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The wonder of the Meeting

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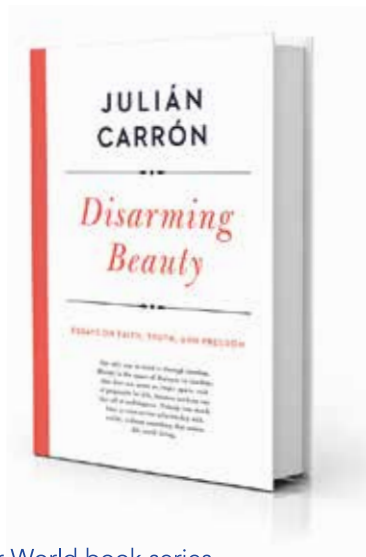
September 2019

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"Our cry"

JULIÁN CARRÓN

Disarming Beauty

ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM



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Out of the ordinary

This year the Meeting of Rimini turned 40, and it has remained faithful to its effective formula of dialogues, exhibits, and performances. It remains something truly out of the ordinary, because of *what happens*; that is, because it continues to be a place of encounter for everyone and to bring into conversation worlds that otherwise would find it difficult to even look at each other, something that is increasingly urgent in our lacerated society. It is also out of the ordinary because of *how* it happens, an aspect that deeply strikes those who come from outside Communion and Liberation: the volunteers, the gratuitousness, and the thousands of people, including many young people. “I’ve never seen a Christianity like this,” said one of the guests during a dinner, identifying the wellspring that has always nourished this beauty—while everything else around it changes form or disappears—with such power that it is impossible to reduce it to the merits of those who work there and attend.

Julián Carrón, the leader of CL, noted how Fr. Giussani’s foundational concern — “the generation of the subject, of an adult who is passionate about life. All the rest is the consequence of this” — emerges clearly in the Meeting. So if you want to truly understand such an extraordinary event, and its surprising “presence charged with a proposal” for everyone, you have to look at faith. “Only the Christian event, lived as the wellspring of an ideal, is able to create friendship, that is, a space to encounter ‘a person with a message within.’” The origin of this beauty is Christ, and the Meeting is an opportunity to encounter Him, no matter your background.

So in order to understand what happened in Rimini, we offer you detailed reporting about facts, episodes, and encounters—the *life*—at the Meeting, which have the unmistakable accent of glad intensity. The contents of the encounters are of such depth and richness that it is worthwhile to review them at www.clonline.org or the website of the Meeting. These are ways to grab hold of ideas that otherwise might be overlooked because of the richness of everything that surrounded them in Rimini, and to be amazed, once again, at their origin.

This same richness fills the rest of this issue, from the letters, to the testimonies from the Balkans, to the focus on the Amazon, the topic of the next synod. These stories have a single source: the lived Christian event that generates women and men and friendship.

Marta, Jesica

edited by
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The vacation and the neighbor

I'm not one who loves to talk, but at a School of Community, I couldn't resist. I felt a great sadness in seeing the spread of the idea that the verification of the Christian event; that is, that "Christ is truly the answer to life," can only be done through the things offered by the Movement and our life becomes a sequence of highs and lows, without continuity. To me, instead, verification means seeing whether what I am living corresponds to what I desire, if the Christian event allows me to overcome any doubt and fear. I shared the story of when I told my husband that it was time to review our finances to see if we could afford to go on vacation with the community and to determine if we needed some help. This became a topic of discussion—in his opinion, I was exaggerating. I was insistent, because although I have a desire to go on vacation with our friends, I have a greater desire to stay in front of the reality that has been given to me. This doesn't scare me, because I know that the One who gives me this reality never disappoints me. Anyway, not without difficulty, we worked out a budget and understood how much help we would need to ask for in order to go to the CL vacation. Two days after this discussion, a neighbor called me. She is the mother of three girls; she had the first two with her previous partner, and the third one with the man she is living with now. Occasionally the girls come down to play with my kids, so I've had the opportunity to exchange a few words with her. She told me about her ex, and about her problems with her current partner, and a strange closeness was born. She called me and said, "I have a problem, I have been thinking all morning about what to do, and you were the only person who came

to mind." I invited her down for coffee. When I asked her what happened, in tears, she told me that her ex was late in giving her some money, and she couldn't pay a bill that was due by lunchtime. She was afraid to tell this to her partner because they would certainly end up fighting. I had no doubt about what to do. I took the envelope with the money set aside for our vacation and gave it to her. For me, the desire to go on vacation and this woman asking me for help are the same thing; it is Christ who comes to me, and I want to meet Him. What may appear irreconcilable, like, on the one hand, running the numbers to see if you can afford a desired vacation, having an afternoon at the sea or an appointment with the hairdresser, and, on the other, lending money taken from the vacation savings to a person you met only a few months ago, have the same weight. Both put you in front of the One who gives you the experience of a total correspondence.

Marta, Perugia (Italy)

Waiting in Tegucigalpa

"At times life weighs heavy and man despairs. / Bitterness weighs heavy as does a lack of happiness; / hope whispers: hope, hope, hope, / and the weary heart responds: Why?" These words of the Honduran poet Jorge Federico Traveso resound in my mind. All I hear is bad news: roads are blocked by protesters to prevent the free circulation of vehicles and pedestrians; doctors and teachers are taking to the streets to protest against the unjust implementation of new laws; police are protesting to ask for better working conditions; university students are protesting to defend their ideals, and so on. For this reason, I wondered what it is that makes us "live in the truth, without having to look over our shoulder, without being afraid." The answer is simple. "We have seen and felt something so great, that everything else is nothing in comparison." This became evident during the Fraternity Exercises in my

city, Tegucigalpa. They were set to start on Friday, on the day the protests became more violent. Uncertainty grew, but we all resisted suspending them. Those of us who live in other cities took a chance and started the trip, but the roads were blocked, and we had to return home. To be safe, the decision was made to reschedule everything to begin on Saturday. Luckily, the roads were unblocked, and we managed to arrive where the Exercises were to take place. What is it that motivated us to do everything we could to keep that appointment we were so looking forward to? Only our love of God made this possible. It is only what our hearts recognize as something so great and so intense that it can make the impossible possible.

Jesica, Tegucigalpa (Honduras)

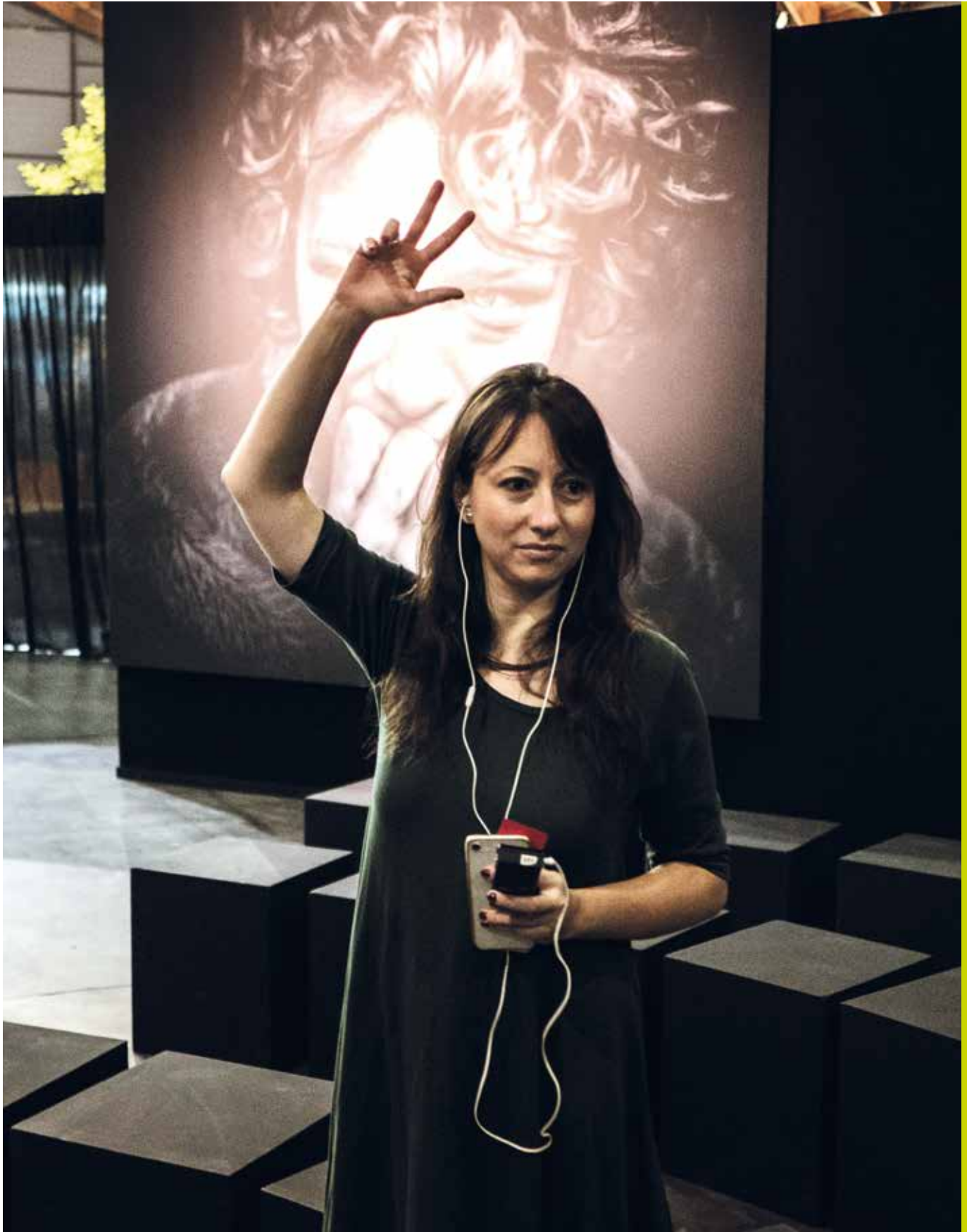
Waiting for the twins

In mid-May, I received a proposal from the head of the obstetrics unit where I work. “At the end of the month, a woman who is expecting twins, a boy and a girl, will come to give birth. The girl was diagnosed with anencephaly. Seeing as you are on duty the day the C-section is scheduled, you’ll go into the operating room to assist the neonatologist during the birth.” Anencephaly is a malformation of the skull and brain that makes the baby’s life outside the mother’s womb very short: we’re talking about minutes or hours at the most. For this reason, at the time the condition is diagnosed, the default proposal is to terminate the pregnancy. This mother had discovered on the internet that in our hospital we propose “Giacomo’s Way,” which originated with Giacomo’s parents and doctors who are friends of the Movement, like Patricio and Chiara. The goal is to accompany parents of newborns diagnosed as terminal during the birth and the hospital stay, supporting their desire to celebrate the birth, regardless of how long the baby lives. When the head of the unit entrusted me with this responsibility, I immediately thought, “Oh, beautiful preference that doesn’t spare me anything! As if I were just waiting to see a newborn die in my arms.” But then, immediately, I said to myself, “It was asked of me and not of any other colleague who might have been more skilled. Therefore, it is I who must respond and put myself in play. Perhaps this could be an opportunity for me to see what happens when you adhere to a proposal that perhaps at first doesn’t really appeal to you. But you know that behind it all there is Someone who loves you just as you are, even if you are unsure of the outcome.” And so that morning I went to the hospital to meet the

couple, who had to come in to fill out their paperwork and for some tests. They had been looking for so long for a place to welcome the birth of these two little twins. They sought to be supported in this, because neither amongst their friends nor in their city could they find people who would accompany them without making the situation worse with uncalled-for judgments. And so, we all agreed, more or less, how the event would unfold, but then the unexpected happened. Toward evening, the mom wrote me that her water had broken. Panic. Now what? They decided to leave without hesitation and get on the highway toward Bologna. All of us from the Giacomo’s Way team also prepared to go to the hospital. I parked my car just as the couple arrived and I guided them toward the emergency room. While I was waiting for everything to be prepared for the C-section, I was overcome by a great expectation that the Mystery would come to keep us company. I began to pray that I could be simple and attentive so that I might see Him and be able to be a witness to my colleagues who were on duty and who looked at me incredulously, asking me if I was being paid to be there beyond my shift. The twins were born just before midnight. As soon as I saw the little girl, I was immediately taken aback by her malformed appearance. But after having aspirated her and dried her together with the neonatologist, I put the little cap that her mother had made for her on her head. Then I wrapped her in a blanket and placed her into the arms of her dad. I accompanied him into the operating room where the mother was, so that she could also see her. I placed the little baby near her mother’s face so that she could see her, know her, smell her, and kiss her. Then the dad and I washed her. I helped to dress her and after that, he held her until the very end. I was so struck by their choice. They are both atheists and decided not to baptize the little baby but they had valued the life that was in front of them. It’s as if they had said, “Yes, we adhere to what reality is proposing to us.” We also adhered to this reality alongside the parents. On the day of her discharge from the hospital, the mother wrote: “We leave today. We leave with a longing that will accompany us for a long time to come. We also leave with our little boy and the light that all of you have left in our hearts. Our little girl has taught us that life is not measured by the time we have on this Earth but by the power of the impact we leave while here. We would do anything to have her again in our arms even for an instant, but what you have done for us fills a good part of this emptiness and gives us peace. A tiny little child has changed our lives. Thank you for having granted this to her.”

Signed letter

Meeting



All in a gaze

From whatever perspective we viewed it, as a volunteer, guest presenter, or visitor, the Rimini Meeting demonstrated that the key to deciphering everything is “you.” And it revealed what allows us to be reborn.



Alessandra Stoppa

photos by
Roberto Masi

A girl from a Ugandan slum: “I am 18 years old, but I am really only five because my life began on February 26, 2014, at 8:05 on Wednesday, the first day of school. I went there without the desire to live; I had even tried to die. The teacher welcomed me with the most beautiful smile; no one had ever smiled at me like that. Then she asked me my name. I was born in that moment.” Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jewish woman who died at Auschwitz and still leaves a deep mark on those who encounter her today, had a similar experience of rebirth: on the day of her 28th birthday, she wrote: “Precisely one year ago, on February 3, 1941, I was brought into the world by an ogre of a man.” One morning in 1930, the young Japanese doctor and convinced atheist Takashi Nagai was reborn when he rushed to see his mother who was dying. “My mother, in that last penetrating gaze, knocked down the ideological framework I had constructed.” For him, an intuition that there is life without end broke open a new horizon. To investigate, he went to live among Christians.

But this is just the beginning: these are experiences of an encounter in which you are reborn, when your “person” truly begins to live, allowing a new perspective to develop inside of you that is for all people. These are only three of the many witnesses one might have run into at the 40th edition of the Rimini Meeting, with the theme: “Your Name Was Born from What You Gazed Upon.” Guadalupe Arbona Abascal, a literary critic from Madrid, introduced the theme in a talk that is published on the CL website. It is a dialogue between her humanity and those of the great sages about the deep longing to be reborn and the real possibility that it can happen. She thinks that the the-



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me, based on a striking verse from Karol Wojtyła, “cuts right to the heart of our time.” Why? Looking at what happened during this year’s Meeting can help answer this, though it is impossible to report the richness of a whole week – with 179

conferences, 25 performances, 20 exhibitions and 7 meeting areas dedicated to particular topics, a space full of places upon which one can fix one’s eyes on the hope Pope Francis expressed in his message: “What hope can there be in this world?

How can men and women rediscover themselves and find hope again? We cannot do so only through reason or strategies,” in an age in which, “people are often anonymous figures,” because they do not have “faces to fix their eyes upon.”



“A Christian proclaims that for which the men and women of our time—without knowing it—have the greatest thirst: the One who is life’s hope is among us. We will be ‘original’ if our faces are the mirror of the face of the risen Christ.”

(from Pope Francis’s message)

It happens instead in “the insistence of that gaze frees you.” Photographer Guido Guidi, one of the many guests who participated in conversations in the “Itineraries” area (organized by *Traces* and the CL International Center), says that “our eyes must be educated.” It is not enough to see things; we have to know how to look. “Do we see what is bad or are we seeing badly?” the main character

in the week’s opening performance, *Midnight Barabbas*, asked himself. The play, inspired by Pär Lagerkvist, depicts the man who owes his life to Jesus confounding the guests at a party. Between cocktails and sarcasm, they let themselves be wounded by questions about their lives: Is there anyone for whom I would be ready to give my life? Amidst a widespread weakening of interest for one’s own and our shared destiny, “I got to know a beautiful part of Italy,” said author Paolo Rumiz after his time at the Rimini Meeting. The Meeting exhibited a vitality in its presentation of charitable initiatives, social projects, and research from every discipline, as well as in the enthusiastic participation of those who came (not only for the talk with “*il capitano*” Javier Zanetti, which made the Fiera go wild). There was so much energy dedicated to knowing what others, often strangers, were experiencing, doing, or studying; so much attention given during the packed talks, even on complex subjects and the patient waiting in line to attend the performances, even for a second time, performances that caused people to ask questions and look at their implications for their own lives. “Even Havel would have been impressed,” said Pavel Fischer, a disciple of the great Czech dissident, who was struck by the young guides at the exhibit dedicated to Havel.

In the area dedicated to the theme “What’s in Our Brains,” you could hear discussion of high-level scientific research that was faithful to the nature of a mystery “more expansive than the heavens.” Among the experts was Monica Frega, now a researcher in Holland, who was “honored to be here”; the Meeting had formed her over many years as a volunteer, just as it is now forming many other young people, “broadening their gaze and helping them grow in awareness,” as astrophysicist Marco Bersanelli said, causing “their care for the object of their studies to grow.”

are even more valuable. I am not much of a believer, but I believe in what I see and I see all of you.” Roman, a 29-year-old from Moscow, spent his vacation working at the Meeting because “this is a place where I learn to have a tenderness for my humanity.” Bianca, in her first year as a volunteer, was surprised by the thousands of details that presented themselves in her week as a hostess, details that would have meant nothing to most people. Above all, she was amazed at herself: “I am a little spoiled, bourgeois... but I was filled with a desire to live, to face all that awaits me, to know myself beyond what I think of myself, beyond my limitations! I never would have imagined how important these days could be. It’s incredible; this all happened in the simplicity of volunteering.” “From the moment you ‘baptize’ yourself in reality, you discover you are much more than you thought.” Fascinated by the man with a hunger for what is happening, the Book Corner was overflowing for the discussion with Daniele Mencarelli, the author of the novel *La casa degli sguardi*. “We have to return to being children of reality.” The faces of visitors reflecting the bright gold tiles from the mosaics in Monreale was a silent marvel that filled the plaza where Mario Schifano held up the work of art he created amidst the jeers of a crowd: over 30 years later, *La Chimera* left those who entered the exhibit *Now Now: How a Work of Art is born*, spe-



echless. The exhibit featured seven young artists doing creative work ten hours a day as visitors watched. Their works were shaped in part by a relationship with the public, who showered them with questions. “Curiosity is hardwired in our brain,” said physicist Roberto Battiston in a talk with astronaut Paolo



Nespoli, but “we need contexts that can help stimulate it and build upon it,” because, “it can fall asleep and even be destroyed. We are capable of occupying ourselves with things that are not worthy of what we are.” Throughout the week, people of every age sought to grasp the meaning of things, whether it be the reform of nonprofits; what attracted the life of a normal young woman of our age, now named Venerable by the Church (Sandra Sabatini); how you build a skyscraper or a family, and how you rebuild a people after an atomic bomb, in the middle of the Holocaust, or during the war in Syria.

In response to today’s apathy and “the illusion that social egocentrism can

solve our problems” (Miguel Poiares Maduro), the Meeting presented gems of personal commitment, charity, and initiatives both from history and our present world, including the couple from Trento, Italy, who have 23 children (four biological) and job training organizations and other associations who work

“The Holy Father hopes that the Meeting can always be a place of welcome, where people can ‘fix their eyes upon faces.’”

(from Pope Francis’s message)

with people “cast aside.” These phenomena are marked by love to express the meaning of things, not just to provide explanations. Through them, you feel unique and revered, because they contain people who see something extraordinary in each of us, like Maria Elena Canavese who, in the *Now Now* exhibit, took pictures of the bristles of a broom and turned them into a waving field of wheat.

Agata Smeralda was the first of 500,000 babies welcomed beginning in 1445, over the course of four centuries, at the Ospedale degli Innocenti (Hospital of the Innocents) in Florence. It was a magnificent home for the smallest, those who are “last,” who were placed in a manger between Mary and Joseph as soon as they arrived. “Jesus told us that our law is love,” said Mariella Carlotti, curator of the exhibit. “Law not in a moralistic sense, but in the same way we speak of the law of gravity, as the dynamic through which a thing fully realizes itself. We become ourselves when we are moved to love.” This is the same love as can be seen in the life given “drop by drop” by bishop and martyr Pierre Claverie, including in his friendship—depicted in one of the performances—with his Muslim driver, Mohammed, who died with him in violence in Algeria. Both knew they were risking their lives, but it was worth it for the sake of the other. “The other, precisely in his or her difference, is the condition for us to stay alive,” were the words of Trappist monk Father Thomas Georgeon that filled the auditorium. He also observed that “to seek only what is like us is to be condemned to die.” He told the story of what is happening in Algeria: for months, thousands have taken to the streets every Friday to ask for profound political changes, for a true and just freedom. “A

country that lost its face for many years has now gained a name. Perhaps, without them realizing, the peoples’ celebration of the [martyrs’] beatification brought newness. Maybe it is their first miracle.”

“Here, then, is the secret of life,” the Pope went on to say in his message—“fixing our gaze on the face of Jesus and acquiring familiarity with Him.” Father Francesco Patton, Custos for the Holy Land, described the presence of his “little flock that is fixed upon Jesus,” flowing out of the encounter eight hundred years ago between two men, Saint Francis and the Sultan, both of whose eyes were focused on a greater treasure, as one of the big exhibitions documented.

Hope is found in the many people up to their necks in problems, but with a free gaze on life. These are people who arrived in Italy on a barge from Gambia like Morr and are now living through illness, and also the many doctors who spoke, who have not let the failures of the system keep them from spending themselves in the service of their patients, starting from the first moment of their lives. There were the Venezuelan musicians from the *People, Song, and Work* project who recorded a CD in the middle of a blackout, walking many miles home after rehearsals because of the gasoline shortages in their country. Seeing them changes the way we think about what can transform the desert their country is passing through. “My work is supporting the personal initiative of others,” said Alejandro Marius, who does so because someone first did the same for him: “It is that boomerang of preference.”

With his friends, he supported the desire of a young man from Caracas named José Francisco who, just two years ago, wanted to leave the country. Starting from

the person saves us from ideology, like beauty, and doing so “is constructive, even among those with differing ideas.”

Skimming over the list of names for the week (you can find videos from all the talks on the Meeting’s YouTube channel) gives you a sense of the breadth with which the organizers tried to look at the world. It includes the president of the Italian Senate Elisabetta Casellati, the president of the European Parliament David Sassoli; Church diplomats Ivan Jurkovič and Paul Gallagher; Olivier Roy and Al-Issa from the World Muslim League; Italian Constitutional Court judges Marta Cartabia and Francesco Viganò; Nazir Ayyad from Al Azhar in Cairo; Father Feras Lufti and the Mufti of Aleppo, Abou Khazen; and many others, from Cardinal Bassetti to Andrea Monda, Joseph Weiler, Paul Grim, Giovanni Scifoni, and Mark O’Connell, economists, outgoing ministers, and experts in artificial intelligence, palliative care, education, and more.

Some found in the Meeting a contribution toward making our social climate civil again. “Here there is pluralism without relativism, with men and women from all over the spectrum—believers, non-believers, and believers without religion, like me. In the face of a public discourse that is offensive and disproportionate, here there is wide-open dialogue. And it always goes to the heart of the meaning of life” (Luciano Violante, former President of the

Chamber of the Italian parliament). Film director Krzysztof Zanussi has seen many long years of both development and decline in Europe. “I am happy the Meeting continues to offer a profound vision. We cannot survive without the infinite and without the hope that there is something beyond this world.”

There was a time when people deluded themselves into thinking that “the loss of the ultimate reason to live could liberate them from useless complications. The result, however, has been confusion and fear. The underlying problem of our time is that we *do not understand the problem.*” From whatever angle you viewed it, from an audience or in front of an exhibit, behind the scenes or on the stage, the Rimini Meeting demonstrated that the key to deciphering everything is “you.” You, as you face life.

But how can we keep from retreating and closing ourselves off in fear? How do we overcome our fear of freedom? This was the challenge tackled by the talk with Greg Lukianoff and the bold exhibit on American identity, the paradigm for modernity. The exhibit was an unmediated space beyond time where you could immerse yourself in your own experience in light of the words of pioneers, slaves, and contemporary men and women. It highlighted the forceful impetus of the human heart, the events that overwhelm even that, the mysterious solitude revealed in boundless nights over the prairie, the time

after 9/11, and even returning from the moon. “Now what?” Buzz Aldrin asked himself. “Why get up in the morning, if not for something extraordinary?” What if that bubble to which you fled to escape all the drama is burst by a light that enters, by love or by life itself? And what if the remedy to *feeling alone* is the *splendor of being alone*, that “getting away” to better hear one’s own interior voice? Wendell Berry describes this as “the attraction of one’s most intimate sources,” and says that from the mountaintop they create, “one responds more clearly to other lives.”

This is what happened to Etty Hillesum: an extraordinary humanity was born in that interior silence. She discovered it in an encounter with a person and by “working on herself,” in a continual and “laborious process” that brought her to God, the source of her freedom and of her whole being, not in an intimistic way, but by throwing her into reality, making her a witness to many people living through the horror of Nazism, and now to the organizers of the exhibit about her and the thousands who visited it. It was the voice of Etty you heard at the Meeting; she was an extremely human young woman following a road: she suffered, loved, endured her own weaknesses, got up again, and gave herself. “The only way we can prepare for a new time is by preparing it in ourselves. It will certainly come. After all, it is already growing in me every day—I feel it, right?” ■

In the heart of the Balkans



text and photos by
Paolo Perego

An encounter has reached them in different ways and in different countries, all marked by a history of problematic regimes and now by secularism. From Pristina, Cluj, and Larissa, three witnesses from the CL community in southeastern Europe.

Donjeta, Kosovo

12 “Mom, I want more chocolate.” “Why?” “Because I feel happy when I eat it,” said Jin, 5, the second child of Donjeta and Lorenzo. Donjeta explains, “Do you understand? That is what it is like for me. What I met in the Movement makes me happy. That is how I felt 20 years ago, at the end of the war, and it is what I feel now, so much so that I come back for more after having distanced myself somehow.” Pristina is the capital of Kosovo, a country with a little over two million inhabitants. “Just last year, 180,000 young people expatriated. There is no work.” And the lord and master of the city? Corruption. Donjeta Beri-sha Matoshi was born in 1980. Yugoslavia still existed then, and her country was a province of Serbia. In 1995, the war in the Balkans came to an end, but Serbians began to persecute Albanians in the region: 11,000 civilians were killed before the UN intervened in 1999. “In 1996, I moved from a rural area to Pristina with my family. My father was a dissident and the city was safer for us.” Their house was occupied by Serbs. “We had lost everything, even the place

to ask questions.’ Survival was our sole priority.” In 2000, she encountered the Movement. “I had started working for AVSI, which oversaw distance support programs.” Donjeta spoke English and Italian. “A teacher named Beppe often came from Italy with some GS teens to introduce them to teens in the local parishes.” They needed me as interpreter. “The words they spoke touched my heart, although he didn’t even know me.” Beppe spoke to her about the Movement: “It was made for me. It simplified how I faced my daily life. I discussed this with my friends, who asked, ‘Is this true for us as well?’” And that is how the first community was born in Pristina.

“After years of living intensely, over time, the enthusiasm faded.” Donjeta explained, “I got lost in my daily routine” between her work as an interpreter and her family. “I had stopped taking myself seriously, and consequently, everything else.” The School of Community meetings have stopped. Except there is a “but.” She spoke of a “constant” need in the back of her mind. “While I was unfaithful, Christ never stopped showing His face. This

would happen when my friend Claudio would come to visit from Italy. Lorenzo and I would speak freely with him about our problems. But I would ask myself what was he doing here with us, a foreigner...”

It is like an ember still burning under the ashes that is reignited in difficult situations, such as the death of the daughter of friends. “I called Bernadeta, a friend, one of the ‘co-founders’ who was in distress: ‘I am not doing well Donjeta...’ How could I help her? I sought help from Davide, a friend from Italy who gives advice to the community in the Balkans.” He flew to Pristina. “We talked. We needed to continue on the path together. Not starting over, but from the evidence of what we belong to, from the origin of our friendship: Christ,” said Donjeta. We began from ‘chocolate,’ from what makes us feel good.” A few months later, Donjeta and Bernadeta went on the CL Vacation in the Balkans, which took place in Macedonia. “How faithful God is. He never gave up on me and he welcomed me back. This love cannot even be compared to the love I have for my children.”



Donjeta Berisha Matoshi.

Father Gregorio Marius, Romania

“My father was Orthodox, my mother a Catholic ‘fundamentalist.’ As a condition of marrying him, she convinced him to become Catholic.” Cluj-Napoca is located in the heart of Transylvania in northern Romania. The third of four children, two of whom are priests and two artists, Father Gregorio Marius Furtuna, class of 1966, is currently the rector of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary in his city. At the Summer Vacation in Macedonia, he celebrated Mass in the Roman Rite. “It is a sacrifice, in a certain sense, to ‘follow’ a different rite. But it serves to affirm the catholicity of the Church. The thing that brings us together, Christ, is ‘for everyone.’” He did not learn this through his studies, but rather through experience.

“I was an ordinary youth in Communist Romania. I attended Mass in Hungarian in a Roman Catholic Church. The Byzantine Rite had been banned.” Nowadays he jokes about the two Easters. “For Byzantine Catholics it comes later, and even after the ‘resurrection’ of the Hungarians, we still had to carry on with Lent, up to five weeks more of fasting and penance.” But it was a treasure and it continues to be so today. “I experienced the beauty and the absurdity of living my faith in the backyard of another rite.” Ceausescu, the Communist dictator who had ruled Romania since 1967, allowed Mass to be celebrated in the Roman Rite in Romanian only in 1985. After the revolution in 1989, Byzantine Catholics were granted the freedom to worship freely. “Meanwhile, in 1987, I had begun my studies to become a priest, in secret.” In those years, Gregorio took evening classes at the Technical University of Cluj. During the day, he worked at the Institute of Physics in Cluj. “When I gained the freedom to practice my reli-

gion, I began to live the faith in a way that until then I knew only as history.” After the fall of the regime, in 1990, he was invited to study in Rome. “Living in the heart of the Church helped me to better understand who I am and my history. Being in touch with other realities can tear you apart, or it can be an enriching experience. This is catholicity: the ability to embrace diversity. In Transylvania, different cultures have coexisted: Romanian, German, and Hungarian. It is diversity that defines the identity of each of us.”

For this reason, a few years ago, he did not hesitate to “open the doors” to a few people of the CL community. “I was already familiar with the Movement and with Father Giussani from my visits to Italy.” He was fascinated by “the unconventional way of thinking of the people I met.” Now Father Gregorio participates in the life of and serves the small CL community in his city. “I remain myself, but staying with them makes me grow, as a man and as a priest. In the other, I meet Christ. It is almost as if I can’t live without it.” He never met Father Giussani, but he has read his books.

“For me, it is most evident in his ‘children.’ They are part of the real world, with their doubts and worries and judgments on reality, which also includes politics. They are part of the reality even in a country like mine, where religious tradition holds no weight because it is no longer able to present itself in a way that is attractive and relevant for our times.” This is the same challenge that Father Giussani accepted when he walked into Berchet High School. “The intelligence of his proposal is made for today’s world. That is why it interests Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Jews, atheists... Many need it. They are thirsty. But who offers them a glass of water?”

Lambros Xalulis.

Father Gregorio Marius Furtuna.





Lambros, Greece

It is hard to describe what home is when your life is spread out around Europe: Austrian origins, a house in Greece, a wife and children in Portugal, and travel for work... “But now, after many years, I have found my home with all of you,” said Lambros Xalulis to his friends of the CL communities in the Balkans. He is a Greek Orthodox Christian, surrounded by Catholics of the Roman and Byzantine rites, who decided to follow a group of Greeks in Larissa, the town where he lives. He met them three years ago by chance when he accompanied his wife to Mass.

“My mother is Austrian and she became an Orthodox Christian when she married my father, who is Greek. In 1974, when I was two years old, we moved to Greece, where I live now, surrounded by my olive trees and grape vines.” He installs irrigation devices for a living.

“When I met Rosaria, Tassoula, and Andreas in Larissa’s School of

Community, many questions resurfaced, including about where my family should live.” His wife Sandra lives with their children three thousand miles away in Porto. “She is Catholic. I met her in August 2001. I was in Portugal with a group that danced *sirtaki*, the dance of my homeland.” *Sirtaki* is his passion, but this was also a dark period for Lambros. “I only lived to work and outside of it I led an unruly life. Alcohol, late nights...” Sandra, joined by a friend of hers, decided to go visit him in October. “It was a beautiful friendship. And she came back at Christmas, but this time she came alone.” Lambros noticed himself changing for her. “I stopped drinking and smoking. Sometimes I would go to Porto and other times she would come see me. This continued until 2004, when they got married and she moved to Greece. Time passed and they began to have children. Sandra started to suffer from homesickness, which was intensified by postpartum depression. She returned to Porto and moved her bridal shop there, which opened in 2007. “For a long time, she felt alone

in Porto, even though her family is there. I thought about moving there... but it’s complicated. Once in a while she would come to see me, and on one of those occasions, we met the CL community.”

This would change Lambros’s life completely. “Sandra was in Porto, but I was not alone anymore. I wanted to stay with them. They were full of life and I could be myself with them.” There was School of Community and getting together. It was “an accompanying presence, finally, to help me live through these challenges.” Their presence was so strong that he did not let more than three weeks go by without seeing them. “I feel welcome. It is like a breath of life...” He said, “I don’t understand everything, but I feel embraced and so does my wife.” In January, Sandra came to Larissa “for the first time alone, without bringing the children. We spent some time with the friends of the community. Before leaving, we were talking about them and she said, ‘Now I know that I could come back to live here, because I would not be alone.’” ■

Amazonia

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16

“Our cry”



Alessandra Stoppa

Why is the life of indigenous peoples at the center of the Church’s attention? How do the threats to nature and to these peoples concern all of us? We spoke with the Bishop of Parintins, Giuliano Frigeni, who will be at the October synod dedicated to the faith and the problems of the great Amazonian forest.



The trans-Amazonian highway, in Brazil.

Thirty-four million inhabitants, 390 peoples, of whom over 130 have yet to be contacted or choose to live in isolation. A territory of 4.8 million square miles, where 240 languages are spoken. Along the rivers and in the forests there are indigenous peoples boasting a magnificent variety of cultures, but also brutal violence and billion dollar interests that often act with impunity. Pope Francis, in calling for a synod of bishops on the Amazon from October 6th to October 27th, stated that he realized the

region's importance at the Aparecida Conference in 2007. Until then, it had been a distant reality for him, a world of the imagination, as it can easily be for us as well.

Traces asked Bishop Giuliano Frigeni, a PIME missionary in Brazil for 40 years, and for 20 bishop of Parinins, how the cry of that land and those peoples concerns everyone. In fact, the documents prepared for the synod speak of an area in which “the great questions of humanity emerge.” The social and environmental crisis of the Amazon raises questions for the entire world about models of development and production, but above all calls the Church to reflection and asks her for conversion. It is “the opportunity to present Christ in all His liberating potential” for the human person. The great outlook opened by *Laudato Si'* (Praise Be to You) will be put into action by the method of the synod, as the preparatory document for the synod notes: “New paths for evangelization must be designed *for* and *with* the People of God who live in this region.”

Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, the general rapporteur of the synod, often quotes a Brazilian song: *tudo está interligado, como se fôssemos um*—everything is interconnected, as if we were only one thing. The synod is significant not only because the Amazon is an important (but threatened) source of oxygen and biodiversity for the entire planet—whose rescue requires “structural and personal changes by

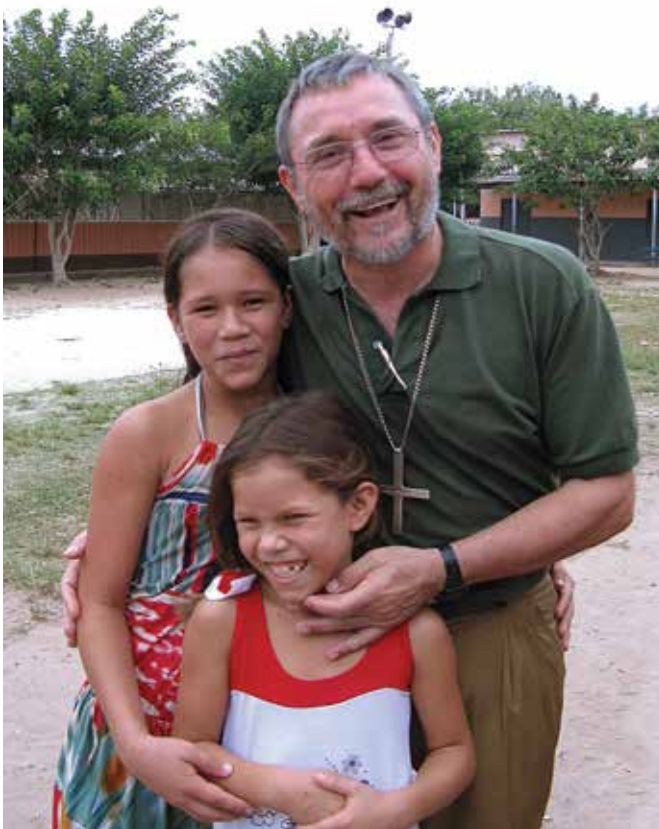
all human beings, by nations, and by the Church”—but also because the Amazon, as cardinal Hummes says, “can bring new lights to the Church in Europe and the world.”

Why is the Amazon important for the Church?

Paul VI was the first to realize the Amazon's importance, after the Second Vatican Council. At the 1972 Santarém meeting with all the bishops of the area, a follow-up to the 1968 Conference of Medellín (subsequently followed by the Puebla Conference in 1979), the pope understood that the problems of the region were a very serious concern for the Church and the world. First of all, the Amazon is reflected in the first chapter of *Genesis*: the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the water, and animals... it is the beauty of creation. It is also reflected in the third chapter in which God created human beings. If human beings remain humble and accept the task of caring for the creation that God entrusted to them, they discover that it was given to them to be at their service. Here we call her “mother earth.” Mother: she who gives you life and nourishes you. It is a relationship of love.

Could you describe this relationship?

I just told some seminarians who have arrived for a few days of mission: “You must learn that here, things move slowly.” This is not out



Giuliano Frigeni (Bergamo (Italy), 1947) has been the Bishop of Parintins since 1999. A PIME missionary, he has lived in Brazil since 1979.

a simpler life, which does not mean traveling by bicycle, but rediscovering the defense of life! It is to live a human life, the life that is here, like that in any other part of the planet, so that it not be sacrificed for profits and gain.

For you, what is the Amazon?

For me, it is school, school, school. It teaches me the riches that the Lord has put on this earth, and that man, in his intelligence and freedom, for love of himself and his wife and children who will come after him, should take care of it. As I said in 2002 at a meeting with then-Cardinal Ratzinger: the indios, the caboclos, the ribeirinhos are people like me. They make mistakes. They get angry. What can help them? That the gospel enter their lives, in order to accompany them in living the responsibility that God has given them. As John Paul II said in *Redemptor Hominis*, those who do not encounter Christ do not know everything that is within the human person. These peoples also need to know Christ, to be able to love Him, to be protected, and as Church to be a wonder, as the first Christians were. The Amazon gives me back this origin of everything.

The synod will center on violence against the environment and indigenous peoples: deforestation, expulsions from villages, illegal occupations, predatory mining, the dumping of chemical waste, criminality, human trafficking... The reports of local Churches denounce systematic violations of fundamental human rights.

Today more than ever, projects that are the fruit of greed and speculation, of a purely economic vision, are evident—usurping, invading, destroying, poisoning the rivers. Yesterday I saw over 30 trucks loaded with very long tree trunks: they were being transported who knows where with the permission of who knows whom. There are very serious problems. But it is important not to be swallowed up by those who only want to save nature and have no interest in women and men. The Church is not called to “baptize” everyone. The cry of the Amazon must be listened to and inserted into the human and intelligent vision of *Laudato Si'*.

of laziness, but because the river goes slowly! If the waters of the river ran quickly, they would drag us all to the ocean, and we would not be able to travel upriver. Instead, it goes slowly, and makes everything fertile. At times the river overdoes it; it rises and reaches homes, but so slowly that people invented the *maromba*: they raise the floor a yard, a yard and a half, and live for a month or two bent over so as not to hit their heads on the ceiling, waiting for the river to subside. Three-hundred-year old trees fall and by doing so leave space for tens of other trees, which in time grow. This slowness is the equilibrium of the ecosystem. The great forest is so wondrous! But you discover it only if you live it from within. There is the companionship of the song of the *uirapurú*, whose music has been compared to that of Bach: when it sings, all the other birds go silent.

Why does the Amazon concern all of us?

The Amazon teaches us that the economy must not be the commander of humanity. Today life is determined by those who have money and power, those with the loudest voices. Looking at this reality offers us the opportunity to put ourselves in an attitude of listening, and to earn

Is there a risk of mythologizing nature or the “good savage”?

The Amazon needs the gospel. We cannot reduce ourselves to being defenders of nature or culture. This would be the failure of the synod. Instead, the synod is a journey of incarnation. It is not true that cultures exist on their own, that they are “pure.” The first miracle Jesus performed was to restore joy to a bride and groom, because even the love of a man and a woman is incomplete without His presence. Evil is man’s choice to try to be equal to God. But man is not God, neither in the Amazon, nor in Cairo, Tokyo, or New York. Evangelizing is remembering this, and stating clearly that God is not disinterested in the fact that man is wounded by or wounds others. The synod must reawaken the Church’s responsibility to evangelize, not merely to save the forest and aboriginal culture, but so that the light of Christ may make the vocation of these people and this land greater, truer, and more beautiful.

What do you learn from “your” people?

When one of our missionaries who had founded a school for the indios had to return to Italy, I wondered what should be done with that school. So I called together the parents, and 600 indios came. I bought five cows to feed them and we spoke for four days. At a certain point it seemed to me that we were repeating the same things, but a former student told me, “In every speech, there is a different adjective, verb, and emphasis.” So I asked him, “When will we finish?” He said, “When everyone is absorbed in the discussion and by their need to listen to each other.” Dialogue with these people does not involve a vote in which the winner commands the others. Their method is to listen.



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This is the same watchword for the synod.

Yes. I learn this from them. I believe that for 30 years, Jesus listened. He listened to Mary, Joseph, the people, the scribes, and the pharisees. He added the newness, which was Himself, and His deeper gaze, capable of overcoming evil. In relationships and in trying to listen to each other, there can be evil, the need for my idea to prevail. A seminarian who is of the *Sateré-Mawé* ethnicity wrote: "In the seminary, unlike with my tribe, there is too much noise. The people do not listen to each other. I miss the silence. In silence, you understand better what is important."

What does it mean to live mission there?

The first thing is that a missionary never goes into the communities alone. There is always a small "team" so that it is clear that no one person is the owner of the gospel, but that the gospel is an experience of relationship between those who have been sent. "As the Father sent Me, so I send you." Jesus came from an experience of communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and grew up in the communion between Mary and Joseph. Mission does not happen because you are competent: Saint Paul was very intelligent, but he always went with companions. I was sent here without even knowing what the Amazon was, but I arrived with a friend, Fr. Massimo Cenci. He was the rector of the seminary. I always listened to him and today I think about what he told me 30 years ago: here, young people live their relationship with their family exactly as with nature; that is, the mother is the focal point. This is a very serious

thing. In fact, when Fr. Massimo saw that they attached themselves to him the way they were attached to their mothers, he knew that he had won them over, meaning that they started out from themselves as men, and he accompanied them in being faithful to what they wanted. There is a continual battle against the image of the priest as the "village head," so that the people do not obey us, but rather Christ, who became man for us.

The pope, in the face of the danger of spiritual "colonialism" involving an exportation of Western models, reminded us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that "it is an indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ." Will the synod also rethink the theme of inculturation?

The gospel is not a super-culture. It is the presence of God who comes to save all that is true, beautiful and just in every culture, and to correct what is not good. I believe that we must wager on the formation of women and men whose encounter with the gospel has given them an awareness of human life, the economy, and ecology. This is a different thing from labor union leaders, associations in defense of the language, or for the protection of fathers or ways of painting yourself.

At the synod, there will also be discussion about the growth of evangelical and neo-Pentecostal groups.

This is a very strong reality. Many Catholics, not sufficiently sure of their own faith, have followed them. I always look to what Benedict XVI told us about this topic. He invited us not to argue with them, but to do

a deeper work, because the problem is a weakening of the awareness of being Catholic. The problem is not proselytism, but a testimony that gives life. So he told us not to speak badly of them, but to speak badly of ourselves, who end up defending the forest and forgetting the gospel and the truly human journey of *Laudato Si'*.

You have ordained twenty priests in twenty years. What do you think about the need for autochthonous priests, for a Church with "an Amazonian face"? Cardinal Hummes said in an interview that "the indigenous Church is not created by decrees. The Synod has to open the way to start off a process that has sufficient freedom and that recognizes the true dignity of each Christian and each child of God. This is the greatness of this Synod. The pope knows how historical it can be for all the Church."

I'll tell you a story. Among my faithful, there is a married man, the father of seven sons and a daughter: two of his sons are in the seminary because their parents travel by canoe for eight hours to take the children to a catechism meeting and back. They've done this for over 20 years. He and his wife learned from missionaries to be missionaries. I bring my seminarians to that man's home and say: look at him! He is not a priest; he is a father. We have to show young people these witnesses.

In order to respond to the lack of priests and the need for the sacraments, there is discussion of divisive themes: the role of the laity, possible new forms of ministry, and the ordination of married men



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or even of women. And it is said that one must keep in mind that in the indigenous culture, celibacy does not exist.

The indigenous people know very well what it means not to marry out of love! Celibacy entered into history as an imitation of Christ. It did not start because of canon law. The Church chose to live it in order to be more similar to Christ. We know very well that in other Catholic rites there are married priests. But, this said, the problem is not finding “the solution”: the first problem is consciousness, as in the case of that father I described.

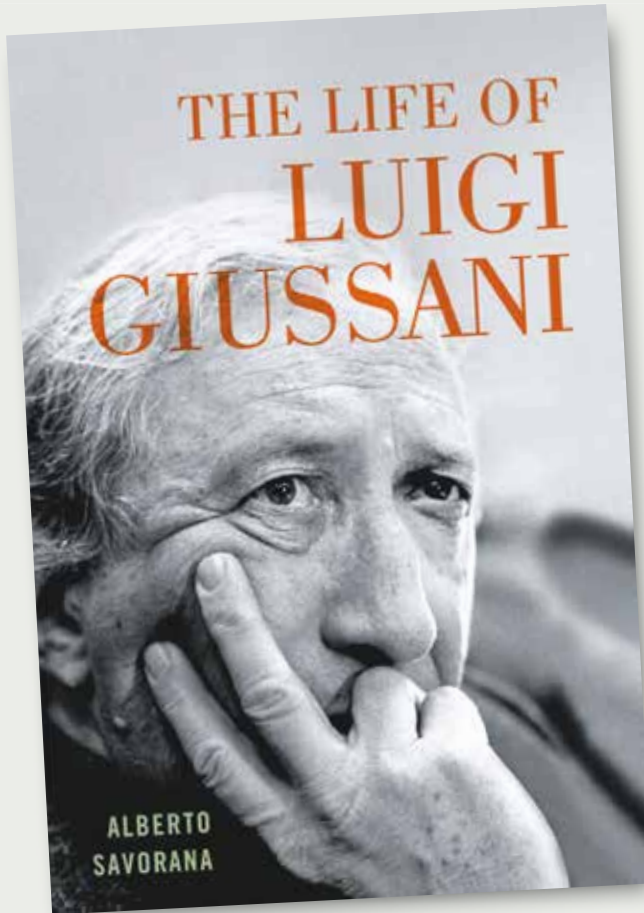
The Pope urges us not to fear new things, and invites you bishops to be courageous.

If the Church decides that in the Amazon it is possible to evaluate whether to ordain married men, I will obey. Mission can push the Church to “go out of herself” to meet particular needs. It’s an entirely different thing to think, “Oh, finally, priests can get married! Finally, women can be priests!” No. This is a question of finding married men, fathers of families, who have an extraordinary awareness and experience of the Church. In front of such men, the question of ordaining them can arise. I’m going to the synod to obey what we will hear. The Amazon speaks in its silence and in the voice of those who love the land and people, not in that of those who love their own projects, be they to destroy the forest or the Church. ■

Pope Francis during his meeting with indigenous people, in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, in January 2018.

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.

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