

2016

COMMUNION AND LIBERATION INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

# TRACES

9

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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



# BEGGARS OF MERCY

From Italy to Kenya, from Syria to Spain (and in the Holy Land, the U.S., the Philippines...) we capture the words and faces of a day that recaps the Jubilee.

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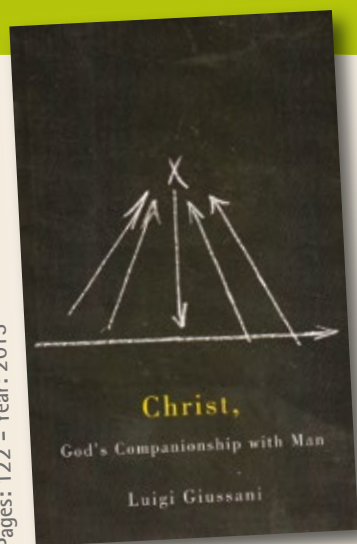
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**LUIGI GIUSSANI**

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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# THE KEYSTONE

**T**he day is approaching. In little more than a month, on November 20<sup>th</sup>, Pope Francis will close the Holy Door. The Year of Mercy will be over, at least in form. But there is nothing greater and truer, nothing that speaks to us better about God, than something that passes through the form of our finiteness (the space of a door, the time of twelve months) to expand it, transfigure it, to make that same form become an impressive sign of the infinite. This is what the Jubilee has been.

Many times in recent weeks we have heard people say, “How nice it would be if this Year went on longer.” Not for sentimental reasons, or out of attachment to the liturgies, the papal teachings, or certain moving moments, but because this Year of Mercy has evidently touched the depths of a real need, and thus people wish that such a powerful response to our thirst for forgiveness would never end.


Well, the beautiful thing is that this is truly so. God’s forgiveness is eternal. It is *always* the time of mercy. And this gift that the Pope has given his Church, this Jubilee that all of us needed—and need—so much without realizing it, has served precisely to make us aware of this fact.

**A few weeks ago, at the Marian Sanctuary of Caravaggio**, and in many other churches around the world, the CL Jubilee Pilgrimage took place. It coincided with the beginning of the academic year, with the normal resumption of ordinary activities, and the journey of every day. This was no coincidence. “There is no journey without mercy,” said Julián Carrón, the leader of the Movement. “Without forgiving and being forgiven, no relationship would have the chance of lasting.” Without the embrace of Christ that descends all the way to the abyss of our limitation, as happened with Peter, we simply could not live.

“I do not understand how one can think it possible to make a journey without returning to the ‘yes’ of Peter,” Carrón continued. “Otherwise, how can we start anew? There is no possibility of morality, no possibility of attachment without a Presence.” For this reason, a “particular story [...] is the keystone of the Christian conception of man, of his morality,” as Fr. Giussani said. Because “mercy is a person. Mercy has a face. It is called Jesus Christ and it reveals itself in the relationship with you as it revealed itself in the relationship with Peter. Even with all his mistakes, his failures, his betrayals, none of this was an objection. None of all this is an objection. [...] We can take up the journey again only if He once again draws us to Himself.”

**A particular story.** A face, an encounter, is the way Christ’s mercy reveals itself, attracts us to Himself. It seems so small, and yet, when it happens, it changes everything. The fog melts away. You walk. Even the widespread uncertainty that grips our world lessens, that “existential fear” analyzed so well by Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most lucid intellectuals of our times, in the interview you will read in these pages. Even in the midst of the powerful epochal changes of our time, you can receive the certainty that is necessary for living, as shown in the simple stories of Student Youth kids, and in the many other testimonies you will find in the magazine. They are *particular* stories, everyday stories, which may seem insignificant at first sight. But they happen, and in happening, they point out a road for everyone. **T**

## MAKING ROOM FOR HIM IN OUR HEARTS


 Dear Fr. Carrón: After three years in Taiwan, we moved to Turin. One day, the elevator door opened on us just as our neighbors' door opened. The man who was on his way out, seeing our Siena plaque with IHS hanging outside our door, asked what our religion was. "Catholic," I answered. In the meantime, one of his children, a six-year-old, appeared at the door. For my two older children, it seemed impossible to have found a new friend so soon after arriving here. "We're going downstairs to play. Bye!" They disappeared and I was left to have tea with my neighbor who invited me in. We chatted awhile. They are Muslim with two children. She hardly goes out except to do the shopping so she doesn't know many people in our building. From that day, our children became inseparable. It's impossible to stop them: in the yard, on the terrace, in the house. They run everywhere. Inevitably, the different "belonging" comes out and it's beautiful to hear their conversations from the terrace, "Want to come down and play?" "We can't today. We're going to Mass." "What's Mass?" "You don't know?! Mass is when you go with all your friends to church to see Jesus and then you go to the priest's house to have a barbecue." "Cool! Can I come?" My children asked, "Mom, can Jad come with us?" "Hmmm, we'll see... Maybe next time." "Yeah! Mom says you can come next time." Then the other evening, my son said, "Mom, why did you make pasta with pesto? I wanted carbonara!" "Jad can't eat bacon." "Ah, okay. I really prefer pesto



anyway." While I served the food, I heard my daughter say, "Jad, you can't eat yet. We have to say grace." "What's grace?" "What's do you mean, what's grace? It's a prayer you say before eating to say 'thank you!'" "Oh, right. We say, 'buon appetito!'" "No, that's not a prayer. We'll teach you, 'Thank you, Lord.'" These are simple daily events, but to me, they are beautiful examples of what you said about the form of witness. For them, it is immediate; they communicate their belonging simply by living. First and foremost I felt welcomed. Their family is one of so many gifts Jesus gives to us. We, in turn, are asked to continue to make room for Him in our hearts.

**Ilaria, Turin (Italy)**

## ON THE TRAIN READING "PAGE ONE"

 Dear Julián: It has been a few days since I printed "Page One" from the September issue of *Traces*, but I haven't found the time to read it yet. Even so, I realize that the existential uncertainty makes my legs tremble, and, away from home, from my certainties, I am often lost. Today, while on the train returning from Brussels to Paris, where I have been working for six months, I immerse myself in the reading. I'm immediately thunderstruck and I devour the pages one

after another. While I'm reading, it's as if I finally understand more of what has happened to me in the past months. My friend from Milan comes to mind; I worked with her only three months, and this summer, after a long illness, the Lord wanted her with Him. Nonetheless she, with whom I remained in daily contact via WhatsApp, displayed a certainty in everything, a passion for a life conquered after a tormented journey of faith. While I'm reading about the "walls" and the "dialogue," I also think about my other colleague, a vegan, crazy about yoga, who, unsatisfied with her job, never censored her desire, and after the death of our friend has found the strength to finally go and do what she is most passionate about: teaching. While I go over the passages about witnessing, I think about the older friends of my Pisa community, who spent a year taking seriously what Pope Francis told us: to welcome the immigrants. In mid-September, with the pastor of our parish, they organized a party in our community with seventy immigrants hosted in the surrounding welcoming centers. Then, when I read *Les Misérables*, I understand that the grudge toward one of my managers is born out of my underlying desire to put order into reality. One thing is to provide witness to the mercy that we have been given, as some of my friends have done. I also reflect on my family, and on how my wife, my three daughters, and I, in completely different circumstances, are searching for our own road, and how each one of us, with the encounter with the Movement, feels embraced and launched into the world.

**Giampaolo, Italy**



## ENCOUNTER


### GIOVANNI AND THAT “GREAT, GREAT FRIEND”

**G**iovanni is a father who was left alone with a six-year-old daughter. We had been accompanying the family and our nurses followed the mother until she passed away. After this happened, the relationship with Giovanni grew more intense because his needs are more pressing. For this reason, he asked us to help him by taking his daughter in. Now when the father is not available, we bring the girl to school in the morning, and she has started to come to our home every day: lunch, homework, play, bringing her to medical appointments, and catechism. With time, Giovanni started to know the friends of the Fraternity. One Sunday he was invited to the baptism of a baby of one of these families. He was taken by the words of the song, “*I have a great, great friend.*” He wants to know, “But who is this great, great friend?” Then he answers his own question. “To me, this great friend are the nuns of Charity of the Assumption.” Later, he exclaimed, “Here we are talking about God! I never realized that; God as a friend, close to us.” In the following days, the dialogue continued, “I never was ‘against’ God, but God had nothing to do with me. How different it is to realize that He entered my life just like a friend who sustains me. The nuns and the friends are the way He reaches me!” Since then he has begun to look more at the friends of the Fraternity. One day he said, “You guys are different from the rest, because you too are full of problems, but you have a gladness in facing them. I want to live like you.”



**Sister Donata, Torino (Italy)**

### WHAT I DISCOVERED ABOUT MYSELF IN RIMINI

 I am a seventeen-year-old teenage Italian boy, but I live in the U.S. I’ve always played sports, especially soccer. When I got to high school, I couldn’t wait until I could play varsity, the school’s most advanced team. About three years ago, our friend, Fr. José, came to visit us and I had the chance to tell him about my passion. He was happy to hear about my interest, but suddenly he posed this question, “When reality hits and you find yourself with a great desire in your heart, do sports give you an answer? Are they enough for you?” At the time, I didn’t really understand the question. A few months later, however, I began to go through a difficult time. I realized that

my heart desired great friendships that not even my teammates were able to give me. I was always in a bad mood. I went back to Italy last summer and met a group of kids from GS. We did lots of things together: trips to the mountains and the seashore, songs, barbecues, sports. It was different with them; we discussed life and what our heart really desires. We could just simply be together, being ourselves. In June, before I left for vacation, the coach told me that if I returned in August for training, I would be able to play varsity. But my Italian friends had invited me to work with them at the Rimini Meeting. That’s what I chose to do. My job was to clean the pavilions. If someone had told me two years ago that I would give up playing varsity soccer for cleaning, I

never would have believed it! I’m back at school now and they let me practice with the varsity team, but not to play in the games. But I am happy with the choice I made because I understood the important things in life: 1) There is a place where I can be myself and find people with whom I can dig deep; 2) There is no true friendship if Jesus is not at the center, because I can be on a team with fifty people and still feel alone because I felt like I was constantly being evaluated. Whoever forges a bond based on Jesus loves the other in spite of his defects; and 3) I experienced great joy cleaning the stands because it is wonderful to work together with friends to make something beautiful for everyone.

**Pietro, Rochester (USA)**

# THE TUNNEL AND THE LIGHT

The solitude. The fear of the “strangers at our doors.” The sacrifice of freedom. **ZYGMUNT BAUMAN**, one of the greatest intellectuals of our time, goes to the root of the “existential insecurity” that marks our world, and explains why the one way out has a name, “encounter,” and a face, that of Pope Francis.

BY DAVIDE PERILLO

**A** light. The only one, at the end of “the long and *uncannily* dark tunnel we currently walk.” But it is “an *uncannily* bright light.” *Uncannily*, that is, “mysteriously, surprisingly,” rendered in the form of an adverb. Zygmunt Bauman says the word twice in two sentences when speaking of Pope Francis and their encounter in Assisi last month at the meeting of representatives of the world religions requested by the Pope and organized by the Community of Sant’Egidio. “What did I say to him? It would be preposterously vainglorious of me to suppose that I can have much, if anything, to add to what Pope Francis already knows of the human predicament and what

suffering means to those who experience it firsthand... I only confessed to viewing him as a light.”

Ninety-one years old next month, a Polish Jew by birth and a cosmopolitan by vocation (he lived in Warsaw, London, and Tel Aviv before putting down roots in Leeds, Great Britain), Bauman is one of the most famous—and prolific—intellectuals in the world. A sociologist and philosopher, inventor of formulas capable of defining epochal changes in two words (for example, “liquid modernity,” that is, a society marked by an ever-increasing absence of bonds, one that is frayed and indefinable), Bauman is above all a great observer, a man able to photograph the world and its inhabitants in detail, deep

down, with a gaze that is at once acute and charged with empathy.

He has been directing this empathetic gaze for some time now at the phenomenon of immigration. Or better, at migrants, the *Strangers at Our Door* (the title of one of his most recent books) who undermine our certainties and become an easy target for our deep, deaf insecurity, an insecurity that cannot be alleviated by the solutions proposed by the politics of walls and strong men. “Once this measure is refused to those who request asylum from wars and destruction, and more migrants are repatriated, it will become evident how all this is irrelevant for resolving the real causes of the uncertainty,” he said in an interview for *Corriere*



*della Sera*. “The demons that persecute us—the fear of losing our place in society, the fragility of the achievements we have made—will not evaporate or disappear” because the root of that uncertainty is deeper. It is existential.

**Let’s start from here, then. What is this “existential insecurity”? Where does it come from? From the “rupture of all ties”—as you stated in that interview—or is there something else?**

Kant, the most indefatigable explorer of the mysteries of the uniquely human mode of being-in-the-world—to whose wisdom we all, thinking humans, are in debt and of which we are either willing or unwilling, enthusiastic or despairing heirs—famously confessed and pro-

claimed: “Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” The “starry heavens” represents things beyond human reach and human ability to tackle, and the “moral law” the dilemmas facing humans who are, despite them, doomed to choose. More than a century before those words had been recorded in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Blaise Pascal elaborated in his *Pensées* on the roots of that harrowing, fear-generating inadequacy: “When I consider the brief plan of my life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after, the small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here? By whose command and act were this time and place allotted to me?” And further: “Being unable to cure death, wretchedness and ignorance, men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things.” The snag is, though, that however hard they try to follow that decision, the activity of thinking and the thought, the ever-renewed thought, remain stubbornly irremovable, part and parcel of the human condition. This is why “existential uncertainty” is ineffaceably carved into the human way of being-in-the-world. There it is where you come from and from which you cannot escape.

**The first reflection of this insecurity is the “fear of the other.” You have clearly articulated why “strangers at our doors” scare us so much. But don’t you think, deep down, there’s also a fear of having to ask ourselves certain questions? I mean, the other who’s knocking at my door inevitably forces me to ask *who I am*, what**

**I think about life, about relationships and what really matters... Is building walls also a way of avoiding these questions?**

The feeling of “insecurity” derives from a blend of uncertainty and ignorance and the humiliation that results from inadequacy to the tasks of life, and, in the last consequence from the collapse of commonly held self-esteem and self-confidence. “The others,” particularly those among them classified as unfamiliar, alien, or foreign, are especially fertile in gestating and strengthening that sentiment.

**Why?**

What recycles strangers into dangers (dangers all the more awesome and intimidating for their nagging under-definability) is the absence of reliable knowledge of their intentions and of their behavioral code, as well as of the skills required to tackle relations with them properly and to adequately respond to their gambits. In addition, you correctly put your finger on one more factor of crucial importance. Strangers (mostly migrants, the newcomers among them) tend to question what “we,” the natives, hold in the realm of “*doxa*” (the knowledge we think *with* but not *about*). They press and nudge us to explain the way in which we go about our life pursuits: convictions and actions that to us are obvious, self-evident, and therefore self-explanatory. By doing so, they disturb and unsettle our spiritual tranquility and erode our self-assurance so necessary for resolute action. And how many of us welcome such a state of affairs?

**In *Of God and Man*, you say that, “The moment that *uncertainty* was born was the moment that *morality* was born—together with the moral *self*, aware of walking a tightrope. Sentencing them to choosing, [...] God invited humans to participate in the act of creation.” In front such a huge >>**



» **problem are we afraid of this “invitation”? At least, are we afraid of our freedom? And if so, why?**

An old, familiar story again... Perhaps better described as a sort of perennial story; after all, rebellions against freedom occur with amazing regularity—well-nigh every gallant fight against servitude, oppression, and constraint on liberty is likely to lead, sooner or later, to the pendulum of public disposition and passion turning 180 degrees, with the ranks of those ready to accept and even welcome the tightening of screws and battening of hatches swelling (a phenomenon described in much detail by Erich Fromm in his classic *Escape from Freedom*). We are currently living (at least in the West and among the generations lucky enough to forget or to never experience first-hand the charms of a life under despotism and tyranny) through another such turn of the

pendulum, triggered by the same factors as in the past; namely, the fact that liberty can only arrive in a double deal with the burdens and risks of responsibility. To a growing number of people—prompted, encouraged, aided, and abetted by a rising number of aspiring (and in a growing number of cases victorious) vote-seekers (of the Trump, Marianne Le Pen, Orban, or Fico type)—trading rights to choose tied to responsibilities too heavy for individual shoulders to endure, in exchange for reductions in the scope of personal freedoms, seems a good bargain. The weaker the individual shoulders and the heavier the responsibility loaded upon them in the course of the state-sponsored and market-enforced privatization and commercialization of social functions, the more we may expect to see a fast-growing crowd of strongmen (and strongwomen) sniffing the

opportunity of electoral success and eager to surrender to the temptations it exudes.

**It's a heavy risk...**

The numbers of people exposed every day to the risks, traps, and ambushes of a life lived under market rule are growing, people whose nostalgia after lost Paradise focuses on freedom *from* choosing; more precisely, on emancipation from the duty of caring for, and contributing to, the well-being of the world and hospitality to its human residents. But this dream of following the example of Pontius Pilatus by washing our hands of the battles between good and evil, morality and indifference, and truth and lie means the renunciation of human dignity, which (as Pico della Mirandola and Immanuel Kant taught) involves God's invitation extended uniquely to the human species to participate



## LIFE AND WORKS

**Zygmunt Bauman** (in the photograph) was born to Jewish parents in Poznan, Poland on November 19, 1925. At the age of 19 he fled the German occupation and ended up enlisting with the Russians. After the war, he studied sociology in Warsaw, then went on to the London School of Economics. He embraced Marxism. He taught in Poland, and in 1968 moved to Israel. Three years later he returned to Great Britain, where from 1972 to 1990 he taught in Leeds.

Among his works are *Freedom* (1988), *Postmodern Ethics* (1992), *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Society Under Siege* (2002), *Wasted Lives. Modernity and Its Outcasts* (2004), *Of God and Man* (2013), *Babel* (2015), and *Strangers at Our Door* (2016).

in completing the act of creation, and which in turn was the motive behind endowing humans with reason, sociability, and freedom of choice.

### What can overcome the fear?

Again, surely not quick fixes, shortcuts, and instant solutions... Having pointed out (in his speech at the Charlemagne Prize ceremony) the development, absorption, and daily practice of the culture of dialogue as the royal road to humanity's peaceful coexistence (and by the same token to a gradual yet steady dispersion of reciprocally aroused fears), Pope Francis emphasized the need to introduce the art of dialogue to school curricula at all levels of education. Clearly, education is the opposite strategy to one-off campaigns; calculated to achieve lasting and preferably irreversible effects, it takes time (possibly even a few generations), and calls for a lot of patience and un-

flappable determination resistant to the petrifying impact of occasional and difficult-to-avoid missteps, errors, and lapses. And let's note that in our age of universal access to the media of information and the massive, ubiquitous pressure of PR and advertising, education is no longer (if it ever was) an activity limited to schools; however carefully school curricula are composed, they are far from alone in the field of mindset and character formation, and anyway their superiority to a plethora of competitors is not a foregone conclusion.

### You mentioned the Pope.

Lately, you have often spoken about him with admiration. You said that to truly face the problem, "we'd have to study and apply Francis's analysis" and "pray that his word be incarnated in our actions." Why? What struck you about him?

I believe Pope Francis to be the most precious gift the Christian Church has offered to our troubled, lost-in-its-way, confused, and drifting world, missing its compass. Francis has restored vigor to wilting/fading hopes for an alternative, better world made to the measure of human needs and dreams. He is perhaps the only public figure in the limelight willing and able to do so, thanks to a voice reaching well beyond the incestuous circle of political elites to the *hoi polloi* whom the managers of loudspeakers fail or don't care to reach, let alone to lead out of their present quandary.

May I ask a personal question? And for you? What is the origin of your outlook? I ask because reading your comments I often find myself won-

dering, "But how can he look at society, at things, at man with such acute insight? What's does he take to heart?"

This question should not be addressed to me, as I am not the best person to provide a credible and trustworthy answer. With this proviso, the sole "unpacking" of the way to "look at society" I can intimate is an attempt at "*sociological hermeneutics*" (that is, interpreting human modes of behavior, circularly, as responses to their life conditions as established by the society which their conduct creates and reproduces), as well as resorting, as much as I can manage, to empathy (trying to view those modes from *their* practitioners' perspective, or in a simpler formulation, to walk the world, potholes and all, in *their* shoes).

### In *Strangers at Our Door*, you write,

"The sole way out of the present discomforts leads through rejecting the treacherous temptations of separation [...] we must seek occasions to come into a close and increasingly intimate contact." And further on, you go deeper using an expression that really impressed me: you explain that walls, populism, basically this entire defense mechanism against the other and against fear "appears flawless and unbeatable. It could indeed be so, were it not for the presence of a counterforce: the phenomenon of *encounter*," that leads to "a dialogue that aims at mutual understanding." What does this "encounter" consist of for you? Why is it so decisive?

Equipped as we are nowadays with the online alternative to the offline world, we can shelter from encounters in electronic "comfort zones" by the single expedient of eliminating the "otherness of others" from sight, hearing, and concern. Such comfort is, however, unattainable in the offline world—in the neighborhood, street, workplace, in the schools our children attend. The reality of others, with the constant risk of >>

» encounter, buttonholing, conversation, and interaction it contains, cannot be electronically eliminated or even suspended, left out of account. There is still the possibility, as Martin Buber observed, of diluting unavoidable encounters by degrading them to the emaciated form of “mism meetings,” or carrying the escape exits in the form of a mobile phone in one’s pocket. The chance of “mism meetings” being inadvertently raised to the level of true encounters calls for mastering the art of dialogue and for accepting the fortuities and jeopardy endemic to its practice. Until we reach Hans Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” in which the otherness of others fades away—ripping the curtains, taking apart the stockades and barricades, and wrecking the walls always remains possible in the offline world.

**Fr. Luigi Giussani, the founder of CL, said to the young people who were following him at the very beginning, back in the fifties, that “dialogue is communicating your own personal life to other personal lives; it’s sharing in the existence of others in your own existence.” In other words, dialectic has nothing to do with it. But rather, it is an enormous opportunity. What do you think? How would you define “dialogue?”**

Where to go, what to explore in search of answers to the questions of the “who am I” kind? From Descartes on, his “*Cogito ergo sum*” (*I think, therefore I am*) pointed inwards. Luigi Giussani, in close affinity it seems with George Herbert Mead, points to an interaction between inwards and outwards—the interplay of “I” (my self-definition) and “Me” (my perception of how others define me). As recent as a few decades ago, investigations of the birth and development of selves were aimed at “authenticity,” which was squeezed into and stored in hiding inside the murky innards of psyche and all too often



exposed to the repressive pressures of cultural norms, waiting for therapist-assisted and -monitored efforts to break from prison. At the moment however, as anticipated by Giussani two decades ago, there is a tendency to replace the orthodox *Cogito* by something steering clear from Descartes’s egocentrism and coming closer instead to “you are, therefore I am.”

**Last month, in Rimini, the Meeting was held: a massive event for culture and for a people, with guests from all over the world, 106 panel discussions, 17 exhibits, and 800,000 visitors. The title was “You are a good for me.” In his message, the Pope said, “For these times, it’s a courageous title.” In your experience, what do we need to be able to go back to saying to the other “you are a good for me”?**

It will take, I fear, more than 106 panel discussions and even more than 800,000 visitors filling Rimini exhibition galleries to make those noble words into flesh. Another case of “cultural lag” is one of the most conspicuous markers of our present-day condition: we are aware of many more problems waiting to be urgently tackled than of ways and means likely to

tackle them. We tussle, haplessly and hopelessly, between powers let off the leash and institutions no longer capable of taming and curbing them—let alone controlling the mode and purposes of their use.

**And what is it that you are certain of?**  
I keep repeating that the sole certainty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, enamored as it is (at least so far) with deregulation, flexibilization, contracting-out, and “outsourcing,” is the growth of uncertainty.

**But in the *Corriere della Sera* interview, you said that when we finally see that building walls is “irrelevant in resolving the real causes of uncertainty, the game is not over: “at that point we can wake up again and develop the antibodies.” What are these antibodies? What kind of certainty do we need to live?**

Maybe humans may find sooner or later the golden mean between a deficit and an excess of certainty... However, having perused many proclamations, scattered over space and time, of it having already been found, I am inclined to doubt whether such a hoped-for result (tantamount to the end of history) will be ever attained. **T**

# A STORY OF ORDINARY CERTAINTY

**We recount here the experience of a Brazilian judge, PAULO ANTÔNIO DE CARVALHO, who speaks of the risk of trusting in front of the “two walls” we raise.**

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

**D**uring a hearing, a judge read out the sentence condemning a man to 8 years in prison, explaining that he could appeal and hope for a better result. “No, no. I agree with the sentence. I made a mistake and I have to pay,” responded the prisoner. But then he added, “Excuse me, do I have to go to prison today?” “Yes, this is the way it works,” the judge confirmed, surprised. “Why do you ask?” “Because I’m not ready to go today.” At this point, it would have been natural to laugh or to ask a question. The judge asked him why. “We have two children, and I’m the only one who works. If I don’t get things ready at home, my wife won’t know how to get by.” “So you’re asking me for some time?” “Yes.” “How much time do you need?” “Ten days.” “I’ll give you thirty.” He opened his datebook and marked the date the prisoner should return.

Thirty days later, the man presented himself, right on time, with his suitcase in hand. Today the judge, the protagonist of this story, told *Traces*, “People at work couldn’t believe it. Instead, it hap-

pened, because trust is stronger than everything.” “Not protagonist, collaborator...” he added right away. His name is Paulo Antônio de Carvalho. Raised in Conceição da Aparecida, in the southern part of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, he has been working for over thirty years as the head of the judicial district of Itaúna, a city of 100,000 residents about fifty miles from Belo Horizonte. People say he was crazy to have made that decision. He knows that he



Paulo Antônio de Carvalho.

risked quite a lot that time, especially his job. What gave him the courage to grant those thirty days was a very simple fact: “I looked that man in the eyes,” he recounts. “I wagered everything on trust in him.” The story did not simply involve the man showing up on the thirtieth day on his own two feet to go to prison, but also the fact that the judge did not send him home in a police car with the siren blaring. “It would have been very embarrassing for him, handcuffed, in front of his wife and children, the neighbors at the windows. Things can be done in a more humane way. And just think what a difference it makes to go

to prison without the anguish of problems left behind at home. If I were to be sentenced to prison today, I wouldn’t have my affairs in order either.”

De Carvalho graduated from law school in 1970 and became a judge six years later. He did not take on the job right away. “We judges deal with a person’s freedom. It’s necessary to be very prudent. We have to act with mercy, in order not to betray God’s trust in us. I have matured with time and experience, above all in religiosity, and also thanks to some encounters.”

**WITHOUT GUARDS.** He arrived in Itaúna on June 30, 1984. In the beginning he did his work “like the great majority of judges” regarding sentencing and prison—as an administrative concern. “Until I realized that ‘on the other side’ there was a person like me, that is, with the same need for attention.” He learned this by encountering the method of APAC, the prisons without guards, featured in one of the best-loved exhibits at the recent Meeting of Rimini. The method of APAC was born from the daring intuition of a São Paulo lawyer, Mário Otoboni, who was the first to wager that people are always greater than the bad things they do, no matter what the crime. Over the years, the number of APAC prisons has grown to 40 just in the state of Minas Gerais, hosting over three thousand “people in recovery,” and they have been a source of forgiveness and of unimaginable happenings, transforming families and the society around them. People who leave these prisons have a 15-20% rate of recidivism, compared to 80% for traditional prisons.

It is a different vision of law, prisoners, and sentences. But the most revolutionary power of this method was revealed in the experience of a prisoner, José de Jesus, who left an indelible mark on de Carvalho. “He was a very strong and very intelligent man, >>>

## CLOSE UP

» and thanks to these two qualities had always been able to escape from any prison.” When the Tribunal of Justice commissioned a report on the APAC prisons, a journalist asked José: “You’ve always escaped from prison. Now you’ve been here for two years, in a prison with no guards, and you haven’t escaped. Why?” “Because nobody runs away from love.”

**WE “ARREST OURSELVES.”** Judge de Carvalho was not immediately persuaded about the APAC method. “It took me a couple of years.” He had to see lives changed, like that of José, the effects on society, and especially the work of the volunteers. “I was very impressed by the dedication of all those people who spend their time and energy in this way, in a world like today’s,” where if someone is unacceptable, it is that person’s own fault. He was very struck by Julián Carrón’s words in Page One of the September issue of *Traces* about the attempts to respond to the existential insecurity of our time. “It surprised me because it’s crucial,” explains de Carvalho. “Today we build two types of walls, the first to keep at a distance those who do bad things, the second to close ourselves in on our own lives. We ‘arrest ourselves,’ thinking that this way we are safe, but in this way we only create more problems, isolating others, and we fail to resolve the problem of the fear deep down inside ourselves, because it depends on a change of heart, a transformation of life, without which we’ll never be at peace.”

If the world spends all its time “arresting people, thinking it’s the right road, reality says that it is not.” Reality says otherwise. “We have to look for new modalities, to do the same things in different and more humane ways.” Criminality is reduced where an attempt is made to “lower the height of the walls, to look at the prisoner as a subject with rights, to invest in education and recovery.” It is not true that



such a world is less safe. The APAC results are not “gratuitous.” They exist because “the method works.”

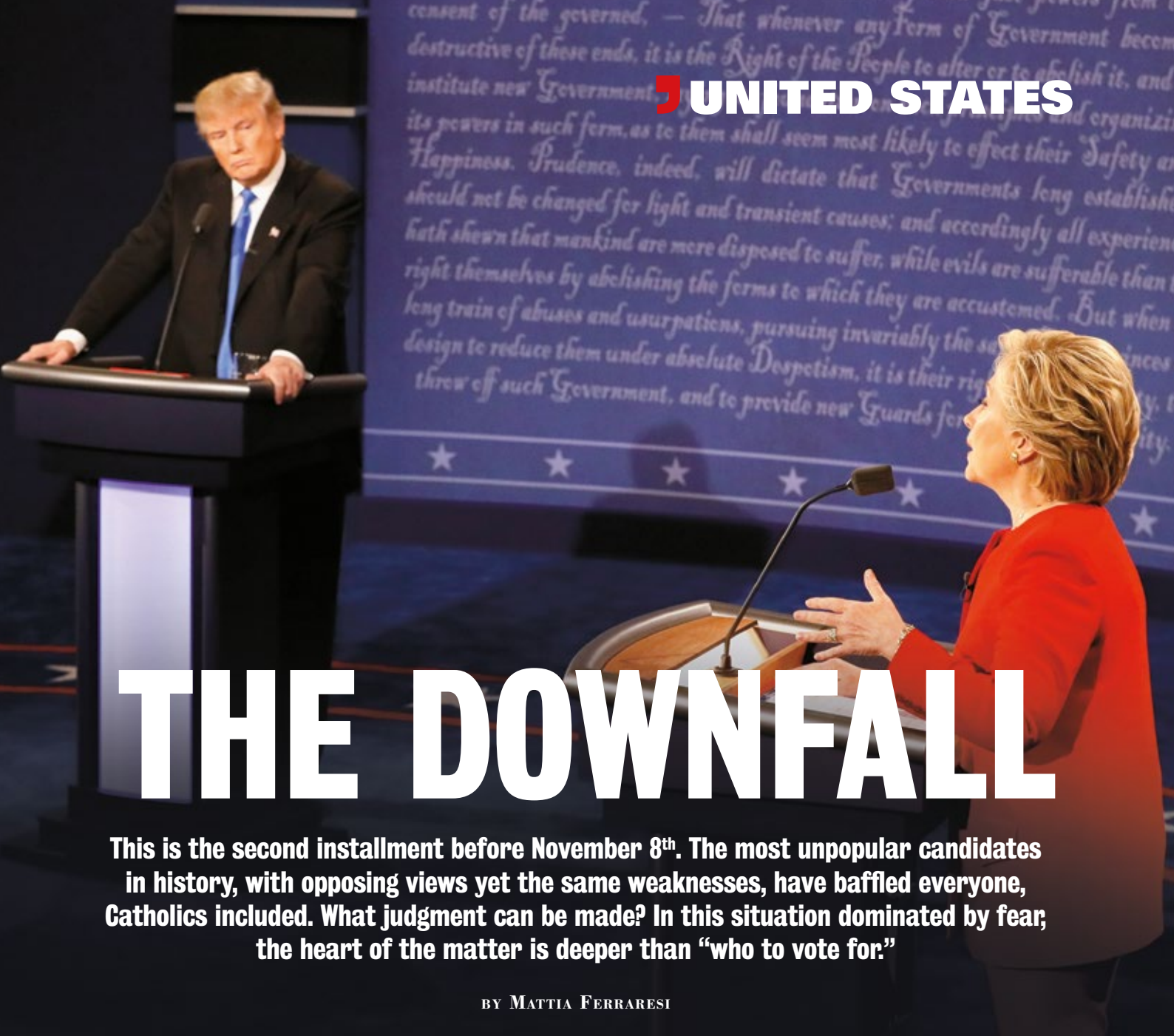
For de Carvalho, the key is seeing in action the conviction of Gudesteu Biber, former President of the Tribunal of Justice of Minas Gerais. “A prisoner must be treated like a man, so he can act like a man.” De Carvalho ventures even further: “You have to treat him in light of the divine spark he has within.” This is why he finds so interesting “the challenge of Fr. Giusani and Fr. Carrón: only when you reach the heart of man can you work any transformation, including social transformation.”

He looks at his career and does not see the roughly 18,000 sentences he has imposed, but rather the 70,000 people who have come before him in court. Over time, he has learned to see them as “so many Lazaruses, just as we can be, or as the people we meet every day, ‘dead’ people who need Jesus to stand in front of the tomb and say, ‘Come forth!’ He confides that he often thinks of the Pope’s provocation about alms, when he says that if we give a coin to a man on the sidewalk, we do nothing: we do not change the situation. “Francis says that it is an altogether different thing if you stop, look

him in the eyes, shake his hand, and speak to him, because it is certain that this person is asking for love, not just a coin. This is another form of the same thing, and it changes everything.”

What do you gain by working and living in a different way? “Of all the things we could talk about, this is the most important,” he answers. “Nothing we do has value if it is done formally, if all the ‘right things’ are done out of religious duty, as spectators, without living the essence of life. I gain a very great deal. Getting involved in the relationship I have with the brother in front of me, with the facts that happen to me, has provoked a very deep transformation in me. I have grown as a Christian, as a man and as a judge. Today I am a better person than I was before.”

In speaking about himself, he cannot leave out the experience of APAC, but he must also include relationships with two priests who were fathers for him, since his own father died when he was seven years old. “They transmitted the faith and today I continue to follow the road they showed me.” Then he adds, “God has been very good to me, giving me all this. Yes, ‘certainty’ is born from knowing that you are loved very much.” **T**



# THE DOWNFALL

**This is the second installment before November 8<sup>th</sup>. The most unpopular candidates in history, with opposing views yet the same weaknesses, have baffled everyone, Catholics included. What judgment can be made? In this situation dominated by fear, the heart of the matter is deeper than “who to vote for.”**

BY MATTIA FERRARESI

**T**he moment has arrived: the election is on November 8<sup>th</sup>, and never have there been two more unpopular candidates competing for the White House. The more optimistic surveys say that over fifty percent of American voters disapprove of, or even disdain, both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Faith in the ability of the government to respond to the needs of society has hit a record low. This was proven by the fact that an outsider won the nomination of and besieged the party of Lincoln, tearing down historic institutions

deemed unassailable, while the other candidate fought a hard battle in the primaries to defeat Bernie Sanders, an opponent virtually unknown beforehand who was able to mobilize millions of young people with the promise of a “political revolution” to purge the system of its inequalities.

The forces that excited the anti-system sentiment reaped their reward. In this campaign, it is not the political news shows, the wishes of the people, or the grand promises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that dominate; it is fear. Fear of immigrants, of terrorists, of globalization, of the pretentious elite. Fear

of the other, whether it be a driver who gets pulled over by the police or a political adversary who is demonized and ridiculed by demeaning the “basket of deplorables” that support him or her. It is the exact opposite of St. Ambrose’s definition of the ideal political person: “What love can do, fear could never do. Nothing is more useful than to be loved.”

In this time of “a beginning of a new epoch,” as Pope Francis has described it, overcome by fragmentation and fear, when hype and other background noise prevail over the content of the debate, a time in >>

» which the certainty of the greatest democracy in the world is falling apart, the most pressing question is not the one made famous by Lenin—what is to be done?—but a more purely revolutionary question: how can we judge?

**THE DEMOCRATIC SOUL.** First, we should start with a premise. No matter how the vote turns out, America, with its unpopular politics and populism, will suffer a blow to the “bipartisan cult of the presidency” (to use the term of columnist Ross Douthat), one of the dominant traits of American democracy. The role of the president is enshrined by a quasi-mystical aura; it is sacred and embodies universal virtues. The faces of the presidents are carved in stone so that they become eternal.

Far from being a realist in search of compromise, the American president is the incarnation of an ideal, to the point that the electoral campaign is the triumph of the individual: the candidates are judged based on their personality, their eloquence, their humanity, their credibility, their temperament, and their charisma. It is determined whether they are, as the saying goes, “presidential”; if they are truly made for a role with a semi-religious gravitas. What they say, the proposals they present, are secondary. These are all signs of the boundless faith in democracy found in America, defined as the “project of modernity” by theologian Stanley Hauerwas. This faith is the alpha and the omega of every action, the place where every answer to man’s questions lies. It would seem unusual, then, that such a high office is sought by candidates who are so unpopular and so uninspiring.

Theologian David Schindler, Dean Emeritus of the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C., explains it this way: “Trump and Clinton reveal the



end-point of liberal democracy: that is, the point where the inner logic of liberal democracy ends. Trump is the moronic version; Clinton the more systematic, venal version. Both have democratic souls: that is, both believe in endless manipulative chatter coupled with technical (political, scientific) force as the proper means to bring about preferred (in contrast to natural) ends.”

Catholic Social Doctrine insists on the fact that democracy is “a ‘system’ and as such is a means and not an end” and its “‘moral’ value is not automatic.” (from the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*) According to this realist lens that desanctifies democracy—a thought that is unacceptable to those who, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union, theorized the global realization of the democratic model as the inescapable destiny of mankind—toppling the image of the President of the United States from its divine pedestal is an

opportunity to restore the natural order of things. This premise makes it possible to jump feet first, without fear or force, into the adventure of judging based on political merit. The differences between the worldviews of Trump and Clinton are both numerous and vast, but R.R. Reno, editor of the magazine *First Things*, tries to shed light on the heart of the matter: “This peculiar election turnout is the realization that the Post-War world order is coming to an end, and this fact is changing our notion of politics. The clash between left and right is giving way to one between establishment and anti-establishment, and the debate is centered around the tension between nationalism and globalism.” The uncompromising positions against illegal immigration and in favor of protective measures to defend the American economy that Trump has taken have made him the “champion of nationalism who finds a consensus among those



who feel excluded and betrayed by the projects of globalization.”

**“EXCEPTIONALISM.”** While explaining that globalization is not a good in and of itself, just as it did for the case of democracy, Catholic Social Doctrine speaks about the tension between “new hopes” and “troubling questions” that the electoral process provokes: Trump’s rhetoric appeals to Americans who are troubled by the questions and who feel let down by the promises. They are the voters who are disillusioned by the prospects of global progress under America’s leadership, prospects that are embodied by Clinton.

Foreign policy is where the visions of the respective candidates are seen most clearly. Trump adheres to the so-called school of realism in international relations—he thinks that states interact on a bilateral level, without preconditions imposed on the dialogue with other sovereign states,

from Russia to North Korea—because he rejects the notion of “American exceptionalism.” According to him, America is not the universal nation ordained by History, with a capital “h,” to be a beacon for other nations on the path toward democracy and capitalism (a concept that for generations has been equally formative for both the Republican and Democratic parties); rather, it is a superpower that first and foremost must take care of what goes on within its own borders. The America that Trump envisions is non-aligned and isolated.

Clinton, on the other hand, is the defender of exceptionalism and of the view of history that it entails. It is more than just a dislike of Trump’s personality, but also a worldview sincerely shared with Hillary that has caused the Republican George H.W. Bush, champion of globalism, as well as many intellectuals who inspired the “War on Terror” by George W. Bush, to refuse to support Trump.

“Where does the Church stand, with our nation or with globalists?” asks Reno, who has observed that this “moment of disorientation in the world has affected us Catholics as well. Solidarity, subsidiarity, and human dignity in search of the common good still have, I believe, an incredible originality: there is nothing similar among political viewpoints that do not acknowledge a greater dimension or a hand at work in history that is not merely human, except perhaps some surrogates. The challenge is to present these principles in a way that is befitting to this phase of modernity.”

**HISTORIC CHANGE.** One of the crucial questions, especially for American Catholics, is the candidates’ position on life and family issues. Generations of Catholics have voted in alignment with the pro-life movement, but today that pattern is no longer valid. This is not simply due to the fact that, as Reno admits, “we have been on the losing side of most cultural battles,” but also because not even the Republican candidate prioritizes abortion, family, and gender issues in his political agenda. He declared a generic conservative orthodoxy at the beginning of the campaign and has hardly brought it up since then.

And so, as a result, the question for Catholics becomes more profound—and more fascinating—than “who to vote for.” “I believe that this context is an invitation for us to be witnesses in a new way, to seek new spaces for dialogue and to propose new ideas for the good of all,” explains Reno. The flyer created by the CL community in the U.S., titled “Protagonists of Our Own History,” marks this historic change: a call for people to wake up when the structures, the bureaucracy, the slogans, and the choice of candidates demonstrate their human frailty. **T**



# FOLLOWING SOMETHING ALIVE

**For some of them it was something normal, like going to school. For others it was something they had never heard of before. Here the stories of the GS community in Montréal and in London who are now discovering what moves their life and causes it to flower.**

BY ANNA LEONARDI

It usually takes about 20 minutes to walk to the top of Mount Royal, in the heart of Montréal, but the GS students did it much more quickly, such was their hurry to arrive before sunset and look down upon the beauty of their city. Then they waited for nightfall and the stars, and before pulling out their guitars and starting to sing, they listened to some words of explanation to help them as they gazed at all that immensity.

Looking at them, even in a multiethnic and bilingual place like Québec, you might be tempted to ask what all these Russians, Chinese, Romanians, Italians, and Québécois are doing together. “In effect, at times it seems like a UNICEF delegation,” joked Cristiano, a physician who drops everything every Saturday afternoon to spend the rest of the day with the teenagers. “Usually we meet at a Catholic center in the city and do Scho-

ol of Community,” recounts Elena, an English teacher, 45 years old, 13 years of which she has spent here. “After pizza we watch a film or play ‘Mafia,’ a role-playing game that’s very popular here. In theory we should end by ten, but we never manage to send them home before 11:30.”

Many of these teenagers discovered GS a year ago, when they met Pierluigi, a history teacher who arrived in Canada 23 years ago from





**LONDON.** The GS kids during a day spent in the suburb of Maidenhead.

Italy, where he had encountered the experience of the Movement. Then in Montréal, after a series of highs and lows, he had drifted away. Today he teaches at the Collège International, one of the city's most "in" high schools. "It's a very selective school, and it's no coincidence that children of immigrants attend too, because they're often the most motivated. In these years I've always proposed some theatre activities or readings to my students, and this has facilitated a friendship with some of them," recounts Pierluigi. "In the summer of 2014 I invited them to come to Europe with me to do the Road to Santiago. I thought maybe 10 would come, but instead I found myself leading 40 of them. At the end of the pilgrimage I said to them, "How would it be if your whole life became a journey?" I understood then that if I didn't get back to following the Movement myself, I wouldn't lead them anywhere."

**MERGING.** A few months after returning home, Pierluigi sought out Elena and Cristiano, who were leading a small GS group, almost all of them Québécois youth from families in the Movement. There was a study weekend in Kingston with the friends of Toronto and Ottawa scheduled, and it presented the right opportunity to get to know each other. Pierluigi arrived with four students, two Chinese and two Russians. For those teenagers the weekend has entered the annals of history, more for the *merging* that happened than for the studies, because it was not a painless experience. Ben, who at the time was 18 and attending firefighter school, remembers it as a shock. "These new kids seemed to have so much more to say, while I had never spoken up. They seemed so far ahead of me, and I was jealous of their questions. I asked myself how they managed to jump in so quickly."

It also shook up Jean-Etienne. "GS

had never been a choice for me; it was always a routine, like going to school. Seeing these new kids for whom the Movement wasn't a family inheritance but a decisive friendship that made them come back week after week made me understand that I was missing something." It is a wave that enters each person's life and makes it truer. Elena and Cristiano had no fear of riding that wave. "GS isn't ours because we've been here longer," they challenged the young people. "We follow something alive, and we'd be disloyal to ourselves if we didn't ask how this new thing can be useful for us. This place is for someone who has a question now."

Pierluigi was not afraid either, and told the teenagers about himself on Sunday before they left for home. "This is a kind of strange place that I've left many times, but it has always held an attraction that made me return. I've said many *nos* and few *yeses*, but enough *yeses* to be able to begin walking together again today."

Among the new young people was Alexandra, nicknamed "Queen of Russia" partly because of her origin and partly because of her personality. Her family is Orthodox, but when she was fifteen she fell in love with a Muslim boy and started wearing a hijab. There was an uproar at school. Her classmates were scandalized and her teachers joined together with the family to try to get her to stop. At the end of the school year she sought out Pierluigi. "Excuse me, I'd like to come too on the pilgrimage to Santiago." Pierluigi was clear with her. "Alexandra, during the walk we'll read the Gospels and pray together. If that's okay with you, I'd be very happy for you to come." From that moment on, she never left them. "At times on Saturday I'm dead tired because I train all day on my bicycle," she recounts. "I return home and throw myself on my bed, and think I'll never >>



## “THEY CONSTANTLY SURPRISE ME”

About 30 teenagers gather for meetings, organize parties, and try to get their classmates involved, because as Fr. Pepe often reminds them, “they have the same wound you do.”

“**S**tudent Youth is a friendship, not a place.” This is the clear evaluation of sixteen-year-old Martha, a Londoner from Maidenhead, a suburb of the British capital. She began following GS in Great Britain a few years ago, invited by Fr. Pepe, a Spanish priest at their local parish (see *Traces* n. 10/2015), during her preparation for Confirmation. Today at the GS gathering she talks about her summer, the vacations, her friends, and the GS Equipe in Italy, where she went for the first time this year. With her in Cervinia was Anna, from the City. “We expected we would feel very alone at the Equipe, but actually we felt very welcomed.” They sensed an unexpected familiarity with everyone. “Those kids I didn’t know shared my same question.”

**Singing Coldplay.** “Giorgia has the same questions as well,” Martha thought about her classmate, who is not even baptized. “Last year I tried to invite some friends to the GS initiatives. I wanted them to come with me, but almost egotistically. Instead, I un-

derstood that what I’ve encountered is for them, too, for their happiness.” This was a new hypothesis for her for facing everything, from her classmates to her passions, like theatre. “GS outside of ‘GS’” is how she now defines the discovery that she can challenge everything, starting from what has seized her.

This new gaze prompted her to invite Giorgia at the beginning of September, for a day together organized by the London GS youth, featuring games, dances, and a meeting together. There was even a look at modern songs, from Coldplay to Brandi Carlile, trying to compare their experiences and ideas with those in the lyrics. “Here it’s not normal for a Catholic to invite an ‘outsider’ to a Catholic gesture,” Fr. Pepe explained. And instead Giorgia was there. And she will be there for other ga-

therings of the English community, about thirty young people in all, some children of families in the Movement, including transplanted Italians and other “non-natives” in London for student exchanges.

**The same wound.** And what is the context of the Maidenhead group? “There’s prejudice against the Church, certainly. Here the rule of *cool* reigns supreme, the fashion of the moment. You have to go to parties, you maybe have to drink, and if you don’t fit in.... Instead, the kids themselves say that in GS they find relationships where they don’t have to fake anything and can be themselves. They feel embraced. But this isn’t some bomb shelter to take refuge in, they always say. Even if some kids still live it this way, others are beginning to ask themselves how the experience they have in GS can challenge every aspect of life.”

Irene, for example, changed schools, and at the beginning of the year found her new classmates and “the superficial things they talked about” to be unbearable. She felt “desperation at the idea of passing most of the next two years with them.” So what did the experience of *Student Youth* have to do with any of this? At the GS gathering she wrote these notes: “I can be a victim or I can make memory of the unconditional love that has embraced me.”

Fr. Pepe asked, indicating the theme for the next gathering, “Only starting from this embrace can you see that the others are not different from you? Isn’t it maybe that they have the same wound, too?”

“They constantly surprise me,” says the parish priest. “I see things happening in them that I ‘already know.’ I see Christ change their lives, and the lives of those they

meet, like that mother. She noticed that her daughter was different, happier, and she came to see, and she, too, began coming to School of Community.”

**Paolo Perego**

“I see things happening in them that I ‘already know.’ I see Christ change their lives.”



**CANADA.** The Montréal GS Community during a hike at the summer vacation.

» make it to School of Community. But there's always a moment when I realize that it's the thing I've most desired all week. Going to GS is never an effort, just the opposite, because it wipes away all my tiredness."

Sebastien also comes from an Orthodox family, but his mother had him baptized a Catholic because of a vow she had made to Saint Joseph. He went to the summer vacation for the first time in 2015. "As I was returning home, I had the impression that someone had opened my eyes. I saw that it was possible to live every detail of the day intensely. So the first thing I did walking along the road was to take off my earphones and stop listening to music. All the emptiness I heard no longer frightened me and I no longer needed to fill it myself."

**"I HAVE TO SEE."** Sylvain and Ruijie are Chinese, like three others who are in GS (Alexandre, David, and Yulaine), and they have not been baptized. All year they have been reading *The Religious Sense* together. "The Chinese students were a whirlwind of questions. They asked for an explanation of every word. For example, Alexandre couldn't accept the idea that sadness was 'the desire for an absent good,' saying

instead that it's simply something that happens in the neurotransmitters in your brain," recounts Cristiano. But what changes their way of thinking is never an explanation. Halfway through the year Sylvain and Ruijie asked Pierluigi to be able to do a course to prepare them for Baptism. "Actually, Ruijie told me he wasn't entirely certain he wanted to be baptized, but he wanted to do a journey to understand it more," Pierluigi explains. Instead, Sylvain was sure, and one Saturday night he came to School of Community with his mother. "I kept telling her about what we did together, but at a certain point she said she wanted to see for herself, and so I brought her." Today she goes to the School of Community with the adults, together with Sylvain, who helps her by translating.

Marie-Jeanne is also a source of many invitations. The 15-year-old who attends the Marcelline girls' school has never spoken up at the meetings and always grumbles when they ask her to play guitar, but every week she arrives with a new classmate. A month ago she came with Shaza and Marie-Elene, two young Syrian girls who had fled from the war.

Jean-François, instead, took a different route. He left at the time when

everyone else was arriving, and missed out on the famous *merging*. At school he began to get involved in politics and after months away from GS, told Elena and Cristiano that he was not coming back. "I wanted to understand what was truly important for me for living. GS didn't seem to have anything to do with what I desired," he recounts today. "We didn't do anything to keep him from leaving," Elena remembers, "but not out of indifference. Leaving him free to take his own steps made us feel both expectation and trepidation for him."

**A TEXT MESSAGE.** During the next two years that he spent away from the Movement, Jean-François grew his hair long, became a vegetarian, and was a leftist. So Cristiano's heart leapt in January when he received the text message, "I'd like to come to the winter vacation." In the hotel in Orford, Jean-François found that things were very different. He thought that he had changed a lot, but found that his friends had changed even more. At the assembly he was the first to speak up. "What I missed were the questions we ask here. I thought they were natural in me, but in these months I had begun to forget them. In the end I began to feel unsure about everything, even God. I would go into a Church but I couldn't talk to Him like I used to." From the moment of that winter vacation, GS truly became his home. He even brought his girlfriend, and wants to help out with the organization of the gatherings. "I've developed a lot of interests in these months," Jean-François explains. "But they would bore me and I'd feel suffocated if I didn't have these friends. I need this place so that the things I do will continue to interest me, and life will continue to speak to me." **T**

# FLOODED BY MERCY

**Twenty thousand pilgrims gathered at the sanctuary of Caravaggio, but groups also converged in the U.S., Africa, the Philippines, even as far away as Capernaum, to knock on the Holy Doors, to become more deeply aware that “there is no journey without forgiveness.” The following pages offer passages from the meditation by Fr. Julián Carrón.**





What boundless gratitude for His mercy throughout this whole year! Each of us can take advantage of this moment to become even more aware of how often in these months we have been invaded by the mercy of Christ, by His boundless tenderness to us. Let's listen again to what Pope Francis tells us: "For all our sins, our limitations, our failings, for all the many times we have fallen, Jesus has looked upon us and drawn near to us. He has given us His hand and showed us mercy. To whom? To me, to you, to you, to you, to everyone."

We come here, at the feet of Our Lady, with this awareness. We come as beggars of mercy, even more aware of being needy. "Let us ask her [...] to have the courage to acknowledge that we are sinners in need of mercy, and not to fear surrendering our hands into her maternal hands" (Francis, Presentation of the Christmas greetings to the Roman curia, December 22, 2014). Only when we do not reduce our evil, and all the more, only when we do not justify it, can we realize the newness of His mercy, which is necessary for not leaving anything behind, for not being crushed under the weight of our evil, for not having to censure anything. And so we stand in amazement of Him: "How is this? With all that I have done and continue to do, You still have mercy on me, on us, Christ?" This turns everything upside down!



**LOMBARDY, ITALY.** Over 20,000 united at the Sanctuary of Caravaggio, in Bergamo. Above, Cardinal Angelo Scola and Fr. Julián Carrón.



**PHILIPPINES.** The small community of Cebu.



**USA.** The Pacific Northwest community united at St. Mary's Cathedral in Portland.



**UNITED KINGDOM.** Mount St. Bernard Abbey in Leicestershire hosted 260 pilgrims.

How does His mercy reach us? Giussani shows us in a moving way, immersing himself once again in the figure of Mary Magdalene: "All of a sudden the sense of life dulls. The circle remains closed, cold, encompassing ourselves: egoism. [...] You no longer look for the person, for whom alone the soul is broken and opens up, giving itself, sacrificing itself. [...] Mary Magdalene broke open the alabaster vase and 'wasted' the perfume: she gave it away. Giving is always loss. Really loving a person seems like a waste: a waste of oneself, a waste of energy, a waste of time, a waste of forecasting in view of a return, a waste of the possibility of personal profit, a waste of the possibility of enjoyment. Watching what Mary Magdalene does, the others shake their heads, saying, 'She's crazy! Unthinking! No thought for the profit she could have had!' But in that dining room only she 'lived' because only loving is living [...]. That opening oneself to others—to the others, to all others—by breaking opening the 'peel' of our 'I,' usually happens by means of a face that breaks through the bark of our egoism and keeps this marvelous wound open. That face arouses and inspires our love. Our spirit blossoms with generosity when it comes in contact with it, and by means of that face our spirit gives itself, gushing forth, to others, all others, to the universe" (Manuscript notes by Fr. Giussani, in *Vita di don Giussani* [Life of Fr. Giussani], Bur, Milano 2014, p. 135). In order to make an opening in the shell covering Mary Magdalene, God did not use violence. A face evoked and stimulated her love. Only a gaze was adequate for challenging the freedom of that woman. That face, that gaze full of mercy is the culmination of the testimony of God, of His tenderness towards us. Christ responds to our boundless need by bending down to pass through our freedom. It is up to us to embrace His unconditional mercy, which can arrive through a person from whom you would least expect it.



**KENYA.** About 250 gathered at the Resurrection Garden in Karen.



**NIGERIA.** Seventy-three people participated in the gesture at the Mater Ecclesiae.

⌋ If He did not renew His initiative with us time after time, there would be no chance of a journey. In a relationship, there is no journey without mercy. We know this well: without forgiving and being forgiven no relationship would have the chance of lasting. If we do not let ourselves be embraced again, let ourselves be forgiven again, we cannot embrace and forgive ourselves on our own. In this we see the Mystery reveal Himself to us as mercy, as Fr. Giussani says, "The point in which the Mystery reveals itself to us as mercy is a Man born of woman, who shatters all the limited images and plans that we can form with our imagination" (L. Giussani, *Generating Traces*, p. 138). Talk about mercy does not enable us to live. What does so is the relationship with a Presence that causes you to abandon yourself in the arms of an Other.



**SYRIA.** The friends of Damascus, in the place of Saint Paul's conversion.



**HOLY LAND.** The walk from Capernaum to the Mount of the Beatitudes.



**SPAIN.** About 3,000 gathered in the Co-Cathedral of Soria.



3<sup>rd</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2016 FREE ENTRY

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