

TRACES

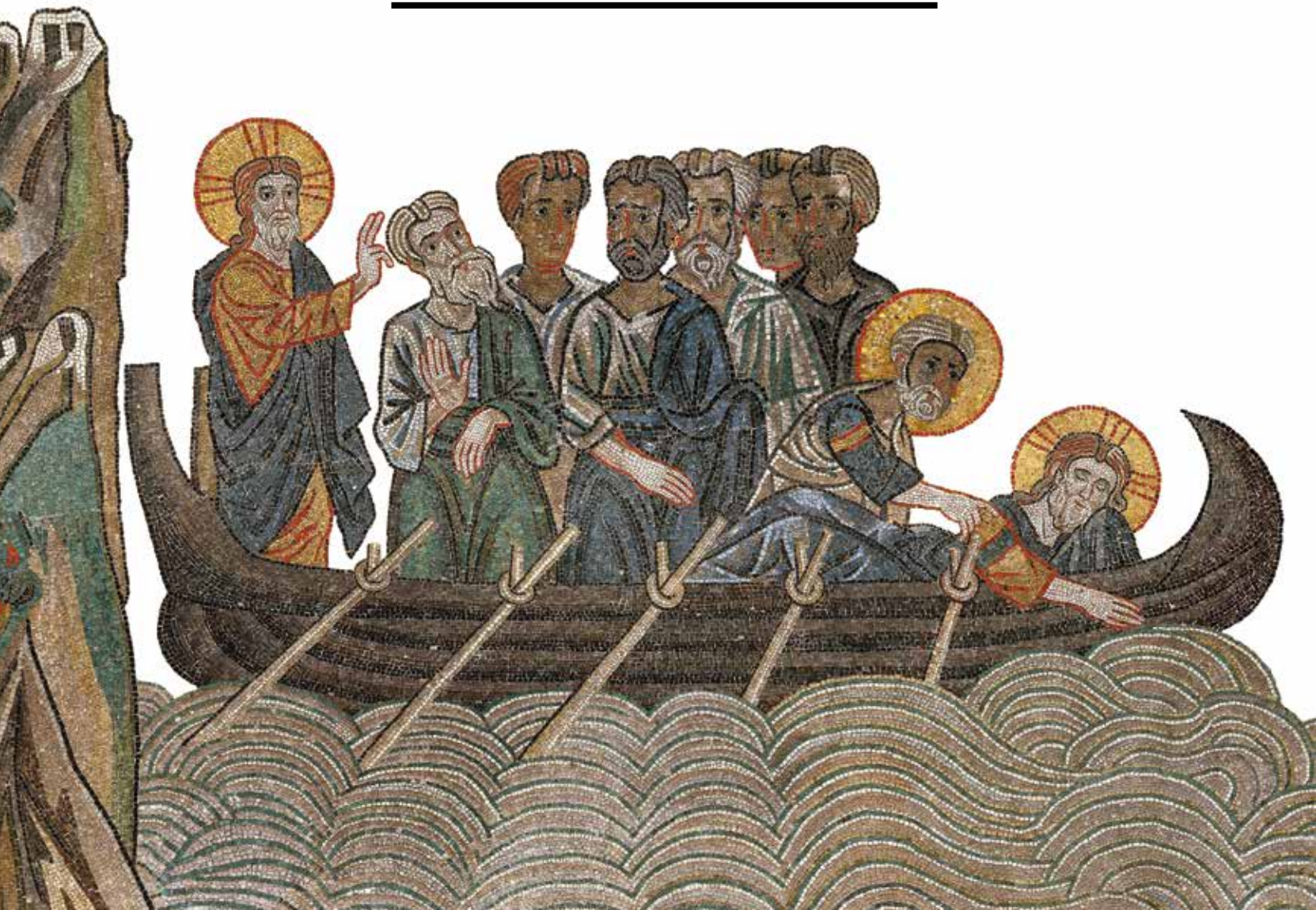
litterae communionis

Communion and Liberation
International Magazine

Vol. 23
October 2021

07

***“You are not
lacking in any
spiritual gift”***



TRACES

Communion and Liberation International Magazine
Vol. 23

Editor (Direttore responsabile)
Alessandra Stoppa

Editorial Assistant
Anna Leonardi

Art director
Dario Curatolo

Layout
Maria Cristina Mazzù

Editorial office
Via De Notaris, 50 - 20128 Milano
Tel. 02.92945400 - Fax 02.92945401

E-mail: traces@traces-cl.com
Web: english.clonline.org

Publisher (Editore)
Editrice Nuovo Mondo srl
Iscrizione nel Registro degli Operatori di Comunicazione
n. 26972

Cover
Christ calms the storm. Basilica di San Marco, Venice.
© Photo Scala, Firenze

■
© Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione
for the texts by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

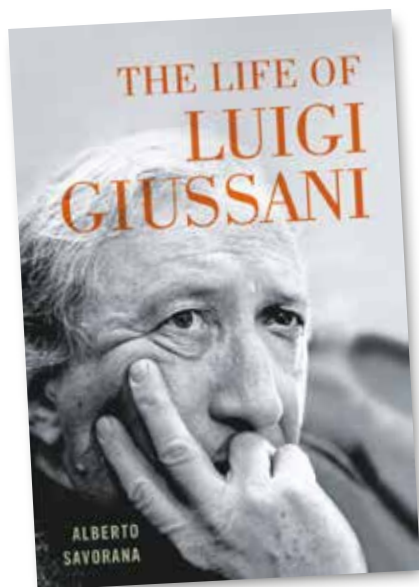
n° 07

October 2021



The image and the title
of the CL Beginning Day

- 01** *Editorial*
- 02** *Letters*
- 04** *Close-up*
Immersed in the world
- 08** *Something that resists confusion*
- 12** *Who am I?*
- 16** *The miracle of existing*
- 21** *The cord and the hundredfold*



1,416 pages | December 2017

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.*

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

Priceless

Those who saw the exhibit at the Meeting of Rimini on secularization, which we cover at the beginning of this issue, saw the images of churches transformed into restaurants, museums, or pools, and heard the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor say that for him the most interesting question to ask is why he did not drift away from the church in the 1960s like so many others.

In the video, his question emerged backlit by quick shots of generations before ours displaying shards of authentic aspirations expressed in all sorts of ways that would flow into the tragic drive for an answer that we cannot give ourselves, even if there was no one who “hears” in these aspirations the presentiment of something more powerful than the buffeting winds.

Taylor’s question remains pertinent today. Julián Carrón proposed it again in the recent Beginning Day, which opens the journey of the Movement of CL for the next year, published soon at *clonline.org*: “How is it that we did not end up like so many of our peers who abandoned the church?”

Facing this question and not taking it for granted is the most evident fact in this moment. “If we do not belong to the desert, it is because of the grace we have received, the grace of the charism the Holy Spirit gave to Fr. Giussani, to serve the whole church”; that is, “because of the way Christ chose to draw us to Himself.” Faith breached an opening and penetrated into our lives only “because it answered our thirst for fullness and destiny,” continued Carrón, before introducing the audio of a 1976 talk in which Fr. Giussani said with all his being that “there is nothing more humanly revolutionary and true than this,” referring to the desire for Christ that beat throughout his life and left him breathless. “What would it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose the meaning of himself in the process? What can a man offer in exchange for his very self?” The grace of life is an encounter with a voice like this, like that of Christ who speaks like no one else of the boundless value of the person. “If I spoke the word ‘I’ with a minimum of attentive tenderness,” said Giussani, we would see that nothing is comparable, nothing is as important and irreducible. “This ‘I’ is priceless.” In the midst of the noisy confusion of life and the ruins into which it may crumble, the possibility of a new self-awareness is born and reborn through the surprise of a unique gaze that you happen upon.

For this reason, we return to the Meeting of Rimini to look more deeply at some proposals that affected many people, to see them with the eyes of those who allow themselves to be struck, of those who were there for the first time or who concretely contributed, involving themselves by working on an exhibit or lining up the seats in an auditorium. There are people and facts that have a different weight than others that give rise to a concrete newness of life that exists because it is shaped by an encounter.

Letters

Cristina, Tommaso, Teresa, Marta

edited by
Paola Bergamini
pberga@tracce.it

“Can you tell me something about him?”

One day I got a message from a friend. She told me that in the hospital where I work, someone she knew was going to have surgery and asked if I could go to see her. Angelina, the woman scheduled for surgery, is around seventy years old and only speaks Italian. She emigrated to Canada when she was little and always worked as a homemaker. She's learned a little bit of French and English, but not enough to carry on a conversation. I went to visit her and get to know her. I saw that she read the Italian newspapers that her son bought for her, so I proposed *Tracce*, to which I have a subscription. I started bringing back issues for her to read. Each time I went to see her she was reading them and she would say, “How beautiful these stories are! They do me good. But this Giussani, can you tell me something about him? Do you belong to this Movement? I want this faith! Will you bring me more issues?” At the beginning, she was very bitter about the situation of her illness, but now when I go to see her, we talk about everything: from food to problems with children to education and future projects. She has passed the copies of *Tracce* to her cousin, and when her children come to visit, she tells them about the articles that have struck her.

Cristina, Montreal (Canada)

On the radio

My summer has been marked by my two yeses: agreeing to take a temporary job in

Milan and to work at the radio station during the Rimini Meeting. I got my degree in July and the Monday after, I moved to the Lombardian capital. The experience has been as beautiful as it has been difficult, especially because I found myself alone most of the time, in a very hot and ghostly Milan. At age twenty, why spend a summer this way? The immediate answer is: to follow what I'm passionate about. And that's the truth. But when you find yourself alone in an unfamiliar city, passion is not enough. You must see hope and be sure of a good that has permeated your life. I've had the good fortune of having met people who love me so much that I accept proposals that I would not otherwise have been able to say yes to; from these people, I have had a clear glimpse of a concrete hope for my immediate future. So, living alone has been a struggle, but it's been possible by virtue of a good, a certainty on which my life is based. If I think of the Meeting's theme, “The Courage to Say ‘I,’” I realize that I can be ever more Tommaso and can face all the challenges I have before me because of a gaze on me that radiates good. I decided to spend my only days of rest from studying and my job working at the Meeting radio station. I was tired, I knew little or nothing about what I would be doing, and I didn't know any of my colleagues. Why did I say yes? Simply because I was sure that there would be something there for me. I went to Rimini and the work began. I was pushed to take risks, to be myself in the work of doing interviews and running the radio station. But this was only possible in relationship with an Other, an Other by whom I felt loved and esteemed, an Other with the concrete faces of Paolo, Fabio, Andrea, and Alessandro. Only thanks to the adults who guided us, to our friends present during those days, to my girlfriend, and to my family, was I able to say yes to asking questions in a press conference while professional reporters from a wide variety of news outlets crowded around the microphone. I returned to Milan recharged. I

felt like I had filled my tank, so much so that I threw myself completely into my day-to-day responsibilities. Working at the Meeting made me realize the beauty that surrounds me, but above all it made me judge again that I can say “I” through a courage that doesn’t come from me.

Tommaso, Ravenna (Italy)

The wedding Day in hospice

Two weeks before the wedding of two dear friends, the mother of the groom, who was very ill, entered hospice. I asked myself how something so joyful like getting married could be paired with such a deep grief like accompanying a mother in her death. In the days leading up to the wedding, I had the great fortune of spending some time with the bride and groom and I saw that, in them, these two things were already linked: their grief and the effort of staying on top of the organizational details (they had set up a video link so his mom would be able to participate in the ceremony), along with the joy of beginning a life together. But on the wedding day, this linkage was even more evident. During the ceremony, a friend who had agreed to bring the newlyweds to the hospice asked me, “Why don’t you come along and sing?” Outside the church, we made sure this was feasible, proposed the idea to some friends, and off we went. There we were, about twenty of us, singing “In ginocchio da te” beneath the window of the hospice room because it was the mother’s favorite song, “Argento,” to stay with the theme of what we had just witnessed at Mass, and then, following someone’s last-minute idea, we joined her in singing “La strada.” His mom could no longer get up out of the bed and she no longer spoke, so the groom came to the window and gave us a running commentary about how she was reacting to the songs. He said she was happy and that she followed along by mouthing the lyrics. As I was there below the windows of the hospice wing singing “I want your caresses” and “the road that leads you home is beautiful,” little by little other patients who had become curious came to their windows. And I thought about how any passerby would have found the scene absurd, impossible. But in the company of Christians, it happens that the Holy Spirit puts an intuition into someone’s heart, and others, recognizing this goodness, follow along according to what the customs of the moment allow. In so doing,

they find themselves immersed in an exceptional event. In the companionship of Christians, two newlyweds can leave a hospice room with shiny but radiant eyes, and a mother who cannot accompany her son to the altar can be happy.

Teresa, Milan (Italy)

Leaving Scotland

The day we locked the doors of our house in Scotland to move to England, my husband, my children, and myself were not only tired from the extremely intense days before the move but also heartbroken by having to leave what had been a wonderful experience of familiarity, friendship and growth. The days before leaving were full of the constant presence of our friends meeting up with us. Some of the restrictions were still in place and people were taking turns visiting us. We received gifts, gadgets, and shared meals with friends. A family even organized a tea party in their garden with some other families from the primary school. A family of friends invited us to their house and cooked an Italian-Scottish dinner and their kids made drawings for us. They gave us a very nice picture of a modernized version of Saint Mungo, the protector of Glasgow, because “they became interested in his life after hearing about him from us.” Our parish priest wrote a letter of recommendation to our children’s new school. Someone even wrote to me: “I can guarantee that not only me but also everyone who got to know you became a better person by your friendship.” I asked myself if we had done anything particularly special during our years in Scotland. I think we simply just lived. We lived as we had seen other friends live, as we have been taught to live, in the certainty that our path is intriguing; it is difficult yet easy, and everlasting. Another thing that helped me very much was the closeness to our kids. I was worried about the logistics of it all. Where would they stay during the days of the move so that they would not be overwhelmed and so that they would not be a nuisance? I did not find any solutions that were affordable, but what happened was a nice discovery for me. They helped us with everything, from packing their things to lifting the boxes they were able to, and from ordering a last-minute pizza from the best place in town to saying good-bye to all our friends they cared about in a special way.

Marta, Colchester (United Kingdom)



Immersed in the world

© Archivio Meeting

Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty. A deep dive into the human adventure, enlightened by the testimonies of Rowan Williams, Julián Carrón, and Charles Taylor. The exhibit of the Meeting on secularization is born from the story of a friendship, one that looks at the world without censoring anything.



Paola Bergamini



On these pages, the exhibit on secularization displayed at the Rimini Meeting 2021.

Meeting of Rimini, Pavilion B3. The big screen of the third “room” displays the quotation of Fr. Giussani stating, “I am not able to find another index of hope if not the multiplication of these persons who are a presence. The multiplication of these per-

sons and an inevitable sympathy between them.” The audiovisual exhibit *Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty* has finished. At the exit, Alessandra Gerolin, Pia De Simone, Alessandro Rovati, and Samuele Busetto—young professors of philosophy and curators of the exhibition—await the visitors. A man approaches them. “Recently, my son told me something about himself that was a scandal for me, a sign of my educative defeat. The exhibit helped me understand that I can look at this situation as something more than a condemnation. I desire to stay in front of him and his needs, which are so deeply human. Today is the beginning of a new journey.” Some weeks later, a friend who had seen the exhibit from home called Samuele, who is a professor of philosophy in Treviso, saying, “Thank you for the work you have done. I perceived the same ‘ineffable and total vibration’ that seized me in my encounter with the Movement and that is the only thing capable of waking me up.” Messages and conversations of this kind continued even after the week in Rimini. “There was a superabundance of humanity that is almost inexplicable. I am understanding more and more that this is not something we own or do. The Lord is working in a mysterious way. It was more than the work of our own hand,” recounts Alessandro, director of the depart-

ment of Theology at Belmont Abbey in North Carolina.

But what lies at the origin of this work that moved and continues to move the humanity of so many people? A friendship, “an inevitable sympathy between them,” that has been present since the beginning. In October of 2019, Charles Taylor, professor emeritus of philosophy at McGill University in Montreal, was in Rome to receive the Ratzinger Prize. For Alessandra, a professor of moral philosophy at the Catholic University of Milan, it was an occasion to reconnect with the Canadian philosopher. They had met in 2015 in the Italian capital during a conference, and Taylor, with great curiosity, had wanted to accompany her to the audience of Pope Francis with the Movement. Seated on the steps of Saint Peter’s plaza he had said: “If I understand well, all of this was born from the friendship between a priest and some young people.” Together with Pia, a friend and currently a professor of ancient philosophy at Trier in Germany, Alessandra invited Taylor and Carrón to dinner. The two had an intense dialogue that converged into two main points: Christianity is not a collection of rules, but rather, is useful for living, and secularization is an immense opportunity to verify the nature of our need and to rediscover the nature of the faith. “From what

Alessandra Gerolin, Pia De Simone, Alessandro Rovati, and Samuele Busetto.



an exhibit on these themes,” Alessandra proposed rapidly. “Yes, let’s try to get something going,” was Carrón’s response. Thus, the exhibit was born out of an exchange of words during dinner that lasted a maximum of forty seconds.

6

Pia and Alessandra invited Samuele and Alessandro to join them. They are connected by a friendship that began at the Catholic University of Milan, where they were involved with the experience of the Movement, that brought them to encounter—at Oxford and Cambridge—the great intellectuals of the Anglican world. The way these thinkers lived Christianity fascinated them. Among them was Rowan Williams, then the Archbishop of Canterbury. His was a name that during the dinner had been mentioned “due to his fascinating position in front of reality,” says Alessandra.

The working group became larger, coming to involve two Canadian friends: Kirsten Gfroerer and Aaron Riches. The pandemic hit, and Zoom sessions followed, some between the curators and others with Carrón, Taylor, and Williams. They were dense dialogues for many reasons, including, as Pia explains, “because of the perception that they had of reality and their gaze full of tenderness for man.” The work proceeded with the selection of keywords, beginning from the phenomenon of secularization: freedom, humanity, fullness, hope, desire... These became the foundation of the interviews with the three interlocutors and were the basis for the organization of the exhibit. As Pia remembers: “We had thought of the standard panels with quotations from poets, writers, maybe the choruses of some songs, in order to document what they had told us. But instead....” They began to ask the opinion of some experts. Then, a friend, himself a theologian, provoked them: “Who reads the panels these days? You need to create an immersive exhibit. Video. Play the songs that young people dance to nowadays, the new psalms of the twenty-first century. Give it a try.”

This suggestion was the turning point. They stopped pursuing confirma-

tion of their ideas, instead simply accepting the challenge: to communicate a gaze on the present moment that is capable of embracing the questions of everyone. And they saw that the response to those questions was present within reality. “We discovered that in every expression, even the most extreme, there are elements of the irreducibility of the human that nothing can rip away; there is a desire for fullness that no institution or rule can exhaust,” Pia continues. Slowly, the exhibit took form. The idea of panels left in the dust, the new format became three videos in which Carrón, Taylor, and Williams, speak-

you are telling me, you live that which I speak about academically. It would be beautiful to communicate it to the public at large,” said Taylor at a certain point. “It would be wonderful if the Meeting had



ing about themselves and their encounter with Christianity, dialogue with reality through image and film clips, TV shows, and songs. Nothing is excluded. The words “freedom,” “hope,” and “humanity” became faces that speak, shriek, and seek. When Samuele happened upon



a video of a transsexual who was speaking about his experience, he thought: “He has within himself the same desire for fullness that I do.” Only a few months earlier, he would have moralistically categorized that existence as the fruit of a failed education or of a society on the edge. “With a gaze like this, secularization is already defeated,” Alessandra says. Or, better, it becomes “a vocation, the invitation of God who invites us to enter into a new profundity of relationship with Him and with the world,” as Williams said during their talk at the Meeting.

For their project, they asked their friend Massimo Bernardini, an author and television director, and his son, Matteo, for a hand. Both proposed the director Giulia Sodi (*see p. 8*). “The encounter with them was fundamental,” Samuele continues. “Giulia asked for an explanation for everything. She left no stone unturned.”

A year and a half of work ensued in the personal lives of each person involved in the project. The three

months before the Meeting were the most difficult for Alessandra. During the day, she worked and took care of her sick father, while during the evening she prepared the exhibit. “When I read the title after opening the file, I asked: But is this true for me? What allows me to live without fear, to live with hope?” Her father died on the Sunday of the Meeting. “I thought: how fortunate He is to be looking upon the One for Whom we are searching this week. I was filled with a gladness and gratitude that I had not expected.”

When the Jewish communities of Gastonia and Charlotte asked Alessandro to organize an event on interreligious dialogue, he proposed meeting every two weeks to read the texts of the two religions on the theme of living without fear. “The gaze full of curiosity that I had been living in the preparation of the exhibit helped me to stay with them full of questions.” This event ended up happening. “But that which is most dear, that which I bring home with me, is a friendship. One that continues.”

The news of the exhibit went beyond the borders of Italy, and friends in the Moscow community decided to add Russian subtitles. Some weeks later, an Orthodox priest of the Donetsk region, which is contested by Russia and Ukraine, asked: “Can I share this video with the people of my region? It will help us to face the tragic situation that we find ourselves in.”

On the last day of the Meeting, a young boy, glued to his smartphone, followed his parents as they visited the exhibit. When they arrived at the second “room,” he



looked up at the big screen and saw his favorite rapper. He turned toward his older brother and asked him for the headphones that accompany the exhibit. The image changed, but he did not give back the headphones until after the last section of the presentation, including the final credits.

“Forget your perfect offering,” sang Leonard Cohen in a song that accompanied the final video. “Forget the idea that reality must be ‘correct.’ I do not need to change it to be able to offer it to others. I can simply look at it in its entirety,” Samuele says. And therein lies the challenge of this exhibit. ■



Something that resists confusion

“I want to see if the faith still has a chance to resound in the hearts of men and women.” Giulia Sodi, director of the exhibit *Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty*, explains why she decided to become involved with the project. And she shares what she discovered, in what was her first time visiting the Meeting.



Anna Leonardi

Giulia Sodi is a director and creator of television programs and documentaries.

A “pop” translation. It is with these words that Giulia Sodi, a young director and documentarian, succinctly summarizes her exhibit “Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty.” An atheist herself, brought up in an environment not hostile to faith but completely devoid of it, she decided to throw herself into the deep end of the raw material comprised of the three interviews of Julian Carrón, Charles Taylor, and Rowan Williams, in order to find therein a path on which the immense and eternal themes of freedom, the existence of God, and hope could enter into dialogue with the world of today. In order to do this, she used every possible language: from the amateur videos of social media to the films of great directors, from the rappers to Leopardi. “It was not an operation of simplification, of rendering banal such profound testimonies. ‘Pop’ does not mean ‘vulgar’ but ‘credible,’” explains Sodi, who for three months worked side by side with the four curators of the exhibit in a mutual exchange. “I was the one who had the least familiarity with certain topics, but I said to myself: if faith really does still have a chance to resound in the hearts of men and women, then I want to see it.”

How did this research unfold?

I needed to focus on the point in which the three interviewees encounter my lay soul. I asked myself: “But do these themes speak to me as well?” Not everything was comprehensible to me; however, I understood that the questions from which their reflections are born are profoundly related to my life. If I think about my life, my husband, and my daughter, I too have the problem of hope. And so I did nothing more than let surface that which they suggested to me, seeking to use all of the languages that people inhabit every day. At times, the rhythm of the video is a bit febrile, but it depicts the context in which we live today.

Can you give us one example?

In the first room, Taylor speaks about the time when his father was dying and how, on Easter night, he was lit up by the words that the choir sang during an Orthodox celebration: “Christ with death has won over death.” It is a strong affirmation, paradoxical, that I struggle to comprehend. But, because of the effect that it had upon him, I know that there must be something in it that is true for everyone. A kind of message for humanity. For this reason, I chose images of the underwater mu-

seum of Lanzarote in the Canaries. For me, those underwater statues seem to be saying: “We are dead, but we are not finished.” Every death, even that of a stranger, speaks to us directly, bringing us back to life.

Is it simple to find these similarities between images and words? At times, they seem a bit vertiginous, or risky. Was this difficult for you?

The only struggle I had was that of prejudice. When Massimo Bernardini, with whom I had worked at Rai, proposed this project to me, I was frightened. I had my prejudices about those in the Movement, and the subject seemed too elevated, too grandiose, for me. I asked myself if I would truly be able to communicate my ideas with the curators. Instead, as soon as we began to work, I was amazed by their openness. We had a mix of competencies, experiences, and sensibilities in a relationship that was at first timidly approached, but, in time, became ever more direct. They asked me a thousand questions. And there was a moment in which I felt free myself...

When?

When I proposed adding the image of a ballerina on skates: it is a video that I am deeply attached to, but

they were perplexed. They didn't understand what it had to do with anything and they asked what my reasons were for wanting to add it. It was at that moment that the door between us was flung open.

In this picture, the girl on the skates moves between images of persons who are sick and images of natural beauty. What does it mean?

That girl on the skates communicates to me exactly that which is communicated by a perfect sunset or the peace of a young person who is sick but surrounded by friends: equilibrium. It is something that happens in the instant in which you live without feeling the weight of life. When you move gracefully amidst the gravity of things. My explanation convinced them in the end. And from that moment, our work together began to proceed, as we added piece after piece, continuously open and attentive to each other. It is not that common of a thing...

You all became friends?

Yes. I believe what happened is what is recounted by the exhibit. "The other is a good for me," says Carrón at a certain point. For me, it was the discovery of something that I had always known. It is a privilege when work offers you the opportunity to question yourself and to be with people who do it with you. The four curators are all teachers, but they didn't ever try to teach me a "lesson." The other helps you to discover who you are, what is most precious for you, what you need in order to take another step along your path. I remain that which I am, but becoming so involved with these themes, to the point of suffering because of them in certain moments, helped me discover that there is something attractive in someone who lives the faith.

Why "to the point of suffering"?

For me, it is impossible not to suffer when one becomes involved in something so deeply. For example, I stayed in front of the concept expressed by Carrón as

the "irreducible nature of the human heart" for weeks without understanding it. I had to ask for "tutoring" on Sunday afternoon from Alessandra Gerolin (*Editor's note*: one of the curators). She explained it to me, word by word, and it seemed to me that I understood the concept, but I came away from the Meeting saying to myself, "But how is it that I keep understanding and then forgetting this bit about the irreducible nature of the heart?"

How was your first visit to the Meeting of Rimini? To one group who was beginning their visit to the exhibit, you said, "I invite you all to look at this without prejudice, without superstructures. Exactly as I had to do as I was working on it."

I wanted to go around the Meeting by myself, without mediation. The first thing I did was to jump into the exhibit incognito, without telling those who organized it that I was there. I was moved to see people before the screens and the people were moved in turn. It didn't matter whether they were eighty years old or fifteen: they let themselves be wounded by what had wounded me: a desire for life that connects everything, that "makes us allies in the world," as Williams had said.

Did you find traces of this desire for life in other parts of the Meeting?

I saw *You Are Worthy*, an exhibit on Ugandan women who are victims of war and of AIDS, who live a life today that has been saved through someone who loved them. In another moment in which I was taking a break, I found myself seated next to about thirty young people who were singing together, exuding an uncontrollable joy.

Then, the day after you returned...

Yes, I met Carrón and walked through the exhibit with him. He welcomed me full of curiosity. I told him numerous times that this final product has not only to do



© Archivio Meeting

with believers, but also intersects with the interests of those who are far away. It is an occasion to try to show what faith is for those who have it and what is the nature of the attraction that ties a believer to his or her beliefs; speaking as an atheist, it is much different than what I normally see at weddings and funerals. Often, I see a formalism that contains nothing of this heartfelt attraction. But more generally, I wanted to say too that the Meeting is a gesture of which secular society has

great need—there are too few spaces in which it is possible to begin the process of reflecting on where we are and where are we headed.

The last room of the exhibit concluded with the same images that opened it: an enormous collar of small screens from which were shown glimpses of a humanity agitated by its own needs. Why this choice?

It is based on the idea that the voices of Carrón, Taylor, and Williams

come forth surrounded by a bombardment of voices that assaults us all every day. Their story, which speaks of bewilderment and hope, does not pretend to be the resolution of every enigma, but rather, offers the possibility of seeing, even within confusion, that which resists confusion. I wanted to end it in this way because I feel that I am in an eternal present—we must always return to understand anew that which we have already understood. ■

Who am I?

“Rose’s women” from Kampala, Uganda, were the protagonists at one of the most visited exhibits at the Meeting in Rimini, entitled *You Are Worthy*. Here is what they experienced in their days at Rimini.



12

Anifa. With what I have seen in my life, I never would have dreamed I would come here. Nobody in our clan has ever left Kampala. I believe they'll write about it in the newspapers. The people amaze me with this Italian heart that I saw first in Rose (*Editor's note*: Rose Busingye, founder of the International Meeting Point of Kampala). I was amazed by a little 11-year-old girl. At the exhibit she watched the video of our stories and cried. I thought, what a heart God must have given these people! I've never seen people who offer such friendship that comes from the heart. I'm used to people liking you because of what you have or because of your appearance; nobody considers who you are. Now that my certainty is getting stronger, the question “Who am I?” is growing within me. When I return home, I'm going to tell my children that we're not alone; we're not rich, but we're not alone. We are loved. If everyone had this heart, the world would change. I'm Muslim and many ask me why I follow people who are

not of my religion. They ask me why I sell *Traces* if I can't read it. I sell it because I know that the things written inside have value. There is beauty inside it. I'll never stop selling it. Those who criticize me because I journey with Catholics are backwards, but they help me rediscover what I'm following. I know what I have gained inside me. I do it because it makes my life better. It increases my being. I follow the meetings with Julián Carrón even though I don't understand everything. I watch him and feel that what he's saying enters my heart. In the morning, too, I think over that man's words. They continue to give me life and being. If I didn't follow, I wouldn't still be alive. What we talk about in the exhibit is small compared to what we've been through. It's like a speck. We've lived a life that is fearsome.

Akello Florence. This is my first time in Italy and at the Meeting. I arrived here and I began seeing something I've never seen before. Rose al-

ways tells me: “Don't reduce yourself because you are of great value.” If you do not reduce yourself, God will bring, great things begin to happen. I've met faces here that have slowly given me answers. I'm experiencing the certainty that there's always Someone with me. All the affection I receive is a call from God: “Come closer, come closer to Me.” The people here look at me with love. I can't even describe it. This is what I am bringing home with me for the people I love, not just for me. I return knowing that there's this call; that where I am living is the right place.



© Archivio Meeting

Agnes. All the people who saw the exhibit were moved and touched. Before I arrived here, I wondered if there would be people who would come to see all this. I thought that nobody would come up to say hi. Instead, as people left the exhibit they asked if they could hug us and they were crying. Nobody knew us and they were touched anyway. For me, this is the proof that what Rose says about our value being the same as the value that the people who came to the exhibit rediscovered in themselves. This is why people can truly identify with the pain we've suffered. I've seen this reciprocity of love, not only received from but also given to the people we meet. This is why people who saw the exhibit have felt my pain; they were at my side, even if they didn't suffer everything I experienced. Even now the question presses me: "Who am I?" And all those with this question are able to understand.

Claire. It is a gift from God to be here. Before arriving, I had many questions, above all about friendship. I sensed that God was telling me, "Come, I'll give you the answers in Italy." I found that the people who asked me real

On these pages, the women of the International Meeting Point of Kampala at the exhibit *You Are Worthy*. Above, Rose Busingye.

questions, not just polite questions, were sincerely interested in us. It's surprising: I went to lunch and dinner with people and shared many important things with them, and they shared a lot with me too. I discovered a friendship that I've never experienced with other friends. I went to the exhibit *Living Without Fear in the Age of Uncertainty* and I understood that Christianity is a thing that attracts us and is not just talk about rules. What I experienced here is something truly interesting. I don't believe that anyone said to these people, "Be nice to the people you meet and try to have deep conversations." My experience has been challenging and interesting because it has generated a lot of questions in me. I feel loved. But who am I to receive all this love from people I'd never met before?

Apolut Florence. I am discovering that I'm not alone. For me it was a dream—day and night I thought about it: Who am I to go to Italy? Why does Rose hug me even though I have AIDS? When I met her, I had all the signs of the sickness but I was embraced anyway just as I was. Here too, I've found the same embrace. For me it was incredible just to be able to take an airplane—me, a person from the forest, with everything I've gone through. I was isolated because I had AIDS. They didn't let me have treatment, but when I met Rose, she welcomed me and didn't ask about my ethnic group, but instead said, "You are worthy." I didn't even know what "worthy" meant. I thought worth was something only rich or educated people had. I didn't know I was of worth because I have AIDS

and people were continually telling me I would infect them. Rose took my children and brought them to school where they receive the same love. When I accepted Christ into my life, I understood that my worth is greater than poverty, disease, or education. Now the more I live, the more I feel Christ living inside me.

Ketty. The first thing I experienced is that the people showed me love. I was told that people here are distant because they're afraid of COVID. Instead, what happened was something amazing that set back into motion what I had inside and is "pulling me up," giving me so much. The thing that surprises me the most is that people call out "Ketty, Ketty..."—they know my name. After they see the exhibit, they ask me many questions. "Why are you hap-





© Archivio Meeting

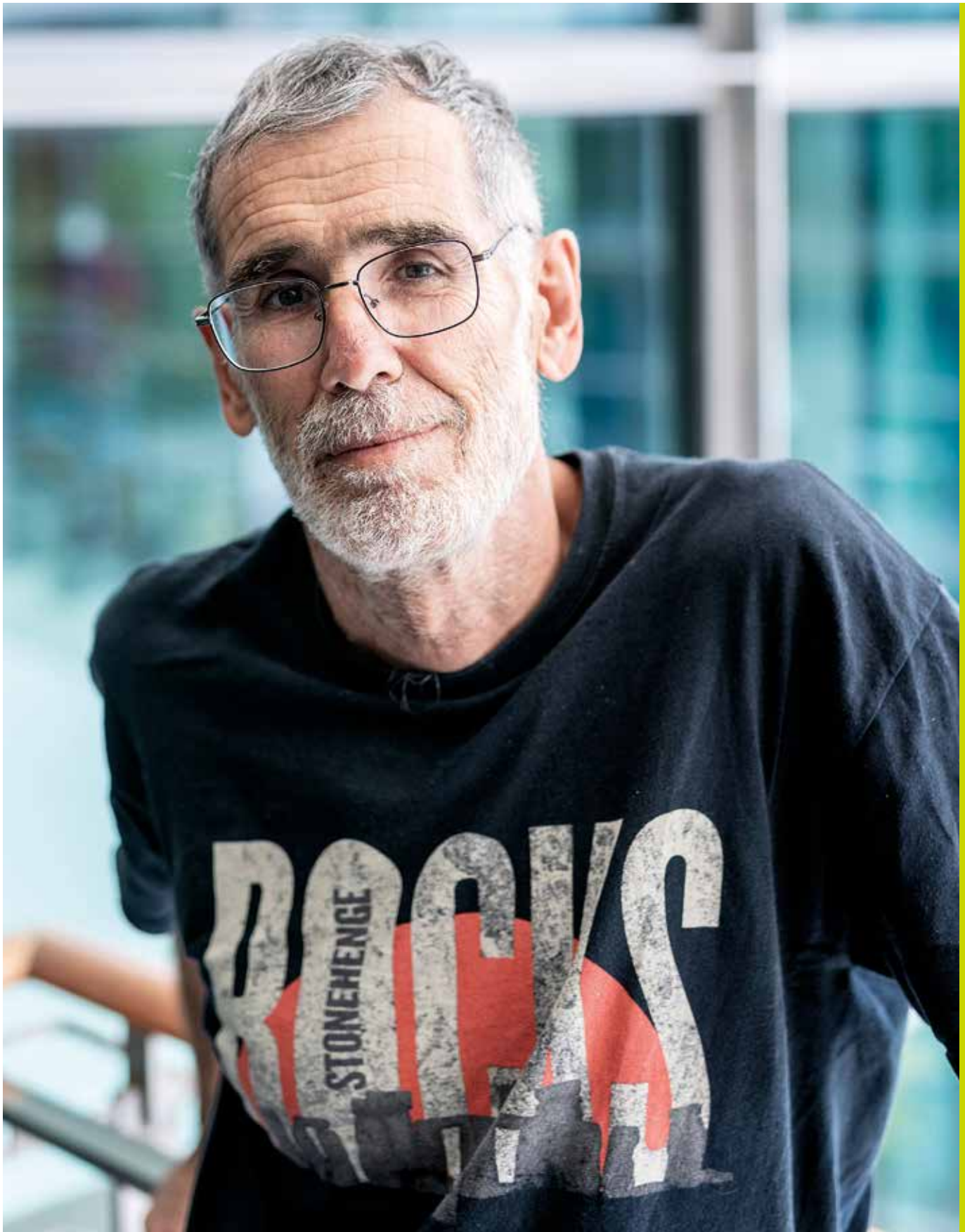
py? Why are you laughing? What you've lived through is unspeakable, but you dance and sing." At times I answer crying because these questions are deep in my heart. Then I think that if they ask these questions, it's because they're suffering too, so I'm surprised at myself and ask, "Why are we laughing?" They ask me about the Luigi Giussani High School. Before, our children went to school in a place where they hated their lives. I didn't want them to experience what I experienced. The school has literally saved our children's lives. This is why we sing—to give thanks. We can't thank you in a different way, but with singing, yes. The question is "Who am I?" and the answer is that I am what I'm experiencing now.

Rose. These last two years of isolation have been difficult because I couldn't meet with people or even go to visit the women. I was surprised when I told them to be careful not to get another virus and one of them answered, "We will be what God wants." I was taking God out of the moment, out of the fact of COVID. This year two of our young people died, one from leukemia and another because he didn't accept treatment. I was angry. Then I heard Carrón talking about a person who died, who was better off than us. What a slap in

the face! He said, "You're judging reality without faith, as if God had nothing to do with reality, with the moment." And then I said, "I haven't lost You. With Him I can say, 'Danielino, I haven't lost you. Mark Trevor, I haven't lost you.' We don't lose anything if we have our gaze on Him who is greater than us. I'm happy, even if things leave me breathless. I'm still breathless, but as the women say, we have a place where we can ask our questions. I don't lose the moment because my friend lives in it. He lives in me, lives in the moment. I'm very happy about the Meeting because it renews my way of looking at things and my faith. It renews my certainty about what's at stake now: it's not so much the exhibit. Maybe Anifa's life will fill the Exhibition Center. And even more, I get a knot in my stomach when I ask, 'Who am I to be so favored? I'm nothing, but You love me so much. Who am I? Who is God that He takes care of me? If I measure myself, I don't find anything left over; the more I go forward, then nothing is left over. Why does He care for me?'"

It's not that we've found the answer, because it's still moving to ask, "Who am I?" It's not so much that someone should give me an answer; it's a crying inside myself, and asking, "Who am I that you take care of me?" Because I'm nothing, I know. ■

Close-up



The miracle of existing

“Every city should be like this place.” Juan José Gómez Cadenas, a Spanish physicist, spoke at the Meeting of Rimini about himself and his questions. “Why are we here? What is all this that is never enough for me?”



Paolo Perego

The issue is simple. “What we see, touch, and observe never cease trying to amaze and move us.” Juan José Gómez Cadenas, a 61-year-old Spanish physicist, directs the NEXT experiment on neutrinos at the LSC, the Canfranc underground laboratory in the Spanish Pyrenees. Cadenas has worked all over the world, from the US to Japan, including at CERN in Geneva, to advance his studies in particle physics. “In fact, I work on the origin of the universe,” he said at the beginning of his talk at the Meeting of Rimini, “the reason all of reality exists.” It was not difficult to spot him among the stands, observing with curiosity and surprise something he did not expect to find. “It was a shock when I arrived here. I thought right away, ‘My goodness, these are Christians, but they’re not here lighting candles.’” He talks about exhibits and encounters with people from all over the world and of many religions. “It’s a place where you can talk about art, cinema, and physics, about everything.” Full of interesting people, he adds—“especially the young people, all of them smiling. It’s like a village where people are more happy than sad. They’re more affable, more open. And so I think, ‘Every city should be like this place.’ Everyone should see this Meeting that offers itself to the world as an alternative or a complement to the life of each person. It’s as if to say, look, it’s better to come to an exhibit, speak with people, eat together, and then go hear a talk about the brain rather than staying glued to social networks....”

He came to Rimini because of an invitation from some friends and colleagues of the Movement he’d met over the years. “People who, meeting me just as I am, proposed that I journey a stretch of the road together with them. Just like what happens at the Meeting. I wish everyone could meet something of the kind.”

Juan José Gómez Cadenas
at the Meeting of Rimini.

So, who is Juan José Gómez Cadenas? We know you as an internationally renowned physicist...

It's difficult to define oneself. Certainly I'm a scientist, but that's not all. I love literature, too, and I've written a few novels, a bit for fun. But in order to write, first of all you have to be a passionate reader. I have read and read a great deal ever since I was young. The third factor is that I'm the father of two children, Irene and Hector, and the husband of my wife. This defines me totally: family, science, and literature. And I'd add my passion for languages, which arose from my love of literature.

And physics? What was the origin of your interest?

I don't know. It's odd, but I don't know. Perhaps it was the same sensation of surprise and fascination that fed my passion for literature. The point of departure is the same; it's the same disproportion and to go into things more deeply.

That is?

My father was career military and we moved often. I was little and every time we arrived in a new place it was exciting. There were many opportunities to meet people, but also a fear of being alone. This moves you; it fills you with questions and doesn't allow you to be placid. And with all the new things you encounter, you feel the need to explain them to yourself, so I read books and learned languages. This is the similarity between literature and physics—they dig into different aspects of reality but start from the same inquietude. "Why are we here? What is all this that is never enough for me and consumes me inside?"

So then, the origin is wonder.

And the need to find meaning in the face of what you see. When I was lit-

tle, this happened through literature. Physics probably "arrived" when I discovered that the world that fascinated me so much could be measured, quantified, and understood. I was in high school when I began to realize, thanks to a teacher, that everything is ordered. What a wonder! And in pursuing this and arriving at quantum physics, I understood that it's true that the universe is measurable and understandable, but that it's equally full of mystery, of things we can't explain. Physics comes as an attempt to explain, as a search for the meaning you perceive.

But if in science there remains mystery, can it be a good road for finding that "meaning"?

Meaning does not mean certainty: "I've understood everything! Now we can go." Rather, it's a matter of saying that there's some certainty in my uncertainty. It doesn't lessen you to say that you don't know something. In history, every time we thought we understood everything, something unhinged our convictions. Think of the Greeks, who realized that the skies have an order and don't just follow the whims of the gods. Or Galileo. Or in more modern times, the discovery of the quantum nature of the universe, which is more mysterious than we had thought. The more steps forward we take, the more we discover that there are more things we don't know. This is anything but considering the case closed. I want to continue finding something that drives me further on. This is science. The more you progress, the wider the prospect of mystery that opens out.

What is this mystery for you? Is it connected with faith?

Often the idea of faith is reduced. Personally, I don't believe in God, but neither do I define myself as an



atheist. I'm someone who observes, looks, doubts, examines, and says, "This is interesting. I don't understand this yet. Let's see what's behind it." Does God exist because He has spoken with me? It scares me to say this. But it also sounds strange to say that God doesn't exist. For me, it would be stupid to think of believers as crazy. They see a part of reality that I don't see. I haven't had a revelation like they have, but precisely for this reason we have a lot to look at together and compare ideas on. This holds also for those who deny the existence of God. As a physicist, I have faith in science. I have to have it in order to be a scientist, otherwise it doesn't work. I must have faith in science and in human beings because this is the only way to move, to go forward, to take steps.



© Archivio Meeting

What do you mean by “faith in human beings”?

You don't need to be religious to understand what I am saying, even if they tell me it's something deeply Christian. But I think it's human, first of all. I think of giving and receiving. In my life, I've always tried to give, at home, at work, and with my friends, without expecting it to be reciprocated right away and without calculating, and it has always worked. My family is the best thing that's ever happened to me; my children are a miracle. And then my friends... Sometimes things don't work out right, but more often that hundredfold the Bible speaks of is can be experienced. Even if we are all imperfect, and not as free as we would like, in the end, the factor in life that defines us is, Do you have hope or not? I do, and mine is in human beings. Where does it come from? I don't know. For me, it's one of many mysteries. How can all this be defined as anything other than faith?

Human beings are imperfect, yet capable of wonder and hope. Do you think human are made well or badly?

There's a Spanish poet, Blas de Otero, who speaks of the human being as “an angel with great wings of chains.”

We're imperfect, but there's something in us that's absolutely savable. Human beings are fallen angels who want to fly but can't manage to. However, there's hope, and the ability to be a bit better each time. The history of humanity shows an evolution in the quality of feelings, the way we look at human dignity, children, women, rights. Certainly, maybe it's not all beautiful the way we would want, with many steps backwards, but the general drift, the tendency, is positive. For Christians, God made us in His image. I think we come from the mud but we see an angel, a “god” that perhaps we invented and we want to be like him. We're not perfect in anything but we aspire to be so. My faith is based on this aspiration, this possibility. I speak again of my children, but they are the brightest example of this, a daily experience of it. Faith needs material things. I'm not a person who can believe by engaging in abstraction. I have the good fortune that every day I wake up and I see in them a demonstration that human beings have a future, a hope.

Why?

Because they're there, because I see them grow and “evolve.” Because my son comes to me and says to me, “Dad, today I read a book by such and such a philosopher.” Or my daughter, who hopes to become a doctor, who tells me that she learned something new giving emergency medical help to someone while she was out shopping. Well, in those moments I feel that the universe becomes a lovable place. For this reason, hope is not an abstraction. Human contact, another person, something concrete, is needed. A miracle.

And for you, what does it mean to be the object of these miracles, to become conscious of them? You said that among the various things that move you, there is the fact that in the history of the universe, human beings occupy a microscopic portion of space and time, yet it is precisely in human beings that an awareness of everything happens.

On this point, there's an analogy with what I study, neutrinos. You can imagine the neutrino as the most insignificant thing in the universe: it doesn't interact with anything, it's everywhere, nobody pays any attention to it. Or you can take into consideration the hypothesis (what I'm working on) that the origin of the universe as we know it lies in the neutrino. You can imagine the same thing for human beings. You can take the nihilistic position and say that nothing has meaning, that human beings don't count for anything, that they are part of an insignificant species in an insignificant world, and so on. Or you can look at the probability that you and I are here, now, speaking: if

the point of view is the history of the universe with all the variables in play, the probability is zero. But then why are we here? It's a miracle. A miracle of God? I don't know, I don't think so. But I feel incredibly fortunate.

What does it mean to hope, if, as you have stated on other occasions, there's nothing before life or after death?

It's true, I think so. But this doesn't frighten me. I did not exist before, and I will not exist later. But I'm here now and I'm observing an inconceivable miracle. If we are the object of this miracle, if we are capable of seeing it and understanding it, then our responsibility is not to pretend that we don't see it. You can say that God exists or that He doesn't, but if the whole universe happened, and if it has happened that we exist as we are, that we can understand it, that we can interact in this way among ourselves, feel the love we feel or eat a sandwich with pleasure, we can't look at these things without being amazed and moved. Whether you say it's God or not, the point is that the miracle is the same. Reality is reality.

So the point is to allow yourself to be surprised?

This happens to me constantly. If two days go by without it happening, I think I must be sick. You know those sensations that take your breath away? The "wow?" They happen for me in front of my children, but also during a walk in the fields with my wife, seeing the marvelous blue sky, or swimming in the pool. Simple things, little things. Or in front of what you're doing in the laboratory, when you realize that the thing you're working on *exists* and isn't a simulation or an abstract theory. The first miracle is that things exist, that you exist. If you have your eyes open, the miracle of being alive is evident. The Catalan poet Jaime Gil de Biedma says that "the fact of being alive asks something." I'll take that a step further: not the fact, but the miracle of being alive. You can't help but feel gratitude. I'm full of gratitude, and it doesn't allow me to remain tranquil or passive.

I'm listening to you, and it's hard not to think that Christianity exalts exactly this humanity that you describe.

This is a very interesting point. What impresses me about the figure, I wouldn't know whether to say literary or historical, of Jesus, is that He is a man. My family, like everyone in Spain, was Christian. I've read the entire Bible. When I was little, I liked the Old Testament a lot; it is full of compelling stories. The Gospels bored me. I didn't understand anything about this guy who spoke in parables. When I was seventeen and *Jesus Christ Superstar* came out, I began to explore and read various authors who spoke about Him. The more I read, the more He interested me. But who was Jesus Christ, truly? What did He say? Out of everything, the thing that attracted me the most was His compassion. For me, the most crucial passage of His life was the episode of the widow of Nain: "Woman, do not weep."

Why?

I see myself in her place in front of that man who shows us another way of conceiving of life, one that is more beautiful, more good, a different horizon. And whether we like it or not, this way of conceiving of life has shaped our

way of living today, at least in the West. Our whole civilization starts from Christianity, even though there are also dark moments in the history of the church. Today, just as children rebel against their parents, many people try to deny its influence, but it's impossible. If tomorrow some extraterrestrials arrived, they would see our wars, all the social injustice, the fact that we're devastating our planet, our evil, and they would ask, "Why shouldn't we destroy them?" Then they would see our cathedrals. "It's an ugly species, but look what they can make." They would spare us.

What do you mean?

Our society is obsessed by the affirmation of the ego, the value of the individual. I, too, care about this. I, too, want to succeed in what I do and be acknowledged, but this isn't enough for me. It's not enough to be a great physicist, an excellent husband and father. I'm someone who's working on a great "cathedral," a bigger building. Not a pyramid—that is for the pharaoh. In the cathedrals there is a different sense, a sense of a community that is in relationship with something bigger than itself. For some, they were built for God. For others, like me, they can signify the striving for the all. In a story by Asimov, a machine recognizes the existence of God when human beings reach the apex of knowledge. Thus, God can exist or be only an aspiration, as He is for me, but in a certain sense, what's the difference? In both cases it's not possible to resign yourself to being a banal accident without a future. Deep down, banality is another way of expressing a lack of hope. Christianity combats banality. For this reason, I find many friends among Christians. ■

Close-up

The cord and the hundredfold

© Archivio Meeting



As a volunteer during the pre-Meeting, I worked as a forklift operator, which for me as a student of Energy Engineering is the most beautiful job in the world because it is a fantastic machine! But after a few days I began to tire of it because I was alone practically all of the time and there were many hours with nothing to do at all. I said to myself, “Why did I come? It doesn’t make sense.” But then at the assembly with the volunteers a man stood up to speak and my friend sitting next to me elbowed me and said, “He’s the father of the boy who died two years ago.” The man began talking about the task he was performing in those days: holding taut the end of a cord also held taut by another person so as to position the chairs in a straight line, a much more boring job than driving a forklift. But his expression was different from mine. He held a cord taut and he was happy! How was it possible? I was missing something.

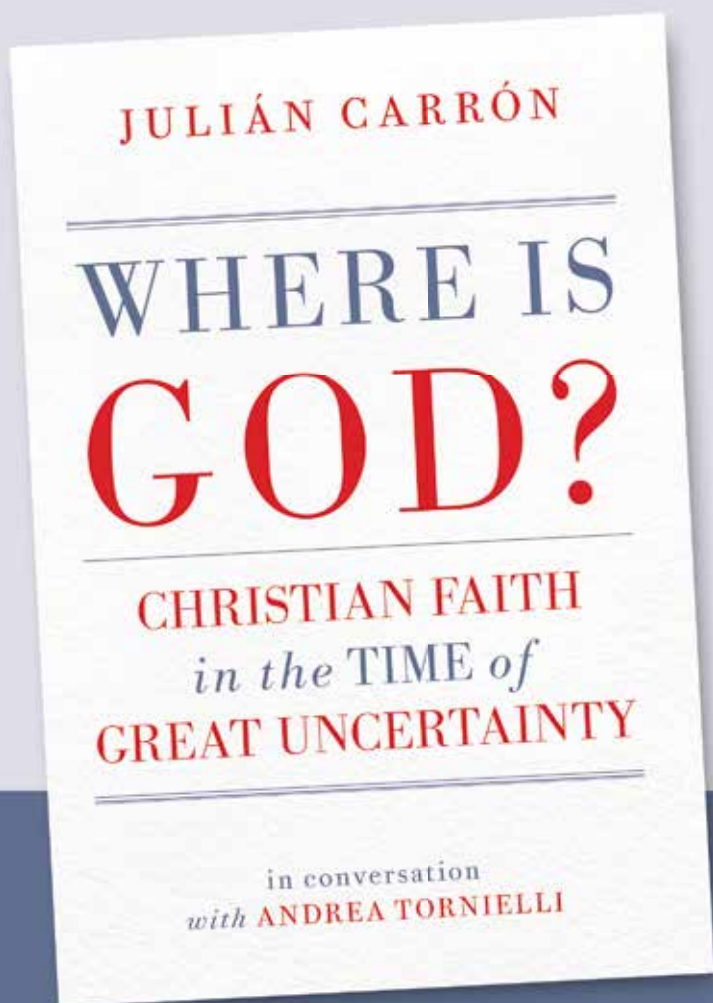
At a certain point the man said, “I’m grateful to you. Holding this cord changes the world, because who knows, maybe someone coming to the Meeting may be struck by the straight line of chairs.” Pointing to us young people, he added, “One child has been asked of me, but coming here, following this companionship, I find another hundred.” Jesus’s words immediately came to mind. “You will obtain the hundredfold here below.” I looked at him and thought to myself that in this companionship he was living the entreaty for meaning that surged up in him from his dramatic situation, and he was enjoying life a hundred times more than me. For some time, I had sensed that life is made to be given, but it seemed like a piece was missing. During the assembly it became clearer to me: you have to give your life

for the work of an Other, who incarnates Himself in this companionship. If you do this, no matter what the circumstances, you will obtain the hundredfold here below.

The day after, I “experienced” that intuition. Listening to that father and seeing his face made me look differently at the people to whom I brought the loads of rocks; their eyes gave me companionship. In addition, at the pre-Meeting we engineering students of Milan usually have a series of games in which the freshmen of Bovisa campus challenge those of Città Studi, but up to that moment none of us had taken it upon ourselves to organize it. So, during my lunch break I began to organize the challenges together with some of my friends. Nobody had asked me to do it. I did not “owe” it to anybody, but giving that one hour of freedom made me gladder. Afterwards, the first-year students came to thank us. “We hadn’t expected you older ones to get involved in this way.”

What that father had described was happening to me, too. The more you give, the more you discover something for yourself that is generated in others. Through the journey I have made, I am learning that responsibility does not require a commitment or special effort or capacity, but means involving myself in the life that I see happening.

Giacomo Lonardoni



WHERE IS GOD?

CHRISTIAN FAITH
in the TIME of
GREAT UNCERTAINTY

Julián Carrón
in conversation with
Andrea Torielli

Should we battle a plural and relativistic society by raising barriers and walls, or should we accept the opportunity to announce the Gospel in a new way? This is the challenge Christians are facing today.

In an extended interview with Vatican expert Andrea Torielli, Julián Carrón examines the historical moment we are living through in order to revive the essential core of Christian faith. Starting from the realization that the world is experiencing an evolution in which the difficulty of finding shared values and natural morality makes sincere dialogue between believers and non-believers challenging, Carrón reflects on the possibility of communicating the essence of the Christian faith in a form that can inspire interest in modern times.

Addressing the central questions concerning the announcement of Christian faith in today's less regimented society, *Where Is God?* discovers and rediscovers the contents of Christianity and asks how they can be witnessed again in a society that is not yet post-Christian, but potentially headed in that direction.

Julián Carrón is President of the Fraternity of the lay Movement of Communion and Liberation and Professor of Theology at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan.

176 pages - \$ 29,95 CAO

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS