader issue of the relationship between the Church and the world, or history. If God is working in every place throughout the world, then the Church is called to have a positive gaze; a gaze that is able to recognize and affirm even the tiny seeds of His Presence. It is a Presence that is always full and total, though it often manifests itself gradually. Only one who keeps this gaze open is able to recognize the Presence where it happens, and therefore to be in dialogue with all humanity. We discussed this at great length.

These issues were clearly already present in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the “programmatic document” of Pope Francis. Based on what you have seen during the last month, do you think that the Pope is happy with this Synod?

The Pope does not have a preconceived idea, and is very attentive to what happens in the moment. I've seen this very clearly. What was written in some newspapers—describing a tense, worried Pontiff—is not true. He lives this open dynamic, welcoming all that is positive while also seeing the temptations, as he indicated in his concluding remarks. It is not true what they wrote in some newspapers, talking about a Pontiff tense, worried. I think he was satisfied that the course of the Synod was lived in a full way; but it is a journey that has only just begun...

Could this Synod can change something in the way in which the world and the faithful look at Pope Francis?

The Pope is, in fact, a world leader. I was very impressed by the words of Omar Abboud, a Muslim friend who accompanied him in the Middle East. He reflected on the fact that, today, the world needs a global leader with a positive moral influence on people. And you do not find many like this, if not Francis. This was said by a Muslim. The Pope is a figure that the world looks to, perceiving his authority. It's not merely a question of image, and in the end it's not just the Pope, but rather the Church.

Why do you say this?

In his speeches at the Synod, the Pope “reinterpreted” himself in a way. He referred to the Petrine ministry at least two or three times, confirming the authority of Peter, saying that his role is to guarantee the right road, but within a context which legitimized full freedom of expression. He thinks of himself as the rock, but not in the sense of a barrier or bunker that blocks deviations. Rather, he is the firm rock and sure foundation which makes it possible for people to speak freely. Without a doubt he is there to ensure the adhesion to the truth of the Gospel. He founds the freedom of expression within the Church on the fact that he has been given the authority to guarantee the orthodoxy of the faith.

In short, it is the opposite of the permissiveness of which some have accused him...

Exactly. And he does so in order to prevent others from appointing or crediting themselves as the guarantors of doctrine.

Still, some of the issues that are im-

portant to the Holy Father were not discussed much in the Synod Hall. For example, the emphasis on witness, or the priority of *kerygma*, or the announcement of the faith over the ethical consequences. It seems they spoke much more of ethics than of the former.

Above all, the theme of the Synod was “the pastoral challenges.” The aim was to not to define the family and its ideal form, nor was it the announcement of the *kerygma* of the family, which will be developed in the Ordinary Synod. The meeting had a specific task: to bring to light the pastoral challenges which the Church is living today. We should not feel obligated to repeat everything, starting over with Adam and Eve each time; in this meeting, the focus was on the challenges. Further, to say that there was no mention of the Gospel of the family is only partly true, because many people did make reference to it.

“The aim was to not to define the family. The meeting had a specific task: to bring to light the pastoral challenges which the Church is living today.”

Why not publish the texts of the speeches along with the other documents? It seems strange.

Look, at first I thought it was a bad decision. Then, I changed my mind, because it has led to positive consequences. First and foremost, it gave space and priority to the dynamic of a Synod, which is the end result of what happened, and not just the sum of the individual interventions. Also, the Fathers felt free to change the text up until the last moment. A certain degree of confidentiality was needed, at least until the debate reached a conclusion. Briefly put, this nurtured discussion with-

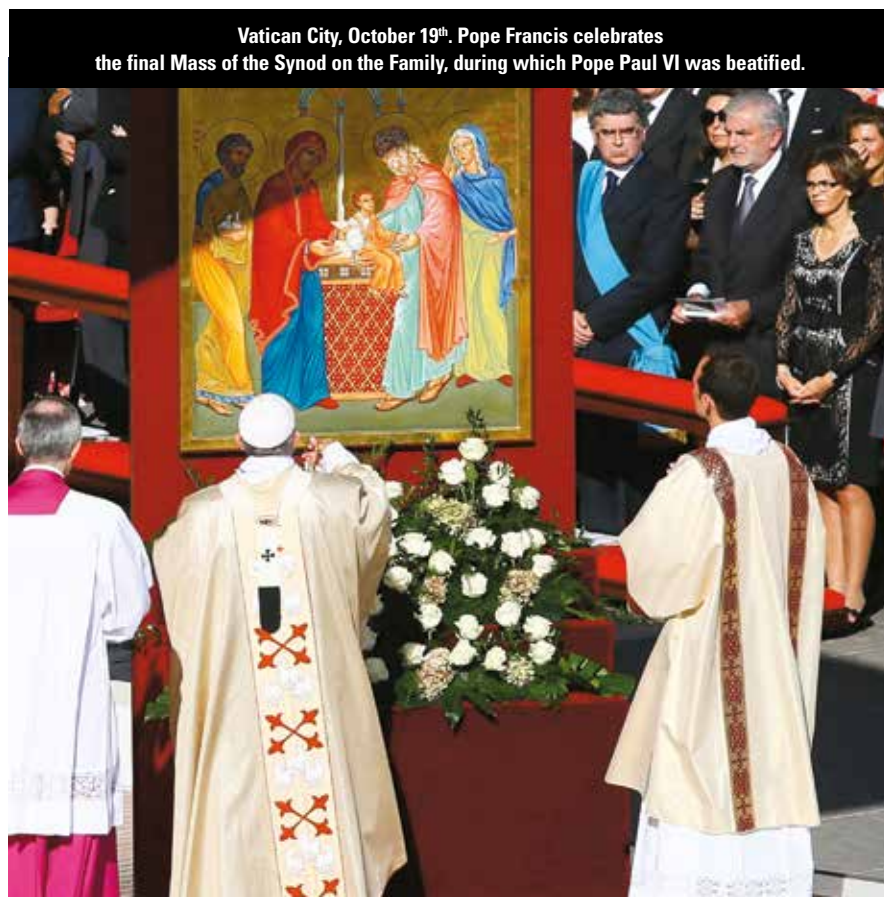
in the Synod, which then made it possible for the Synod Fathers to speak externally, through interviews, blogs, and so on.

The result, though, was that there has been a lot of talk outside the Synod, in many cases giving the impression of sharper divisions within...

Yes, there have been risks, but rather than allowing journalists to do acrobatics based on this or that word read in the synthesis of an intervention, we have encouraged them to ask questions, to explain and to contextualize. Overall, balancing the pros and cons, the dynamic has been positive.

Did all of this debate *outside* of the Hall have an impact on what was going on *inside*?

I would say no. The debate inside was serene; it was never focused on particular individuals. The media is not neutral; that’s clear. The Synod reflected on what has happened. Some were disturbed, and some were surprised in a positive sense. But there not two Synods, one of the media and then the actual Synod. There’s only one, and its work continues. **T**



Vatican City, October 19th. Pope Francis celebrates the final Mass of the Synod on the Family, during which Pope Paul VI was beatified.

5 WITNESS
THE DIARY OF A DOCTOR



**“WHERE
ARE YOU?”**

Her name is Valentina. She is a gynecologist who used to do research in England, and now finds herself working in family counseling centers. She has to reckon with many problems that are constantly debated: the pill, artificial insemination, sex. "I thought it was enough to know doctrine, but instead..." Here is what she is discovering by accepting the Pope's challenge.

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

The hand was her own. She was writing hurriedly, trying to finish as quickly as possible while asking routine questions to a woman she'd barely even greeted, the last patient of the day. Illnesses? Problems? Family history? "At a certain point, I looked at my shaky hand moving across the paper almost hysterically. I annoyed myself. I stopped and thought: Vale, where are you now? I looked up, I saw this woman. Who is she? She is a person, a piece of Being, a woman I didn't know before but who is now in front of me. It was only a moment. Nothing important. But it was there that my life was opened again."

It is a simple story, this testimony of Doctor Valentina Doria, but it can help us better understand the challenges in front of us, which were unthinkable until only a few years ago. It can reveal how fruitful such occasions can be for those who decide to face them. This is what Pope Francis means when he speaks, like he does in *Evangelii Gaudium*, of a Church that "accompanies humanity in all its processes, however difficult they may be." Or when he asks Christians to "find ways to communicate, with a language that is comprehensible, the perpetual novelty of Christianity." Because, he says, "it is necessary to be realistic," and "many times it is better to slow down, set aside anxiety and to look people in the eyes and listen to them, or give up other urgencies to accompany those who remained on the side of the road"—a point he made to us in his message to the last Meeting of Rimini.

Valentina is forty years old and boasts an impressive resume, which includes six years of PhD work in London studying the neural networks of fetuses, and in projects that took her to Stockholm to present her research to the Nobel Committee. Something was missing, though. "Research is beautiful, but I missed the contact with a living reality and I wanted to go back to the clinic." In her case, the clinic is the Niguarda Hospital in Milan. She began working in 2010 and has spent three years there. Then, because of budget cuts, she finds herself without a job. She begins looking for work where she can find it, in outpatient clinics and in family counseling centers. It is a search burdened with the weight of doubt inflated by the voices of her colleagues: "Counseling centers are considered second-class compared to hospitals. I asked myself if I had wasted all of my years of studying, but that was the reality—there were no jobs in the hospitals. I was trying to read the signs of reality." She is helped by a spark from a conversation with a friend. "He told me, 'Look, Vale, we don't build anything in life if we try to carry out our own projects. You do medicine, then you specialize to become a gynecologist, then you complete the PhD. But, everything must be for true charity. We build something only if we respond to someone in the present. Now, doing what you're doing, what are you affirming? What do you love? Think about it...'"

The question remains with her while her week fills with things to do: along with the first clinic in Bergamasca, a

second one is added, then a job in an outpatient clinic, then others. Her days become filled with challenges, powerful right from the start. "The hardest thing was working with the adolescents. I remember that on the first day a mother came with a 13- or 14-year-old girl and almost threw her at me, saying, 'Doctor, you take care of it. Explain everything to my daughter because I don't want any problems. You understand, right? The pill...'"

They come like this continuously, accompanied or even alone. And a simple and dramatic thing happens to Valentina: she has a crisis. "I've been working for fifteen years, I know what the Church says, I have read *Humane Vitae* a thousand times. I thought I was prepared." And instead? "I realized that these girls speak a different language. I was refusing to put them on the pill because I am certain that it is not right and that it breaks the human person in half. I tried explaining what love is, what responsibility is. I had a list of quotes from Fr. Giussani to try and move them. Nothing. It was a dialogue with deaf people. There were no words that we had in common: love, happiness, fullness, responsibility. Every value that I wanted to bring out was reduced and misunderstood. I couldn't reach them. And I couldn't live life myself just trying to make another person understand values. It wasn't enough."

Her days become dry, and not because of the work schedule, the 20-24 visits per day, the few minutes per patient, or the hours of moving between one clinic and another. "I was in- >>>



Valentina Doria.

» secure. I would get to work, pick up the list of appointments and figure out what was going on: ‘This one’s in menopause, okay, there are no problems. Oh gosh, this one is young, I wonder what she wants...’ In short, I had not even started and had already cataloged my day between ‘pains in the ass’ and ‘things to avoid.’ It was a frenzy.”

A TOTAL REVOLUTION. “After a while, I found myself thinking: maybe it isn’t so true that Christ answers every need, and if He can’t answer them, why should He answer me? It was a point of total conversion. I remember one night I told my friends, ‘Either I let myself be turned inside-out, like a sock, or I lose myself.’” To turn her inside-out, a woman arrived without even saying a word. “It was a hard day, I had already seen so many patients. She came in. I fired questions at her so I could go home as soon as possible. At a certain point, I began to have a huge desire to be present. I looked up, I saw her. I don’t think she understood all my inner turmoil, but it was something extremely intense for me. What clicked was the desire to live reality in the way that it presents itself. It was there that I began to understand that I don’t want ways to run away. It was a total revolution, even in my relationship with Christ.” In what sense? “Instead of starting from good intentions of living with Him at the center of your life, suddenly you say: ‘But if He isn’t present in reality now, in the *whole* list of patients, not only in the ones *I* want, in the end who is He? He’s no one. I reduce Him to my thoughts.’ In realizing this, the ground trembled under my feet.” And the need to understand multiplies. “I began to ask for help, concretely. I asked colleagues and gynecologists, both Catholic and non-Catholic, fam-

“But if Christ isn’t present in the *whole* list of patients, in the end who is He?”

ilies, young people, priests...” One of them changes her perspective again, stretching her: “He told me, ‘Valentina, first of all you have to do your job. And what is the first job of a doctor? The history: asking questions. You have to learn to ask questions.’ So I slowly started to ask my patients real questions—actual questions, not fabricated ones to which I already knew the answer.”

In asking, she also makes another discovery: Teen Star, a method of emotional education created by Pilar Vigil, a Chilean doctor, that is very popular in Latin America. “It is based on John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” explains Valentina. “It restores full dignity to the whole body. It puts the person at the center. And, most of all, it begins from experience. Because you can’t teach teenagers anything if it does not have to do with what they live.” For example? “If you tell an adolescent, ‘You are not only your body, you are also spirit, so don’t use each other,’ it is very likely that it goes in one ear and out the other. Pilar instead makes them do an exercise. She tells them, ‘Look the person next to you in the eyes for 40 seconds.’ They laugh, they can’t do it, it’s very hard. But in the end she asks them, ‘What happened?’ ‘No, it’s a mess...’ Why? A girl jumps up and says, ‘Because behind the eyes, there is something else.’ Do you understand? You can’t force anything on another person and the next time you start from here.”

VERY CLEAR IDEAS. It is there, in what happens, that Valentina begins finding a path. “Think about natural family planning methods. A lot of times you talk about them and it falls on deaf ears. I thought that I was missing a true understanding of doctrine, or full professional skills, to say the right thing at the right time. Also, the Church speaks



about them in the context of marriage; my patients are almost never married. I would tell myself, They’ll never be able to understand. But after a while, Grace enters in.” This is the (fictitious) name of a Nigerian girl, about 25 years old. She is a prostitute. One afternoon, she rushes into the clinic and says to her: “Doctor, for my job, I have men use condoms.” It is an awkward moment. “But with my man, I don’t want to use one, because we have to understand that there is something different.” There is another pause. “But we already have two sons and now we can’t have any more. Can you teach me about natural family planning?” Valentina still smiles telling the story. “I had her repeat it to me three times. I thought I hadn’t heard her right. Instead, she had very clear ideas. That girl was God’s answer to me. It was Him saying, ‘You think that today’s man can’t understand? Good, I’ll show him to you where you least expect it.’ For me it was fundamental.” Why? “It is the method of the Incarnation. You see in action what you have always desired with nostalgia. Suddenly it happens and you understand that it is what you desired... it is as if the ‘I’ suddenly touches reality. You touch something and that thing changes you, it’s like a vaccination. From then on, you have new instru-



understand what is right, what is human, what can make me not feel so bad. Because I am furious. I feel like a sacred space that I share with my wife has been usurped.” And you? “I was shocked. He understood it on his own, through his experience. It is incredible to see a heart that is discovering something about itself. I didn’t encourage him saying, ‘The Church says...’ Everything was already there. It was happening. Afterwards, we read together some parts of *Humanae Vitae* and *Donum Vitae*, because I always have them in my purse. And this enlightened their hearts, it helped them judge.”

ments. It happened. I don’t know how it will happen in the other women, but for me it is enough to say, ‘It is not true that they cannot understand.’ The interesting thing, then, will be to discover the path, the steps to take together.”

In the meantime, she and Grace have become friends. And the same has happened with other prostitutes, Nigerian and Romanian.

THE RIGHT QUESTIONS. But did this path solve all of her problems? The pill for young girls, for example, what do you do? What changed? “I am more certain in proposing an alternative. Before, I always said it, I always talked about other possibilities. But it wasn’t a true proposal. It was like saying, ‘This is how I do it. If you don’t want to do it this way, go somewhere else.’ But it seemed like something intellectual.” And now? “I’m not rewriting *Humane Vitae* and I haven’t developed any case studies for the proper way of doing things. The peak of the mountain remains high and wonderful, but one on the path must be patient. And it’s not like if I lower the peak, man will be happier.” But you, are you more serene? “I’m never okay, I’m in constant tumult. But I realize that slowly, slowly I am reach-

ing those girls. And that I, too, am making some real steps. Every time a young woman enters the clinic that I think wants the pill, I try to understand the context in which she lives, her story, how far I can go.” Family history, the right questions. The kind that touch the heart of the Tunisian woman who comes into the clinic seeking an abortion because “We already have three kids and we can’t do it.” She now has a fourth daughter, named Doria. “She told me, ‘I can’t name her Valentina, it is a Christian name, but I want her to be as happy as you are.’ She didn’t say *good*, she said *happy*...” Or the kind that bring to the surface the hearts of the couple who knocked on her door a few weeks ago. “Two very simple people: he a worker and she a housewife.” They can’t have kids, and another clinic has convinced them to try artificial insemination. “They came to us already having tried everything. And I said, ‘Well, then, why are you here?’ ‘To understand.’ ‘Understand what?’ ‘If it’s right or wrong.’ But what? I could see that he was growing ever more insecure, until finally he burst out, ‘Doctor, I want to

“ARE YOU HAPPY?” Enlightening the heart, and accompanying someone in the rediscovery of the human, from the field of experience. That’s what Christianity does, in any circumstance. “Last week, a young Indian couple came to me. To communicate with foreigners, we have big books containing essential phrases in 145 languages. It didn’t have theirs. He is a cook, she stays home. A very tiny woman, 4’7”, she weighed 73 pounds and was pregnant. They were completely lost because she was throwing up a lot and very worried. ‘First child?’ ‘Yes.’ We scheduled tests, I calmed her down as best I could, speaking to her via

“It is incredible to see a heart that is discovering something about itself.”

her husband who knew a little bit of Italian. Then, at a certain point I asked her, ‘But are you okay? Are you happy?’ and he answered, ‘Yes, she is happy.’ This happens a lot: you ask the woman a question and the man answers for her. I insist, No, let her answer. Have you ever asked her?’ And him? “He was surprised. Then he turned to her and asked her: ‘But are you happy?’ I can’t describe their faces, it was incredible. As if they looked at each other for the first time.” As if someone had looked at them for the first time. **T**



KURDISTAN
THE CHRISTIAN REFUGEES

FROM THEIR PIERCED HEARTS

Forced to leave their houses overnight, these families had a life together, but now ISIS has taken all of that away. A visit to the tent cities of Erbil introduces us to Avas, Haidi, and Marya, and to stories of forced conversions, kidnappings, destroyed monasteries, and crucifixes riddled with bullets. We meet people who have nothing, but who are not despairing, and they tell us why.

BY MARIA ACQUA SIMI



A Peshmerga fighter carries a young Iraqi girl who was separated from her parents at a checkpoint near Erbil as they fled from the advancing militants of the Islamic State.

The pick-up truck jostles with every pothole. Avas, our driver, tries to avoid them without much success. On top of dealing with the poor road conditions, he is unfamiliar with the dusty, uneven roads that connect Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish region of Iraq, with the rest of that autonomously-governed region of the country. He is not even a driver by trade. “Before, I taught middle school music,” he explains. “My wife and I are from Qararosh. We lived there with our two children and thirty white pigeons. Qararosh was beautiful before.” That word “before” says everything. Before the “caliph” al-Baghdadi’s men arrived, before the black knights of jihad destroyed houses, schools, monasteries, stores, wells, and crops. They destroyed pigeon coops, and they destroyed people. Before all this, Iraq was a beautiful country. Yes, it was full of problems, “but in the end people lived in peace, society was functioning.”

BEES AND GUNFIRE. It seems as if it were years ago, but Avas refers to a time only four months back. It was the end of June that the Islamist attacks overcame the weak Iraqi armed forces and conquered part of the northern region of the country.

Along the road, the potholes become more frequent and the temperature continues to increase inside the truck. The air conditioning is broken, but we have another half hour to go in our trip. Our destination is an abandoned construction site where 10 Yazidi families have sought refuge. “They have no one to help them, if not the local church,” Avas tells us. “We have to help them.” He has been displaced as well. He lives in Duhok camp, sharing a brown tent with his family and three friends. He volunteered to escort journalists and humanitarian workers around the Kurdish region, because he didn’t want to



sit around all day doing nothing. “The Yazidis were massacred by ISIS because they are considered devil worshipers. We Christians at least had a choice: to convert, to pay, or to leave. They had no choice but to be killed.” The story is interrupted; Avas points out an invisible border in the distance. Across that line, just ten miles down the road, there are other villages, but it is impossible to visit them now. Qaraqosh, Mosul, Bartallah, and Sinjar have all become familiar names. They are home to ancient Christian communities on the plains of Nineveh in northeastern Iraq. Places of breathtaking beauty, they are tucked between rugged mountains, valleys lush with figs and persimmons, and walls of monasteries that date back over a thousand years. It is the land of beekeepers, farmers, and Christians. This

is Avas’ home, where “they make the best honey in the world,” and where Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is still spoken. It was a land without great crises “before.” Now, the sound of artillery has replaced the buzzing of the bees.

ISIS has violently overtaken the entire area, having reached as far as the region of Al Anbar, and continues to march—almost unopposed—toward Baghdad, the capital city of Iraq. Since May, more than 1.7 million civilians have abandoned their homes to escape the violence of the Islamic State. Most of them have sought refuge in the Kurdish region, the only place still safe thanks to the protection of U.S. air strikes and the diligence of the Peshmerga, the Kurdish militia which is doggedly protecting the borders of the region. Now, however, Kurdish social services are

“The academic year did not begin here. Not for the Kurdish, and not for the half-a-million displaced children.”



Here, Volunteers distribute blocks of ice to the refugees at the Chaldean Church of Mar Tshmony, where around 500 families are sheltered. On the right, from the top: A priest bathes the infants in Erbil; below, Haidi, who fled from Mosul.

being over-stretched. Over the last year, more than 250,000 refugees from Syria have arrived as well, and 70% of the region's schools are now occupied by displaced people, as the UNICEF Country Representative Marzio Babbille tells us. "The academic year did not begin here. Not for the Kurdish children, and not for the half-a-million displaced children present." The hospitals are over capacity, there is a shortage of clean water, and prices are five times what they used to be. The pressure continues to increase, and those who arrive in the Kurdish territory can certainly not expect to find a house. Those who are lucky find shelter in the hallways of parishes, or receive a tent from the local church or UNHCR (the UN refugee agency). All the others do their best to get by in parks or abandoned construction sites.

Among these families is Haidi, a mother of five whose husband is blind. We find her sitting on a sponge matress that the Dominican nuns man-

aged to get for them a few days ago. She has dark circles under her eyes, her hair is pulled back in a disheveled ponytail, and her gaze reveals one dazed by suffering. "My husband is blind, and I don't watch television. When the 'Daesh' (the barbarians) arrived, people began to flee the village; but we didn't understand what was happening until several days later. We escaped, but we were stopped at the barricade." Christians have to pay to be able to leave the city, but Haidi's family did not have the money for the fine. ISIS does not bargain. Rather than money, they took the family's youngest daughter. No one knows where she is. "Cristina is only three years and three months old; she can't survive without us." She and her husband blame themselves for not having protected her. "I pray every night, asking God to bring her home to me,"

she says softly. Her husband, who has remained crouched on the ground and silent up to this moment, raises his head. "But we also thank Him, because so far He has kept us alive."

BECOMING CHRISTIANS AGAIN. There are dozens of stories like Haidi's. Everyone here has his or her own story and pain, borne silently. There are elderly priests who were forced to watch their churches burn, the crucifixes defaced and riddled with bullets. Other families were forced to convert to Islam, and then risked their lives to find their local bishop to receive his blessing and reaffirm their Christian faith. "We tried to escape from our village two times," Marya tells us. "The third time, they caught us and threatened us. They said if we wouldn't convert, they would kill our children. We accepted, but in our hearts we knew we were Christians. They took us by night to Mosul, and in the morning they made us recant in front of a crowd in a place called the 'public tribunal' of sharia law. I couldn't believe what was happening. Immediately afterward, the 'Daesh' gave us a new house, food, and medicine. But they had taken away Jesus. Later, thanks to our uncle and the help of two Sunni families, who risked a great deal for us, we were able to escape to Kurdistan."

"We did not have the money, but ISIS does not bargain. They took Cristina: she is only three years."

Many have lost loved ones, and all are now living in dire conditions. Despite this, all of them say the same thing, in one way or another: "We are here, we have lost everything,

but thanks to God and to Mary our faith has been preserved." They are not timid Christians, let it be clear; they are quick to condemn the idleness of the international community and the violence of the "Caliphate," but they are not in despair. In need >>>



Clockwise: The UN tent camp at Duhok; Marya (first on the right) with her family, who were all forced to renounce Christianity; Heidi's blind husband with one of their sons.



» of everything, yes; full of pain, yes; but not desperate. With help from their bishops, the priests and religious sisters manage to provide for the urgent needs. They meet the heads of families one by one, add them to a special registry, then identify the priorities and allocate funds to take care of the most urgent needs—women who are about to give birth, those who are gravely wounded, and the needs of children and the elderly. It's all new to them; they are not humanitarian workers. They are shepherds of souls who now find themselves accompanying their flock in the most painful daily life they have experienced. A great dignity reigns at these distribution stations swarmed by flies in the heat, and in the tents crowding around the churches. The inhabitants keep things as tidy as they can, careful to be polite and to share the little they have.

Another example are Sharbel and

Rone, two Syriac-Orthodox men who fled from Bartallah, where the Islamic State destroyed their homes and the Christian television station that they worked for. They tell us about their work in an association that had worked for many years to help Christians in the Middle East stay in their homelands. “We have been here for more than 2,000 years, we speak the language of Jesus, and we have our own history and identity. We were the first Christians. If we leave, this heritage will be lost.” Some of them had even organized armed militias to defend—“Not to attack,” they told us, “get that straight”—the cities threatened by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. “We were not born to fight; it is not what we are here for. But our families and friends are there. If no

one else will defend us, we have to do it ourselves.” They were ready to give their lives for love of their friends and of Jesus.

The Church continues to ask that the conflict not be seen and lived as a conflict among religions. “Christians can enter the Kurdish army to help fight for displaced people to be able to return home,” remarked Louis Sako, Chaldean Patriarch of Baghdad, recently, though this should not be mistaken as a call to arms. “Christianity is born from the cross, from a pierced heart,” says Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, Custodian of the Holy Land. “If we forget this, we will fall into the temptation of believing that it will be our initiative that saves us, even here in our own land.”

A great dignity reigns at these distribution stations swarmed by flies in the heat.



A close-up portrait of Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete, an elderly man with glasses, looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. He is wearing a dark clerical garment. The background is softly blurred.

LORENZO ALBACETE (1941-2014)

Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete passed away on October 24, at age 73.

“I LIVED A BEAUTIFUL LIFE”

A close friend recounts the life of a man whose friendship with Fr. Giussani generated a new flourishing of the Movement in America. A man with a PhD in Physics, a "late" vocation to the priesthood who toured with Cardinal Wojtyla and dialogued with Fidel Castro, he was, first and foremost, a father to many people.

BY GIORGIO VITTADINI

I met Lorenzo Albacete for the first time in in 1996, in Washington, D.C. He was introduced to me as an intellectual who might be able to help with the growth of CL in the U.S. After letting me talk for a while explaining what CL is, he interjected in his ironic and knowing manner: “But I am in the Movement! The »»

» problem is that no one will recognize it...” That was how I began one of the greatest friendships of my life: a friendship with a man who made me feel totally at home with his humble capacity to establish a familiar rapport, and who at the same time was a major actor in the life of the contemporary American Church.

Lorenzo was born in San Juan on the island of Puerto Rico. In the beginning, his life was shaped not by a religious vocation but by science. He was a promising young physicist about to finish a prestigious doctorate when the CIA confiscated his dissertation because it contained military secrets of national interest. For a more superficial man, this would only have been an obstacle. For him, it was a sign which prompted him to rethink his life. He intuited that science couldn't fully answer his desire for knowledge. This was the beginning of a “late” vocation that led him to become a priest and theologian who would quickly gain renown among Catholics throughout America for his talks and writings.

GOD AT THE RITZ. Albacete was made the dean of the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C.; and, having become close friends with the future Cardinal Sean O'Malley and many other American bishops, was named an advisor on Hispanic affairs to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He met Cardinal Karol Wojtyla in the mid-1970s, when Lorenzo was given the task of driving the young cardinal around D.C. during a meeting on the family that both were attending. These experiences never sowed the seed of pride in him;

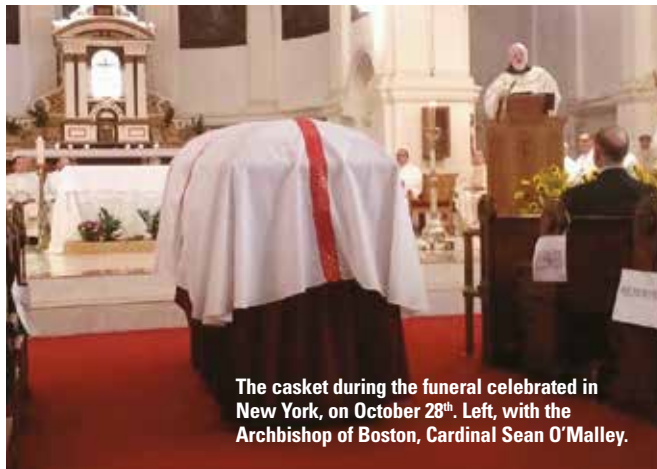
“Every man and woman needs someone who can make them more free each day wherever they are living, even if they happen to be in a five-star hotel.”

he remained a humble man in search of a faith that was personal. This could be seen in 1998, during John Paul II's visit to Cuba, when Fidel Castro was struck by Albacete's insistence that the foundation of the faith is the defense of what is human.

Lorenzo never stopped seeing himself as one of the beggars in the Gospel who needed to be saved by a loving Father. Fr. Giussani won him over because of the respect and sensitivity they shared for the freedom of every person, and for the acknowledgement of the existential anguish of modern man—themes which are omnipresent in the land of the Stars and Stripes. For both men, neither the divided subjectivism in which American

Protestantism loses itself, nor the attempt to live a “neo-Gothic” Catholicism dominated by rules and structures and at odds with modernity, is capable of responding to the drama of human life. It's beside the point that Lorenzo was full of the vices most intolerable to American Puritanism: smoking, drinking, and eating—a point he never tired of joking about. Every man and woman needs someone who can make them more free each day wherever they are living, even if they happen to be in a five-star hotel, as Albacete suggests in his wonderful book *God at the Ritz*. Meeting Fr. Giussani turned out to be the most valuable gift for Lorenzo's life, so much so that one time he rescheduled an appointment with Wojtyla, who by then was Pope, because Fr. Giussani had already scheduled an appointment with Lorenzo on the same day. His ongoing dis-





The casket during the funeral celebrated in New York, on October 28th. Left, with the Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Sean O'Malley.

cussions with Giussani, both public and personal, became the point of unity that directed his life from that moment on. Thanks to his merit as a scientist, in the mid-1990s he was named rector of the Pontifical University of Ponce in Puerto Rico, but resigned after a short period. It was more his style to step aside rather than fight a battle to impose his ideas on people who did not accept them.

FATHER AND SONS. What remained of Albacete's time on the island was the gift of the birth of the CL community in Puerto Rico. He returned to New York where, having been named the spiritual guide for CL, he dedicated himself full-time to the Movement. He traveled from coast to coast presenting the books of Fr. Giussani, leading Spiritual Exercises and retreats, preaching, and meeting with lay people, priests, bishops, and professors. Sustained by his friendship >>

"FAITH: INTELLIGENCE OF REALITY"

Dear Friends,

Monsignor Albacete's life is fulfilled today in front of the merciful Presence of the Mystery who makes all things, and it blossoms in the gladness that we always saw in him.

The encounter with Father Giussani struck his life so deeply that he asked to serve the Movement in the United States, becoming Father Giussani's witness on the dramatic front where faith engages with a modernity in search of meaning. He sought this encounter with anyone, challenging the American intelligentsia with the sole weapon of his witness, as a man who had been seized and transformed by Christ in his reason and in his freedom.

Therefore, Pope Francis' words from *Evangelii Gaudium* are befitting our dearest Lorenzo: "Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone, not as one who imposes a new obligation, but rather as one who shares a joy, points out a beautiful horizon, offers a desirable banquet. The Church does not grow by proselytism but 'by attraction.'" He was undoubtedly so captivating that he immediately became friends with

anyone he met, because he was showing the beauty and usefulness of faith for facing life's needs.

With his tireless work, he witnessed to us how faith can become "intelligence of reality," with his ability to recognize and embrace anyone without ambiguity, but for love of the truth that is present in every person. With his suffering, he has reminded us that there is no circumstance, not even the most difficult and toilsome, that can prevent the "I" from having a daily dialogue with the Mystery.

Let us ask Father Giussani, who now meets Monsignor again as an everlasting friend, to obtain for him that peace that is the sign of a life that rests in the eternal. Let us also pray to the Virgin Mary, to whom Monsignor Albacete attributed his encounter with Father Giussani, to carry him toward sharing in the smile of the Eternal.

Let us all pray together and personally that we may strive to live like he witnessed, so that we can inherit his legacy of how to follow the Movement within the Church.

Julián Carrón
Milan, October 24, 2014



Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete with Benedict XVI and Julián Carrón.

» with Fr. Carrón, he tirelessly proclaimed the faith to—and helped—everyone he met, and it was through him that hundreds of people met CL and were fascinated by the charisma.

Even those who seemed the farthest from and least interested in the faith wanted to speak with Lorenzo, who over his lifetime wrote for *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New Republic*; he appeared on CNN, PBS, and EWTN; and he was quite at home in the secular settings of the “city that never sleeps,” as in cultural events such as the New York Encounter, Crossroads, and the Rimini Meeting in Italy. Looking at him was like looking at Chesterton’s twin, both in physical appearance and demeanor. Just like the writer, his face was never without the smile of one who knows he has a loving Father

always waiting for him. Who could forget the time when he, making his entrance at the Rimini Meeting on an electric cart, imitated the Pope in his “Popemobile” offering a three-finger blessing? Or who does not still laugh thinking of the theological congress in Mexico where, after one of his lectures, he asked to sing *Cielito Lindo* to make up for the time when he was six years old and couldn’t finish it in front of his parents at a public celebration at school?

FRIED CHICKEN. So many of us have learned so much from Lorenzo, especially the meaning of *Veni per Mariam*: Christ was given through the flesh of Mary—not generated from our thoughts, which is too often how we think (not only in America but in the whole world). His view of the world was fiercely

loyal to reality in all its concreteness. He looked, touched, and inhaled fully. For him, the Infinite was always the theme of the finite; God was a fact discovered in experience, never an intuition of the mind. The fried chicken and fountain pens that he loved were not separate from this. His perception of the coincidence of the Mystery and the concrete particulars of reality is perhaps the characteristic that others cherished most in him.

Even in the last years of his life, when his illness and the need to take care of his brother limited his travel, Albacete still had a profound influence on the thoughts and hearts of friends and others, both near and far. “I lived a beautiful life,” he said just a few days before leaving us. “I always followed Christ. I will live as long as Christ wants me to live.” **T**



THE STORY

OMAR'S ROAD

The rendezvous was at the bar. We got a quick coffee and then each of us left with a heap of *Traces* magazines to sell outside of the first mass of the day. Others prepared the gazebo, the posters, and a table for cocktails. There, in front of the table, Stefano and Nazareno met Omar, who was accompanied by two other friends carrying a box of books. They are hucksters, and like many immigrants from Africa, spend every day making a living on the street selling tales, Senegalese recipes, and colorful children's decorations.

Stefano knew Omar already. They had exchanged phone numbers some time ago and Omar even attended a dinner with some people from the Movement. "So, how are you? Working today too, huh?" They spoke for a bit about their families and friends.

Stefano and Nazareno found themselves selling the *Traces* edition that contained the DVD commemorating the 60th anniversary of Communion and Liberation shoulder to shoulder with three Africans and their paraphernalia of books, bracelets, and other merchandise.

"Come on, move over a bit today! You're ruining the square."

"Friend, you don't know how to sell. Give me the magazines and I'll take care of it."

They laughed and patted each other on the back. Then I gave a copy to Omar and said goodbye. Stefano says, "Don't forget to watch the video! It is about us."

MASS ENDED and all the copies of this special edition of *Traces* were distributed. But all afternoon, Stefano could not stop thinking of what happened with Omar, even as he watched the others selling *Traces* and the Communion and Liberation university students' Alpine choir perform at their stand in the city plaza. "I kept thinking about Omar and his friends. They sold books to eat and to support their families. But ultimately, their work is a way to show the world that they existed and to affirm their dignity. Well, that Sunday it was the same for me. I was there to say who I am. I was not there to make a living, but I was there to live life."

THE FOLLOWING DAY, Stefano received a text message on his phone. It was a message from Omar. The form was poor, but its substance was not. "Thank you for newspaper. And the video. Beautiful!" Still holding his cell phone, Stefano stopped in his tracks and thought to himself, "I haven't even watched the DVD yet..."

"Hello, Omar. Did you really watch it?" said Stefano.

"Yes, almost all of it."

Omar laughed and started singing: "È bella la strada (*Beautiful is the road*)... you sang it at dinner that night, do you remember? Beautiful." And then he became serious: "It made me want to go home to my family. Because that is where I belong."



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