



A HUMAN IMPACT

What can awaken people today? We took part in the New York Encounter to see what happens in a place where this question is posed.

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CLOSE UP

MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

At the New York Encounter, three days of presentations, exhibits, and performances in the pursuit of answering man's true question. We took part in a public event that is the crossroads for the life of CL in the United States.

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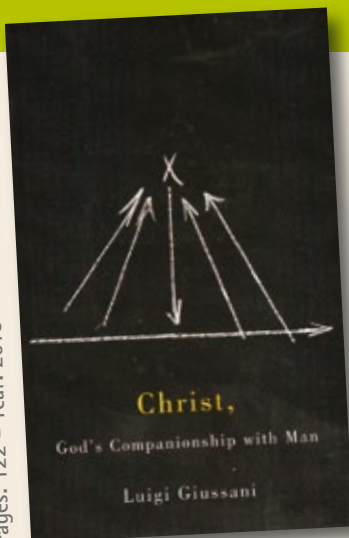
LUIGI GIUSSANI

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 practised in eighty 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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TODAY, FOR YOU


What contribution can we Christians make to today's troubled world? Everyone sees the suffering, and in varied ways it is in everyone's life. It takes the form of what is happening on the global stage: terrorism, a "world war fought piecemeal," the tearing away of foundational elements of society, such as the family. It is felt in the weight of the shift of our person in our everyday struggles lived out at home, at work, in our studies—that sometimes seem to suffocate us, suffocate and stifle us.

In this way we often think that reality, above all when it is harsh, is not made for us, holds nothing good for us. We sense within ourselves an inextinguishable desire for happiness, an open wound, a hollowness that constantly drives us to seek something else, because as Cesare Pavese said, "What man seeks in pleasures is the infinite." But we find nothing that truly and fully fills this void. Thus, we end up believing that our heart is destined for nothingness. We think that perhaps, to use Franz Kafka's image, there is a "point of arrival" for this desire, but "no way to get there."

How does Christianity respond to this nothingness? How does it help me, and thus, the world? For there is no help we can give our fellow human beings that does not pass through our own "I." Do we help with a more acute analysis of the situation, or some extra initiative? Or is there something else?

This question forms the theme running through this issue of *Traces*. We explore it following the road indicated by Fr. Luigi Giussani, the founder of CL, who died in February 2005. You will find some articles that will help you learn more about him and the reality to which he gave life (and that, thanks to God, is alive and kicking all over the globe, from Kenya to the heart of New York). In a 1994 lesson to university students (later entitled *Recognizing Christ*), Fr. Giussani showed the nature of a life entirely spent in announcing to thousands of young people that there is a road: it is Christ, present here and now, as He was two thousand years ago. "He wasn't yesterday. He is today, for you, whatever your position," he said in that lesson. Christ is a fact, present, not a collection of ideas or precepts, but a face to recognize. Where and how? In reality, in the changed lives of those who follow Him, and in the life that is born when people keep their gaze fixed on Him; a life that questions, churns, and produces an impact in one's innermost depths, moves one deeply. Christianity is not "just one more thing to do," but "a subversive and surprising way to live the usual things," as Fr. Giussani once said. It is a fullness that enables us to breathe freely, to live anywhere and to face any situation with gladness. T

THE MEANING OF LIFE AND TRUE DEVELOPEMENT


 I am doing a year of volunteer service in Kampala working for AVSI's Distance Support Project. Frequently I compare myself to the recent graduates in Development from the University of Bocconi who are managing large projects. I like the work that I do, and especially in these past few months I have been overcome by a "fever for life" that gives me passion for everything I do. In the first few months, this thirst was not there: only my suffocating attempts to do the best I could, and without success. I owe this desire to live to my relationship with Rose, who works with women infected with AIDS, and with children who need to go to school. For half of my week I work with her organization, learning from the social workers. One Saturday evening I was talking with a friend, a graduate of Bocconi, who told me about the important results obtained by the organization she works for. But for me, the numbers just didn't add up. What came to mind was a discussion I'd had with Rose that changed my life. One day she said to me, "Franci, what is development? Is it how much medicine you distribute? Is it how many children you send to school? No, it is not this because you distribute medicine and the women don't take it. You pay the tuition and the children don't go to school. And do you know why? Because we are free. Development is the woman who takes her medication because she understands that life is worth living. It is a child who decides that that school is a place for him. This is the nature of Meeting Point International. And to



anyone who asks less than this of me, I say no." I went to her asking for data and she answered by asking what the meaning of life was for me. I was moved because I never would have thought that every instant and every situation is there for me. Saying yes served Uganda, served Rose, and above all served me so that I might understand that how I am made has purpose for the world. I timidly told my friend from Bocconi about this discussion. A silence fell between us because another measure, or non-measure, was imposed. In her eyes, I saw the same emotion that I felt, when talking with Rose, understanding that through work I could discover what I need to live.

Francesca, Kampala (Uganda)

"MAY I COME TO YOUR HOUSE?"

 Dear Fr. Julián, I work near the Cadorna train station in Milan and every morning I bump into a beggar asking for handouts. For quite a while now, my attitude has been mainly to look for some excuse to avert his gaze by speeding up my pace or pretending to be on the phone and, on a rare occasion, to cough up some change so that I could feel at peace with myself. Then it happened

that I was struck by a phrase from Pope Francis, exhorting us with the concrete suggestion to look into the eyes and to touch the hands of these beggars, as they are the eyes and hands of Christ. Then you "upped the ante" by titling the latest Exercises, "A Presence Within the Gaze," not to mention all of the references that I found in the work of School of Community. In short, my conscience gnawed at me, giving me no peace, until I decided to meet him. His name is Simon. He is a thirty-eight-year-old Catholic from Nigeria, married with two children he has not seen for four years. He was working in Libya, but was forced to flee with the outbreak of war in 2011. His family returned to Nigeria and he went to Italy. He lives in Novara, and every morning he takes the train to Milan to beg for money; money he needs for rent, food, and calling cards to talk with his wife and children. Now when I meet him I no longer try to avoid his gaze; in fact, before I turn the corner, I hope he is there. It has happened that some mornings I've had nothing to give him, but I no longer feel the need to justify myself. Even a greeting is enough. At the end of November, I invited him to participate in the Food Drive Day. He answered with a text, "I'm there, tell me where and when." I decide to go with him to Novara, so that he could meet some of us. What a witness to see him giving packages to the people coming into the supermarket, especially for me, who a few days prior would have done anything to have a shift that would not interfere with my schedule. A few days before vaca-



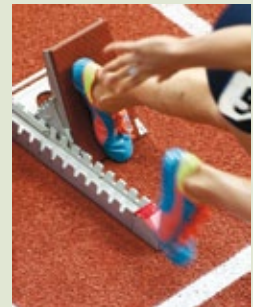
FROM THE BLEACHERS

WATCHING THE TRACK MEET

I am a fifteen-year-old athlete and participated one Saturday afternoon in an indoor track meet in Modena, with the sports association I belong to. After the meet I was supposed to spend the evening with the GS group from Modena and Parma for the “raggio” concluding our pilgrimage to Rome. I specialize in sprints, but this time the 60-meter dash did not go so well, in fact it went rather badly and I clocked a much slower time than I usually do. When the race was over, between the indifference of my teammates and that of my coach, I sat in the stands to watch the other athletes who were competing.

I was sad, alone, discouraged. I was really not in the mood for going to the GS meeting. Watching the competitions, my attention was drawn to a girl who was practicing the high jump. She was probably about my age and was completely without hair or eyebrows! It was clear that she must have been under treatment for a serious illness. She was really quite beautiful, but what astonished me was her tenacity as she tackled the jumps, and her constant, even contagious, smile. At the third failed attempt, she left the field, and with her smile still planted on her lips, she went to her coach. They exchanged high fives and a hug and then she went to the dressing room. To think of how sad I was, to see what I had seen, I felt enormously privileged and grateful for the witness that girl had given me. It was as if Jesus Himself had brought me to the bleachers and said, “Look.” I went to the GS “raggio” happy and convinced that without an education I would not have been able to notice His presence.

Maddalena, Coenzo de Sorbolo (Italy)



tion, I ask him where he will spend Christmas, and he answered that he would be at home with a fellow Catholic countryman. The next day, while we were having coffee, he told me that he would like to meet my family and that he would like to come to my house for Christmas. I said yes, that dinner would work. So at four o'clock in the afternoon, I picked him up at the station in Gallarate and he spent the evening with my family, telling his story, eating, and celebrating as if he were one of the family; perhaps as he would have liked to do with his own family. It got late and we decided to give him a ride home. When we got to Novara, he couldn't stop thanking us. On the

way home, I thought of the Grace that had fallen upon me, and the serenity of heart that had been generated for having said yes to that Presence in the gaze of Simon.

Carlo, Cassano Magnago (Italy)

“YOUR BELIEFS CORRESPOND WITH WHO YOU ARE”

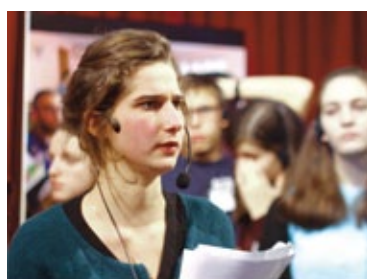


For a number of years I have handled matters of immigration, and collaboration with cultural brokers is fundamental for my work. In spite of our cultural differences, I have developed friendly relationships with many of them, most of whom are Muslim. I have never spoken directly to them about my faith, but this year in reply to my holiday greet-

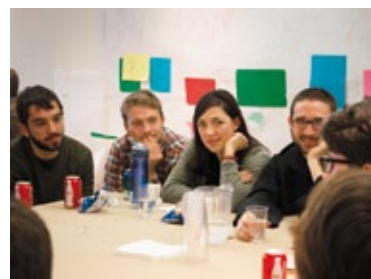
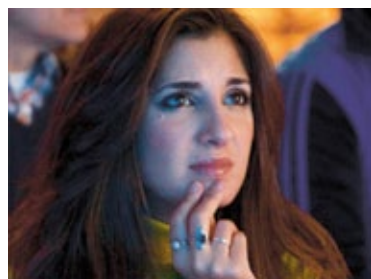
ings I received this Christmas text message from an Albanian mediator who is Muslim by tradition, but an atheist, having grown up during the years of the regime: “Thank you and many warm wishes to you and your family. Merry Christmas and a 2016 full of light, just as you are! You are the third person I have known in eighteen years whose actions coincide with their beliefs. I would willingly allow myself to be converted by people like you.” I thought of Fr. Giussani's words when he says that man today does not need to hear verbal or cultural repetitions of the announcement; what he is waiting for is the experience of an encounter.

Gianna, Lerici (Italy)

5 CLOSE UP



MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

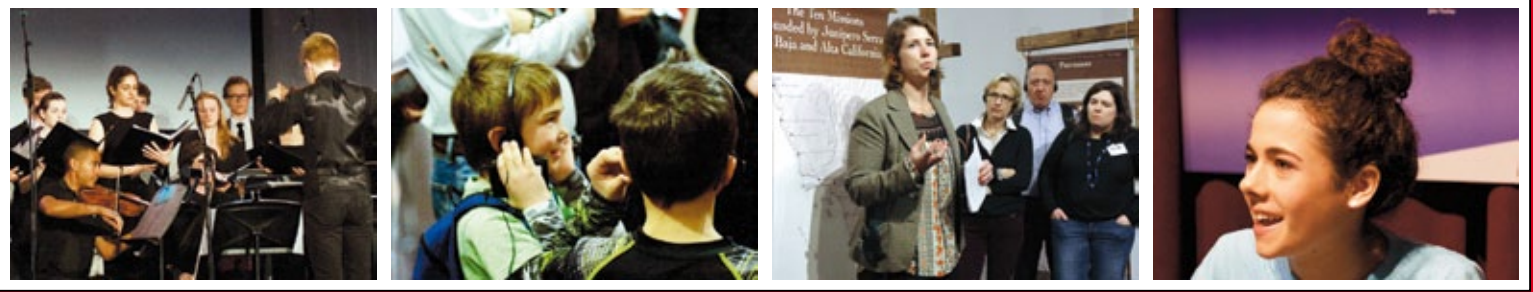




NEW YORK ENCOUNTER

In the heart of the Big Apple, three days of presentations, exhibits, and performances in the pursuit of answering man's true question. We took part in a public event that is the crossroads for the life of CL in the United States to see what generates it and the effect it has.

BY LUCA FIORE



On the curbs you see the trees from this past Christmas. Tiny evergreens tied up with string, ready to be picked up by the trash collectors. On the eve of the blizzard at the end of January, the Big Apple had just bid farewell to Christmas lights and religious holidays. It is here that the New York Encounter sheds light on something forgotten and that (at least in America) people would rather not talk about. Something that causes embarrassment; one of those topics that you would rather spare yourself and others.

This “something” was revealed in the theme of this year, harkened in a verse from Edgar Lee Masters’ poem, *George Gray*: “Longing for the sea and yet (not) afraid.” Fear in front of the great journey of life. The desire, the nostalgia for something great on the one hand, and the reluctance to risk everything for that lack on the other. This “not,” inserted within the poet’s verse, shows that here at the Encounter there are people who believe that it does not have to be this way. That in America today, where polling institutions have been closely studying the “quarter-life crisis” (the paralysis of life experienced by disillusioned individuals at twenty-five years of age), fear is not the final word.

FRESH AIR. The New York Encounter, in essence, is this: it is a place where Americans from all four corners of the continent have begun to live in a different way; have come together to experience a new intensity. A people who, instead of seeking shelter in their convictions, have decided to come here, to Manhattan, to tell everybody what they have discovered. In other words, coming to this event in New York really helps one to understand the life of Communion and Liberation in North America, and, one could add, Communion and Liberation itself. Fif-



teen presentations, 6 exhibits, 3 shows, and 360 volunteers. Attendees numbered in the thousands. A three-day event clearly inspired by the Rimini Meeting. This year, the Encounter opened on the stage of the Metropolitan Pavilion with the words of Texas poet Christian Wiman: “I am struck by how often I can articulate a psychological dilemma, and being able to articulate it cannot rescue me from it... I think we live in a therapeutic culture, we think if we can just put words on it, then we will be released from our tensions; but I often find that’s not true, and I think what releases me are remembrances of moments when I was released.”

Those who come to the New York Encounter seem to be attracted by something close to what Wiman describes. Take for example Curtis and Rachel, a couple from Des Moines, Iowa. They asked their five friends from their School of Community (a weekly meeting of formation that is typical of the experience of CL) to

take care of their five kids so that they could come to the Encounter. A brave gesture, to admit one’s own need to friends, and a rarity in the country that tries to conform itself to the image of the self-made man. But what is this need? “Recently we lost a child,” said Curtis. “It was a difficult time in our lives and we needed to go back to the last place where we clearly saw the face of Christ. Where we experienced Him.”

Or look at Emily, who amidst the noise of the restaurant area stands next to the young Juliette and wraps herself with a white shawl: “I left my three kids with some family friends. It was important to me to come. You know, I have a beautiful life, but often I am not able to realize it and I become sad. Here at the Encounter, I find people who teach me to see my life as it is. And for me, this is a breath of fresh air.”

At the Pavilion there were discussions about poverty, the environment, immigration, and research on outer space.



The humanity of astronaut Tom Jones was visible here, as that of Priscilla La Porte, sister of Matthew, killed while attempting to stop the 2007 assailant at Virginia Tech, who took the lives of 32 other students before taking his own. And Joshua Stancil, a former inmate who rediscovered faith during the 18 years he spent behind bars, was also present.

AN INVESTMENT. All lives are wounded, needy, but content. Not unlike the rest, this is the life of Fr. Branson Hipp, a man with the face of a child, ordained a priest just six months. He lives in Atlanta and attends a small School of Community with two families. “My friendship with them helps me understand my vocation,” he explains. “I need this friendship...it takes me back to the fascination I have lived for the person of Christ and that made me become a priest. After a few years in the seminary, I became cynical; I only saw the negative aspects of the Church. When I discovered the works

of Fr. Giussani and CL, something snapped inside of me, that bridged the gap between the breviary and everyday life.”

The conference rooms of the Metropolitan Pavilion have a continuous flow of people going in and out (this year the number of attendees was 8,300 versus 5,500 in 2015). There are many families that brought with them even their youngest children. It is the occasion to see friends who live far away. It is a big sacrifice for everyone, but no one seems to regret it. A weekend in this city is very expensive, and in a country where people are inclined to save money, the decision to come to the Encounter means making a true investment. It seems that the attraction is worth the price of a plane ticket and a hotel. This also goes for those who come here to volunteer, and who forgo most of the scheduled events. Some forgo everything, including the exhibit on St. Junípero Serra of California, or that on the little world of Guareschi and Jannacci, or the con-

temporary music performance on the Psalms, or the staged piece on American music and poetry.

Among all the presentations, there was one organized by doctors who meet throughout the year to help each other look at the reason for their work. There is a similar gathering for teachers that meets annually. An event also takes place for members of Well-Read Mom, a network born in Crosby, Minnesota, an initiative of a CL mother that now includes dozens of groups throughout the country and world (see *Traces*, 11/2013).

Marta and Emad speak in Arabic between themselves. She was born in Jerusalem, to an Arab-Israeli family, and she lives in Toronto. At the Encounter, she curated an exhibit on the Christians in refugee camps in Jordan. He is Egyptian, and he met the Movement a number of years ago after moving to the United States. Emad is the host for Monsignor Amel Shamon Nona, the exiled archbishop of Mosul, a city taken by ISIS. He with the >>

“GIUSSANI, WHO? TELL ME MORE...”

He risked his life to eliminate Ebola in Africa. But he preferred not to talk about it on the stage. Yet, he went to the New York Encounter anyway. The story of David and an encounter that should have never happened.

“Hello?” There was silence on the other end of the phone. “Hello?” Maria Teresa, one of the organizers of the New York Encounter, read about him in the newspapers. With him, an international medical humanitarian organization won an important award for being able to stop Ebola. An unforgiving disease, it was the worst global epidemic in recent years: 28,000 cases, 11,000 dead. She thought to herself: “It would be interesting if he could speak to us about what pushed him to risk his life in such a way.” So she wrote to David, a Jewish doctor, who answered, “Yes, of course. We can talk about it on the phone.”

Maria Teresa calls him, and very patiently, David tries to understand: “Do you want me to show some pictures and to talk about how we work?” She, on the other end: “Sure, that would be nice, but more than anything we want to know why you go there, why you risk your life in those parts of the world.” David does not answer. A few seconds of silence, which are already the beginning of an answer. “Hello?” Then David says, “If you want me to talk about what we did, that’s fine. The rest does not seem very interesting to me.” Maria Teresa replies, “Well, really, that is what is interesting for us.”

At this point he raises his voice: “Just say it: You want a hero, don’t you? Somebody who’s done extraordinary things, right? I’m sorry. I cannot go on a stage to act like a hero. And do you know why? Because I have a wound inside of me, a terrible wound, and I find some relief only when I go to these places. For a moment, I think I can help someone.”

She replies, “But this is exactly what we want you to talk about. It is this wound that makes you great, that’s the point.”

“I’m not ready to talk about it yet.”

Later, Maria Teresa thinks back to that conversation. Why was it that she could say that that wound was important to her? She tries writing him an email.

A few days pass and she receives the answer: “I am on a train to New York. I keep reading your message over and over again, I never thought that this heart that you talk about, that it could be a good thing. I repeat: I will not come to speak. But would it be possible to continue this conversation? I never thought about these things in this way.” This is how David arrived at the Metropolitan Pavilion. He was welcomed by the title of the Encounter: “Longing for the sea, and yet (not) afraid.” Maria Teresa invited him, to the very place where she had wanted him to speak onstage. Their appointment was a breakfast with other guests of the event. They picked up the conversation right where they left off. Then, at a certain point, David said, “From the moment I arrived, I saw that people here were happy. What is this? You see, I had never wanted to face that question that you asked me. And this is why I raised my voice when we spoke on the phone. But today I came because I thought that maybe here I could better understand what I am looking for.”

The conversation continued and David explained that he had recently written to his medical organization to hand in his notice. He wanted to take the risk to see if what Maria Teresa



wrote to him about could be lived, not only in dangerous places, but also in a regular hospital in Brooklyn, near his wife and his six-year-old son.

As he walked through the conference rooms of the Encounter, David asked, “Where does this all come from?” Maria Teresa began telling him about Father Giussani: few words about an Italian priest to a Jewish-American doctor. She invited him to go look at the exhibit called “From My Life, to Yours,” the exhibit dedicated to the founder of CL. Reading panel after panel, they arrived to the one titled, “My wish for me and you is that you never be tranquil.” “But this is what



we were talking about before! This is my issue: to never be tranquil. What makes my wound a good thing? I want to understand. Where can I meet Fr. Giussani? Is he dead? But, has he written anything about this? Give me something to read." And she replied, "Start with *The Religious Sense*." The two walked towards the booth. David bought a copy of the book and, while putting it away, he said, "I want to study this, but can we continue to talk about this? I want to do this, not just to read and to discuss the book, but to talk about life. My life."

» people of his diocese were forced to leave Mosul and now he leads the Chaldean Church in Australia.

HUMAN IMPACT. The persecuted Christians were the ones who shook up the participants of the Encounter. During the discussion with Fr. Pizzaballa, the Custodian of the Holy Land, Monsignor Nona found himself repeating what he had been saying in the last few months: "The terrorists are afraid of a very happy Christian life." In this instance, it is as if fear, mentioned in the title of the Encounter, has been

abolished. Using different words, the same call back to the core of the Christian experience came from Fr. Julián Carrón at the conclusion of his talk at the Encounter: "A human impact is what can shake people up today. A human impact, not only as a set of values, not only a doctrine, not just preaching, but a human impact is what can shake people up today. An event that echoes an initial event in which we find the initial event." It is here that the Spanish priest slammed his fist on the table. "Now! In the present. Otherwise, the Christian »»

“AN INTENSITY I HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE”

She’s a Navy Lieutenant and a Black Hawk pilot. At the Encounter, she coordinated volunteers. Carie Boothe tells the story of how she encountered first, faith, and later, the Movement.

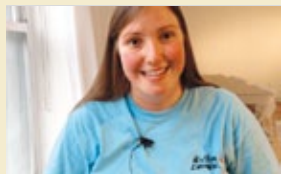
Lieutenant Boothe, a member of the U.S. Navy, was born in Oregon and today lives in Jacksonville, Florida. She flies Black Hawk helicopters, like those featured in the Ridley Scott film. This summer, she’ll be deployed for a surveillance mission in the Persian Gulf. At 27 years, Lieutenant Carie Boothe is still a young woman, with long hair and a bright smile. She helped coordinate volunteers at this year’s New York Encounter. She tells us about how she converted to Catholicism and how she met the Movement. What she says about her School of Community and American Catholicism is interesting from a girl who has a clear understanding of the word battle: “For the majority of Catholics, life is a constant battle between what the Church thinks and what the world thinks. And you have to fight, darlin’, because the world is there, ready to cut you down. But School of Community isn’t like that: everything that happens is a help. That’s why I keep going.”

She met the Church through John, a friend from flight school. “I’d never met anyone so interested in life,” she says about him. On Sunday mornings, he’d come to her house, she’d make breakfast, he played the guitar, they studied and talked about planes, life, and the Church. They started to exchange books. “He lent me the autobiography of Thomas Merton, and I was reading Dante, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine. They were all people who’d had experiences similar to

mine and were able to describe them in an extraordinary way. And I couldn’t believe they were all Catholic! I asked myself: could they all just be rogue Catholics?” She wanted to find out and asked John to lend her the Catechism. She read it cover to cover. “When I finished it, I started going to Mass. Nine months later, I became Catholic.”

She went through RCIA in Pensacola, Florida, where she met Fr. Richard. “A month before my Confirmation [she was baptized as an infant], I had a two-hour flight with an instructor. He was a Calvinist and we ended up talking about the question of predestination. Instead of two hours, we flew for four hours talking about it. When I got out of the helicopter, I under-

stood that that theory made no sense for my life, but I still wasn’t clear on what my freedom really was and how it worked. So I went to see Fr. Richard and we talked a long time. At the end he said to me, ‘We have a group of friends that meets on Mondays, do you want to come?’” It was the Pensacola School of Community group. Two girls and three priests. The first time she went, Carie, who loves to talk, didn’t manage to say a single word. “What was happening was much more than what I ever could have imagined. After the meeting, we went to dinner and I saw how those people were interested in each person’s life, even mine... It was an intensity of life that I’d never seen before. After that, I never stopped going.”



Carie Boothe, 27 years old.

» event is dead, it is something that remained in the past, that only rests in doctrines and traditions, but without any possibility of awakening desire now, and fulfilling it.”

CONQUERING FEAR. And someone can feel this human impact come upon them even at the New York Encounter. Ashley and Nate, for example, are a young couple from Omaha, Nebraska. Nate grew up in a Protestant family and converted to Catholicism before getting married. He has cystic fibrosis. The option of staying home would have been much more comfortable, not to mention economical. Putting together the puzzle pieces of time off for the holidays, it was clear that for the first time he would not spend Christmas with his family, as this year he wanted to be in New York.

And his parents? His mother also came to the Encounter; she being the one who had not taken his “fling” with Catholicism well. Over the past few years she made the best of the situation—a good woman, a serious and devout woman, a volunteer in a rehabilitation community. Nate and his wife invited her without expecting her to say yes. “I spent a lot of time with my mother-in-law this weekend,” says Ashley. “She had spoken to me of her tendency to ‘not desire,’ to not expect much in order to not be disappointed. It struck me that this was the very same experience of Joshua, the inmate. But all of the encounters echoed the insistence of the possibility of conquering this fear. My mother-in-law was truly amazed.” The woman bought a copy of *The Religious Sense* by Fr. Giussani. She read through the first half of it in one night. She walked around the Encounter with her eyes wide open, and before getting on the plane to Nebraska she confided to her son and daughter-in-law: “I’ll use this as a text for the young women in the rehabilitation community.” **I**

TRADITIONAL RIGHTS AND FOUNDING VALUES

BY JULIÁN CARRÓN

In Italy the debate is erupting on the approval of the Cirinnà bill (which regulates civil unions also for same-sex couples and extends to these unions the possibility of so-called “stepchild adoption,” the adoption of a child who lives with a couple of the same sex but is the biological child of only one of the two), and Family Day demonstrations are underway in opposition. We are reproposing a letter by Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, published in the Corriere della Sera on January 24th. Carrón’s article seeks to face the basic, underlying questions that intersect in this legislative issue, bringing to light the kind of original contribution that faith can give in facing challenges. We want to draw everyone into the discussion, as these are questions that apply to each one of us, beyond the borders of Italian politics.

Dear editor, after months of discussion regarding civil unions, Cirinnà’s bill has reached the Parliament, prompting yet another public demonstration; two, actually, one in favor and one against. Those supporting the initiative demand new rights be recognized, and those in opposition do so to defend traditional rights. What causes the bitterness in this open conflict? One contingent of the public opinion claims these new rights are a step forward in civilization, while another considers them an attack on the founding values of Western civilization. Therefore, the social and political divides caused by these issues are seemingly irreconcilable. What’s behind the strong attraction and aversion?

We have to ask ourselves the origin of these so-called “new rights.” Each of these, when it comes down to it, draws from deeply human needs: the need to love and be loved, the desire to be a mother or a father, the fear of suffering and death and the search for one’s identity. This is why they’re so attractive and so numerous, each with the underlying secret hope that juridical structures can resolve the drama of living and “legally” guarantee the satisfaction of the infinite needs of every heart.

It is within this context that Cirinnà’s proposal has been formed, intending to respond to the desire for emotional fulfillment between people of the same sex who want to be joined together, creating new social structures and demanding that they be recognized. With all due respect for the juridical debate, what I feel compelled to highlight here is that the issue at hand is still men and women and their fulfillment. Behind every human attempt is a cry for fulfillment. But is this initiative, sincere as it may be, a sufficient response?

Our contemporary culture, which we are all a part of, does not always look at the profound needs of the “I” in a way that grasps the infinite weight of those needs that constitute our humanity.

Therefore, often it offers answers that are partial and therefore inadequate. But is human desire really compromised so easily? As Cesare Pavese taught us, “What man looks for in pleasure is an infinite, and no one would ever give up hope of reaching this infinite.” A single drop can never fill the glass that is life. One example of this is the testimony—that I recently came across—of a homosexual man in the fashion industry who has a good job and a relationship with another man. He confided to a couple of friends he ran into by chance that he isn’t happy, and told them, “It’s as if I’m missing something; it’s like I’m living life as a reaction, defensively. That makes me uneasy.”

Uneasy, like everyone else. We all tend to continually reduce our desire to an

FAMILY AND RIGHTS

» image we create, because we think the solution is just within reach. But real men and women never content themselves. The price they'd pay is too high; it would mean suffocating behind the bars of a prison they build themselves. Can our lack of satisfaction be healed with the passing of a law? Many people think so. This explains the furious fight to get it approved. On the other side, those who maintain that it threatens the basis of society often oppose it with the same fury, without even minimally challenging the position they're fighting, sometimes even supporting the challengers.



“Who will deliver us from this mortal situation?” St. Paul asked even in his time. Only a living encounter that exalts man's humanity and helps him breath again can free him from the dictatorship of reducing his desires, awaking in him the desire for another type of life. Only such an encounter could be an adequate response to the reductions that even we see, while still respecting the freedom of the other. Like the friendship that the couple offered to their homosexual friend, which brought him to say, “It would be beautiful to live my work and my relationships as you and your wife live yours. You're special, in a normal way. It's beautiful speaking with you.” And then he asked, “How do you live like this?”

The scene demonstrates what Fr. Giussani always reminded us, “In a society like this, you can't create anything new except through a *life*: there are no structures, or organizations, or initiatives that can stand. Only a life that's new and different can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships—in a word, everything.” That same life that challenged the thirst of the Samaritan woman, a thirst five husbands hadn't satisfied.



Only Christ, an event present in people's lives, is capable of freeing man from all his reductions and give him back experience of the fullness for which he is made.

Is this not perhaps what the world expects of us Christians? “What is missing is not so much the verbal or cultural repetition of a proclamation. Today's men and women await, perhaps without realizing it, the experience of an encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a real presence that their lives are changed. It is only a human impact that can shake up today's man: an event that is an echo of the first event, when Jesus raised His eyes and said, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly; I am coming to your house’” (Fr. Giussani). This is where we find the method through which Christianity happened and continually happens again. In other words, Christ is not just a decoration and we look for a solution somewhere else, but rather the very key to the solution. Only Christ, an event present in people's lives, is capable of freeing man from all his reductions and give him back the desire and experience of the fullness for which he is made. “It would be beautiful to live my work and my relationships as you and your wife live yours.” Without an experience of freedom like this, any supposedly “concrete” response will always be insufficient. Each of us finds direct proof in his or her life. What, then, is the real contribution that each of us Christians is called to offer to the ongoing debate, not putting them into question, but faithful to the Church's traditions and her teaching? “We know that the best response to conflicts of human beings, from the well-known *homo homini lupus* of Thomas Hobbes is the ‘*Ecce homo*’ of Jesus who does not recriminate, but welcomes and, paying in person, saves.” This certainty, testified to by Pope Francis, is the point of departure that makes it possible to relate to anyone, to “build together with others in civil society” (Florence, November 10, 2015), offering our contribution—to the degree it's possible—to better the situation, keeping in mind to the good of all people. **T**



FATHER GIUSSANI

RECOGNIZING CHRIST

Last year at the CL Spiritual Exercises, we had the opportunity to see a 1994 video of Fr. Giussani. It was a lesson given to university students, later entitled *Recognizing Christ*, that coincided with one of the most intense moments in a life spent announcing that there is a road. Eleven years after his death, we'd like to share the story of Andrea, whose letter was read and commented on by Giussani in that video.

BY LUCA FIORE

"Ziba, if I write a letter to Fr. Giussani, will he ever read it?" "Why shouldn't he?" "I am nobody, he doesn't know me." "Andrea, don't worry. Write it." The letter, read by Fr. Giussani during the Spiritual Exercises of the University Students of CL in 1994 and then published under the title *Recognizing Christ*, was born like this, simply, as almost all the important things are born. It was one of the most intense moments in the video that was shown during the recent Fraternity Exercises. Andrea went to high school with Marco Zibardi, known as "Ziba," then a recent graduate of the Catholic University in Milan. "Dear Fr. Giussani: I'm writing to you calling you 'dear' even though I do not know you.... I think I have reached the end of the line of this troubled life of mine, carried by that train called AIDS," he writes in his letter. Moved, Giussani asks for help in reading it to the end. "Pray for me; I will continue to feel useful for the time I have left by praying for you and for the Movement. I embrace you, Andrea."

GOING BACK TO THE STORY. Up to today, whatever we knew about Andrea was written in that letter. But today, twenty years later, Ziba goes back to that story. Out of discretion he doesn't mention his friend's last name, or give us a picture of him.

"He dictated, I wrote," says Ziba. "He spoke with difficulty. Those were his last days in the hospital in Parma. We had to write it in pieces. We would start, then, when he was tired, we would stop. It must have taken one whole week. It wasn't easy for me either: it was a struggle because I resisted a little about some things, those which were related to me...." Their friendship, as Andrea explained in his letter,



started during high school. "We were classmates at the high school," says Ziba. "We graduated in 1987. During the last two years, we shared a desk. I was in GS; he was the leader of the student union. But we were always great friends. Each of us had his own ideas, but we would also go on vacations together." Andrea was intelligent, studious, and had good grades. He played soccer, loved tennis, and skiing. Besides the typical things of his world: picket lines in front of the school, peace demonstrations, and nights spent at the Leoncavallo social center. Then he started dating a dear friend of mine, Elena. Thus, together with other three friends, although we went different paths, we stayed in contact," remembers Ziba. "We would meet on a Saturday night for a beer or during a weekend to go skiing together. Andrea had started Physics, Elena Medicine. Then Ermanno studied Law, and Daniele Engineering. I studied Literature, and I was the only one who belonged to CL."

That evening in 1991, the five of them were in a pizzeria, in the suburbs of Milan. Andrea, out of the blue

said, "I was tested. I am HIV positive." Elena already knew it, the other three didn't. They are all shocked. At that time a positive test was still a death sentence. That same year Freddie Mercury died. The simple word "AIDS" generates fear and prejudice. At the end of the dinner, Andrea said, "We must bear together this adventure now."

The four friends took him seriously and they really accompanied him. They got organized and took turns to visit him every day. He went to various hospitals: Milan, Bologna, and Parma. During those months a dialogue started that Ziba defines as sometimes "turbulent." He even involved the patients next to him in the discussion. He got carried away, started arguments, reprimanded the nurses who, according to him, didn't know how to treat his disease. "Every now and then, in his own way, he would talk about the problem of God and would tell me angrily, 'Your God doesn't exist and is useless. Look at what is happening to me: I am 27 years old and I am dying.'"

One day, at the end of 1993, Ziba

“ME, TODAY, IN FRONT OF THAT VIDEO”

This is a letter from an eighteen-year-old student, **GRACE ACIRO**, who lives in Kampala: “Giussani is my best friend, because he made me understand my life again.”



brought him a copy of *The Religious Sense* by Fr. Giussani. “It was a time when he scolded us for visiting him every day. He told us that we were acting like Florence Nightingale. ‘It’s no use, I will die in any case. Why do you do this?’ Then I, giving him the book, told him, ‘Start reading this, then we will talk about it.’ He took it and threw it on the night stand. ‘This is just bullshit.’ The next day he had already read the whole book.”

QUESTIONS AND MEANING. The content of their dialogues changed. Andrea started asking questions. “He had read the book deeply. From that day began a beautiful period, most of all for me. It was clear that he had understood it much better than me, who had been working on it for years. He asked me questions about the ‘heart,’ about the thing that all human beings have in common. What struck him the most was probably that even what was happening to him could have meaning. He walked the whole journey from the religious sense to faith like he had it written it somewhere himself, without having known it. At first he >>>

With humility I would like to share what I have seen happening recently through the Lord’s will. Before going to the CLU Spiritual Exercises [CLU refers to CL University], I was very sad and full of emptiness. In fact, I was not looking at reality in its totality. But during Carrón’s first lesson, something touched me deep down and I felt all my fragility.

The second lesson was Fr. Giussani’s. Watching that video I felt moved, and it became something real and true for me. It was not simply a video, but precisely Fr. Giussani with me. I looked at myself in front of him, and listening to him I started weeping like a child, as I understood that everything around me was crying out that I was wanted and loved by the Mystery.

From that moment on, everything changed and my emptiness has been filled with happiness. I began looking at Fr. Giussani as the best friend I had in that moment, together with Fr. Carrón, because they understand better than anyone else what I truly need and what my heart has been seeking for so long. This has changed everything and everything has become wonderful.

The volunteers who got up at dawn to set up the chairs in the hall were the same age as me, and the songs seemed perfectly chosen for me. All these things were signs of a reality that is calling me and telling me that I am loved by the Mystery.

In front of Fr. Giussani, listening to him in the part where he talks

about virginity, I understood that it is something very real: it is what enables me to look at reality with purity, precisely because I belong to Christ. Virginity prevents my relationship with Christ from fading away and keeps alive the relationship with my family and friends.

The realization of all this has given me a greater desire to draw close and open myself to reality in every moment of life, so I can recognize the presence of Christ here and now. I have begun to long for Christ even more, because I love Him so much and am always full of yearning for Him. Watching that video and listening to Fr. Giussani was the most powerful thing that has happened in my life; it made me understand anew and accept the exceptionality of

Christ, who corresponds to the needs of my heart, even if I am sad and lonely. Only a friendship like the one I share with Fr. Giussani and “Auntie” Rose [Rose Busingye, the founder of Meeting Point International in Kampala] can fill the emptiness and make me live intensely.

With Saint Peter I too can say today, “Lord, I don’t know why, I don’t understand things well, I may have missed many of Giussani’s or Carrón’s words, I can forget about You in a second, but I know that I love You and that if I don’t return to You, if I am not with You, there is no other place where I can go, because my consolation is with You, because Your eyes are upon me in every moment.”



Aciro Grace.

» wouldn't talk about God; it was as if following his own path he wanted to let me see that he had understood. He moved forward in steps. He had already read the whole book. He knew how it ended..."

"Ziba always told me that what matters in life is to have a true interest and to follow it. I have pursued this interest many times, but it was never the true one. Now I have seen the true one, I see it, I've encountered it and I begin to know it, and to call it by name: it is called Christ."

THE GREATEST SATISFACTION. And their dialogue didn't stop being turbulent. It was at that point that Ziba began saying the *Angelus* in front of him. And Andrea, as he mentions in his letter, started swearing to his face. The nurses rushed to his help, and asked Ziba if he was beating his friend... "It was a path marked by his temperament and by his full awareness of journeying to the end. He had to go to the depths of the fact that he was dying." After questions about *The Religious Sense* he started asking questions about Father Giussani and about CL. The last month and a half was like "rush" to the end. Andrea started saying the *Angelus* with Ziba. Then, with only a few days left, that question: "If I write him a letter, will he read it?"

"I didn't know what he was going to say. I had no idea that he had arrived to that point of adhesion. I saw that something was happening. I found out that he had called for the hospital's chaplain but I don't know what they said to each other. Up to the point of that letter our discussions never arrived to such an explicit point. It was a surprise. A gift."

In the years after high school the two friends went on having discussions. "He had made a choice for his life, I had made another one," Ziba went on. "Between us this was clear,



THE VIDEO. Fr. Giussani reads Andrea's letter during his talk in 1994.

we weren't going to change our minds. Yet, he was somehow struck by my position. For him it was inconceivable planning one's life based on a religious choice. In his mind, faith was intimism and irrationality. Then, what happened to him made him understand that he had had that question all along. For me it was an unexpected grace. Those three friends and I stood in front of what happened, and we saw that within disease and death the miracle of a new life happened."

Andrea wrote: "Ziba has stuck over my bed St. Thomas' quote: 'Man's life consists in the affection that mainly sustains it, and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.' I think that my greatest satisfaction is to have known you by writing you this letter, but the even greater satisfaction is that in God's mercy, if He will, I will meet you where everything will be new, good, and true. New, good, and true like the friendship that you have brought into the life of

many people and of which I can say: 'I was there too.' I too, in this wretched life, have seen and participated in this new, good, and true event."

Ziba picked up the letter and brought it to Fr. Giussani. "This is from a friend of mine from High School. It is really beautiful." He didn't have time to explain anything to him. Andrea had a complication a few hours later; when Ziba arrived, he found him in a coma. Fr. Giussani's phone call arrived after the funeral was already over. "This is a wonderful letter! May I read it in public?" "Gius, the letter was for you..." Then, on the night before the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises for the University students, Fr. Giussani

called Ziba: "I want to read Andrea's letter, can you drive me to Rimini?" On the way back, after *Recognizing Christ*, he said, "I have never met a person who understood *The Religious Sense* so well and could thus summarize it in two brief pages." **T**

Fr. Giussani
Fr. Giussani was born in Desio, Italy, on October 15, 1922, and died in Milan, Italy, on February 22, 2005. In 2012 Fr. Julián Carrón, his successor in the leadership of CL, communicated that he had formally requested the opening of the cause for Giussani's beatification and canonization. The request was accepted by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola.

JCL LIFE

ANOTHER MEASURE

This article concludes the series on our journey visiting the CL communities in Africa. After the visit in Uganda and in Nigeria, we spent a week in Kenya and saw the hovels of Kibera, a slum of Nairobi. Here in Kenya, religiosity is often lived as superstition, but everything changes if the main point in life is "to live truly." We recount here our journey in the midst of the mud and beauty.

BY PAOLO PEREGO

Mud is everywhere in the slums of Nairobi. Mixed with trash, it clings to your shoes. I saw the Pope on television at the end of November during his visit to Africa, shortly after our visit, and he was walking in the same mud I'd walked in. During the other two stops of his visit, in which he opened the Holy Year of Mercy, he spoke to the people I met in Kenya, as well as those in Uganda and the Central African Republic. But he was really speaking to the whole world, as in his visit to Kangemi, a huge shantytown in the north-eastern part of the Kenyan capital, when he referred to injustice, poverty, and unemployment. He denounced a new colonialism that sees Africa as merely "parts of a machine, cogs on a gigantic wheel" to be exploited. And yet, he told the people of the slum, there is "a wisdom born of the 'stubborn resistance' in that which is authentic... You are able 'to weave bonds of belonging and togetherness which convert overcrowding into an experience of community in which the walls of ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness overcome.'" These are only a few of his rich thoughts; his points of departure. So then, what is authentic? What is it that endures?

I think back over my experience in Nairobi, to that same question that rose in the mud of Kibera, the largest slum in the world, where a million people live crowded together in the heart of the city. "Walk close together, so nobody can get between us, because it's dangerous." In the midst of shacks, people sold food, sandals, and charcoal. The mud stuck to our shoes. The road opened up and the sheet-metaled houses lined the wheel-track lanes



KARIBU KENYA! "Welcome to Kenya" in Swahili. From the left, Joakim Koech with the students of Cardinal Otunga High School; the CLU School of Community and, below, the Fraternity group of Mutuati; two moments during the celebration at the Otunga High School.



full of people and trash. From there, lanes narrowed to a foot and a half wide, between earthen walls. The smell of burned rubber and poverty hit us like a punch in the face. There were no churches, though the city had them on every corner. "Many people take refuge in the churches out of desperation. Evangelicals, and Baptist sects ask for money and promise to heal people of AIDS, but it has nothing to do with life," said Antonino.

BEFORE OUR EYES. We arrived at a small elementary school in the middle of the slum, and at the door were welcomed by one of Mother Teresa's sisters. About a hundred children attended, brought there so they might have a different future, or to protect them from the violence, or maybe just because at the school they would be fed.

We met Andrea and Romana at the school; they smiled as they spoke with the children. There it was, beauty before our eyes. The same beauty marked the life of Antonino from

Sardinia, one of the AVSI workers in Nairobi, and Andrea, who'd arrived only shortly before to direct an NGO in Kenya, and Romana from Eldoret in the west, who, so elegantly dressed, works with them amidst the shacks.

We saw this same beauty earlier in the week, in the flower beds of the Cardinal Otunga High School in Kahawa Sukari, on the periphery of Nairobi. We participated in celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the institute, which was established as an expression of the life of the Movement of CL in Kenya. The beauty was apparent in the building itself, the new cafeteria, the kitchens, the large masonry bower in the center of the courtyard, and in the bustling of the students preparing for the events of the next day: a Mass, a performance, and lunch with their families. I thought of the beauty we saw in the university students during the School of Community in a classroom of the Jomo Kenyatta University, in the families of the Fraternity during a dinner we shared, and in Antonino, Nino and Andrea,



when we visited the *Memores Domini* home where they'd shared life for years, or for some, days.

This is Kenya, mud and beauty, wonders and woes. We spoke about this in the last few months, not just after the attacks at Easter in the small Eastern town of Garissa, where Islamic terrorists massacred 150 Christian university students. Kenya, with its shopping malls, cell phones, and increasing number of cars, is one of the most developed African nations, and yet politically it remains precarious. At the November 27, 2015, gathering of 40,000 young Kenyans at Nairobi's Kasarani Stadium, Francis spoke about the problems that endanger the nation. Tribalism "is when you keep your hands behind your back, a stone in each one, ready to hurl against someone else." Corruption "is like sugar; it's sweet, we like it, it goes down easily. And then? We get sick! We come to a nasty end." "It is a path which leads to death." Terrorism does not have the last word. "God is more powerful than any recruitment cam-

paign." In the face of these problems, the Pope reminded them, "There is something which all of you have... the ability to choose which path you want to take. Will I let myself be overcome by problems or will I turn my problems into new opportunities?" What is needed is "an education, not just techniques and politics," "men and women who radiate the truth, beauty and power of the Gospel that transforms life."

Our encounter with the young CL community here, just 30 years old, was this continual surprise.

"IT'S FOR ME." "Look at them, my children. The oldest one will be flying to America to study." The proud father and Protestant pastor almost yelling into the microphone, speaking of his son, a graduate of the Cardinal Otunga High School, at the tenth anniversary celebration. "He is enthusiastic," Joakim Koech, the Principal of the High School and head of the community laughingly said. Romana's husband Joakim, the father of six children, was there when the adventure began. Seventeen-year-old Nicodemus said, "This beauty for me is," yes, nice buildings. "But, the teachers are truly *maestri*: in many other schools it is not this way." Collin, his classmate, concurred. Maureen added, "It's one of the best schools, and has won many prizes." Sammy added, "Nobody tells you what you have to do. Here, they teach you to be free, even at the risk of making mistakes."

This is Christ, Joakim commented. "The thing about Fr. Giussani's method that has always fascinated me is his wager on freedom. You help it to emerge." Reality becomes a provocation; it is something that does not remain in the classroom. "With

some of them we have even begun GS." Many parents, struck by their children, have started to seek relationships. "There is a great need. The question is: a need of what? And what addresses it?"

In the mid 1990s, shortly after Joakim and Romana met the Movement, they happened to read Fr. Giussani's lesson at the CLU Spiritual Exercises of 1994, *Recognizing Christ*. It was revolutionary. "Seeing him in the video at this year's Spiritual Exercises made me re-live, in a deeper way, what happened back then." It was a new measure for life. "The Kenyan Movement's commitment to education began there, and led all the way to the foundation of the Otunga High School." First, in 1986, there was the St. Kizito professional institute in the Kibera slum of Nairobi, with the presence of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, then the Little Prince Elementary School that AVSI founded in Kibera in 1999, which is now supported by distance adoptions. Later, the Italian priests were entrusted with St. Joseph parish in Kahawa Sukari in 1997, and the Urafiki Carovana Elementary School and the Emanuela Mazzola Nursery School were also founded.

We participated in a "special" Fraternity meeting that gathered the "veterans" of the early days and the "newbies." "I don't have children, but the Otunga school is mine. It says who I am," our hostess, Camilla, told us. She'd moved there from a place near Milan, with her husband Matteo, an engineer. The conversation in their garden ended up as a discussion about life in recent times. The setting around us was a fresco made up of the African sunset and the children playing. Henry spoke about the death of his mother a >>>

» few days earlier. He is the Principal of the Urafiki Carovana Elementary School and one of the first to meet CL, together with his wife Jane. “Many of you called me. Some of you collected money for the funeral. Not everyone would do this.” Joakim added, “I went to the funeral, even though it was the day before the school party and I had a thousand things to do. But what really counted? The friendship with Henry is the face of Jesus for me, and I need to see Him again.” A few days prior, Romana had reminded him, “It’s not a party to celebrate something you have done!” Joakim had no doubts. “It wasn’t a celebration, it was something that was happening. You recognize this only if you continue to ask for what seized you.” Victoria, from Switzerland, had come for an internship five years before and met James, who became her husband. “That is the point. A few months ago, we moved to a smaller house, farther from our friends, in order to save money.” James had decided to go into business for himself and the firm had yet to really take off. “It has been a big struggle, but it forced me to understand that I was called to live what I desire there, in that new house. Unexpected things began to happen, like the friendship with an Italian woman, the mother of one of the children at my son’s nursery school. She hadn’t gone to church for years, and one morning I saw her at Mass. I hadn’t done anything. I just asked for Jesus for myself. Now, seeing Him happens through her, the people I encounter, the things I do...” It is another measure “that makes you live.” Romana spoke up, her heart saddened by the departure of Leo Capobianco, for years the head of AVSI, and who had recently returned to Italy. “It is difficult, but everything



is a gift. Also the arrival of a new friend like Andrea, who has come to take his place.” Another gift had happened in September, when Rose Busingye came from the Meeting Point of Kampala, Uganda, with “her” women who have AIDS. Antonino said, “This challenged us to have a new gaze on everything. It was like a new beginning” (see *Traces*, n. 10/2015).

CIPRIAN AND UGALI. Seeing people like this demolishes the void. This happened for John, a man of piercing eyes and few teeth. To meet him and about fifteen friends of his Fraternity group, we travelled north about 250 miles to Mutuati, beyond Mount Kenya. We reached a road lined with shacks and a market, a mission and people’s homes scattered around the neighborhood. John used to roam about, like many others, and always scraping together enough to get by, day in and day out. He saw many people, some were happier than oth-

ers. “Five years ago I went with them and my life changed. For the first time someone brought me to see Nairobi,” he laughed. Josafat, 38 years old, said, “He was more interested in me than I was.” It was this way for Stanley and Tabita as well. They were gathered in a room that opened onto the gravel road.

They talked about the beginning of the Movement there. John met Ciprian, who later became the Principal of a public school in Nairobi, in the early 1990s. When John returned home, he continued to live that encounter, and involved his childhood friend Silas. The two men married two sisters, and today have over twenty children between them. As the community grew, so did their works. “I began teaching, and at the same time we started a food bank and a cooperative for mutual assistance, and the Saint Riccardo Pampuri Elementary School.”

We lunched on grilled meat and *ugali*, a kind of grits. “For whom do I



DISTANCE SUPPORT. From left, Antonino Masuri among the children of the Little Prince Elementary School on the outskirts of the Kibera slum (above). AVSI, with its supporters, helps 2,800 children today, financing their scholastic progress. Below, after the Mass at Saint Charles parish in Kahawa Sukari, and above, the gathering with two Fraternity groups of Nairobi: the “veterans” and the “newbies.”

do all this?” Ciprian continued. “This is the question. Reality is the road where you grow in faith. You enter into it for yourself. This is why you go into the classroom. The thing you are searching for is also the thing that challenges the children.” Antony shared the same sentiments. He is the Principal of the Little Prince Elementary School, the “pearl” of the Nairobi slum of Kibera.

Joakim’s sentiment, that “seeing that face again” is what counts most in life, was also the theme of the dinner we shared with our *Memores Domini* friends. Paolo, a teacher from Sardinia who had gone back to Italy the previous year, was in Nairobi for the school’s anniversary. Bebé, a Portuguese woman who works in Dadaab (see *Traces*, n. 9/2015), and Chrispine, a Kenyan who was about to leave for Uganda, were also there. The conversation could be summed up in two sentences: “The center is Christ, not our activity. This challenges our

vocation and our task every day.” Those who have encountered the Movement in these years have been fascinated by a life. Think of when Fr. Giussani designated the *Memores Domini* houses as monasteries. “Living that fact has grabbed us, we’re not *doing* an ‘association,’” said Antonino. The same is true for the four priests of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo, and the sisters of the same Fraternity. At Sunday Mass, we saw the life that had blossomed around them. There was a real danger of terrorist attacks, but the metal detector at the entrances almost disappeared in the midst of the songs and hugs as people made their way out, the poor families and those that were comfortable, the disabled children who gather with their mothers in the parish and the women with AIDS of the Meeting Point.

Fr. Gabriele, together with Simon, a young worker, follows the CLU. On the evening of the School of Com-

munity, he fills his Toyota with young people to bring them to the University. It’s not easy to move around, and it’s often dangerous. The police stop people. “Many things can happen, even dying in an attack on a supermarket or the university. But this makes me live more intensely; we want to be ready,” Eunice, an aspiring engineer, said after Garissa.

TO SAVOR EVERYTHING. School of Community began with a song, and then Daisy asked everyone to share, “starting from what happens to us.” One student spoke about a meeting with Alfredo, an Italian friend, on the topic of work. “He didn’t come to tell us what to do, but to share his experience. This is our companionship.” Patrick, instead, talked about his visit with the CLU in Eldoret. “We live the same thing. For them we were the presence of Jesus, and they were His presence for us. Very beautiful.” “‘The road is reality,’ this is what I heard the Pope emphasize,” Daisy said of the encounter with Francis a few weeks before. “It was encouraging for the experience we live,” not only as CLU, but as a Movement, as the Church. “He spoke to us frankly, like someone who knows everything about us. He didn’t give us a user’s manual, but invited us to look at Christ, who gives meaning to everything. He is the one we should ask for in everything.”

As we left Kibera the mud came up to our pants legs, but the African sky was a wonder. I realized that the old man on the corner, there amidst the charcoal and the hanging meat, was smiling, and that a girl’s coiffure was truly perfect. Mud and beauty. There is a new measure, and it makes you savor everything. **T**

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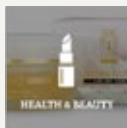
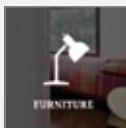
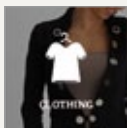
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