



TRACES

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03

***Something  
to start from***

## TRACES

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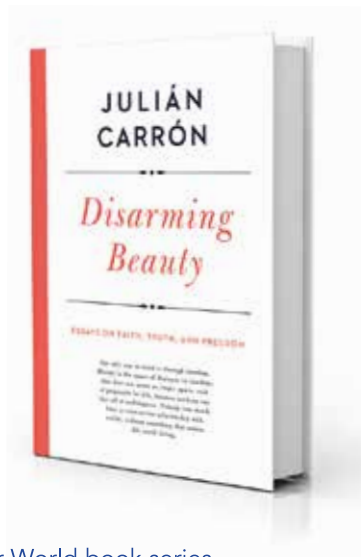
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Irreducible

## JULIÁN CARRÓN

# *Disarming Beauty*

### ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM



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## The ideal that conquers life

**I**t takes courage to talk about “something to start from.” The world seems so confused, so “liquid” around us, that even thinking we can find firm ground to start from to face the problems surrounding us—both great and small—seems impossible, seems like wishful thinking. “There is no ideal for which we can sacrifice ourselves, because all we know are lies, we who do not know what the truth is,” wrote the great French author André Malraux. And to some degree this is true: ideas and theories are no longer of any use; they pale in comparison to the facts. Therefore, to use the word “start,” and to do so as a suggestion, a proposal for everyone as a common way forward, requires great courage, because in testing such a proposal, we cannot cheat.

**This was the challenge of the New York Encounter**, three days of talks, exhibits, and performances centered on this theme. It was a small drop of water amidst the vast stream of life in a city like New York, and was even smaller if you zoom out to situate that little drop on a map of the US or, even more, of the world. Yet there, over those three days, something happened that is significant for everyone, not only because of the style and depth of the content presented, both of which were objectively out of the ordinary, and not only because of the spirit that made such a gathering possible, unusual in that it all started from a group of friends and is sustained by the work of 400 volunteers. It was significant because of its method. There were no theories of perfect systems about how to escape all the crises that entangle us in economics, politics, education, and human relationships...no, it offered just the facts. Witnesses were present who “infected” everyone entering the Metropolitan Pavilion who had a curious eye, whether they were famous or just ordinary people. Like the case of the young man working in security for the building who, listening carefully at the back of a hall during a meeting, moved closer until he asked if he could speak about his own experience. Or like David Brooks, the columnist for the *New York Times*, who surprised everyone in one of the weekend’s biggest events by speaking about himself and the path that, through great suffering, helped him discover that his abilities, his success, were not enough, and what he really needed is “a heart that seeks another and a soul that seeks the good.” These were stories capable of speaking to the irreducible needs for beauty, justice, and fullness we all cannot help carrying inside us.

**There is always something to start from, or restart from.** It is the heart, our hearts. This *Traces* is dedicated to this irreducible hope. It embarks on a journey to find the “answer to [our] desire for happiness and meaning,” a journey that Pope Francis proposed to everyone in his message to the organizers of the Encounter. Happy reading, and have a good journey.

## Alessandro, Daniela

edited by  
**Paola Bergamini**  
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### The smaller seed

*Last February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Assembly of the Responsibles of the Knights of the Grail (the CL proposal for middle schoolers) began with the reading of a WhatsApp message from an 11-year-old girl. Here it is:*

What is the Grail? You don't know, right? Neither do I, and I have no reason to be embarrassed at all. Look at us! We all are the same age, we come from the same place, but we are all looking for the same thing: happiness. And all those who are with us find it, both young people and adults. Happiness is the friendship that binds us together in spite of distance. That's where true friendship is found, that's where you find yourself. Grail makes us knights, civilized people, makes us different from other people. Grail is our union, it is our greatness. If you ask why I am in Grail, I would tell you, "I cannot do otherwise." It's difficult to explain the Grail to those who are not involved; it's difficult to explain with words. And it's even more difficult to explain to those who ask us, "Why?" Why go to the meetings or go on vacation even if it's pouring rain or snowing, why go and tire ourselves out in the mountains when we could be comfortably settled in our lawn chairs on the beach or in a hotel, why choose such odd people who sing in the streets... Grail is not explainable, but it has been explained to us. There are no lessons on what it is and how it works. The Grail is a lived experience, and so words are almost useless.

#### **After reading this, Fr. Carrón commented:**

Just because the seed is smaller doesn't mean that it's less true. That a person so young should have this awareness means

that the proposal is present. In order to have this awareness, she must have bumped into a Presence so real that it caused her to have this kind of experience. And this tells us more than any kind of measure to which we are accustomed; to be able to have an awareness like this must mean that the Word was made flesh and dwells among us. This could happen to one or to 500. It is not a question of numbers. The fact of being 500 does not make Him any more present. He is made present only in the person who has an awareness like this.

### The coastal surge and the good of all

"Since that night, we've been working without a break. There are still so many things left to do but I have seen the birth of something new in a relationship among us in the city and with the other towns around us." This is how our friend Alessandra, a council member in Rapallo, finished her story. The night was October 29th, when the largest coastal surge on record pounded our city. In just a few hours, it crushed the city's pier and tossed dozens of boats and yachts onto the beach. This event, barely glimpsed but real, struck us immediately because it contained a question for us also. What keeps people going, people who for months, almost 24 hours a day, wear themselves out for the good of all? What moves them to try to restore normalcy and the beauty that so many admire in these places, a beauty which permits many families to make a living? And another question: What have these people seen that is new in their relationships? We said to ourselves that, in some way, we must look at the witness that is given to us in order to understand what the words "harmony," "unity," and "friendship," have to do with politics, which too often is only an occasion for disagreement, a media event, or a proclamation for its own sake. Therefore, we thought to propose a public meeting

in which we could pose these questions to people and listen to their stories. The mayor and some council members from both the majority and opposition parties attended the meeting. Everyone talked about themselves, each according to their own sensibility, about the dramatic change that made them look anew at relationships that were perhaps already established; about the solidarity of so many who, the morning after the disaster, were already at work clearing the debris brought in by the sea; about a city hit so hard getting up again without grumbling too much (we Ligurians are famous for that); about the fact that despite such a catastrophic event, no one died or was even wounded. But above all, there was an awareness of the miracle of the 22 seamen who for hours were at the mercy of the sea and survived. And then there was discussion of the projects, the things to do, the hopes, the shared unity, between those who govern the city and those who don't so that we can start over again. There was the solidarity among the businesspeople (which seems impossible according to the one who was telling us this) and the grateful amazement over the pilgrimage that the city made to the sanctuary of the Madonna di Montallegro, the patroness of Rapallo, to give thanks for her being there and for the certainty that comes from her protection.

**Alessandro, Daniela, and their friends from the Newman Cultural Center, Rapallo (Italy)**

### The trip with the doctor

Dear Fr. Carrón,  
I am a 911 EMT nurse and also work in a prison. My work is the most beautiful thing I have and it really excites me. If there's one clear thing in this period, it's that I have a real desire for meaning, that my life have meaning. This desire of wanting to construct something becomes a question about everything, even in a simple dialogue in the car with an almost 60-year-old doctor with whom I work in the prison. He tells me in his long-winded way about the successes of his life, from the luxury automobiles to the million-euro mortgage on a penthouse downtown. But in the moment when he was talking about the thousands of women he has had and his betrayal of his wife, the grace that happened was to put into play my relationship with him, with the question that I carry in my heart: "But, Doc, are you happy? Because for me everything's fine, but I feel I want to build something, that my life serve a

purpose." Everything changed. The doctor lost his Superman armor and began to confide in me how he had failed in everything: had ruined his family and his relationship with his wife, was unable to love his daughter, and had disappointed his parents. You know, not an everyday scene for me, a 24-year-old driving a Fiat Panda with a 60-year-old at my side. I was amazed how playing out the question I carry within me had been able to generate such a reaction and such great pain. There was a turning point in our discussion when I pointed out to him that, in spite of everything they've done and continue to do, even our patients in prison have that same desire to start again and to be happy and that it is possible to begin again, not denying anything (family, freedom, everything), but instead receiving. Receiving a gaze on oneself that's out of the ordinary. With moist eyes, he kept repeating to me, "You really have a great heart, you're different!" We didn't say anything more to each other for the rest of the trip. What came out of the last School of Community is really true. What is asked of me isn't to work, and what is asked of the student isn't to study, or of the mother to be a good mom. What is asked of each of us is to be holy; that is, to live a relationship with Him who can fulfill with gusto the infinite desire that's in our hearts.

**Signed letter**

### The thank you message from Fr. Carrón

To all of you, friends known and unknown, who in various ways and from all over the world have been close to me with your affection and prayers upon the death of my mother. I would like to say thank you for causing me to experience the embrace of Christ in the flesh, making me glad even within the pain of separation. "Death, where is thy victory?" And thank you for showing me a display of unity that only Christ can generate among those who yield to His unique preference.

Yours,  
**Julián Carrón**



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# A “whole person revolution”



Letizia Mariani

*How to begin again in the general unease that seems to dominate life? The New York Encounter 2019 posed this question to speakers and attendees, and what was revealed was an irreducible core able to make us protagonists again. Three days at the Metropolitan Pavilion in Manhattan helped us rediscover what the heart is and Who makes it.*





The New York Encounter was held February 15-17, 2019 at the Metropolitan Pavilion in Manhattan.

“I have never seen so many people unafraid to live and to live well.” These words of Anne Duchesne, a nursing student from Canada, perfectly captured the essence of the 2019 New York Encounter. Taking place on February 15-17, 2019, with thousands of attendees, about 400 volunteers, twenty-four talks, and four exhibits, the three-day cultural event in the heart of Manhattan was a reverberation of an uncontrollable desire to live.

“**The core of the issue is the heart**, the theme of this Encounter is the heart,” said the president of the event, Riro Maniscalco, in a video interview. The theme in question was “Something to Start From,” a short but provocative title accompanied by a stirring quote from writer Cesare Pavese: “Has anyone ever *promised* us anything? Then why do we expect something?” “I’ve never been happier than I am this year about the absolute usefulness and relevance of the theme,” said Angelo Sala, one of the coordinators of the Encounter who, along with others, selected the theme based on a need observed in American society today. “What happened to the American dream? Did it ever make any sense? Because today it doesn’t,” remarked Maniscalco, comment-

ing on the spark behind the theme’s idea of promise. “In America there is still a desire to build and be protagonists, but this desire is suffocated by a general unease,” added Sala. This unease, according to him, is primarily caused by societal disunity, a general crisis of identity, and demoralization in the face of the once-foundational pursuit of happiness. But all is not lost. “By looking even more attentively at our own experience,” continued Sala, “we did not stop at an analysis, but realized that this unease is not simply negative but reveals something else, positive and strong, in us.” From this discovery came the fundamental



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The presentation of the exhibit "From My Life to Yours" prepared by high school students on the life of Fr. Luigi Glussani.

notion expressed in the 2019 theme: That "something" which is revealed is "an innermost, irreducible, decisive core marked by a stubborn expectation" that must be fostered in the America of today.

This *something*, this internal ache that thirsts for meaning, this cry that cues us to who we are, was the common thread running through the Encounter. Whether it be in a talk on the Sandy Hook shooting, a Bob Dylan exhibit, or a panel on human approach to business, each speaker came to the Metropolitan Pavilion not to give a self-gratifying speech on his or her area of expertise, but to be in dialogue with the pressing needs of others as well as one's own. In the end, each panel and exhibit begged the question, "What does this have to do with you? And what does this have to do with me?"

Such an all-encompassing approach is what allowed professor and art historian Francis Green to see in Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* the perhaps paradoxical signs of a genius "gazing on ordinary things." Or what lead Pietro, a business student who contributed to the research for the "Kindness of Science" exhibit, to affirm that learning about doctor Takashi Nagai, a Japanese radiologist who survived the Nagasaki bombing and spent the rest of his life in service of the suffering, allowed him to "start to pay closer attention to things" and "learn more about [him]self." Or what granted Enrico Petrillo, the husband of the late Chiara Corbella Petrillo [see article at page 14], the space to affirm that on our journey to holiness we often claim that "if things were different, we would have been different. But life is written with the 'yeses' not with the 'ifs.'" Or what pushed David Brooks, a



*“Pope Francis constantly says that the Church will not work if it does not correspond to what the people need. Pastoral conversion means that we have to help the Church to correspond. We cannot live with the Church of yesterday. We cannot live the dream of some people, of some ideology; we need to correspond to the reality of today, because this is the logic of the incarnation of the Lord. Today, now.”*

*(Archbishop **Christophe Pierre** from his talk at the panel, “Do Not Be Afraid to Set Your Sights Higher”)*

columnist for *The New York Times*, to speak freely about his own life falling to pieces when he was consumed by work. “Freedom sucks when it is unattached,” he said in a panel alongside Fr. Javier Prades and moderated by John Zucchi. In the discussion titled “An Irreducible Expectation,” both Brooks and Prades spoke of the encounter of the human heart with modernity, which provides a false sense of freedom. Brooks shared intimate details of his search for meaning, plunging into his own heart and opening it up for all to see. “People in times of suffering are either broken, or they’re broken open. If they’re broken, they shrivel. If they’re broken open, they grow,” he stated after recounting the collapse of his idealized pull toward self-sufficiency. A response to the questions of man and his pursuit of desire in front of modernity, according to Prades, should come in the form of creative action—in order to transmit real values, the Church must be a tangible witness: “We need a humanly significant ‘encounter,’ precisely because the self matures in its capacity of knowing both reality and itself through a relationship with others, who put the self in movement. The self is fulfilled in a ‘you’ that the self recognizes as its own completeness.”

The New York Encounter is unlike anything else pro-

posed in America today because, rather than being politically or socially partisan, it takes the entire person seriously. It is what speaker Anne Snyder, the Director of The Character Initiative at the Philanthropy Roundtable, would call a “whole person revolution,” a movement to meet the needs of the whole person. The Encounter allows people to engage with a wide range of timely topics without caving in to idealism or self-referentiality. Through it all, however, what pumps rejuvenating life into and sustains the dynamic of the Encounter is its consistent aim at taking the heart seriously in everything that is proposed, being faithful to it, and following it to the “something” it is seeking. As law student Matt Soltys exclaimed, “What a beautiful something!”

**This “whole person revolution” spread like** wildfire through the Pavilion, going far beyond just the speakers. Professor of Theology and Religious Studies Jaisy Joseph, for example, decided to come to the Encounter after watching last year’s talk “Out of Many, One: Really?” on YouTube and finding herself surprised to finally come across the kind of dialogue she had been craving. “Here was a space that did not infantilize lay people with top-down for-



*“The transmission belts are broken. The old mechanisms of faith, operating through families, through law, are breaking down under the impact of globalization, of what we would call now, ‘liquid modernity.’ Rather than condemning, what the Church did was to ask, ‘What is the Holy Spirit asking us to do in this situation?’ First, it’s asking us to look with the eyes of faith on a wounded world just as God looks down on the world and sends his Son to save it. The Church becomes missionary for the sake of the world, not for the sake of her own self-preservation.”*

*(Austen Ivereigh from his talk at the panel, “Do Not Be Afraid to Set Your Sights Higher”)*

During the three-day event, about 12,000 people attended panels and saw exhibits and shows at the Metropolitan Pavilion.

mulas but engaged them with real questions,” she explained. At the 2019 Encounter, Joseph was struck by the exhibit on the life of Msgr. Luigi Giussani, “From My Life to Yours,” put together by a group of GS students from across the United States. After her eyes filled with tears during a tour guided by two high school girls, Joseph “realized that the presence of these two young women evoked both a recognition and a hope within [her].” She continued, “[Communion and Liberation] does not numb this desire for more or dismiss it as idealistic or naïve. Rather, this movement encourages a person to start from that ‘something’ that is not satisfied with the status quo because it seeks after the abundant life that has been promised to us.” Then there was Patrick Tomassi, a volunteer who was asked to tend to speaker Jon Balsbaugh and was surprised again and again by his awe at watching “someone who does not belong to the experience of the Movement discovering the Encounter.” Duchesne, the Canadian nursing student, also new to Communion and Liberation and the Encounter, confessed that though she had been working on the “Kindness of Science” exhibit, she was dreading the three-day event. “[But] it soon turned into one of the most beautiful weekends of my life. I didn’t realize the

weight of the Encounter,” she shared. “As I talked to other people about our exhibit, they made me realize how powerful this whole event was. We were there to share beauty with a world that craves it so deeply. The openness of the people involved in the CL movement has always astounded me, but this weekend especially. I felt like I had come home and met a family I didn’t know I had. [...] There was never a feeling of wondering if I should be

“An Epidemic of Loneliness” was one of 23 panels that took place during this year’s edition.







*“John and Andrew met Him for two hours and they could not go through the day after without desiring to look for Him, so attractive is Christianity. This is the most important truth that the Pope is conveying to the Church—only Christianity can be conveyed by attraction, by the power of attraction, because the power of beauty is disarmed. So, only if we can convey this beauty is there a chance for Christianity today.”*

*(Julián Carrón from his talk at the panel, “Do Not Be Afraid to Set Your Sights Higher”)*

there, or if presenting the exhibit was something I was supposed to do. I knew that I belonged even though this was never spoken out loud.” Unlike Joseph, Blasbaugh, and Duchesne, Beth Skinner had been to the Encounter before, but this year, for the first time, she was “able to be present without fear,” and discovered that in the vibrant life she saw before her, she was able to face herself: “The Encounter encouraged me and gave me the space and time to see myself and the events of this past year in the light of the truth of my identity—the identity I’m still learning to live.”

**Even those who happened to be at the Pavilion working** for the building were captured by what they saw occurring before their eyes. Maniscalco, who each year has the privilege to witness these encounters unfold firsthand, shared his amazement before technicians and security guards: “I love being with the people who work in the building,” said Maniscalco. “They love the Encounter, they love us. They listen to the presentations and they share their comments, the events of their lives, and they ask for advice. They acknowledge there is something exceptional about the Encounter and its people. Every year. It happens every year. Even that is a little seed of faith, hope, and love.” Brad Tretter, who volunteered in the welcoming area, recounted an episode that struck him more than most things that took place over the weekend. “As I was going up the stairs, I saw one of the ushers spinning a young boy in the usher’s chair. As I came back down, they were tossing a paper airplane back and forth to each other. They were both so happy and full of joy! I was so moved by this that I

went back later and talked with the usher,” he said. “He told me how much the experience of the Encounter meant to him. He said he felt childlike...” Yet another example of this infectious life that calls out to the heart is that of José, a young security worker who hovered at the back of a GS assembly on the second floor of the Pavilion, moving ever closer, until he finally asked if he could speak and share his own experience of not being satisfied with his life. At the Saturday afternoon panel “Do Not Be Afraid to Set Your Sights Higher,” Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, reminded the Encounter attendees that the Church must respond to the needs of the people. In the footsteps of Pope Francis, Archbishop Pierre, Fr. Julián Carrón, journalist Austin Ivereigh, and Fr. José Medina set out in a panel discussion to understand the role of the Church today. “The only pos-

sibility of responding to this situation is to announce the Christian event as it was announced for the first time,” stated Carrón, echoing Pierre, who claimed that the Church must break through its walls and tell people that they are loved by God. “The Pope says, ‘I dream of a Church in which she becomes missionary for the sake of the world and not for her own self-preservation,’” remarked Ivereigh, adding that the number of the faithful is decreasing because the Church is withdrawing from them. Is the Encounter missionary for the sake of the world, responding to the needs of the people?

**While explaining the work** that went into the selection of the 2019 theme, Sala asked, “Why is this ‘something’ relevant to America today?” The answer the coordinators came to through work and observation of their own experience was that the “something” that propels us forward “provides a method, a road to discovery,” that can “cure the discontinuity” that



Jackie Aldrette, the Managing Director of AVSI USA and Anne Snyder, the Director of The Character Initiative at The Philanthropy Roundtable on the panel on human development.



*“When we, as a Church, take the risk of educating, it means that we also are ready to take the risk of freedom. We don’t impose theory, doctrine; we take the risk of educating people to become disciples of Jesus.”*

*(Archbishop **Christophe Pierre** from his talk at the panel, “Do Not Be Afraid to Set Your Sights Higher”)*





The Sunday Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Pierre, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States.

exists by “allowing sincere dialogue,” and can reorient the free pursuit of happiness in the hearts of Americans. After three days at the Encounter, it was clear that these were not just words. People from all walks of life were touched not only by the talks, the exhibits, the eclectic array of speakers, and the miraculous openness many experienced by engaging in free dialogue. People were moved by the freedom and vibrant shared life the Pavilion overflowed with, but even more they found themselves welcomed by that life—they perceived themselves as seen and embraced.

**The New York Encounter truly differs** from other initiatives because at its core is the human heart. For this reason, the effort expended in making the Encounter a reality cannot but bear fruit. But what our hearts are aching for, which was found in glimpses throughout the weekend, must be given a name. “It was evident that each person at the Encounter had met and encountered Jesus, craved another encounter with Him, and was

living that which He calls us to,” said Soltys after his first time at the Encounter. Ellen Bauman, a veteran of the event, recognized the same things in her work preparing panels for an exhibit, and could point to specific faces of other volunteers who were, for her, the very real face of Christ. “It’s impossible to speak of this experience of Christ without it passing through the faces of Dr. Andrea Mariani, Dr. Elvira Parravicini, Dr. Gerard Brungardt, and Giovanni Lucertini, whose kindness and patience with me truly kept the memory of Christ alive and in the present,” she wrote at the end of the three days of work. “The exhibit is now stacked away and will begin to collect dust, but what Christ began in me through that work continues to this day, as do the friendships it brought about.”

The New York Encounter is over, but the life it generated, as Bauman said, “continues to this day,” and calls the wholeness of our being into action. From the arms of the Church and of the Movement, we go out into the world and “set our sights higher” because, as volunteer Joshua Layugan said, echoing the words of poet Paul Mariani, “The Christian experience is not subtle, it is an explosion of life.” ■



© Petrillo


## ***Born to never die***

This is the story of Chiara Corbella, a young Italian woman who died at the age of 28. Her encounter with Enrico, their marriage, her dramatic experience of maternity, and then her illness were all lived with a faith stronger than fear, indicating a path of holiness possible for everyone.



**Paola Ronconi**

**“A**ll the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord—each in his or her own way—to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect,” Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, quoting a line from *Lumen Gentium*. And “each in his or her own way” seems to be the message of the life of Chiara Corbella Petrillo, whose cause for beatification was opened on September 21<sup>st</sup>. But who was Chiara? She grew up in Rome in the 1990s in a deeply religious family. Chiara was active in the parish youth center, went to catechism and participated in the Charismatic Renewal youth



Chiara Corbella during her the last pilgrimage to Medjugorje in 2012. The cause for her beatification was opened on September 21, 2018.

group. In 2002 Chiara met Enrico in Medjugorje during a pilgrimage and they fell in love. Their courtship was long and beset with difficulties. Over the years they went through a series of breakups and reunions. Chiara was afraid of losing Enrico, of missing her “chance.” But this “desert of courtship,” as she called it more than once, even though one of the most difficult periods of her life, was at the same time one of the most precious, because during this time they met the Franciscan brothers of Assisi, in particular Brother Vito, who became their spiritual father.

**Chiara and Enrico learned** from the brothers that love is the opposite of possession, that if you say yes to the Lord every day, every road becomes possible. In particular, a passage that Brother Vito gave her to meditate on from the Book of Revelation became a turning point for her: “When God opens a door no one closes it. When God closes a door, no one opens it.” If Enrico is the husband that God has chosen for her, she should “be at peace: nobody will take him away from you.” Enrico came to understand that if “you recognize that only in God can you love, you must love God more than your wife or your husband.” Chiara learned that what the Lord gives her is for her because the grace to live every moment is given by God when it is needed, not before or after.

Assisi became a second home for them, after Rome, and on September 21, 2008, they were married in

the city of Saint Francis. Within a month, Chiara was pregnant. It was a girl, Maria Grazia Letizia, but soon they discovered that she was anencephalic: she did not have a skull. Chiara was alone during the sonogram because Enrico was having minor dental surgery. When the doctor informed her of the deformation, Chiara feared Enrico’s reaction. But instead, Enrico told her that “spouse” means with the same yoke, with the same cross. The two decided to accompany the baby as long as she could live, up to the doors of heaven. The pregnancy continued and the baby was born on June 10, 2009. She lived for half an hour, and was baptized, “not because unbaptized babies do not go to heaven, but because for us it was the sign of the presence of the Lord,” said Enrico. A great many people came to Maria Grazia Letizia’s funeral, which was a celebration of “the first taste of eternity that we will taste again,” continued Enrico.

**Soon, Chiara was pregnant** again. The child in her womb grew and during one of the first sonograms they began to understand that David, too, had problems. He had a rare syndrome that prevented his legs from growing. “The Lord was asking us to welcome a disabled child into our home,” recounted Enrico. On March 12, 2010, Chiara wrote in her diary, “Who is Davide? A little one who has received from God the gift of a great role, that of defeating the big Goliaths who are inside us... to defeat our power as par-

ents to decide about him and for him. He defeated our right to desire a child who was for us, because he was only for God. He defeated the desire of those who demanded he be a child of consolation, one who would enable us to forget the pain of Maria Grazia Letizia’s death. He unmasked the magical faith of those who believe they know God and then ask Him to be a candy distributor. He demonstrated that God does miracles, but not according to our limited way of thinking, because God is someone greater than our desires. I thank God that the Goliath who was inside me is finally dead.” As the months passed, the syndrome manifested itself in all its complexity. “Actually, God was calling us to accompany another child to the doors of heaven.” On June 24<sup>th</sup> Davide Giovanni was born. He, like his sister, was baptized right away. And he, like her, lived a very short time. He had a funeral that many remember as a moment in which they experienced eternal life, not mourning. Faced with this further trial, Chiara and Enrico appeared to their friends like the Shroud of Turin: “You can choose to see only the signs of the Passion, or also those of the Resurrection,” recounted a person who was always by their side. After a few months, Chiara became pregnant again. The child was healthy and the pregnancy progressed well, but soon Chiara discovered an aphtha, a sore on her tongue that would not heal. She underwent a small operation and the histology results were brutal: it was a carcinoma, one of the



*“Many wanted to ask for the grace of healing, but Chiara asked for the grace to live the grace.”*

most aggressive types of tumors, a kind that mostly strikes male smokers past the age of sixty. Chiara was 27 and had never smoked.

**She began a battle** against what from the very beginning she called the “dragon.” But the dragon was not just the tumor: it was above all the darkness of faith. After the operation to remove the aphtha, the nurses, due to a misunderstanding, gave her no pain medication, and that night the pain in her tongue was excruciating, unbearable. “Why don’t you remove the pain?” Chiara screamed inside herself at God, as she later wrote in her diary: “God does not exist; otherwise He would not do this to me.” It was the pain of one who felt abandoned on the cross, the pain of Jesus. That night would always remain in her memory as a trial, a point in which fear could rekindle. Late that night she fell asleep, and when she awoke, she found Enrico reading the passages on perfect gladness in *The Franciscan Sources*, passages that speak of a love that faces evil. For Chiara, this was the most concrete sign that God had not abandoned her.

At this point, Chiara should have begun aggressive chemotherapy, but this was incompatible with the pregnancy. They tried to convince her to abort, but she was adamant. The physicians wanted her to at least give birth to Francesco early. “The Lord gives me a cross and I put it on a newborn?!” wrote Chiara. “But who is the king of history?! Do you truly believe that every hair on your head is counted? I am going to wait for my son through a normal pregnancy as the Lord sees fit, and I will have surgery immediately after.” This dragon “is trying to make us fear the future, but we continue to believe that this time, too, God will do great things,” she wrote in January 2011.

On May 30, 2011, Francesco was born, and soon after the delivery, Chiara had surgery and began treatment. The cancer had metastasized to her neck. Even though Francesco was healthy and beautiful, “our first months as parents were complicated.” Chiara had another surgery on her tongue, neck, and lymph nodes, but to no avail: on April 14, 2012, the exam results indicated that Chiara was terminally ill.

Chiara and Enrico had one desire: to return to Medjugorje where they had met. They departed with 150 friends and

relatives. Many wanted to ask for the grace of healing, but Chiara asked for “the grace to live the grace.” They were able to meet Ivan, one of the seers, who said Our Lady had allowed him to see the other world. He and Chiara had a very quick conversation. She asked him, “If you were certain of going to heaven, would you be afraid to die?” His answer was no. That was sufficient for Chiara.

In the following months, the Petrillo family lived in a big country house where they could host relatives and friends. They also asked Brother Vito to live with them, and having spoken with his superiors, he moved in with them. In this way, “We could have Mass at home every day and the opportunity to confess whenever we wanted,” recounted Enrico. But what does it mean to prepare for death? As a husband worried about a thousand things, one day “I asked Chiara if she was afraid of dying. She said no. ‘I’m afraid of pain, of vomiting, of going to Purgatory.’ She was concrete and aware of her sins and of her smallness.” In fact, the opposite of fear is faith, not courage.

**Chiara’s condition** worsened. On June 12, 2012, Brother Vito was in Cagliari, and they called him. Chiara was waiting for him because she knew that he would bring her the Lord. They celebrated Mass at night. “The Gospel of the day seemed written for us: ‘You are the light of world and the salt of the earth.’ Chiara was very beautiful. It was worth living all of life for that moment,” said Enrico. He continued: “My yoke is sweet, and my burden is light, says Jesus, but I did not see all this sweetness. So I asked Chiara if this cross was truly sweet. She smiled and said yes, it was very sweet. I understood that grace arrived at the right moment. She had the grace to make this passage because she needed it at that moment.” A few hours later, Chiara died. On September 21, 2018, her cause for beatification was opened in the Vatican. Chiara is a Servant of God.

Why is this young woman of 28 on the road to being declared a saint? According to Enrico, “Many women have given their lives for their children. But Chiara died happy. She allowed herself to be loved by the Lord. She was happy because she knew where she was going. She was directed toward this eternity, an eternity already begun here.” ■

# Irreducible

*A journey to meet those who stayed in spite of the humanitarian crisis. In a country where the price of a carton of eggs is about the same as the average monthly salary, there are people who work (even without pay) for the common good. These are the stories of Carlos, Francisco, Bernardo, Argenis... and of the greatness of a people.*



Monica Poletto

**A**na leaves her house at four thirty in the morning to arrive at eight o'clock at a small artisan workshop where she works as an unpaid intern. She is learning how to make chocolate. It is a great opportunity, for which she is grateful, especially now when no one can afford to turn down any opportunity that comes his way. In Venezuela, the minimum wage is 18,000 sovereign bolivars a month, around US\$6. An egg carton costs 12,000 bolivars. A loaf of sliced bread costs 3,000 bolivars.

The country is caught between two presidents—the official president, Nicolás Maduro, and the self-proclaimed interim President, Juan Guaidó. European countries have taken sides, and Donald Trump does not exclude military action (anything may have happened between the time this article was written and when it is read). A humanitarian crisis unlike any experienced before has caused many people to flee. Those who remain experience very difficult living conditions. People survive off of the scarce food supplies provided by the government or by the few charitable organizations that can still manage to bring in food; people get by with money sent by relatives who found work abroad or by working for the few companies that can still operate at an international level, which gives them access to US dollars. In most cases, there is no correlation between one's salary and one's ability to live comfortably. We are not talking about a dignified life; we are talking about survival. Yet, there are still people who work, or who want to work.

The public hospital of Caracas is a colossal nine-story building. The elevator has been broken for a long time and the Department of Pediatrics is on the ninth floor. Exhausted mothers carry their sick

children up the stairs. The hospital has no lights because most of the light bulbs have been stolen, or they are broken and there is no money to pay for new ones. Once the sun sets, it is almost impossible to see until morning comes. Treating patients is a demanding task even during the daytime: there is no medicine and the machines do not work.

**Yet a few doctors and nurses** are still there. They could have better-paying jobs in private clinics where the rich go for medical treatment and where doctors are in high demand. There are many, though, who decide to accept meager salaries and the daily struggle to help people; there is something incredible about this. Alejandro, Mariloly, Diana, Henry and friends of theirs work for the Trabajo y Persona Association (Work and Person Association), which organizes workshops throughout the country. They train over 1,000 people each year, teach-



ing them to make chocolate, to provide care for the elderly, or to become “beauty entrepreneurs” by learning to be hairstylists. The stories of those who attend the workshops have a common thread: “They gave us an opportunity and this restored our dignity. Our work will allow us to make a small contribution to the livelihood of our families. Together we will do something useful for our country, for the common good,” said Maribi.

**Usefulness, dignity, and the common good.** Andrea and her friends operate a medical network. With the support of the Fondazione Banco Farmaceutico (Pharmaceutical Bank Foundation), Orizzonti (Horizons) and other organizations, they are able to provide 1,200 treatments a month to people who otherwise would not have the means to get them. Andrea began this initiative because she herself has been sick and understands

what it is like to be unable to get treatment. She was thankful for those who helped her. Gratitude is the spark of this small miracle. Each bottle of medicine that arrives is frequently checked to confirm the actual needs of its intended recipient. Medicine is scarce, and giving someone medicine means choosing not to give it to someone else. Andrea is constantly faced with having to make extremely difficult choices using inadequate criteria. There





Maracaibo: public transportation is barely functional, so people find other means to get around.

is the person who is asking, and there is the fact of the shortage of medicine. And then there is a mysterious friend who becomes a daily companion, which never solves the problem, but keeps the heart alive.

Bernardo and Argenis live in Merida. Argenis used to have a job, but the salary was not sufficient to provide for his wife and kids; Bernardo had retired, but also in his case, the money he received was not enough to get by. Some friends offered to help them financially, but it would not have been enough. It would not have given them a reason to get up in the morning; it would not have been enough to satisfy their desire to be useful and constructive, to be protagonists.

Together with Alejandro and Leo and some Italian

friends, they started looking for solutions and they came up with an idea: “We will serve our community by not charging for the work we are trained to do, and you can support us.” Argenis began to reach out to schools to work as a music teacher. The teachers explained the proposal to their students, who agreed to it wholeheartedly. This is how the first interscholastic children’s choir in Merida came to be, made up of over 100 students.

**Meanwhile Bernardo, who is very passionate** about art and history, set his sights on the cathedral of his city, the sanctuary of faith, history, and beauty. It is the heart of the people, who are in urgent need of a reminder of their greatness. In response to the need of the people to regain their awareness, he organized guided tours. He began to train a group of 25 young people, and they achieved success beyond all expectations: it has become the most significant cultural program that has emerged in Merida in recent years. The local university recognized the program and gave certificates to the participants. Bernardo expressed child-like excitement as he described what had happened—he described himself as a child, “born again at 68 years of age.” One must take a moment and remember that he is not training tour guides for the Duomo of Florence, but for the cathedral in Merida, Venezuela.

Francisco is a young man who studied jazz guitar and

Communion and Liberation in Latin America has published the document ***Friendship with the Venezuelan People***. It delineates the dramatic situation of the country and the position of the Church, which is called to be a mediator of dialogue, the only reality in the country that can hear the cry of the people, of its suffering, of those who flee and those who remain. The authors wonder how the people are affected by the reality of the situation and offer a road, an invitation to all that includes these three statements:

1) "It is fundamental to know **what certainties our life is grounded upon.**"

2) "It is essential to strengthen and expand **the fabric of operative and creative friendships.**"

3) "Let us call everyone to be **protagonists of change** in Venezuela through simple but highly valuable gestures that start from an encounter with concrete people." They also suggest two very concrete possibilities: adopt a family or help someone keep his or her work in the country ([amistadconvenezuela@gmail.com](mailto:amistadconvenezuela@gmail.com)). Also, you can invite a family of Venezuelan immigrants to your home "to share a meal and the embrace and hospitality of Christ." Hope for Venezuelans "is possible if we allow ourselves to be filled with the gaze of Christ, so that we can go out to encounter others."

who has a great passion for music. Venezuelan music is very beautiful and he very much wanted it to be better known. Alejandro joined with him to find ways to make this dream a reality and to turn it into a job. At the Rimini Meeting, he met with Eugenio, a publisher who offered to release a CD, covering the expenses and using the proceeds to support Francisco's work. Micael, a professor of music, was able to help Francisco select the music. But what should the theme be? Work. Venezuelans are a hardworking people and while they work, they sing. Francisco asked Aquiles Báez, one of Venezuela's greatest guitar players, to collaborate. Báez agreed to work on the project and to invite bands and singers, including people from various cultural backgrounds and some who are aligned with the current party in power. The purpose of the CD is the common good. It emphasizes that a society is built through work and through an embrace.

**Carlos was born** into an important industrial family in Venezuela. The family owns cocoa plantations and produces chocolate. All in all, this young man has barely felt the impact of the crisis on his life: his companies sell mostly to an international market, and the product is excellent and makes a good profit. Yet, he is restless. His daughter will be born in May, and what will the future hold for her? For this reason,

he has been working together with entrepreneurs and intellectuals who are gathering to find peaceful means of emerging from the current situation...

It would seem to be an impossible task: Venezuela has petroleum, and everyone wants it desperately, but how can Venezuela find its way? The government employs six million people whom it—for some time now—has not been able to pay. The







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country's infrastructure is crumbling. People are poor. Most companies have gone out of business. In spite of this, Carlos understands that there is a way forward: instead of relying on a messianic individual, the need is for people who focus on the common good, who dedicate themselves to serving their country and its people. They need to support and seek out places that foster the common good. People must help each other and go out into their communities with compassion for one another, for their "brother," as Pope Francis reminded everyone at the CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference) in 2015.

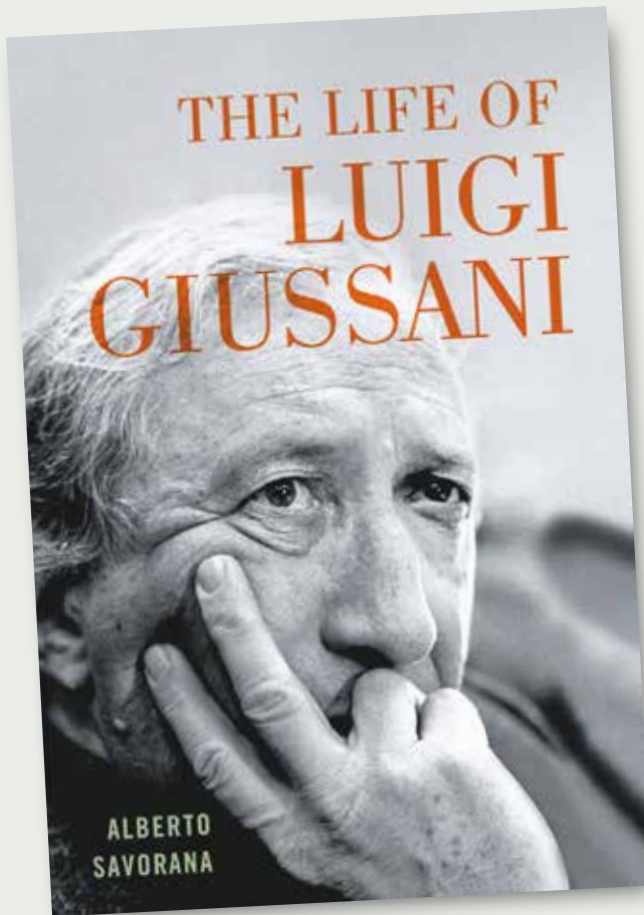
Meeting these people here in Venezuela was a remarkable opportunity to discover what cannot be reduced, to learn that the heart is regenerated by someone who listens to it, and to meet people who are listening. ■

Caracas: a demonstration by opponents of the Maduro regime.



# 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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