

TRACES

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A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a light-colored hoodie, lighting candles in a church. He is holding a lit candle and placing it in a holder. The scene is dimly lit, with the warm glow of the candles illuminating the man's face and the surrounding area. Other people are visible in the background, also participating in the candle-lighting ceremony.

***Free for
everyone***

That's why religious freedom
is a good for society

TRACES

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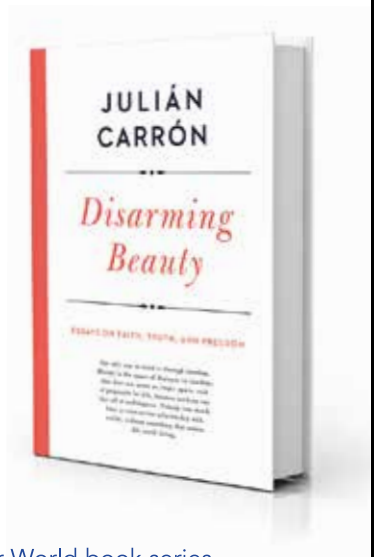
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JULIÁN CARRÓN

Disarming Beauty

ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM



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Living human spaces

This time the prompt comes from a document published by the Vatican on April 29th, “Religious Liberty for the Good of All,” the fruit of over four years of work by the International Theological Commission.

This is not just a text for experts, but a great help for realigning many crucial factors in the midst of the chaos that surrounds us.

The reason is simple: only in a relationship with a meaning do we find a compass able to orient our lives. Without it, we are abandoned to confusion. Only if this meaning has a face that transcends what we can see and touch, if in some way it is God, whatever name we may give it, can everything take up an appropriate form again.

This holds for life in society, where only religious freedom well understood and equally well cherished makes it possible to restore God and Caesar, religion and politics, to their rightful places without the mutual manipulations that in the course of history have already shown all their dramatic limits but today threaten to reemerge. But it also holds for our personal lives, because only in an acknowledged and embraced bond with the Mystery does each thing return to where it should be and take on its right proportion; this does not mean that everything is reduced, but rather brought back to its *right dimension*, without the daily failures of judgment that would have us expect satisfaction, the fulfillment of our desires, and at times even salvation from our families, work, friends, and politics itself—all very important things, but too small to respond to our heart if separated from their ultimate destiny, even when they go the way we think they should, and all the more when they do not.

For this reason, so that people are not “condemned to nonsense and desperation,” as the theologian Javier Prades observes in the dialogue you will find in this issue, there need to be “living human spaces where people can tell each other about their experience of the meaning of being born, living, working, loving, and dying.” They are a good for everyone.

This is the reason our summer journey starts out with religious freedom and then proceeds to the Meeting of Rimini, where many of these questions will return. The theme, “Your Name Was Born from What You Gazed Upon,” drawn from Karol Wojtyła’s poem about Veronica, poses the first question. In a relationship with an Other, our “I” finds its substance and our humanity blossoms, or rather, continually reblossoms. We will see this during the week in Rimini from August 18th–24th.

But in the meantime, the theme of the Meeting is the theme for this issue of *Traces*, exemplified also by the astonishing testimony of Fr. Pigi Bernareggi, who after a life spent as a missionary in Brazil recounts the great newness he never lost sight of. Enjoy reading, and have a great summer!

Letters

Paolo, Elena, Miriam

edited by
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The woman in the house across the street

Dear Fr. Carrón, I would like to tell you about something that happened a few days ago. I was working in my office when Elena made herself comfortable in the meeting room because she had to study in preparation for a licensure board exam. The windows of my office, which look out onto the house across the street, were wide open due to the heat. Over the years, without really paying much attention to her, I have many times seen an elderly woman in this house intent, upon her sewing. Suddenly, I heard the door slam. I asked an employee about this who told me that Elena had gone out to meet the elderly woman, who from her window had signaled her to come over. After a little while, Elena returned and told me everything. As soon as she had reached the house of this 92-year-old woman who works as a seamstress, she surprised Elena by telling her, "I've often observed you and now you have to tell me why you are always so happy. I've seen you studying, and you're always so serene. How do you do that?" Elena tried to answer, but the woman immediately began to tell her the story of her family, her husband, and her son. When she was finished, she said, "So now I've told you all of my memories, and I am sad! The memories make me sad but now I want to be happy, I want to live in the present! Tomorrow will you come again to see me?" The next day the same scene was repeated. As soon as Elena stepped into the house, the elderly woman told her that she woke up happy because she was looking forward to her visit. Her presence had become a reason

for her to live out her day with hope. Astounded, Elena explained that the next day she wouldn't be able to come because she was busy at the prison. Without becoming discouraged, and after confiding to her that she always prayed for prisoners that God might change their heart, she said, "Well, now, that means that you'll come the day after tomorrow or sometime after that. I can't do without you now." That's how Jesus's encounter was with the first ones and how the Unnamed's with Cardinal Federigo Borromeo was. This kind of encounter repeats itself in surprising ways even today, ways I could never have imagined. I am reminded of the Saturday morning lesson from the Fraternity Exercises and am able to say yet again, by grace, that everything you said and witnessed to us in Rimini is true.

Paolo, (Italy)

An evening at the Coliseum

I was at the Coliseum with the young girls I had eaten lunch with and some other people for an evening of song organized at the last moment by the choir director. We went without any great expectations, but only to finish up the day with something that might be pleasant. While we were there, a foreigner, a young man from the Erasmus School, asked me in English if we were an organized group. At first, I really didn't pay much attention to him and I brushed him off with just a few words. However, he continued to ask who we were—he couldn't understand how these young people could be together in such a way and sing together without being closed up in some indoor space. He asked me if we were perhaps tied to some church or something like that. I was really amazed that he asked this question, and I thought about telling him about the Movement and of my experience. He wanted to know everything and to meet some people in Milan where

he was going to spend the summer. I was also really struck because he said that when he heard us sing he felt at home (he is Mexican), that we were people he felt he had something in common with. Only Jesus can do things as beautiful as this.

Elena, (Italy)

“I know you are here for me”

I just returned from Russia with my husband, Tino, and I wish to share with you my experience of the vacation of the Moscow community in Rostov. Our relationship with Russia began a few years ago when Fr. Romano Scalfi asked Tino, who was about to retire, for some help with Russia Cristiana, which he had founded. Before asking him, Father tactfully telephoned me to ask me if I might have any objection. I answered, “Of course not, Father. You remember how many times you’ve asked me to pray and make donations for your beloved Russia?” So this reality, this world so far away became closer. In 2017, we made our first trip for a meeting with the young people from the Diocese of Moscow that had the theme, “The Beauty of the Vocation of Family.” It was a surprise to see with what interest and gratitude we were welcomed. Last year in March, we organized a trip to Moscow and St. Petersburg with the goal of giving those who volunteer for Russia Cristiana an opportunity to see up close the world and the Church they were in some way serving. Then a month ago, Giovanna asked, “Why don’t you come on vacation with the CL community of Moscow?” We were floored and amazed by this proposal. “Us? Two over 60-year-olds? Maybe it would be better if someone younger went!” And yet we couldn’t say no. Any worries we might have about our health or fatigue were too small, nothing really, and after a day, we decided to say yes. We were expecting a vacation with a sizable number of people but instead we found ourselves with about 30 other people. But from the very first meeting with Simone at the airport, we were greeted with the words, “Thank you, I know you are here for me.” The four days of the vacation put into focus that each person was there with a desire to answer “yes.” I, who don’t know Russian, found myself in silence, watching, at certain moments. Those faces, with their diverse stories and backgrounds, became dear to me. At the feast of *Corpus Christi*, I couldn’t help but remember when, at the age of 17, I met Fr. Giussani and the Movement. I heard announced with

conviction and joy what no one had ever said to me before then: that we can encounter Jesus in His living body, meaning in the Church and therefore in the Movement. This is so true that from that day on, for me, friendship became something with a capital F because it transmits His companionship to my life. Saturday, at the final assembly, I thought about the words, “Humankind fully alive is God truly glorified,” because we were all there, so different and yet so alike, with the freedom to look at ourselves without censoring anything and grateful for Him who was among us, as our friend Helena said. I returned to Bergamo with my heart full of gratitude. I could never have imagined that in time my life could become so fruitful. When I was 18 years old, I used to pray, “Lord, make me embrace the world without wanting to hold onto it!” In my golden years that have just begun, this embrace happens in the daily “yes” that is said within the walls of my home and in my going wherever the Lord calls.

Miriam, Bergamo (Italy)

For the good of all

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Without a free relationship with destiny, there can be no civil society, and it would be impossible for people to coexist. There would also be no faith because there can be no path to the truth which is not free. This will be the starting point for a conversation with Javier Prades, the rector of San Dámaso University in Madrid, about the document “Religious Freedom for the Good of All” drafted by the International Theological Commission, which he leads. In a long and fruitful interview, Prades observes that the text is an opportunity to deepen the relationship between “the social dimension of faith and the public character of truth.” This is a decisive theme for reading the present social moment, a theme that will also be in play at the 2019 Rimini Meeting, at which an attempt will be made to build bridges between disparate peoples and experiences. This has always been a goal of the Meeting, now in its fortieth edition. We offer you a preview of featured events, the value of which lies in the decisive factors of religious freedom, testimony, and dialogue for believers and for the world. (dp) ■





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Close-up



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Why are they so free?

A discussion of the need for “humanizing spaces” for today’s world, and the road of testimony toward social and political construction. Javier Prades, who participated in the work of the International Theological Commission, recounts the Church’s journey toward religious freedom and explains why the act of faith is a good for all.



Cuba, people watching a Catholic procession.



Alessandra Stoppa

“God wants to be loved freely.” What does this affirmation have to do with our world, with building it and the attendant problems, with its pluralistic societies that are in a process of profound transformation? The Church offers our world a new perspective through the document of the International Theological Commission, “Religious Liberty for the Good of All.” Placing at its center what John Paul II defined as “the cornerstone of the building of human rights” 30 years ago, the document helps us understand that the great insight of the Second Vatican Council is truly relevant today: there is no access to truth without freedom.

“This holds for everybody and in all dimensions of life,” says Javier Prades López, rector of the San Dámaso University of Madrid, who headed the subcommission that worked on the text. The subtitle is “Theological Approaches to Contemporary Challenges,” but it is not for academics alone: it offers a reasoned vision of the human person. Now that the role of religion in the public space has been reduced to being brandished in conflicts, debates, and the strategies of political leaders, it is crucial to discover that freedom of religious experience is a vital horizon for everyone: first of

all, it means fighting for the spirit and heart of women and men in their ultimate relationship with the Mystery. The “great battle is between authentic religiosity and the powers that be,” Fr. Giussani wrote, because the goal of any power is “to destroy *the human*.” The essence of the human is freedom, that is, the relationship with the infinite.”

“Religious freedom” is thus the testing ground for the Church’s understanding of herself and her mission. It is also a blow to the ideology of a liberal state that seems indivisible from relativism as the only guarantee of freedom, but which ends up becoming authoritarian. “History is the space of the dialogue of freedom,” as Fr. Julián Carrón summed it up in *Disarming Beauty*. In this conversation, Prades explains why religious freedom is the irreplaceable “space” for personal and collective fulfillment.

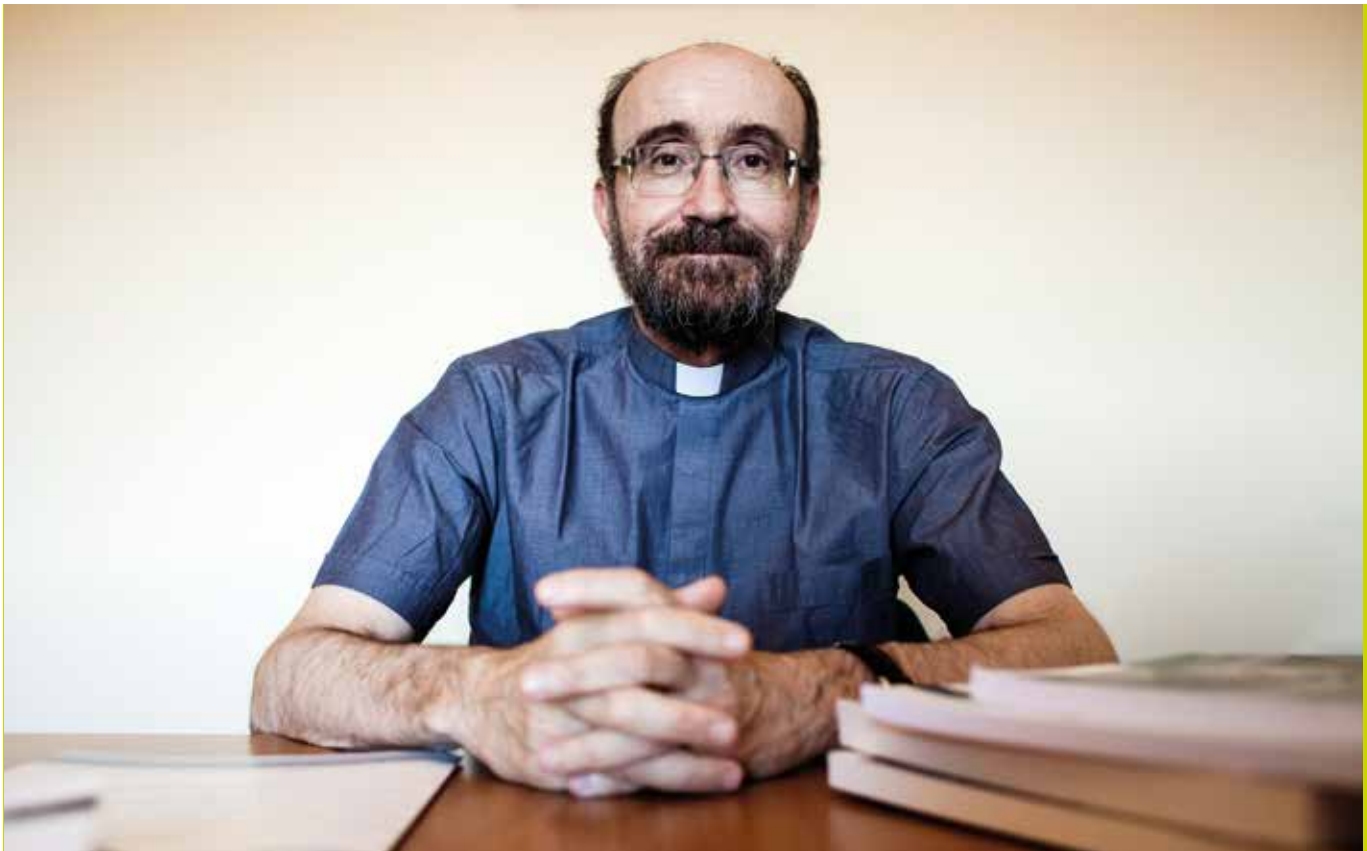
Why the document? Why is it urgent to explore the reasons for religious freedom?

We are provoked by reality, by what happens. In the more than 50 years since the Second Vatican Council, society has undergone deep changes at all levels, in particular with respect to freedom and religious freedom. If we think of the Western world in the early 1960s, the religious

panorama was much more homogeneous. Today, above all through the migration of peoples, there is a mixing of experiences that, in the midst of many difficulties, undoubtedly reopens the question of religion as a living communitarian phenomenon. This is one of the most interesting transformations we have seen: while the West seemed to tend to a private or interior religiosity, or even to its negation, recent history has reopened the question of the *social* dimension of religion and the *public* character of the truth.

The prediction of the “disappearance” of religion, or at least of its irrelevance in the public space, has been disproved by reality.

Global culture has just not moved in that direction. Although there has been an evident waning of religious practice in Western countries, the predicted passage from religion to philosophy, and then from philosophy to science and technology, which should have guaranteed the future of humanity, has not occurred throughout the world. To put it simply, the religious phenomenon was thrown out through the door but has reentered through the window. The other great change from the 1960s has been the evolution of our perception of the democratic state: it is and remains an inalienable gain for



Javier Prades was born in Madrid in 1960 and he is a priest of the Diocese of Madrid. He has a degree in law and a PhD in theology and is a professor of systematic theology in the School of Theology of the San Dámaso Ecclesiastical University. He is a member of the International Theological Commission.

civilization, but there is no lack of observers within and outside the Church who note a procedural rigidification. Substantial affirmations about the human person no longer count: rules of formal procedure and presumed guarantees of shared living are what matter.

Could you provide an example?

If there is a foundational principle of liberal political culture, it is the equality of all before law, linked to the principle of citizenship. Precisely because of its formal character, it was able to have universal application, unconditioned by various particular memberships (cultural, ethnic, religious...), whose tendency was to divide people. Thus justice was better guaranteed for everyone. For this reason, it is very interesting to follow the debate prompted by multiculturalism, in which one hears that this formal principle cannot, paradoxically, secure concrete justice for minorities, for example. In response, other principles have been proposed, such as “cultural citizenship” and “positive discrimination,” which go beyond the formalist conception of the principle of equality. The issue is complex and is still very open. It has important ramifications for the question of religious freedom.

What are the goals of the document?

To verify how the Second Vatican Council is still relevant in the context of all these changes, and, in this world of profound transformations, to understand how to communicate the singular and communitarian di-

“The Church has traveled a journey that can be of help to other religious traditions. There has been a deeper look at the human reasons for the value of freedom in the relationship with God.”

mension of religious experience as our civilization is undergoing a very intense crisis of meaning, as expressed in Pope Francis’s famous expression, “change of era.”

How is the Church becoming more conscious of herself, starting with religious freedom?

The Council took a step that was seen as prophetic; the Church was reconnected with the roots of her earliest origins and with its most alive and true tradition, to repeat the heart of the Gospel: God does not force anyone to embrace the faith. This is even clearer today in the consciousness of the Church than it was 50 years ago when *Dignitatis Humanae* was proclaimed to everyone. The Church has traveled a journey that can be of help to other religious traditions and also to nonbelievers.

Why?

There has been a deeper look at the human and other reasons for the value of freedom in the relationship with God; this relationship is the deepest and most personal gesture one can make. People cannot be forced by others as concerns their religiosity, and the state is called to respect this freedom and to create favorable conditions for the free expression of the human person’s relationship with the Mystery. In front of the phenomena of our time, the Church is looking more deeply at the prophetic step it took; for example, by refusing to exploit and be exploited by politics. In addition, as part of this journey she has accepted responsibility for the mistakes she has made in her self-expression throughout history. But the Gospel has not changed, and the Church has always allowed herself to be corrected by the announcement and by her living tradition. After the Council, all the Popes, from Paul VI to St. John Paul II, from Benedict XVI to Francis, have plumbed this tradition and contributed to the discourse on religious freedom.

Recently, the sociologist Edgar Morin observed that the more it becomes evident today, with globalization,

that there is “a common destiny,” that “all of humanity is swept up in a common adventure,” the less “this consciousness is formed” because fear “triggers a retreat into one’s own religious and national identity.” In the document, you emphasize the central importance of the indivisible bond between personal and communitarian need, to the point of saying that the transmission of national, familial, and religious traditions “is a global geopolitical challenge.”

The national story, as well as the family and religious stories, provide access to a community of meaning where one can discover freedom. You are embraced and welcomed by your family, your nation, and your community, and in this way you can come to know yourself; you receive life and a proposal for the meaning of life from these things, and you can give it to others. If you do not have this experience, the journey toward human fullness can remain greatly reduced, mortified. Thus the communitarian space and the space of religious communities must be defended in order to safeguard the possibility of a humanizing proposal. One must sift and weigh carefully, but one cannot prejudicially expel the religious experience from the public space: it is the deepest dimension of every single human being and is characteristic of all of the great civilizations throughout history.

What criteria should be used to understand whether an experience is a good for all?

If it causes the human to grow, if it generates a humanity that attracts, that becomes fascinating in its completeness in all the dimensions of life: reason, freedom, affection. Every proposal is subjected to the criterion of the truly human, which discerns deviant and mistaken forms of religiosity (to the point of sects and fundamentalism) and verifies whether an experience is a wellspring of values. I am thinking of the value of being together, and then of many others like solidarity and subsidiarity, equality, hospitality, care for creation, the sense of justice and of work, legal security, the good



South Sudan, a woman reading the Bible in the village of Udier.

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of life in all of its phases, and the family. These are needs recognized and felt by everyone, albeit in different ways. These categories can be used to evaluate religious proposals as well as nonreligious ones.

What does the Church ask of the State?

That it promote a religious contribution to the person and to various works, not that it monitor them with diffidence. For the health of social bonds, it is necessary that there be living human spaces where people can tell each other about their experience of the meaning of being born, living, working, loving, and dying. These are “places” that make the human human, that humanize. This is the substance of the perspective that is asked of the state and that Benedict XVI and Francis call “positive secularism.” It is not just a matter of ensuring formal rights and responsibilities—even though this is a dimension—but of valorizing the contribution of the Church as well as the diversity of human attempts at meaning, ensuring for them opportunities because they are a contribution to the good of all, with the understanding that the Church is not in competition with the specific tasks of the state. There must be an appropriate and inalienable distinction between the goals and fields of the state and Church and an attitude of cooperation between the political community and the Church.

Could you provide an example?

A classic example is education in its various models. All of them must be evaluated in terms of their outcomes, not prejudicially, but by making it possible

to verify—gradually, as education develops—which model is most humanizing. There must be a space that allows even a Christian school, or hospital, or cooperative, expressing itself freely, to act in such a way that even those who do not share its worldview can feel that whatever the institution, it is advantageous for society. The more this is possible, the better it is for everyone.

This also holds for the state itself.

If it does not follow this road, it will be increasingly weak in carrying out its very important task of guaranteeing coexistence and serving the well-being of the people. It will yield to a technocratic-economic or technoscientific ideal, or allow those who are stronger, even “religiously,” to take control of power.

The document proposes a vision of the human person.

It proposes a vision of a human person who is not condemned to “non-sense” and desperation. We affirm that every single person, because he or she is part of the human race, possesses an un-touchable and ineradicable dignity that does not depend on his or her specific abilities, but on the very fact of this belonging. This

attitude toward the human person and life can be shared by all. We have learned this from Jesus's announcement that "you are all brothers and sisters, and no one is excluded from the relationship with the Father. You are nothing less than the image of God." This is our proposal. Those who have another should engage it.

How can one give back a *public* character to truth without religion and politics reciprocally exploiting each other?

With testimony. There is no other way. Or better, with the holistic testimony of faith that acts out of charity. It may be the charity of an individual; for example, a mother with her child, a young person with a classmate or at work, and it may also be that of similar expressions in all fields of social engagement. It is fundamental that there be human places where freedom can grow, radically, from the origin to the final destiny of everything; this is life as a relationship with the Mystery who causes us to live. The document says, "Free women and men come to the light in their relationship with others who have already achieved more freedom." The great question, as with every value, is the modality with which it is proposed. It must be an effective modality that truly expresses that value *by living it*. For this reason, if there are not spaces where one can assimilate the content of the value, it is probable that its assimilation will remain very fragile, just an affirmation in name alone, or arising from an extreme sense of duty.

How does this testimony respond

to a culture that opposes truth and freedom? What from the Christian faith does it emphasize?

It makes it possible to grasp that a relationship with the truth is an exaltation of freedom, not a mortification of it. For this reason, religious freedom has a central place in the mission of the Church: the horizon is not a search for privileges or power as such, but service to women and men. This testimony becomes an opportunity to discover the nature of the Christian event and thus, of human experience. The opportunity to become oneself is always mediated by freedom: self-identity necessarily passes through and is completed in freedom. This is the heart of Jesus's proposal in the Gospel. Therefore, the more lively Christian testimony is, the more open the source of freedom will be to all. In front of people who are free, you wonder why they are so free. You cannot deduce it in an *a priori* way. If you do not see it, the question does not even arise. Where does this freedom come from? Only *in action* do you comprehend deep down the bond between truth and freedom.

In this sense, the act of faith, by its free nature, is a contribution to the journey of the freedom of each person.

Yes. In a world like ours, the testimony of a gesture of free affirmation in a relationship with Christ is an example of a loving gift of self to the other. It is a good for all. For this reason, the most urgent task is to propose effective gestures of freedom in the context of a state that makes it possible to live freedom as the loving affirmation of the other and of the Other, so that in front of every eventuality, there is

this experience to look at: people who have encountered something enabling them to love with their whole being, forever. The human reflection of this love is industriousness in every field of human living, according to the various needs we have.

This is also a judgment about relationships with other religious traditions, opening spaces of freedom for them as well. What does these relationships ask of us, in particular with the Muslim world?

I always think of the example of the monks of Thibirine, who bore witness to Christ even to the point of death, in order to embrace the Algerian people. They brought forth a current of acknowledgment, even in the Islamic world, which, if God so chooses, will become a seed of greater freedom for Muslims as well. Starting from this difficult case one can look at all of the various levels of social relationships in every concrete situation.

You chose to end the document with martyrdom.

It is the supreme gesture of freedom as love: in it, a relationship with the truth of Jesus excludes no one, not even the executioner. It is a type of affirmation of the bond with God that firmly holds on to even those who kill: these witnesses give their entire selves to the living truth, which is love, even to the point that they do not reject or condemn those who take their lives. They die forgiving, in such a gratuitous way that our mediocrity can hardly grasp it. We can always recognize that it remains the highest point of a loving relationship with the truth, and that it becomes a seed of freedom for all. ■



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Being generated by what is happening

“Identity is tied to something that does not start or end with us.” Constitutional scholar Andrea Simoncini grapples with the theme of the upcoming Rimini Meeting. On its 40th anniversary, he describes the Meeting as a method for facing the obstacles of the present day.



Luca Fiore



A moment of interreligious prayer at the Rimini Meeting.

The title of the 40th Rimini Meeting comes from a poem by Karol Wojtyła: “Your Name Was Born from What You Gazed Upon.” In order to explain the identity of every Christian, the sainted Pope uses the image of Veronica, who, according to tradition, cleaned the face of Christ on his way to Calvary. What does it mean to propose this title to entrepreneurs, artists, and political and religious leaders when the world seems to be going in another direction? We asked Andrea Simoncini, a professor of constitutional law and member of the editorial board of the Rimini Meeting.

What kind of response does the title of the Rimini Meeting provoke today?

A major theme of discussion today is identity; in other words, “Who are we?” I understood this better in the past few months when I went to speak in high schools at the end of the school year and on the eve of the European elections. Many said, “Italians first,” and I replied, “OK, but what do you mean when you say ‘Italians?’” While the meaning of “Italians first” may seem clear to us, when asked what it means to be Italian, we panic.

What came out of the conversations with students?

We arrived at the conclusion that identity has to do with a certain way of seeing beauty, creativity... It has to do with a history. Identity is tied to something that does not start or end with us. It is by reaching this depth that one understands the meaning of the title of the Meeting: identity, first and foremost, always involves a relationship. It is always an attitude, a certain kind of gaze on the world. This is the most relevant thing that we can tell Italians today because everyone is asking, “Who are we?”

But not everyone has the same answer.

It is more and more common for people to think that the way to cultivate their personal identity is to avoid the trauma of diversity. But

this is a losing strategy; it is like thinking that a child can develop locked in a room. Instead, identity grows and is fostered by perceiving diversity and entertaining the questions it poses. Why is he different from me? And the other person who meets me can ask himself the same thing. He may be different from me because he has not seen the things I have seen. Therefore, it is important to show him those things.

And vice versa?

Yes, and vice versa. As a matter of fact, our Catholic roots are built on this. “Your name was born from what you gazed upon” also means that I have an identity so strong that I am not afraid to put myself in someone else’s shoes. This is the story of Christianity in Italy and in the whole world. The person I am is born from gazing upon something that is happening in front of me. The same thing happens in an encounter with Christ that generates my identity, and this is repeated as a method in encounters with everyone else.

This year there will be some very important Muslim guest speakers. Does this method also apply to them?

Yes. Muhammad Bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, the secretary general of the Muslim World League, will be there. He asked to return after last year’s Meeting. For us, the method has been

Andrea Simoncini.

outlined by Pope Francis, who understands dialogue as an encounter between people of different religions, not between religions in an abstract way. This is a path that actually expands reason; that is, it allows us to better see who the other is. This also happens to the other: they have been struck by the reality that we participate in. For me, personally, what has been fundamental in this dynamic is my friendship, for twenty years now, with Wael Farouq: I can no longer imagine a dialogue with Islam without him playing a role in it. I can say the same thing also about the Muslim writer and journalist Asmae Dachan, with whom I walked side by side on the most recent pilgrimage from Macerata to Loreto. Wael and Asmae are living proof that it is possible to have dialogue among peoples. As for dialogue among labels, I cannot say, or with political or fundamentalist Islam, I have no idea.

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Islam often poses a great challenge to religious freedom.

This can at times be a dramatic problem, but countries that use religion (Islam, but also Hinduism and Buddhism) to deny religious freedom do not take away from the authentic religious phenomenon, which is by nature totally free. What such powers appeal to is religious ideology, and that is something different. The problem is that often Westerners also do not have a clear understanding of what religious freedom is.

How come?

It is reduced to freedom of religions, while instead religious freedom is the possibility for each person to express his or her religious sense. One enlightening perspective was presented by Fr. Luigi Sturzo, one of the first Catholics to accept the challenge of democracy. The objection by Christians at that time was: What would happen if the majority of the electorate supported an erroneous solution? This is the similar to the logical problem resolved by *Dignitatis Humanae*: Why should religious freedom be granted if it would allow people to think that one religion is right when it is not?



People feared relativism and religious indifference.

Sturzo said, "If the true conditions of freedom are in place, if all people can truly express themselves, I am convinced that when the proposals of Christians are submitted to each person to make his or her own judgment, it will be possible for people to recognize the greater reasonableness found in what we are saying." Sturzo, the founder of the Populist Party was not afraid to be subject to the free judgment of everybody because he was certain of the goodness of his position. It is not necessary to have a Catholic king to enact Catholic laws. "The only true condition for making democracy work," said Sturzo, "is religious freedom"—in other words, the possibility granted to every person to express, reasonably and freely, his or her desire for fulfillment. In addition, religious freedom is a buffer against temporal power, something that was evident to St. Ambrose at the time of Emperor Theodosius. So long as everyone is given the right to believe in a religion, no government can become totalitarian, because the totalitarian state is characterized by an ideology that touches on every aspect of life.

Religious freedom is a right belonging to each individual, but its consequences extend to society.

In the Italian constitution, in contrast to the US Constitution, there are two distinct articles: Article 19 regarding religious freedom and Article 21, which protects the freedom of expression of thought. This is because the former goes beyond the expression of thought; it is the freedom to experience: it safeguards the possibility for people to live a life that corresponds with their beliefs. And, in this sense, it is also a collective freedom. In fact, one of the implications of religious freedom is the freedom of education. Sturzo also supported this.

But even liberal democracies appear to be reducing the space for the expression of freedom more and more.

The original sin of liberalism is to have introduced the idea of freedom as self-determination; instead, the religious dimension of man grows from an awareness that the person is not sufficient unto himself. It is the 19th-century bourgeois ideology that states, "I am made of what I possess." The "I" is no longer being in relationship with the transcendent; instead, it is reduced to a possession. Man, by nature, exists in relationship with something. Moreover, the great manifestation of man's religiosity is the existence of small communities: the family, the parish, the newspaper, the company, the labor union. This is because man is inclined to "exercise religion"; that is, to join others in order meet a need.

Yet it is still challenging to establish the connection between religion and freedom. How come?

The true attack on freedom does not come from governments that deny it for religious reasons. That is an effect, not a cause. The cause is believing that religion is no longer the source of freedom. For us Christians, a relationship with God is what generates

man's creative energy, from giving birth to children to operating a business. Instead, if religion is reduced to a source of order, it turns into a tool for the ruling power, a great anesthetic. That would mean that Marx was right when he said that religion is the opium of the people. This year at the Rimini Meeting, we will look, once again, at how he was wrong. ■

News from the Meeting (and from *Traces*)

The title of the Meeting 2019, taken from a poem by Saint John Paul II, refers to a face that challenges the whole of history. The event, now into its 40th edition, has grown and changed over the years without ever losing sight of its origin—the desire to encounter people who are alive. To see this, one need only browse the program (on www.meetingrimini.org) of over 200 events taking place between August 18th and 24th, including conferences, exhibitions, and performances, involving over 400 guests.

Guadalupe Arbona Abascal, from the Complutense University of Madrid, will speak on this year's title, which will be considered from various angles. One of these will be "dialogue and religious freedom," which will involve several important figures from the world of Islam and beyond (including Ján Figel, Alberto Ortega Martín, Francesco Patton, Muhammad Al-Issa, and Olivier Roy). Science will also feature, from astronomy to medicine to artificial intelligence; not to mention economics, justice, and education with ministers Bussetti and Moavero Milanese, the President of the Senate Alberti Casellati, Cardinal Bassetti, Marta Cartabia, and Pavel Fischer... and also charity, culture, and art. There will be a varied offering of performances, like the premiere of Lagerkvist's *Barabbas*. With respect to the exhibitions, in addition to those featured in these pages, others will include "Now Now," for which several contemporary artists will transform the hall into a creative laboratory, and a study of Václav Havel that will reintroduce the theme of a Europe grappling with questions of freedom and the future. An exhibition entitled "Bubbles" will reflect upon the relationship between education and society in the United States.

As for our magazine, you will not only find *Traces* at the usual subscription stand in the South Hall; we will also be found in a "Routes" space dedicated to video presentations and to a series of encounters between international guests. The Meeting, then, is an invitation to consider more deeply the world we live in, challenging visitors to interact with people from backgrounds different from their own. You can meet us every day between 12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. in the Meeting's "Routes" space. (pp)

Digging out

God

A bond with God, discovered deep within, is the source of freedom in any situation, even prison. The life of Etty Hillesum will be the subject of one of the exhibits at the Meeting of Rimini.

16



Paolo Perego

There has been a silence of 40 years for Esther Hillesum, “Etty” to her friends, even for those who began to learn about her when her *Diaries* were published in 1981 and she began to be known throughout the world. “In those two years of life enclosed in ten notebooks, written between March 1941 and October 1942, and in her letters to friends, is all of Etty,” says Fr. José Clavería, a curator of one of the key exhibits of the 2019 Meeting of Rimini. Many aspects of her story touch on the theme of religious freedom. A Dutch Jew who was born in 1941 and died in Auschwitz on November 30, 1943, Etty was at first “far from God, frail and dissatisfied,” but then “transfigured” by the discovery of God in looking “deep within her,” as Benedict XVI said in one of his last audiences.

As Clavería says in a conversation with the group that prepared the Rimini exhibit, the common thread of Etty’s life was “a burst of freedom.” “This happened while day after day, from the German occupation to the concentration camp, the conditions of ‘freedom’ deteriorated more and more.” Outside she was increasingly hemmed in, but within, in her relationship with whatever happened, she discovered she was increasingly free.

“**Many elements of Etty’s story** in some way demonstrate features of today’s world *ante litteram*,” continues Clavería. “She was Jewish, but not particularly bound to religion. She grew up and lived in a secularized world.” And she was part of it, in her affair with the widower for whom she worked, in her relationship with Julius Spier, the psychochirologist and student of Jung, and in her choice to have an abortion. “For her, the discovery of God developed through all this, not out of nothing. The encounter with Spier, which marked the beginning of her diary writing, was a crucial point.”



Etty Hillesum.

Etty began to look at her feelings, desires, and insecurities with a mixture of criticism and tenderness. “I almost feel the urge to stroke my head and tell myself, ‘But you’re so little, you’ll see, everything will work out.’” In this dynamic, explains Clavería, “Etty literally ran up against God” in a relationship she described in her diary. “There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out.”

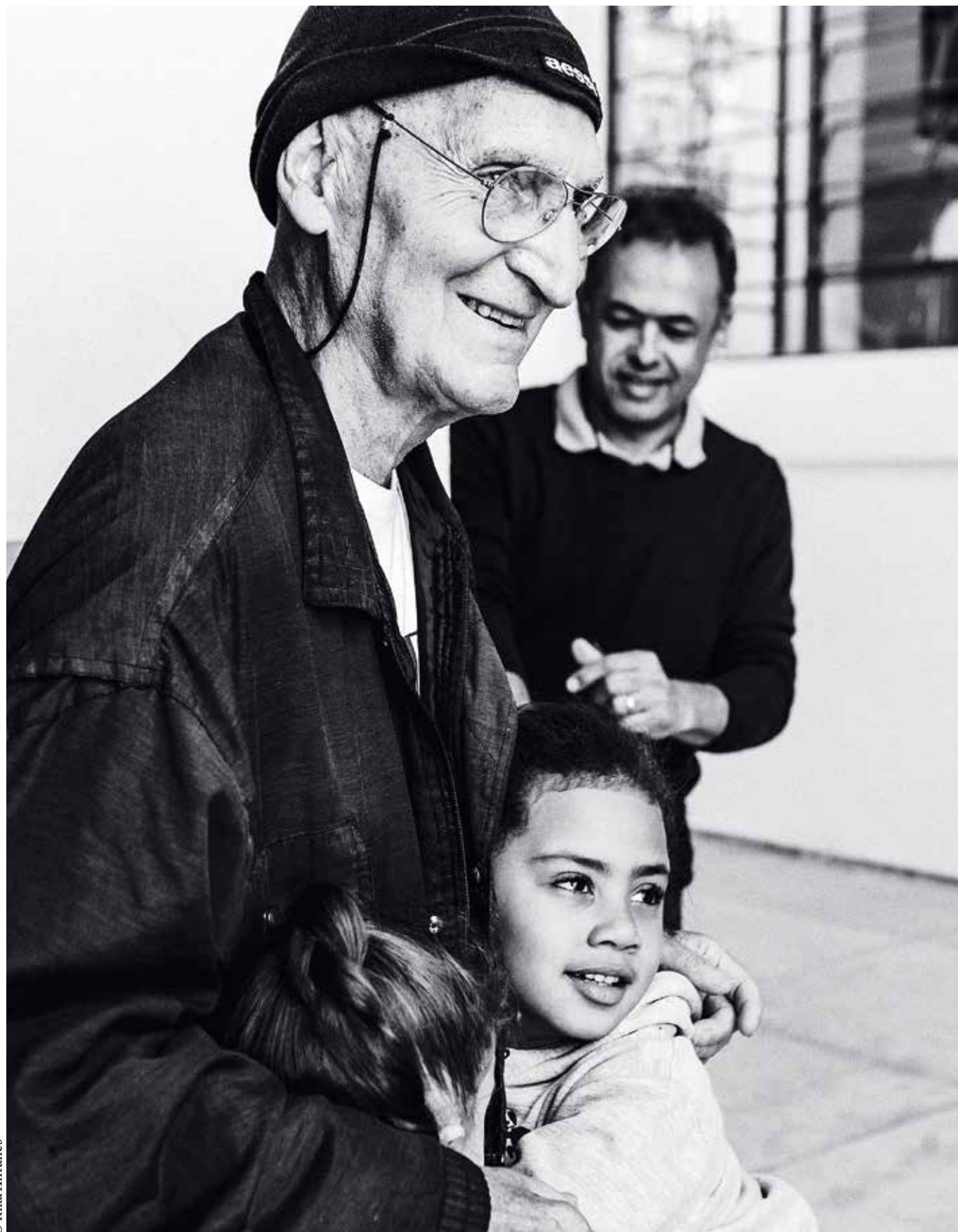
In digging out God, even in conditions that caused many fellow Jews, her people, to lose their faith, she decided to follow them voluntarily to Auschwitz, rejecting an opportunity to escape. Everything happens inside circumstances. She constantly asserted that “life is beautiful,” even in front of the butchers she could not hate. “She herself was surprised by this,” explains another curator, Claudia Munarin. “The first impact of the discovery of God is on herself, as wonder. In her *Diaries* she did not recount things just to describe them, but is concerned with what they generated in her.” The key point is a judgment on reality. “She said that ‘the facts are not what count in life; what counts is only what you become through the facts.’” Etty did not minimize what happened,

adds Munarin. “On the contrary. When she was in difficulty and tormented, when she realized that she was not ‘living up to the greatness of her desire,’ she returned there, to reality, to cooking, mending socks, seeking out a friend.”

This was not intimism, says Clavería: “Etty was aware of being part of the building of history when she was in prison, where a small community formed around her. Earlier too, in the group of Spier’s friends, and later in the concentration camp of Westerbork, Holland, it was understood that a people was being created around her.”

She had her freedom, her conscience, and her faith. “Etty is a flower blooming in the desert,” adds Clavería. “In a certain sense, she revealed the flaw in the ‘progressive’ theories that said that with technical, scientific, and cultural progress, religion would disappear. Instead, as many scholars have documented, religion is alive in the modern world.” There are dangers and deviations like fundamentalism, a suffocating claim to ideological neutrality, an attempt to reduce the space of faith into a social and cultural construction, and even persecutions in the strict sense of the word. “But religious freedom is also expressed through the testimony of many peoples and individuals who live faith as a source of peace. This, still today, is the life of Etty.” ■

Brazil



Pigi Bernareggi in Belo Horizonte (Brazil). The dialogue published in these pages occurred on June 23rd with some friends, among which were Rosetta Brambilla, a missionary in the capital of the state of Minas Gerais, and Marco Montrasi (called Bracco), the leader of CL in Brazil.

In the instant, there is everything

Faith, the passing of time, the great newness... and what he never lost sight of. A dialogue between Fr. Pigi Bernareggi, a missionary priest in Brazil, and several of his friends, who, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, asked him what can withstand the test of time.

Pigi: Thank you, because if I had read Carrón's message [see box on p. 21], I would have begun to cry. I could not have managed it. One day a long time ago, Carrón knocked on my door. I did not know who he was. He asked, "Can I talk to you?" He asked me thousands of questions and I answered all of them. I thought: "God has sent me this person..." No one had ever asked me so many questions. Then he embraced me and left. I'm not sure how long after this I realized it was Carrón. I thought, "My God!" How is it possible to have such a great capacity to love other people without ever having met them before? I had never seen him, or he me. So imagine me now, with this [message]; I would cry for one year and more...

Rosetta: It is for love of our history, isn't it, Pigi?

Pigi: I know that I know nothing.

Everything happens without me expecting it. I would never have expected all of this to happen! There are many people who will turn 80 this year—Eugenia Scabini, Peppino Zola, Dino Quartana, Maria Rita... [Editor's note: some of the first participants in *Gioventù Studentesca*.]

Bracco: You know, Pigi, I was struck by the fact that recently Carrón has been using the word "superabundance" repeatedly. In the last few days, we have held an encounter with teachers. At a certain point, I began thinking about what should be the most important force in the life of a teacher and of each of us, and whether something has happened that got it to vibrate, producing a superabundance. I thought that this consciousness would be like a nuclear bomb in the most intimate of places, without anyone feeling it. I could be far away, dis-

tant from everything (imagine, for example, one's fear of accepting the freedom of one's children). Yet paradoxically, the moment the "nuclear bomb" exploded for each of us was not when we were attending the world's most beautiful event. Perhaps it happened later, when we were alone, or further away as we were leaving: this "nuclear bomb" found me when I understood, when I realized something. I also thought about the incredible grace of having a path indicated for us, of having someone who helps us keep that moment alive; the moment in which my freedom is totally free to understand. It is just as Carrón says in his message: it is your superabundance. In fact, what always fascinates me about you when I come to visit, in the quietest moments—not in the big events—is the fact that the superabundance of Christ is always

Pigi Bernareggi was born in Milan (Italy) in 1939. For more than 50 years he has been living as a missionary in the *favelas* of Belo Horizonte. He studied at Berchet High School in Milan and was one of the first GS students. He left for Brazil in 1964 and was ordained a priest in 1967. On June 6th he celebrated his 80th birthday.



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present: it is a peace generated by Christ, a freedom generated by Christ. This immediately made you something of a father for me.

Pigi: And vice versa.

Rosetta: That “bomb” which explodes, as you say, is an awareness of what we have found, is it not?

Pigi: At the age of 80, it is also an awareness of what awaits us, like a river as it flows toward a waterfall gets faster. The older we become, the faster time passes. One does not realize it is passing so quickly until it is time to go over the waterfall.

Bracco: How would you answer this question that we worked on in our Exercises: “What can withstand the test of time?”

Pigi: The present instant. The instant that passes. Time passes. Everything is contained in the time that passes, in the instant that passes. So, the “nuclear bomb” we are talking about is the kind of event that happens in the instant that passes. We are not talking of things of the past or things of the future, but rather things that are happening in this moment: everything is, everything exists, thanks to God. Have you ever asked yourself: what if, in this instant, God did not wish to create anymore? Nothing would exist, no! We know that everything exists because in this instant which passes, which has already passed, I

perceived its existence. So, you ask about the permanence of the knowledge of the great novelty that is Christ. Christ’s permanence is not a continuous holding onto the past. It is a constant presence in the present which extends into both the past and the future. This is why, as we get older, time passes more quickly; because time must eventually give way to eternity. The closer we are to eternity, the faster time passes. I do not know how better to describe it. When you are young, you never obtain what you desire. Never! When we get older—like me—time passes at an alarming pace. Yet this is not worrying because within this is contained everything else. In the passing moment, there is everything.

Bracco: The great fear that many live with nowadays is linked to the future; it seems to be a weight involving an uncertainty. There is a sensation that everything is fluid and unsettled beneath our feet. Yet this is caused by the weakness of our awareness of the instant.

Pigi: Of the passing instant, that it not be an instant that just comes and goes... that has already gone! It is in the passing of that instant that something is found—the force behind everything, the power behind everything. You spoke about that power as a radical, completely new event. It is found in the passing instant; in this instant, which seems so fragile, so useless, so fleeting, we can find everything.

Elenice: Pigi, yesterday in our Fraternity group, someone spoke about something similar to what you are describing now. She said that this question—what can withstand the test of time?—can lead us to perceive something about the past or in the future, but she realized that we must ask ourselves

that question every day because it is contained in every instant. She said, “I go to work [she is a nurse in a health clinic, a difficult environment] and every day, faced by many people, by patients that arrive with a thousand different problems, I ask myself that question,” because only then can we realize what resists the passing of time; only by working on this in order to verify the victory of Christ.

Rosetta: Tell us, in your 80 years, what have you not lost sight of? What should we not lose sight of?

Pigi: I have thought of only one thing: carrying forward what we have received. We should not worry too much about other things because if what we have received is what makes the world go round, we can imagine that it is also what will attract people’s attention. What I received in GS was the certainty of the presence of Christ in everything, always, come what may, even if the world should implode. This is the presence of Christ in the passing moment, because if it is not in the passing moment, it simply does not exist; it would be a theoretical idea we refer to every now and then, a sort of refuge or spiritual retreat. The great discovery my friends and I made in GS was that the substance of the passing moment, the passing instant, is the presence of Christ. If He is not found in the passing instant, He does not exist.

Rosetta: Many of us may not have this awareness.

Pigi: It is a gift from God that we call faith. Faith is not a capacity of the person; it is a gift of God. When I was a boy, my mother taught me her faith through the way she spoke, as she spoke, and in the positions she took. Yet the world we are immersed in today is so devastating and disruptive that it destroys ev-

erything. When we were students at Berchet High School, we were at rock bottom. There was a particular teacher, Miccinesi, who tore people apart. Everyone laughed at Dino Quartana, my friend, because he was kind and friendly. It was him who brought me to GS. At school, we were the village idiots.

Bracco: Carrón recently said to us that the current cultural moment is one of total disruption, perhaps one of the most difficult ever, yet he maintains that this is also fascinating because none of us can rely on a treadmill to move us forward. Previously, many people thought in the same way, so there were never any big problems. Nowadays, something must occur within me first, otherwise...

Pigi: It is not that something does

not occur within me, but I need an awareness of it. Sometimes, we say “it happens, it does not happen.” It happens! It is you who are not aware of it. What happens, happens. It happens no matter what, whether you like it or not, whether you take it into consideration or not, and it totally surpasses everything you could ever imagine.

Bracco: This is the “nuclear bomb”! When you see students or teachers in this moment of confusion, it is a miracle if anyone stops to realize what is still happening.

Pigi: Christianity is a gift from God, so it is a miracle—“mirabilis,” that which evokes admiration. It is not miraculous, but it is admirable. Miracles are not strange and incredible things—they are what fascinate you in the passing instant. ■

Message from Fr. Julián Carrón

Dearest Pigi,

I take this opportunity to wish you a very happy birthday through Bracco.

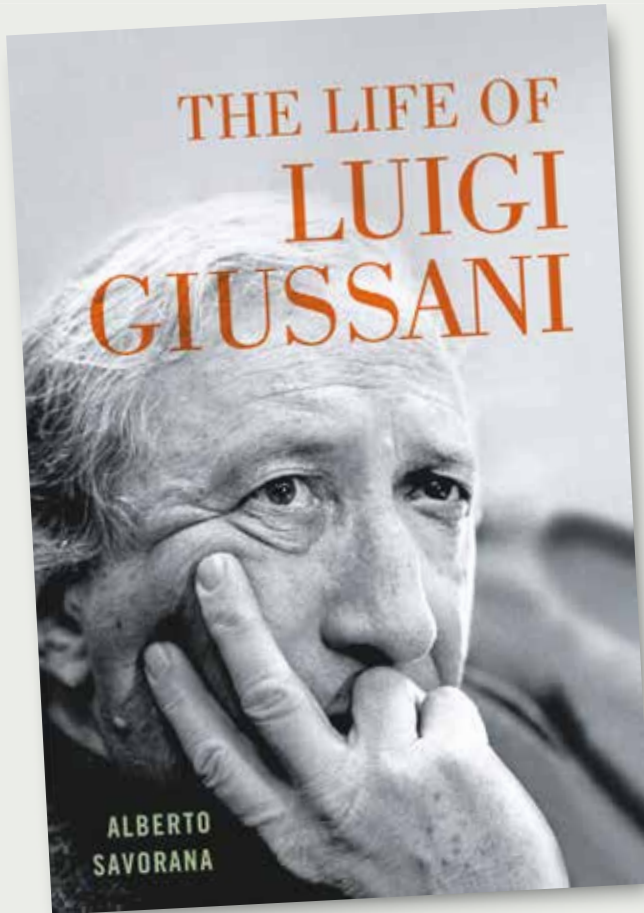
I imagine you must be full of gratitude for the loyalty the Lord has shown to your life from your first encounter with Fr. Giussani, after which you could never be the same again. That yes of yours has born such fruit; it expanded the horizons of your faith and took you to Brazil, where you remain even now with a faith I envy. I ask you to pray constantly for the great “tree” of this Movement, and for me; that nothing may ever separate us from the love of Christ, just as nothing—not even difficulties, misunderstandings, and sufferings—could ever separate you from Him.

Through the intercession of Fr. Giussani, I ask the Virgin that your presence among people may continue to testify to that superabundance of life Christ grants to those who give in to His unique grace. Only His victorious presence can withstand the test of time; your long life is a testimony to that.

I greet you with the words Fr. Giussani wrote in 1999, which you read at the New York Encounter last year: “I pray to God, who loves you just as Christ loves you now, and loved his disciples, that He may never fade from your memory—not from mere remembrance, but memory. Thank you, above all else, for what you have given to humanity out of the love of Christ, and in His name.” Happy 80th birthday from all your friends from the Movement!

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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