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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



MEETING 2017

WHAT WE EARNED

Diary from a Rimini Meeting that helped us discover
the treasure we already hold in our hands

SHARPEN YOUR SIGHT

There was a moment in this year's Meeting of Rimini that gave form to everything, and thanks be to God, it came right away, at the beginning. It was the message from Pope Francis, sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, who also gave a talk on the last day of the Meeting. You will find the full text further on in this issue. There is a simple reason for the power of this message. Not only is it the key for understanding the days in Rimini, but it also indicates an ever-valid method, a compass to check constantly, in order to avoid "the disease that can strike the baptized" at any moment: "spiritual Alzheimer's," the forgetfulness of our personal relationship with God.

This is the source of the existential fear and uncertainty that often knock the breath out of us and cut our legs out from under us. "If we become 'forgetful' of our encounter with the Lord, we are no longer sure of anything." Salvation passes through "one road: actualize the beginnings, the 'first Love,' which is not a discourse or abstract thought, but a Person." It is necessary to "return to [...] that blazing light with which God's grace touched me."

It is not a matter of memories, a dive into a past that must be regained, but something present, now, "blazing," like a fire that burns, living, like the Love for a Person who is here. Deep down, this love is the true contribution we Christians can give the world.

At the Meeting we saw very well this hand-to-hand struggle between the past and present, between the risk of transforming our patrimony into ashes and the chance to live it now. It was seen in the key moments (the talk by Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the words of Parolin, and many other encounters), in many places (just think of the exhibits), but also in the way certain themes were faced (work, geopolitics, science) that only at first glance were more "marginal" than the Pope's words.

However, there was another invitation in that message, an explicit one to those who experienced the Meeting: "to sharpen your sight in order to catch the many more or less explicit signs of the need for God as the ultimate meaning of existence, so that you can offer people a living response to the great questions of the human heart."

This issue of *Traces* you hold in your hands tries to do this, by setting forth some of the many things that happened in the days in Rimini, to which the Close-Up is dedicated, and also by recounting events like the recent International Assembly of CL Leaders in Corvara, and like the story of Paul Mariani, an American poet and critic, struck by the encounter with a reality like CL, and in many other big and small happenings that you will find in these pages. Enjoy your reading, and your search. **T**

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e Liberazione for the texts

by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

RIMINI MEETING 2017

A LIVING LEGACY

A week to "sharpen our sight." These pages contain guideposts through what happened in Rimini: what have you inherited? And how does it become "yours"? Here are the "living responses."



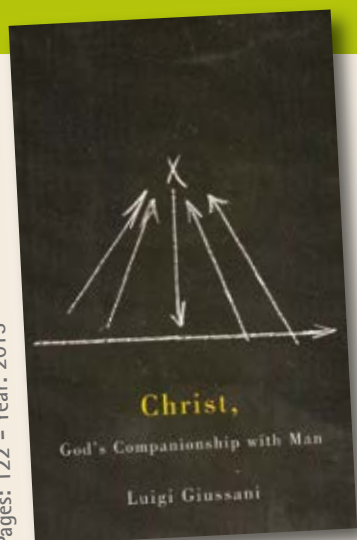
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LUIGI GIUSSANI

This volume is a selection of the most significant writings by Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005), founder of the Italian Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation, which is practiced in 80 countries around the world.

Presented by Julián Carrón, Giussani's successor as head of Communion and Liberation, *Christ, God's Companionship with Man* is the most succinct introduction to the breadth of Giussani's thought, including


memorable passages from works such as *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, *Why the Church?*, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, and *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Many speak of Giussani as a friendly presence, a man who believed that it was possible to live in faith every day and in any circumstance. As a writer and religious scholar who was deeply devoted to his work, Giussani's teachings and reflections have come to generate worldwide recognition and support.



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RAMADAN, CONFESSION, AND THE RELIGIOUS SENSE


 Hello, Fr. Carrón: I've been living in London for a few years and for the past six months I have been sharing an apartment with a young Muslim woman. From the beginning, our relationship has been a fascinating challenge because it means every day coming face to face with a culture different from those found here until recently. During Ramadan, I jokingly asked her if it was possible to break the fast a little but then make amends with something like our Confession. She took me seriously and told me no and then asked me to explain the meaning of Confession and why another man should enter into a private relationship like the one between you and God. I was caught a little off guard because usually, at least in Great Britain, when you are in front of someone with different ideas from yours, you try to be as superficial as possible. You try not to ask too many questions to avoid unpleasant conflict or misunderstanding. She was asking the exact opposite of me. Not having any great theological background, I told her about a Confession I had made a few months earlier with a very dear priest. Beyond telling him my sins, I had presented him with a series of doubts I have about faith, in contrast with everyone around me. So I told her how I felt embraced because before absolving me, the priest told me what were the points of light in his daily experience that gave him strength in front of the darkness that often surrounds us. I tried to



explain to her that if it hadn't been for that priest and some of my friends, it would have been impossible for me to encounter God. Then she said to me, "I often ask myself the same questions." From there was born a very intense dialogue about the meaning that religion has for our life, in our relationships with our friends who are for the most part atheists. Little by little, as we moved forward, the dialogue focused more and more on the ultimate question that we all carry within us. At the end of the evening, I told her that most of what I had said came from an encounter with a certain Luigi and some friends who had introduced him to me. Then I showed her *The Religious Sense*. She asked me if she could read it and I left it with her. The next day she said, "The book you gave me is beautiful. I've almost finished." I thought she was kidding so I gave her a look and she repeated, "I mean it. It would be a book for all of our nonbelieving friends to read." Even though lately I've been shaken by the level of deep hatred and division, the other night I went to bed a little happier and certain that the heart of man is one and it desires His embrace.

Mario, London (Great Britain)

A COFFEE AT THE MOUNTAIN REFUGE

 Dear Fr. Carrón: we are a group of teachers who follow GS. During the vacation, on the day of the hike, we stopped at the refuge with a group of students who didn't do the hardest climb. We ate, drank, played, and chatted. Lorenzo, one of us, went to the counter to get some coffees. He came back all smiles. "Four coffees on the house." Amazed, we asked why. He told us that he explained to the owner who we were; a group of teachers who accompany the GS kids. He explained to her where this experience was born. The day before, the woman and her children had passed by the bike path where the teams were playing, with their colored T-shirts and their enthusiasm and she stopped to watch them. She said to Lorenzo, "For people like you, the coffee's already been paid for. We always need more people like you. Thank you."

Andrea, Saronno (Italy)

"AND I THOUGHT I WAS DOING A BLITZ AT RIMINI...."

 "Not all encounters are an encounter." In the blitz of a day at the Meeting, this phrase of Fr. Giussani's was there in the background. I saw a few exhibits—very beautiful! So many witnesses and beautiful faces. Such a climate of openness seems impossible these days. At one point, a small, almost hidden exhibit caught my eye. My wife and I joined a small group and followed the presentation. A Portuguese girl in a wheelchair was explaining the exhibit while a man,



THE COMMON FUND

PAOLO'S QUESTION

Dear Fr. Carrón: in 2015, my husband was diagnosed with a stomach problem. In December, he had surgery and then chemotherapy. The course of the illness was not easy; so much so that he had to stay home and depend on others. He had always been very active: his work, the life of the Movement, service to the parish. What he would not give up, for as long as he was able, was his breakfast and School of Community every morning. For him, this was what helped him face the day, full of circumstances that humanly you would not want to live. In November 2016, during his last hospital stay, his body was failing. To include him in family life, I would bring bills to be paid with the excuse that I didn't understand certain details, and he would remind me of their due dates. Around that time, we also had to pay our contribution to the Common Fund. Each morning when I arrived at the hospital, he would ask me the same question: "Did you pay the Common Fund?" I would answer yes even if it wasn't true. The doctors had given Paolo less than a month to live. I asked myself, "How can a conscious person in his state of health insist on a simple bill to pay? What does it mean to him?" In the evening, thinking over the day, I retraced our story. We couldn't help but be grateful to the Lord for all he gave us to live together—our engagement, our marriage, our daughters. We were not spared any difficulty, but thanks to this story of grace that the Lord wanted to give us in encountering the Movement, He allowed us to live everything with intensity. In the end, I gave in and paid the Common Fund because I realized that for my husband, the Movement was the dearest thing he had.



Marina, Pellestrina (Italy)

also Portuguese, translated into Italian. It was about a journey that, starting from *An Original Presence* by Julián Carrón, walked through some of Fr. Giussani's steps during the course of the Movement, arriving at today's challenges and the need for a presence that is not just reactive. Constança, our guide, lit up as she explained; without hesitation, she lined up dry, precise sentences. The translator often stumbled. Her intense body language spoke loudly: every time she pronounced the word "Christ" she jumped in her chair. There was a new challenge in

her life: moving from high school to the university. She was leaving the comfort of known friendships, was afraid of facing the "new," but had the certainty that what she had encountered in school and in the people there was more than just the school and her friends. "Therefore, it can be met anywhere I go." The exhibit of the Portuguese youths was born from a challenge in front of a meeting organized by some students in favor of gay couples' right to adopt. The answer that some of them wanted to give was to organize a similar meeting with an opposite

point of view. What would have been the result? A wall facing another wall where nothing has changed, with the realization that they had "already neutralized the others." From there they returned to the text and to the discovery of the urgent need of an original presence. While returning home, I kept thinking of Constança and her friends, and that almost-hidden exhibit. A true "encounter" makes it clear that by risking an experience, you can regain what was given to you and make it your own now.

Davide, Milan (Italy)

A LIVING LEGACY

A week to “sharpen our sight.” These pages contain guideposts and pathways through what happened in Rimini: what have you inherited? And how does it become “yours”? Here are the “living responses” from the Meeting.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

Stopping to think. “It’s precious,” Pope Francis says. Stopping to “consider the great questions” that define us. It’s the first value that Francis sees in the Rimini Meeting, a contribution offered to all those living a life that’s rushed, fragmented, and arid. But also a responsibility toward this world with its short memory that has become “a sad litany of conflicts,” as Cardinal Pietro Parolin said in the beautiful talk he gave on the last day of the Meeting.

Between the letter and the final address was a week fully immersed in the task given: “Sharpening our sight.” In his message, the Pope wrote, “Sharpen [your] sight in order to catch the many more or less explicit signs of the need

for God as the ultimate meaning of existence, so as to be able to offer people a living response to the great questions of the human heart.”

Bishop Pero Sudar, an Auxiliary for the Diocese of Sarajevo, was one of the 300-plus speakers at the Meeting. He told the story of an old Muslim man from a small Bosnian village during the war who was part of the mass killing of his Christian neighbors. It was his role to kill or drive out all of them. After two months, however, he took his own life. He left a piece of paper on which he’d written, “I can no longer live, because there’s no one left to have a coffee with.”

“It wasn’t the people that he started to miss; it was humanity,” Sudar said.

In the cry of the conscience of this one man, Sudar sees light, not darkness; he sees the only “prime matter” that can always give back hope, even in the most difficult situations: that ineradicable root of humanity, that desire for a life that is true.

For that man in Bosnia, simply not being alone wasn’t enough. Nor is just *being here* enough for us, according to Gianni Dessì, one of the artists showcased in the exhibition of contemporary art. He created the giant hand holding a lantern that stood in the middle of the space, illuminating the questions, anxieties, and discoveries of the thousands who visited the exhibition. He wrote, “Our ‘here and now’ has its foundation in a >>

"ALL THAT YOU HAVE, BEQUEATHED YOU BY YOUR FATHER, EARN IT IN ORDER TO POSSESS IT" August 20-26, 2017



» relationship with history. Merely being here tells us nothing.” The week in Rimini was an exploration of that relationship, delving into all the dramatic, polite, fierce, creative, and bitter ways in which people live a relationship with their own history, whether at a personal or collective level, including their culture, their faith, their family, their teachers and ideals, the values and the wounds they’ve received. In summary: they find all that inside themselves.

ONE LITTLE WORD. The first awareness offered by the title from Goethe (“All that you have, bequeathed you by your father, earn it in order to possess it”) is of all that we receive. “In order to find anything again, you have to lose it; lose in the sense of a reality that belongs to you, and rediscovered again as a gift.” It’s a passage from the talk that Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, gave on the week’s theme. In a title made up of weighty words, in his opinion, there’s a small one of great importance: “you.” Bequeathed to “you”... “We have to become persons. Mature adults,” he said. “You aren’t born a person, you become a person. If not, everything continues to be abstract.” And he helped us understand what it is we inherit: not just the customs, attempts, dreams, and sacrifices of our ancestors, but first and foremost their *desire*. “We take time to remember not out of nostalgia, but to reawaken our desire.” Seeking to keep alive what are often just memories in our world: the big questions, as well as the responses uncovered by the lives of those who preceded us.

It’s this memory that a young woman who’s happy to have been enlisted in cleaning up the exhibition halls is living, because she’s certain that “God will continue to gather me back up just as I’m gathering up all these »

THE POPE’S MESSAGE

“Only One Way: Focusing on that ‘First Love’”

The letter from Cardinal Pietro Parolin on behalf of the Holy Father, on the occasion of the 38th edition.

The themes of the Meeting each year invite reflection on aspects of existence which the pressing rhythm of everyday life often causes to be set aside in brackets. Everything seems to overwhelm us, gripped as we are by the anxiety of rushing to turn the page. Life is fragmented and at risk of becoming arid. For this reason it is valuable to stop every once in a while to ponder the great questions which define our human ‘being’ and which cannot be ignored completely.

In this sense we can also read the theme of the 2017 Meeting: “All that you have, bequeathed you by your father, earn it in order to possess it” (Goethe, *Faust*). It is an invitation to regain control of our origins through our own personal experience. For too long it has been thought that our fathers’ legacy would endure as a treasure that need only be preserved in order to keep its flame alight. It has not been so: that fire that burned in the heart of those who have gone before us has slowly abated.

One of the limitations of today’s societies is having too little memory, disposing of what has preceded us as a useless and heavy burden. But this has serious consequences. Let us think about education: how can we hope to help the new generations develop without memory? And how should we think of building the future without upholding the history that

has generated the present? As Christians we do not cultivate nostalgia for a past that is no more. We instead look forward confidently.

We do not have spaces to defend because Christ’s love knows no insurmountable limitations. We live in a favorable time for an outward-bound Church, but a Church rich in memory, impelled by the wind of the Spirit to go to meet the man or woman who is searching for a reason to live. There are countless traces of God’s presence throughout world history; indeed, everything begins with Creation, which speaks to us of Him. The true and living God wished to share our history: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (*Jn* 1:14). God is not a memory, but a presence, to be welcomed ever anew, as the beloved of the person who loves.

There is a disease which can strike the baptized and which the Holy Father calls “spiritual Alzheimer’s”: it consists in forgetting the history of our personal relationship with God, that first Love that conquered us to the point of making us his own. If we become “forgetful” of our encounter with the Lord, we are no longer certain of anything; then we are attacked by the fear that impedes our every movement. If we abandon the safe port of our bond with the Father, we fall prey to the whims and desires of the moment, slaves of “false in-



“It is not a discourse nor an abstract thought, but a Person. The salutary memory of this beginning ensures the necessary impulse to face the ever-new challenges that demand equally new responses, always open to the surprises of the Spirit that blows where it wills.”

finites” that promise the moon but leave us disappointed and sad, desperately searching for something to fill the void in our hearts. How can we avoid this “spiritual Alzheimer’s”? There is only one way: focus on the beginning, the “first Love,” which is not a discourse nor an abstract thought, but a Person. The salutary memory of this beginning ensures the necessary impulse to face the ever-new challenges that demand equally new responses, always open to the surprises of the Spirit that blows where it wills.

How do we get to the great Tradition of the Faith? How does Jesus’s love reach us today? Through the life of the Church, through a multitude of witnesses, who for 2,000 years have proclaimed anew the coming of God-with-us and who allow us to relive the experience of the beginning, as it was for the first to meet Him. For us too, “Galilee is the place where they were first called, where everything began!” and for this reason it is necessary “to return to that blazing light with which God’s grace touched me at the start of the journey. [...] When Jesus passed my way, gazed at me with mercy and asked me to follow him [...] reviving the memory of that moment when his eyes met mine” (Pope Francis, Easter Vigil Homily, April 19, 2014).

That gaze always precedes us, as Saint Augustine reminds us, speak-

ing of Zacchaeus: “He was seen, and therefore saw” (*Sermon 174, 4.4*). We must never forget this beginning. Here is what we have inherited, the precious treasure that we must re-discover each day if we want it to be ours. Fr. Giussani drew an effective image of this task that we cannot abandon: “[T]hose who love the child instinctively offer him, and fill his knapsack with, the best of their experiences [...]. There comes a point, however, when nature gives the child the instinct to take this knapsack and look at it. [...] What one has been told must become a *problem!* Unless this happens, it will either be irrationally rejected or irrationally kept but will never mature. Once the child has this knapsack in his hands, he rummages around inside, examining its contents. [...] The young student will now explore the contents of his knapsack, critically comparing what’s inside of it—his received tradition—with the longings in his heart [...] a need for the true, the beautiful, and the good. [...] By doing so, he will gain maturity and become an adult” (*The Risk of Education*, Crossroad Publishing, New York, 2001, 9-10).

“**Earning one’s inheritance**” is a commitment to which Mother Church calls every generation; and the Holy Father invites us not to let ourselves be frightened by toil and suffering, which are part of the journey. We are not allowed to look at reality from

the balcony, nor can we remain comfortably seated on the sofa to watch the world pass by before us on TV. Only by earning anew the true, the beautiful, and the good left to us by our forebears can we experience the epochal change in which we are immersed as an opportunity, an occasion to communicate the joy of the Gospel to people in a convincing way.

For this reason, Pope Francis invites the organizers and the volunteers of the Meeting to hone their vision in order to discern the many signs—more or less explicit—of the need for God as the ultimate meaning of existence, so as to be able to offer people a living response to the great questions of the human heart. This year too, visitors can see in you trustworthy witnesses to the hope which does not disappoint. You speak to them through meetings, exhibitions, performances, and above all, your very life.

While asking you to pray for his Ministry, His Holiness wholeheartedly conveys to you, Your Excellency, and to all those participating in the Meeting, the Apostolic Blessing as desired.

I extend my personal good wishes and, as I await my intervention on the last day of the Meeting, I convey to you my most distinguished respects.

Pietro Card. Parolin
Secretary of State

» cigarette butts.” The volunteers, are—every year—the primary wonder of the Meeting. There were over 2,000 during the week and 400 who put it together, coming from all over the world, from Canada to Russia and Madagascar to Indonesia, and in most cases to do work that was hidden from view.

THE SALT AND THE MONKS. On the following pages you will find the words and images that marked the Meeting, especially the many “Meetings within the Meeting”: those myriad opportunities for dialogue and witness that weren’t on the schedule. On-stage, the discussions ran the gamut from economics to health and science to politics, featuring speakers from all over the world.

“There’s a word we must repeat to the point of tiring ourselves out,” Cardinal Parolin reminded the audience at the end of his talk: “Dialogue.” We certainly never tired of seeing dialogue in action, of the way it broadens our horizons, or of hearing the Venezuelan chef Sumito Estévez, who brings his witness from a country “on the brink of an abyss.” He talks about his beginnings as a social entrepreneur, and how he watched total strangers run to his aid when his cooking school was destroyed. “Since the day I was reborn from the mud, I’ve no longer been deaf to the encounter with the other.” And seeing Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi, Rabbi David Rosen, and Muslim thinker Muhammad Al-Sammak together on stage, you learn something simple but radical: “Meeting each other makes all the difference.” You also learn about their “holy envy” for all the truth that the other carries. “Discovering this divinity is an obligation,” Rosen said.

If salt is not mined and processed the area where it exists becomes a desert, the Calabrian businessmen from the exhibition “You Are the Salt of the Earth” would say. A bishop



VOLUNTEERS. They numbered 2,259, from all over Italy and the entire world. Plus 400 for the “pre-Meeting.”

gave them the use of over a thousand acres of farmland, and they invested their money and energy despite not owning it. In the end, between the orchards and the videos, all the questions, rather than being resolved, became “yours”: what does it mean to “possess” something, why doesn’t something have to be given in order to bear fruit, and what is the source of our freedom in what we do and with what we have?

The Meeting took place just a few days after the attacks in Barcelona and at a time when Italy had been hit once again by an earthquake; at the time of the debate over the *Ius Soli* bill and over the ban on the transfer of refugees from rescue boats. In Rimini, Italian Parliamentarian Luciano Violante, who organized the “Epochal Change” series of talks, found a place “where cynicism is nowhere to be found, with a kind of innocent wisdom,” while what prevails outside is “a shrug of the shoulders.” After 38 years, though the scale has grown and despite all its limitations, the Meeting has maintained

its personal, rather than formal, character: there’s room for everyone and for all their passions. Each person follows his own path through the week and the most important encounters may be those that happen by chance. Or in situations where everything was taken for granted.

Each day, dozens of people came together for an ecumenical prayer service in a space dedicated to the friendship between Fr. Giussani and the Buddhist monks of Mount Koya. That was what most touched the heart of Wael Farouk, who, along with his Muslim friends, had been invited to participate along with Christians, Buddhists, and Jews. The first day he went, but thinking of it as a bit of a formality. “Then, I was faced with the sincerity of their prayer. It blew me away. And made me embarrassed. This is how you rediscover the importance of the person, and not just ideas. This is what presence means: being attentive to the person.”

This is the outlook that redeems everything: in restorative justice, when



living through a war and keeping Catholic hospitals open to anyone in Syria, whether “you’re named Peter or Mohammed,” as Archbishop Mario Zenari said. The person is also the key in trying to understand fundamentalism, which is the project of Olivier Roy. He said, “European values don’t mean anything anymore; we need to offer a space for spirituality.” And it was helpful, in the exhibition put together by Russia Cristiana, to look again at *revolution* as a violent radicalization of a “void”: by affirming one’s idea of the “new man,” the person and her freedom were negated.

“I COME HERE TO BE CHANGED.” Little by little, “what was bequeathed” comes to light: the most important tradition passed on to the present day is the “I,” the person and the drama of his or her life, without which there could be no people or communion. It’s concrete as can be, demonstrated in part in the way so many people—young and old alike—approached the talks and exhibitions in a posture of asking,

questioning, as if to say, “I came here to be changed.” You find this theme repeated throughout the thoughts of Claudio Chieffo, jotted down in his notebook with a childlike innocence even as he grew older. His notes accompanied a long history that continues today, in which an entire people present at Rimini has been immersed: “There’s only one thing I’m sure I must do: change. And there’s only one way to change: to love. And only one way to love: Christ.”

“You can’t live off an inheritance,” Pizzaballa said, paraphrasing the title from *Faust*. “You have to remember that, and remember it well,” he went on to say. “We lose too much time waiting for momentous occasions, but those aren’t what transform our existence. What makes a difference is not the size of the event, but rather the degree to which you put yourself into play; it’s knowing that life belongs to us.” We learned it over the week from the volunteers, and from the figures of the Bible—who are all imperfect, but who at least take their destiny into

their own hands—as Joseph Weiler recounted in an open conversation with Fr. Stefano Alberto that deeply engaged the audience. And again, in seeing seasoned professionals let themselves be re-energized or corrected by younger counterparts in the exhibition on work.

“Work can be lived to the fullest if, while you’re working, you do not forget yourself,” said Abbot Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, Abbot General of the Cistercians, as he strolled through the Fiera. For him, the title goes hand in hand with the Prodigal Son. “The inheritance wasn’t the money that he threw away; it was the father. Our inheritance is being sons and daughters. And every man or woman knows this in his or her heart: in culture, in science, in history... in everything, the heart burns with this being a son or daughter. And no matter what conception of it you might have, the encounter happens because of this shared awareness.” Then he adds, “We throw away our inheritance, but God never stops making it possible for us to regain it.”

FATHERS AND SONS. In the performance hall, the words of Cain as rewritten by Fabrizio Sinisi echo off the walls. His play retelling the stories of fathers and sons in the Bible was one of the 14 performances throughout the week. “My Father, I have killed a man; I have done wrong; I have betrayed everything, and destroyed everything that I have touched—but never in any moment have I forgotten that I am a son. The abyss inside that defines me, the void that knows not how to be filled, the wound that makes up this ruined heart, all the evil in me—it all speaks of you, father; everything calls out for you.”

And nothing and no one is excluded. There’s even a magnificent inheritance for the children born into violence to women kidnapped >>

» by Ugandan militants who were forced to kill family members, for whom those children were the reminders of the past and of their feelings of guilt. But they learned how to love them, despite the way they came into the world, through the embrace of Sr. Rosemary Nyirumbe. “Those children have an inheritance in God,” she said. “And they can once again occupy the place God assigned to them when He created them.”

THE UNEXPECTED. There was a recurring theme at the Meeting: respect for the humanity of other people, for their efforts, that filled the halls with applause during the talks or after the guided tours, beyond any difference of opinion or background. Fausto Bertinotti, without pausing to worry what might be presumed about his relationship to CL, engaged in an intense conversation with young people, sharing what he finds most urgent for today’s world: “Vigilantly awaiting the unexpected. You are experts at this.” The unexpected is “what appears on the scene that you never could have predicted. However, if you’re ready, it favors your freedom. Therefore: let’s put our trust in the unexpected and prepare ourselves for that.”

That Bosnian bishop mentioned above comes back to mind for the amazed look on his face when he first entered the Fiera. He stopped and asked, “Is all of Italy here?” He’s a regular attendee at such conferences, but the numbers—especially of young people—couldn’t compare with those at Rimini. “No one is interested in listening anymore. Especially not sacrificing a day of summer. There’s a force of attraction here.” One by one, but speaking as if he had every person who stopped in at the Meeting in front of him, he continued to exhort: “You have to engage with what is good, even when you’re totally convinced it won’t work. Goodness never fails.” **T**

And this **Inheritance** Can Be for Everyone

Excerpts from the talk by Archbishop **PIERBATTISTA PIZZABALLA** on the quote from Goethe’s *Faust*.

BY PIERBATTISTA PIZZABALLA

We need to go back to what makes us into something new, something different; to recreate a sense of community, a community of believers brought together by the faith of each, and a community that knows how to enter into dialogue. This is the desire passed on from generation to generation. It’s a desire that is fostered not by regret, but by hope. It’s the desire that built the cathedrals of the past and is now, perhaps, called to build something else, something we will need to understand and define over time.

This “something else” will, in any

case, be characterized by the “Christian style,” which doesn’t mean making demands on the world, but is rather a proposal, a proclamation that then finds its concrete expression in the realms of life and society, in culture, economics, politics, etc. It’s the Christian way of proclaiming that, “God was made man so that man might remain human [...] and to teach them to recognize his glory which surfaces everywhere in everyday life,” (Fabrice Hadjadj, *Resurrection*), illuminating, through the Christian experience, the various realms of life, infecting them with hope and bestowing them with meaning.

THE “CHRISTIAN STYLE.” There’s another passage in the Gospel that we should then, perhaps, revisit at this point. “Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord,’ and what he told her,” (Jn 20:18). The Christian is the one who announces, as did Mary Magdalen: “I have seen the Lord.”

Another Christian way of speaking about inheritance, about earning and a new possession, is in reference to witness and evangelization. In these new times in which we are called to live, we need to rediscover the joy of evangelizing, the awareness that we have something beautiful to say and to give



ON THE THEME. The Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

THE VOLUNTEERS

to the world. Being an heir is also a question of awareness. There's so much beauty, goodness, and truth in the Gospel we've received and in the Tradition through which it has been passed down to us. Without this firmly-rooted awareness (and only a myopic reading of this could mistake it for fundamentalism or integralism...), the fruitful dynamic of inheritance turns into a useless and generic marketing strategy or, even worse, into taking up and defending a position.

This proclamation, to the extent it fits the style of the Kingdom, which is courteous, but without defeatism, welcoming but not indifferent, is the concrete and privileged form through which the Church entrusts her most precious treasure—the pearl that exists on this earth, among men and women, so that they can attain it—to future generations. On this topic, I would invite all of you to read Sections 21-22 of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*) which seem to have been written yesterday because of their current applicability.

CALLED TO BUILD. We would be misguided, then, if we limited ourselves to complaining about what has been lost without taking account of what we've been called to build. Paraphrasing the parable of the talents: if I do not make an investment, losing something to put myself into play, I won't have gained anything, and I won't possess anything, not even what I thought I had. In the end, I'll have lost out and that's it. This is where our future will be decided. Are we still capable of responding to a proposal, a proclamation, that's comprehensible, attractive and provocative? Of responding to an inheritance received from our forefathers, but also new and inter- ➤

“Shay” and the Friendship That Carried Him This Far

BY PAOLO PEREGO

He wipes down the tables and sweeps beneath the chairs in the food court. It's only been two years since that journey over the sea. A nighttime departure from Libya, then two days amidst the waves of the Mediterranean. “Then we saw a ship and the coast of Sicily.” Cheikh, pronounced “Shay,” is 24 and grew up in Senegal, where he left his mother and family behind, and where his father is buried. He's one of the thousands of people who've set foot on the coast of Italy over the last few years. Welcome centers, interviews and paperwork... “Now I work for a cooperative in Varese. We grow fruit in a public park downtown and give it to the city's food bank.”



Giulio and Cheikh.

AND HERE HE IS TODAY in the Fiera along with 2,259 volunteers who are the lifeblood of the Meeting. He wears the bright blue T-shirt for “general services.” Like Giulio, a few years older, who invited him to Rimini and circulates through the halls selling raffle tickets. They met in Varese at the food bank, where the Italian friend makes jam with the fruit Cheikh grows. Now, they're sharing a hotel room. Giulio says, “He is Muslim, and when we go back to the room in the evening, we, together with Giacomo, the other guy in the room with us, who's volunteering for the performances, tell each other about our day, and then Giacomo and I pray a Memorare while Cheikh kneels down for his Islamic prayers.” And in the morning, they

set upon the road once again for the convention center.

“Many people ask me what I'm doing here,” the Senegalese youth says. “They told me there was this place where thousands of people come to meet each other. All from different nationalities, ethnicities and religions [...] where you could enter a dialogue and get to know each other to build something.” And so here he is as a migrant, to “build something for the future. Because if there's one thing I've learned since I came here it's that doing something for others, not being selfish, helps to build something

that's good for everyone. Just like here.” In other words, the common good is for my good. “I'd like to go to school, maybe to study medicine. Then go back to my country, where there's a lot of need.”

His discussions with those he met as he cleaned tables in the food court were not without some differences of opinion. “For example, with my coordinator, who was up in arms about the fact that women aren't respected in Islam [...]” He explained that that's not the case everywhere in the Muslim world. Many of the cultural aspects are different in a number of the Muslim countries.

“One evening, back in our room, I was distractedly organizing my things, making a lot of noise,” Giacomo recounts. “Then, I realized he was praying.” Cheikh prays five times a day. Giacomo's brother gave him a compass to help orient him to Mecca. “I looked at him” Giacomo says, “[and thought], ‘How many times a day do I remember my God the way he does?’”

» esting, that has something to say in the world of culture, of science, of technology, and of formation? Not a purely ethical, impersonal Christianity. It's useless talking about Christian values without saying that Christ is the best thing you can encounter in life.

THE GARDEN AND THE CITY. We're not talking, then, about rebuilding walls that separate us, about distancing ourselves again from the world, but about knowing how to embrace the reality of the world as a provocation that calls to us, today, just as it called our forefathers in the past. There is nothing within human experience that cannot be illuminated and find its true value in light of the Gospel experience. And this is precisely our task, which only we can complete. Then, something new will happen: what we have "earned" through this process of the Gospel being incarnated in history will no longer be just ours, just mine or yours; but will be for everyone, will be an inheritance and a gift for everyone.

The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city. It begins in a place made by God alone and ends in another place where the work of God's hands is necessarily interwoven with that of human hands. In the Bible, God never built a city by Himself; he always needed the work of men and women.

The Jerusalem of Revelation, the city that descends from heaven, is also a new creation, but it's a creation that God does not want to realize without the help of human hands. And so He entrusts to each of us our talents; to some five, to others two, and others one. It is our task to turn them into the building blocks of the new Jerusalem.

(The full video in English is available at www.meetingrimini.org) **T**

A People that Generates a Culture

Sayed Mahmoud, a guest speaker from Egypt, describes his experience at the Meeting. And how the Pope "saved his country."

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

"Here there is a people that embraces a culture and a culture that embraces a people." Sayed Mahmoud, 48, is the editor-in-chief of *Al Ahram*, one of Egypt's main newspapers, in addition to writing for various other newspapers in the Arab world. He spent three days at the meeting before participating in a talk on Friday focused on Pope Francis's visit to Cairo. In these three days, he spoke with Wael Farouq and Mostafa El Feki, Director of the Library of Alexandria. He made his way through the Fiera, looking and asking questions. He heard his 19-year-old daughter Mona, who came with him, declare that "next year I want to come back as a volunteer." And he got a good sense of the place that his friend Farouq, an old classmate, had often told him about: "Here, culture isn't something abstract. It's of interest to everyone, it's tied to people."

views might be far from similar, but they agreed to come here to speak. It means that they found something greater than their own distinctives here to welcome them. They told me about how the Meeting started, many years ago. If something born out of a simple meeting of friends gets to be so big, it means that within it there's an intelligence that's greater than that of those who made it, something beyond what's human... Then, the most beautiful thing: the volunteers. They're extraordinary. Look, I've studied Europe and her history quite a bit. What I see here is one-of-a-kind.



Sayed Mahmoud.

In what sense?

The great shifts in history were all marked by this dynamic: an idea that later became a movement, a society.

Here, it's the opposite: there's a movement that's generating ideas. It's really interesting. And then, there's the strong connection between religion and reason. Usually, intellectuals look at religion as an obstacle, something that gets in the way of reason. Here, even though the origin of everything is a spiritual, religious movement, there's a way of using reason that demonstrates a harmony.

How did you see this?

One example was the talk about the uniqueness of language with Andrea



RELIGION AND HOPE. From left, Mahmoud, Mostafa El Feki (Director of the Library of Alexandria), Wael Farouq, and Javier Prades.

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The Forces that Move History are the Same That Make Man Happy

Moro and Giorgio Vallortigara. Two scientists who said, “Human freedom and creativity express a mystery that makes us go beyond what we see.” I found that to be a really beautiful idea: it’s not just God who can create, man can create, too. But man’s creativity doesn’t negate God’s; rather, it shows even more clearly how great it is. Reason and spirituality, together. Then, all you have to do is look at how I spent my day today. I began with prayer [*in a communal prayer service with Buddhist monks, Catholics, and Jews, inspired by Shodo Habukawa*] and I’ll close the day going to a play. Like a river that flows between two banks: prayer and art. One of Gandhi’s sayings comes to mind: “God dwells in a space where people arrive by many different roads.”

You spoke about Pope Francis’s visit in Egypt last April. What kind of effect did that visit have?

An enormous one. It changed the meaning of the presence of Christians in the public sphere. And, in some sense, it saved Egypt. The Pope came after two major attacks, both against churches. There was a serious risk of isolation. His visit broke open the isolation before it could even happen, and his presence was a sign of safety, for the people as well. The Egyptian people were really happy. They understood the weight of a visit from a pub-

lic figure at that level at that moment when they were wounded.

In your talk, you referenced “spiritual diplomacy.” What do you mean by that?

Spirituality can take on the role of diplomacy when traditional diplomacy is not able to play the part. The Pope demonstrated that well. This is why Egyptians celebrated his presence there. You saw posters and signs on every corner. The slogan they picked was also significant: “The Pope of peace in the land of peace.”

But why is it that spiritual diplomacy can be more powerful than traditional diplomacy?

Because it builds certainty in people’s hearts. More than politics, which makes agreements in order to serve certain interests. It’s a kind of diplomacy that draws people’s hearts together. There’s a lot of fear going around, and at a time of great fear, there’s a need for a religious man like Francis. The last scene from his visit was extraordinary. He chose to stay at the Vatican embassy, in a building overlooking the Nile. When they figured out that he was there, hundreds of people took to boats to greet him. When he came out to greet them, I thought he looked like an angel looking out on the city. For us Egyptians,

a religious man always brings blessings. And that’s what the Pope is.

What is the contribution Christians can make to Egypt?

A big contribution. Christians are part of our society; they’re not an island, something separate. Considering them that way is a Western outlook, not ours. Even the most zealous extremists have had a relationship with a Christian at some point in their life: a colleague at work, a classmate, a neighbor. So, even if a person is hostile, he or

she can’t cut Christianity out of his or her life. It’s like trying to cut out a part of your experience. Not to mention the fact that Christians make enormous contributions to our education and healthcare systems... My daughter studies at a Christian school and has many Christian friends. In Egyptian culture, in the renewal of the last century, the biggest names were Christians: Makram Ebied, Louis Awad... Look, this Western reading that considers Christians to be something separate in Egyptian society isn’t accurate. And it creates problems, adding misunderstandings to misunderstandings. Before there were problems, but there was a common language and a way to look for solutions. Like two brothers in a family: you discuss things and maybe you fight, but in the end you make up. We need to recover that dynamic.

In October 2010 the first attempt to do a Meeting in Cairo took place. Just three months before Tahrir Square and the revolution that changed the face of your country. Do you think it would be possible to consider it again now?

Yes, of course. Without any problem. Maybe even at the Library of Alexandria. **T**



IN THE VERSES OF A FRIEND

Invited to speak on American poetry at the vacation of a CL community, the American poet and critic **PAUL MARIANI** talked about his intense “shared life” with the authors of the 19th and 20th century to whom he has dedicated his studies. At a certain point during those days in the Catskills, he stopped answering others’ questions and started asking his own.

BY MATTIA FERRARESI

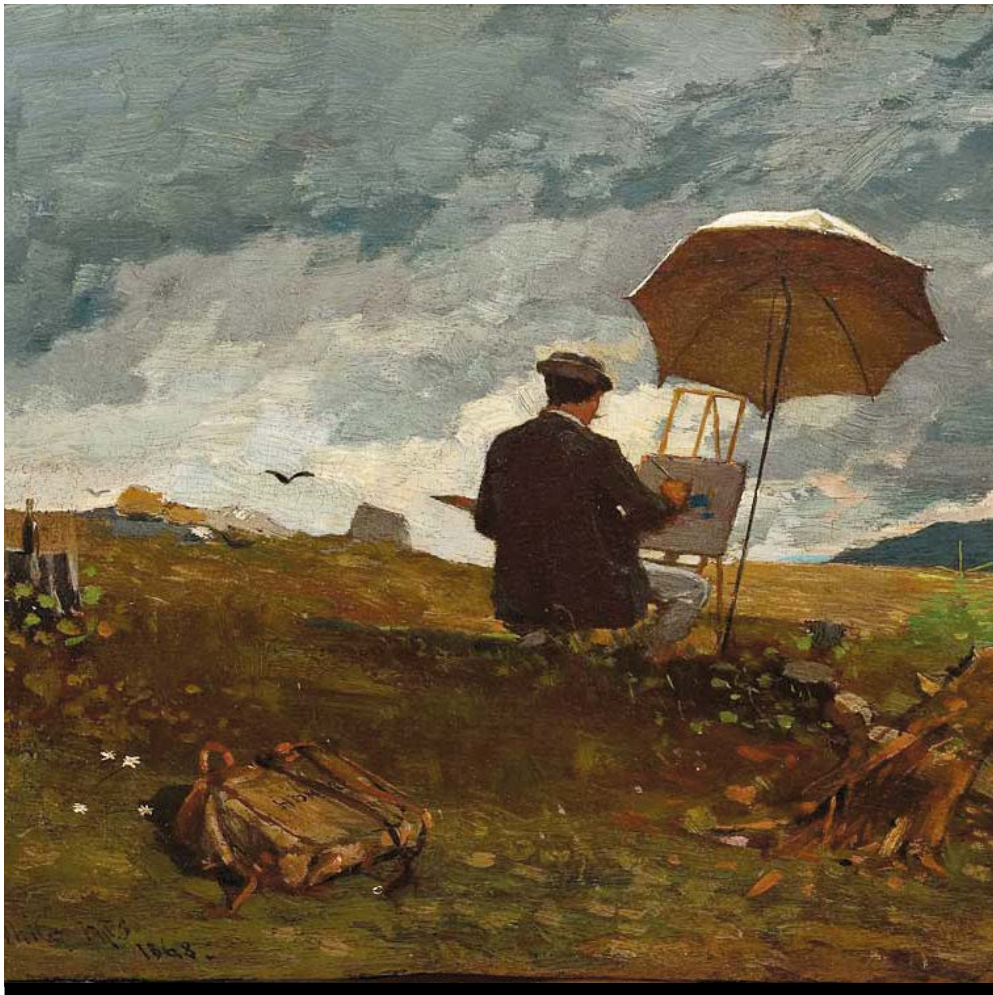
The first thing that strikes you about Paul Mariani is his voice: a warm, deep timbre, amplified by a solemn power that seems to come from remote, other-worldly places. It is an appropriate gift for a poet, one who moves in a realm where words and music embrace each other. When he recited Psalm 62 those gathered in the meadow fell silent. There was only the “exhilarating babble of the children,” as he called it, not so much a distraction as an accompaniment: “O God, you are my God, it is you I seek! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, in a land parched, lifeless, and without water.”

This yearning, this infinite thirst for a “You,” was the point of departure for Mariani’s talk, which was a magnificent synthesis of the human experience present in the verses of the American poets he loves. Mariani is a critic, poet, biographer, and professor of American Literature. Before retiring, he spent fifteen years teaching at Boston College, where is the best known to critics and the general public for his biographies of American poets of the 19th and 20th centuries, each meticulously documented, expert works, thrumming with life, the fruit of an >>

» intensely shared life with authors he never met.

During those days in the Catskill Mountains, Mariani seemed to be speaking about lifelong friends when he spoke of Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman. In fact, after listening to him for only a short while, it no longer “seemed.” They *were* his friends. He has spent close to fifty years “in the company” of Wallace Stevens, the last of the poets about whom he wrote extensively. In each of those years he has spent many of his days immersed in the smallest details of Stevens’s language, in the variations of grammar, in the images, in the mysterious inflections that only a trained ear and an attuned heart can perceive. It is there that Mariani first found proof for the poet’s conversion to Catholicism. There are no “papers” that prove it, he said, laughing, but his conversion is there in the eyes of those who have had the patience not only to read the poet’s words, but to establish a relationship with him.

When Mariani advanced his thesis in *The Whole Harmonium: The Life of Wallace Stevens*, published last year, the critics leapt down his throat, creating an intellectual riot in the pages of *The New York Review of Books*. The mystery behind an insurance executive becoming one of the greatest poets of his generation, of the same caliber as T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost, had to be silenced. In *Final Soliloquy of the Internal Paramour*, one of his last poems, Stevens wrote: “Out of this same light, out of the central mind, / We make a dwelling in the evening air, / In which being there together is enough.” In Mariani’s reading, “being there together” does not refer to the generic companionship of women and men, but to that “You” who is the only one who can ade-



quately respond to the structural lack that defines the human person.

As Mariani read the verses of his favorite poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, he still choked up, even after many years. His telling of the dark night of Hopkins’s battle with “my God” was breathtaking, because it was contextualized by Mariani as the story of a man who believes he has given everything to the Lord, only to realize, in a single instant, that he has held back a “reserve,” setting aside something for himself. As Mariani noted, “the only thing that makes you grow is to give yourself completely.” Then, in a lightning flash of Chestertonian good humor, Mariani exclaimed, “I love this man!” and threw a kiss in the air.

Mariani was quick to accept the invitation to give a talk on American poetry at the CL vacation organized by the Fraternity of Saint

Francis Xavier, a hundred or so young people from all over America. It is a group whose ratio of children to adults might seem sufficient for an immediate inversion of the winter of Western demographics. Also on vacation with the Fraternity in the verdant Catskill Mountains, only a few hours drive from New York, was Julián Carrón.

THE BROKEN TOWER. Mariani’s talk traced the seventh chapter of *Disarming Beauty*, in which Carrón describes the eternal trajectory of the human desire for meaning that matures to the point of becoming an entreaty: “This desire cannot survive even a few minutes if it does not become an entreaty, because the true form of desire is entreaty: it is called *prayer*,” writes Fr. Carrón. All his life, Fr. Giussani engaged in dialogue with poets who expressed sublimely the human per-



A work of the American painter Winslow Homer (1836 - 1910).

son's infinite desire, from Leopardi to Lagerkvist, from Rebora to Montale. Mariani recounted that American poetry, especially that of the modernists of the previous century, blazed with that same light.

The driving force behind the words of these writers is the religious sense. However, the establishment brushes aside these claims as foolishness. If Hart Crane speaks of "broken towers," the critics only see a phallic symbol, and read every word through the interpretive lens of Crane's homosexuality. Instead, Mariani discerns a tower built to strive for ultimate meaning, even if he recognizes that human energies cannot sustain the titanic force required. Heaven must be implored to come down to earth, as in Crane's ode *To Brooklyn Bridge*: "Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend."

Woven into the opaque verses

that Mariani opened up for his listeners, there is also a dialogue with the ideal woman, Mary, a recurrent and always silenced presence. Mariani's talk proceeded from image to image, gave glimpses, flashes, and took leaps from intuition to intuition, because poets deal with things, not lines of reasoning. His presentation was a sequence of frames, just like the 1920s movies to which Crane referred. Mariani opened and closed his hand in front of the wide-open eyes of his audience and said, "click click click," to illustrate visually the idea of the frames of those old movies. Every "click" was a snapshot that succinctly spoke about people like everyone else, but who had the gift of being able to communicate the import of their existential questioning. There was the New Jersey physician (Williams) who stopped to listen to bells, the middle-class manager from Connecticut (Stevens) who lived a torment that nobody saw, and the Jesuit missionary (Hopkins) who wanted to convert all of Wales and never saw even one of his poems published. Who knows how many of the Welsh later drew

close to the Church when Hopkins's poems were finally published?

One might ask whether poetry can still speak to contemporary women and men. However, the better question is whether there are still women and men who have not abandoned their desire for the infinite. From this perspective, there is no true distinction between poetry and life. Mariani testified to this not only by sharing his expertise—terrible word!—but by immersing himself in the life of the vacation. He came to morning prayer and came to lunch and dinner, always in discussions at table with his newfound friends and his beloved wife, Eileen. He chatted with Charles and Paolo in the shade of the big tent, while peaceful hordes of children—and adults—played water games on a football-field length soapy tarp. He answered everyone's questions affably, looking at people he had just met a few minutes before with the gaze of a close friend, saying, "it's just the beginning." In the relationship with this "You" everything is united, from Pindar's *Odes* to the silly skits.

FREE-RANGE CHILDREN. Eating tacos with his new friends and their families, Mariani stopped answering their questions and began asking his own. There was Carrón, with whom he inquired about the Movement and Giussani, especially Giussani's mysterious and beautiful relationship with Leopardi, analogous to Mariani's own relationship with the poets he had become friends with along his path. Embarrassed by the noise created by so many free-range children, not exactly the ideal setting for an academic desiring structured conversation, someone apologized. Mariani responded, "This is what Paradise will be like." **T**

WHO IS HE?

Paul Mariani (New York, 1940) is a critic, poet, biographer, and retired Boston College professor, who taught for over fifteen years, specializing in 20th century American poetry. He has published sixteen books, among them six books of poetry and six biographies of American poets. His most recent book, *The Whole Harmonium: The Life of Wallace Stevens*, was published in 2016.



CL LIFE

OBSTINATELY OUTSIDE THE DOOR

The INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY gathered, in the shadow of the Dolomites, 277 friends from 52 countries. An opportunity to come together and share the progress each is making on the journey. And going back to what generated it all, begging that it happen again.

BY LUCA FIORE

“Will I return? Should you refuse me, I would obstinately remain outside the door, like the beggar. I want to talk with you! I want to hear you, to see you! I deeply need you!” Just look at how many exclamation points Manzoni, in his novel *The Betrothed*, needs to communicate the state the Unnamed is in, after all the evil he committed, as he says goodbye to Cardinal Federigo. A soul pierced by the gaze of mercy, who knows he can no longer live without that source of his liberation.

This is the image Fr. Julián Carrón used to introduce the CL International Assembly of Responsibles (AIR), a

gathering of 277 leaders of communities from 52 countries. After many years, the event returned to Corvara, to the same hotel where the international vacation first happened in 1982 (“at that time there were only the Germans, the Swiss, the Spaniards and a few people from Ireland,” Michele Faldi remembers). Outside the window the Dolomites towered in silent beauty.

This year’s theme, “Does salvation continue to interest you?” invades the hidden folds of each person’s heart, not only of those who’ve been part of the Movement’s history for many years. It forces each to go back and take a good look at him or herself to see what point they’ve reached; if over



the years formalism has won out or if the flame of that “first love” continues to burn in their lives. And it takes courage to admit to yourself that formalism is winning out.

THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING. Beppe works in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Movement, he said, during the first assembly, has helped him to grow a lot over the years, “and yet, the more I move forward, the more acutely I’m aware of my sins; I realize I’m always repeating the same mistakes. There’s no change. Because of this, in the last few months I’d been overcome by a deep sadness. It was demoralizing.” Then a new CL family moved to the city. “Serious types, really radical. He

picked up on my sadness right away and said, ‘I expected to find a CL leader and instead I see a man who’s falling apart....’ I said to myself, ‘I’m more than that.’ So I started to try to spend time with them, I begged for their friendship. And I saw that things started to happen again. I saw that God doesn’t abandon me, even when I’m like this.”

“What does all this have to do with salvation?” Carrón asked. Beppe attempted to respond: “I understood that hope...” “Don’t pick words at random, look at your experience!” Beppe tried again, “I decided to call or go to them, not waiting for them to come to me....” “You were begging for them to come!” Carrón repeats. “We think our sadness is a curse, but instead it’s the beginning of everything; it’s a clearer awareness of our need. We think that change is about ‘performance,’ but it’s not. Change happens when we feel our need for Christ to save us more acutely: ‘When I am weak, then I am strong.’”

Gianni, one of the leaders of the community in Bari, spoke about how a decision he made was questioned during a local assembly by a person who said, “If you do that, you’re getting everything wrong.” He answered, explaining all the reasons for his actions. The other responded, “If that’s how it is, I’m handing in my Fraternity card....” At the end of the gathering, Gianni went straight to his car to head home. He thought, “I answered, I said all I needed to say....” But something kept him from getting in the car. “I couldn’t stop thinking about the way that friend looked at me, so I went back to ask if I could have dinner at his house that night. That way, I could meet his family. It was a real encounter—unexpected and exceptional. At the end of the night, he asked if he could come to School of Commu-

nity with me. That night, I understood that reality is good, that salvation speaks to me not *in spite of* but *through* the flesh. And I see that this recognition is something we work on every day.” Carrón responded, saying, “We’re not the ones who decide how the Mystery acts in our lives.” But when salvation does happen, “the signs are unmistakable.”

It’s those unmistakable signs that we see in the stories of Misha (from Belarus), Sumito (from Venezuela), and Jona (from China). Three “particular histories” emerging from completely different cultural contexts. All it took was being embraced by a professor (Misha), an invitation to present Fr. Giussani’s biography (Sumito), or a meeting in an airport (Jona). The hand of the Mystery finds its way through these back roads of our daily life to reach us. We are touched by the “God of history.”

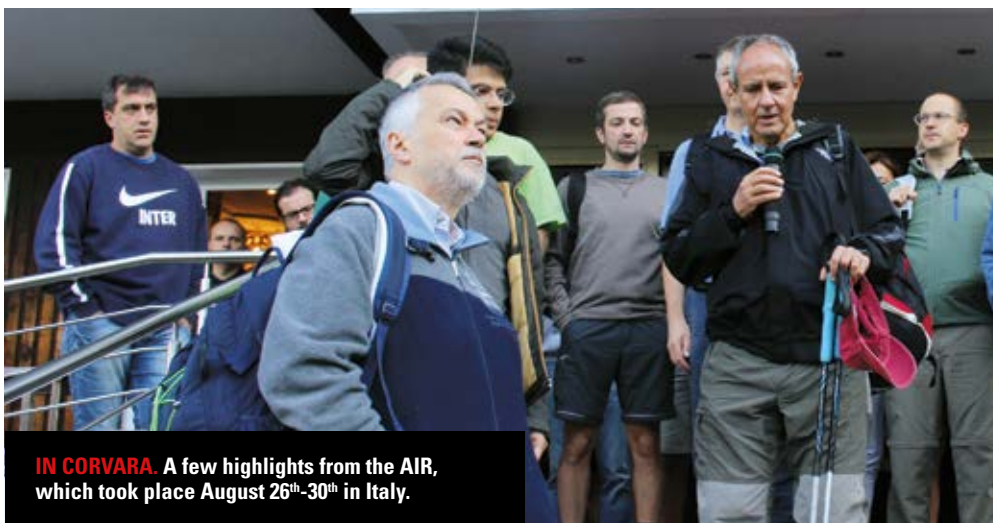
POVERTY. That touch is at the origin of everything. It puts our desire into high gear, enlightens the way we look at things, and transforms our prejudices into openness. It’s not confined to the realm of personal relationships, but rather overflows and proclaims itself to the whole world. “If the three dimensions of faith (charity, mission, and culture) are not born from this, from the experience of the event of Christ in our lives, then our gestures lose all that makes them interesting and attractive,” Carrón explained. This was clearly demonstrated in what Alejandro, from Caracas, said about his country, where in the last year each Venezuelan has lost an average of eight kilograms (17 pounds). People are hungry. However, within this situation that would seem inescapable, he and his friends have done their best to organize a response: not only for material >>

» needs, but also to meet the needs of those who don't want to be left alone in their hardships.

These are the poor that Pope Francis speaks of in *The Joy of the Gospel*, the “manifesto” of his pontificate (Fr. Stefano Alberto gave a talk summarizing the main concepts), people who are members not of a sociological category, but of a theological one: the poor in spirit, like those who are outside Cardinal Federigo's door begging to see the gaze of Christ again.

Also among their number are the sick patients that Alexandre, an oncologist in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, meets every day. Men and women who are not just asking to be healed, but to be looked at as persons with all their questions and weaknesses. The poor like the children of immigrants in Milan to whom Wael Farouq proposed that they pose a question to their parents they'd never asked before: “Why did you come to Italy?” The experience of asking this question set many of their lives in motion again, bridging the generational divide that is often (as Olivier Roy asserts) at the origin of the Islamization of radicalism, the animating factor of terrorism in Europe.

A COLORFUL SHIRT. Those gathered in Corvara included friends from Barcelona, filled with the questions awakened in them by fear during the attack on Las Ramblas. Others from Houston spent the time between assemblies looking at pictures of the flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey. Then there was Cinzia, a teacher from Palermo, worn out after an experiment with the GS students from Sicily. Their summer vacation was organized so as to split the time between Pollino National Park (in Basilicata) and the halls of the Rimini Fiera. She talked about her amazement at how astonished her students were at Rimini, asking hundreds of questions about the talks and the exhibits.



IN CORVARA. A few highlights from the AIR, which took place August 26th-30th in Italy.

Another participant who had been at the Meeting was Fr. Aleksandr from Kherson, Ukraine. The 29-year-old orthodox priest worked as a volunteer distributing bottled water. It was his first time at the AIR. He listened to everyone's interventions with curiosity: “I feel at home here; I feel free being an orthodox priest here.”

In Corvara, you could take a trip around the world in just a few hours. During the talks, Fr. Ignacio Carbajosa described the reactions of a number of Spanish intellectuals, including physicist Juan José Cadenas, anthropologist Mikel Azurmendi, and journalist Pilar Rahola, to the publication of *Disarming Beauty* in Spanish. Fr. José Medina, in turn, explained how the content of Carrón's book fits into the ongoing debates in America about the public presence of Christians in contemporary society. Songs were sung in Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese,

French, and English. Vitaly, born in New York, dusted off the Russian he learned from his parents as he took a smoke break. Barbara proudly donned a brightly-colored Nigerian shirt. Jesús Carrascosa, nicknamed “Carras,” had a *pata negra* ham sent, as he does every year, which he carved with solemn ritual.

During the final assembly, Betta asked for a clarification on the relationship between faith and culture, a topic that came up in the discussion of *The Joy of the Gospel*. “I spent eight years in Barcelona, and in an encounter with a new culture, and I ‘earned back’ all that I had received in my life. Opening myself up was a lot of work. Now I've come back and I recognize that I run the risk that all I learned becomes fossilized.” It was a new topic, but it led back to the dominant theme. “What makes it possible to open yourself up again?” Carrón



asked. “You didn’t go to Barcelona because you loved Catalan culture. You went there because you wanted to share the most beautiful thing that had happened to you: faith. It was that impetus that opened you up to the particular way the friends you found there did things. Faith became culture in you. But if faith doesn’t continue to be a present event, it starts to go numb, it shuts down, leaving just a cultural remnant.”

Marta spoke about how she detected a point of ambiguity in herself when responding to the question about salvation that was the theme of the AIR. “When I had to say what salvation was for me, what came to mind were a number of really beautiful or important moments in my life. But then I asked myself, ‘Were these really moments in which I understood what it means to be saved, or were they just times of personal satis-

faction and success?’ I think it would actually be harmful to sit around telling other about our personal successes that make us so excited, dressing them up as ‘witnesses of salvation.’ They would express an egocentrism that makes us alternate between presumption and depression, as you said at the Exercises.” Carrón smiled. “And so, what is salvation?” Marta answered, “Listening to the witnesses of those who went before me, I’m realizing that the salvation I await is the possibility of looking at ourselves and our wretchedness in a way that, mysteriously, doesn’t depress us but rather allows us to always keep walking; making mistakes, taking steps forward and steps backward, but never stopping, never demoralized or depressed.”

Marta told about a time at work when her boss, out of his own narcissism, took away an opportunity

for her to become more visible. She got angry, but another colleague on the project pointed out, “With all the things you have to get done, you’re worried about this?” “The best part about the whole thing was that it was a simple question from my colleague that allowed me to become myself again, to smile about that weakness in me and to have an experience of freedom. And regaining my freedom from the logic of power so typical of most workplaces also freed me from any resentment against my boss, so I could immediately start over again with him: he, too, has the same weakness I do.” Carrón interjected again. “If Christianity doesn’t happen again, as an event, then resentment wins out. We can face reality from our own position, even a correct one, but it can become an ideology. Or we can be defined by a fact that is happening to us now. The same circumstance can be either the beginning of hell or the beginning of salvation. But salvation is not the result of any of our attempts or of our skill; it’s the fruit of Christianity.”

FULL OF DESIRE. The pace of the assembly began to pick up. Davide Prospero took things one step further: “We measure how much we’ve changed because we tend toward self-sufficiency. We think that once we’ve encountered Christ, we no longer need Him, and it is our job to change ourselves.” Carrón’s face lit up; the terms of the discussion were becoming more clearly defined, and finally came together in a striking parallel, which was echoed again in the final synthesis: “It’s the difference between Kant and the Unnamed! Kant settles for the ‘spoils’ of Christianity that we can get with our own strength, through our reason. The Unnamed, instead, wants to stay outside the Cardinal’s door like a beggar, full of desire for the event to happen again.” **T**

JULIÁN CARRÓN

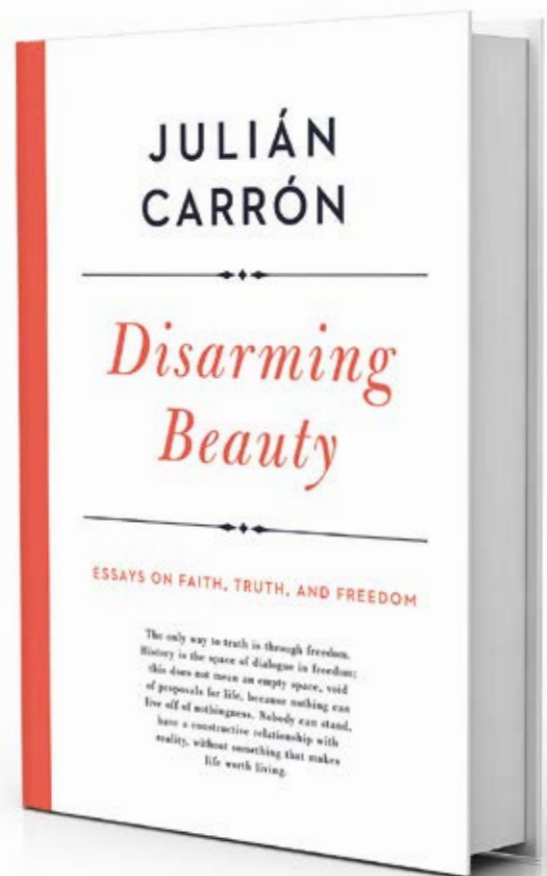
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