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TRACES

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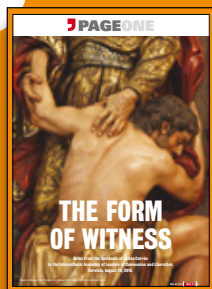
LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS



AT THE HEART OF THE ENCOUNTER

**News from the Rimini Meeting where we saw how history changes
when the other is perceived as “a good for me.”**

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PAGE ONE
The Form of Witness.
Notes from the synthesis
by Julián Carrón to the
International Assembly of CL
leaders. Italy, August 29, 2016.

CLOSE UP

**THE GOLD NUGGET
AND THE SOURCE**

We offer here a summary of the Meeting of Rimini,
and the powerful yet simple people we met there
who are building history with their lives.



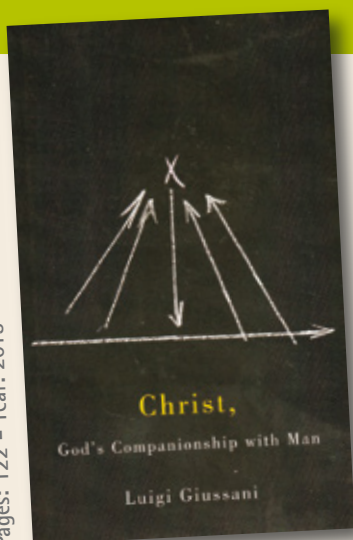
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LUIGI GIUSSANI

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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A HUMAN SYMPATHY

September has come, and almost without realizing it, we come to a fork in the road. We get back to normal life as we return to work, school, and university. Everyday life starts again. If vacations are “the time of freedom,” as Fr. Giussani reminded us, the moment when, having fewer obligations, we *choose* how to use our hours, and thus see better what is most important to us, then the return in autumn is a test in its own way, a very revealing one.


We can find ourselves already at the mercy of the waves, weary at the idea of facing the routine (the usual colleagues, the same old relationships, the inexorable responsibilities... the “living that knocks your legs out from under you” described by Pavese) or even saddened and burdened when we raise our eyes to the bigger and more anguishing situations all around us. Or, it may happen that we find ourselves alive, really wanting to return to that same routine, curious to see what will happen. Happy, in other words, lit up with hope.

It is a subtle, almost imperceptible fork in the road, but a real one. It does not depend on what we say or do: it is an attitude from deep down inside, something that *we see emerge* in the way we face reality, beyond our words or intentions. We stand in front of daily life in the same position from which we face the larger problems: closed or open, folded in upon ourselves or thrown wide open to the new. What makes the difference?

On the *Traces* website you will find a reflection by Fr. Julián Carrón, the head of CL, in which he synthesizes the four days of meetings and dialogues with the leaders of the Movement from throughout the world. We offer it to everyone as an instrument for serious reflection. At a certain point, repeating a sentence said by one of the participants (“the certainty of being loved allows me to embrace reality”), he quotes Fr. Giussani: “The sign of certainty is that one has sympathy with everything that he encounters. In fact, sympathy with all that you encounter is only given by the presence in us of the certainty of our destiny.” A certainty. In the midst of the great insecurity in which we live, the seasickness that seizes us at the idea of having to live daily life in an increasingly difficult context, the thing that restores our gusto and our desire to come to grips with “all that you encounter”—the thing that frees us—is certainty. Not certainty in our own means, projects, abilities, and plans (in the “strength of our tools,” Pope Francis observes in his very beautiful message to the Meeting of Rimini, which you will also find in this issue): we see all too well how inadequate they are for bearing the shock of the impact with things. This certainty instead is “certainty of our destiny,” a continual and ever-deeper rediscovery of what we are: “loved.” This is what enables us to embrace reality.

In this issue of *Traces* you will find many signs of this dynamic, from the summary of the Meeting of Rimini, where “human sympathy” (“the willingness to put ourselves in the shoes of the others to dig below the surface and grasp what troubles their heart,” as the Pope said to the organizers) was evident, to the powerful story of those whose lives have been turned upside down by Mother Teresa of Calcutta. All of these are echoes of what happens when, as the Pope asks, the heart of life becomes “the strong and simple presence of Jesus, His consoling and encouraging mercy,” and nothing else, the echo of what happens a little bit at a time, over the course of years, as we become more certain of Him and of the fact that we are loved. Deep down, this is the purpose of time, even the time that is now starting anew: to become certain of being loved. **T**

MEETING 1: DIRTY DISHES AND MOTHER TERESA


 Being a dishwasher at Rimini Meeting with my friends Erasmo and Vero gave me the opportunity to get to know them better and to discover that even the most boring work can be beautiful. I understood this thanks to Mother Teresa after having seen a video in which she said, “It is not about how much we do, but about how much love we put into doing it. Seeing as we are human beings, it seems a small thing, but when we surrender to God what we do, God is infinite and our small action becomes infinite. We must find the holiness in our work that God has entrusted to us, giving us a ‘special gift’: yes, to each one of us, He has given a special gift. Maybe all I can do is to peel potatoes, but if I peel them in a beautiful way, this is my love for God in action.” Perhaps I can only wash dishes, like I did in those days, but the point is how you do it and who you have in mind. You are more attentive to everything, so much so that every time I found a dirty dish, I didn’t pretend that I hadn’t noticed, but I washed it again because I thought, “My friends have to eat off this plate and I give it to them dirty?” Having them in mind, I did it more willingly. It’s not that it was less tiring, because I did feel like resting, but it was more beautiful, in fact, we sang, we greeted people and looked at everything more closely. Each time someone would come into the kitchen, loaded with dishes, you couldn’t help but go to them and say, “Leave them, I’ll take care of it, you go.” I desire this experience every day,



in everything I do, this putting oneself to work, having someone in mind. My desire is to better understand the meaning of this special gift.

Tecla, Como (Italy)


MEETING 2: THE GUEST WHO RECITES THE ANGELUS

 Dear Fr. Carrón, this is the fourth year that I have been a hostess at the Meeting. The greatest gift of these days came when I was assigned to a guest, Guido, who works in America with the disabled and with wounded war veterans. I was amazed by the familiarity created from our first phone exchange: he was grateful and amazed to have a hostess, not something to be taken for granted. When we walked together around the Fair, and my friends asked if I was his hostess, he answered, “No, she is my friend.” When we met some of my friends, he stopped and wanted to know their names and what they were studying, surprising them because they are used to stepping aside when they see me with a guest. But the greatest and unexpected gift came right before the meeting in which he was to present. Surrounded by the security crew, the hostesses and the group of presenters, we approached

the room where the presentation was to take place and suddenly I heard Guido start to recite the *Angelus*. I gave him a hug and shared with him that prayer born so spontaneously. So there we were, the two of us, a guest and a hostess, reciting the *Angelus* a few moments before entering the room. Right at the moment when the guest should appear confident, put together, and ready for the “performance,” Guido had humbly recognized his inadequacy, incapability, and sense of dizziness while preparing to express in words the beauty of the experience he lives every day in America. He had entrusted everything into the hands of the Madonna. At home, I have the habit of praying the *Angelus*, but had not done so since I had been in Rimini, where the desire to recite it was buried by the thousand things to be done during the day. Now, here, Jesus used Guido to allow me to be happier, carrying out this gesture of total surrender, which alone is capable of giving meaning to my days.

Federica, Varese (Italy)

THE SMALL THINGS THAT BRING THE WALLS DOWN

 In these days, I have lived the pleasant feeling of seeing one of my walls fall: the poorly hidden diffidence that I had always fostered in regard to religion, which in some way has always been part of my life, even if in negativity and absence. I was born and raised in Albania under the communist regime, a regime that prohibited religious practice, going so far as to destroy places of worship. Those who were discovered practicing were imprisoned. My



EARTHQUAKE

I FELT AGAIN THAT TEARING

I was moved by the news and images of the earthquake, surely because I went through it with my family on that 6th of April in Aquila. I again felt that tearing that hurts, that opens your heart and that asks for a reason. I did not lose anyone from my family: in fact, my daughter, Maria, was saved by a toothache that evening. On April 7th I was bewildered; I was sad for my home, for all of those who had died, but I was also full of the miracle of Maria. Today, exactly because of all that happened after the earthquake, I want even more to be there, I want to help those who are hurting; I want to tell them that Jesus loves them. I can perhaps say that I have come to understand one thing from the earthquake at Aquila; nothing is more important than the person, nothing is more important than my "I." I am moved by the shouts of joy from the police and the others when they save a life, when they are able to pull a little girl or a young boy from the rubble. That shout says everything. All of Italy stopped in front of those images with the wish that other people might be extracted from the rubble alive. I am moved by my cousin who says, "Today we saved only two!" He adds the word "two" with bitterness because he has pulled out so many who didn't make it. I pray for the people of Amatrice, that they experience in their lives the person of Jesus, His embrace, because I want to give back what I have received.



Grazia, L'Aquila (Italy)

family was Orthodox Christian and my mother was able to transmit all of the Christian values, such as respect and love for the other, stripped of any religious connotations and yet, rooted in me is the memory of her praying in silence. As a child, I was curious and approached her, asking her to teach me how to pray, but she always refused. The mystery increased my fascination with that prohibited ritual and so I stayed to watch her, trying to imitate her gestures, a habit that I lost as I grew. I came to Italy a total atheist. The first two years I worked taking care of two elderly people. It was a very difficult time; I had a small child and I was often forced to bring him to work with me. I had to be attentive to both my son and the elderly couple; I was constantly under pressure and in those moments

of crisis, I never received even a little help or simply some understanding that I would have expected. Yet those people were very religious; every day I accompanied them to church. That was the moment when something in me broke: I had found the most superficial part of religion. All of this to get to today. I have a dear friend, Gianna, who is part of the Movement of Communion and Liberation. Various times she has talked to me about it, but I always had an attitude of total resistance toward any involvement. She, in response, invited me on a vacation: four days in Val d'Aosta. The doubts were many, both mine and my Muslim husband's, but, in the end, we went. Well, these four days were an unexpected surprise: they were a light that has brightened my hope for the

future. There were 450 of us; I met so many people who truly take to heart helping the other and the search for good. The vacation concluded with a moment of final sharing, an encounter where the most salient moments of those days were played onstage in funny and ironic skits. The organizers wanted to involve those who came from different cultures. Each of us was asked to translate a phrase from his or her own language and sing it. I heard people singing in my language and we shared a magical moment, almost ritual I would say, but a ritual more human and universal than relative to any single religion. I have worked for years in cultural mediation and I believe that it is these small things that can truly change the world.

Florentina, La Spezia (Italy)



THE GOLD NUGGET AND THE **SOURCE**

We offer here a summary of the seven days of the Meeting of Rimini, and the powerful yet simple people we met there who are building history with their lives. In these days they told us about surprising happenings that have penetrated the chaos of the world.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA



Franciscan Fr. Firas Lutfi is an assistant pastor in Aleppo. In the weeks leading up to the Meeting, the one road that connects the city to the rest of the world was closed, but he came anyway, at the risk of dying in a mortar attack. He played down the danger, with the sense of perspective that certain people have. Fr. Lufti was one of the 271 speakers who came to Rimini, and on the next-to-the-last day of the Meeting, having just finished his testimony about how his embattled people have been living, dying, and hoping for the last six years, he said, “More than the applause, the silence is what made me feel the responsibility we bear.”

The audience, their hearts aching for the victims of the earthquake in Amatrice, Italy the night before, had listened to him in silence and watched the video of his young people singing in the summer center during the bombings. This silence came up in another talk, when writer Luca Doninelli, referring to the title of the Meeting, said, “The silence between me and you; wherein lies the root of that which is good. I am not the answer to your questions; and you are not the answer to mine.”

Fr. Lufti quoted John Paul II’s words about courage and hope that encapsulate the value of the entire week in Rimini, in a summer marked by news stories that seemed to speak exclusively

of the opposite: “[...] we need, perhaps more than ever, the words of the Risen Christ, ‘Be not afraid!’ [...] Peoples and nations of the entire world need to hear these words. Their conscience needs to grow in the certainty that Someone exists who holds in His hands the destiny of this passing world [...] this Someone is Love, Love that became man, Love crucified and risen, Love unceasingly present among men.”

This Meeting, with such a “courageous title,” as Pope Francis called it, in a whirlwind of 106 meetings, 18 exhibits, performances, stands, and many extra events, is this: women and men who bring the unceasing presence of a greater design, full of surprises, >>

» one that enables a new start when everything seems lost, featuring people from the past and from our times, from every part of the world, and from very different worlds.

This greater design was made manifest by Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn and the biblicist Ignacio Carbajosa, who brought in flesh and blood the hope of a new partnership between Jews and Christians. It was seen in the exhibit on migrants, which recounted the unspeakable pain of the refugees at sea, and the impetus of those who come to their aid. It emerged in the announcement of the German minister Thomas de Maizière that the doors will be opened again to those who arrive. It became apparent in the kiss the ex-terrorist Maria Grazia Grena gave to the daughter of Aldo Moro, the fruit of a journey together. It was apparent in Gültan Kisanak, the mayor of Diyarbakir, the capital of the region of Turkey with a Kurdish majority, who, while she was in Rimini, learned of the most recent of the numberless attacks on her people, and amazed everyone with her love of freedom. A meeting of mayors gave rise to the prospect of a network on the La Pira model. A greater design was evident in these particular manifestations, and also on an awe-inspiring cosmic scale, as Nobel Prize physicist Laura Cadonati gave the audience the opportunity to hear live the “sound of the universe,” the cry of two black holes that collided 1.3 billion years ago.



THERAPIES. The Meeting during this Holy Year dove into the concrete reality of mercy that enables people to remain human. Many of these stories appear in this issue, while others will be reported in future issues as well as online. The title “You Are a Good for Me” was exemplified in countless concrete ways, the first of which was in seeing the faith and faces of people from the Arabic part of Africa and from Latin America who have a striking joy and capacity to build in the most difficult situations.

“I have nothing but gratitude,” said the Apostolic Vicar for Northern Arabia, Bishop Camillo Ballin, who has served for 47 years in Muslim countries. He moved those at the Meeting with his testimony and was himself moved to the point of having to stop reading, and to ask pardon, when he spoke of his faithful. “Their unceasing intercession is our strength.”

In the face of personal and collec-

tive need, politics, world conflicts, and everyday conflicts, the question—said Fr. Antonio Spadaro in his summary of the Pope’s challenge to Europe and each of us—changes from “Who are you?” to “What do you hope for?” The question of our identity coincides with the hope we have.

“I am not Catholic, but one thing I have learned from Catholics is that the issue of hope is fundamental,” said Luciano Violante who, after various appearances at the Meeting, this year wanted to contribute to it personally, and curated the exhibit on the 70th year of the Italian Republic and the great theme of dialogue as articulated by the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella. Violante added, “Not abstract hope, but operative hope. An action, an example, a word that mobilizes, that moves our intelligence.”

“Reality therapy.” This is the hope that healed Daniel, a Brazilian ex- »

JOSEPH H.H. WEILER, President of the European University Institute



“Italy is a community of destiny. Italians do not all share the same values. There are secular people, Catholics, those on the left and those on the right [...] Why then ‘community of destiny?’ Because regardless of the enormous difference between Italian groups and individuals, one thing is non-negotiable: ‘We will resolve this problem as Italians.’ This is the community of destiny.”



POPE FRANCIS: PUTTING OURSELVES IN THE SHOES OF THE OTHERS TO GRASP WHAT THEY ARE TRULY LOOKING FOR

The message from the Holy Father for the 37th edition of the Meeting for the Friendship Among Peoples.

The title selected for this year's Meeting—"You Are a Good for Me"—is a courageous one. Indeed, it takes courage to state this when so many aspects of the surrounding world seem to point in the opposite direction. Often the temptation to restrict ourselves to the limited horizon of our personal interests prevails, so that others become unnecessary or—even worse—an annoyance or a hindrance. Yet, this is not consistent with our nature: as early as childhood we discover the beauty of the link between human beings and learn to meet others by acknowledging and respecting them as brothers and interlocutors, as the children of our common Father in heaven. To the contrary, individualism establishes a distance between people, emphasizes their flaws and limits, and undermines our wish and ability to live together, where each of us can be free and happy together with others and be enriched by their diversity.

Faced with threats to the peace and security of both peoples and nations, we are called upon to acknowledge that our existential insecurity is what makes us most afraid of others, as if they were rivals depriving us of our vital space and going beyond the boundaries we have built. Faced with the epochal changes affecting us all, who can reasonably believe that one's strengths alone can redeem oneself? Presumptuousness is the very foundation of any conflict between men. Following the example of the Lord Jesus, Christians are always open toward others, whoever they are, as they think that nobody is lost forever. The Gospel provides us with an evocative image of this attitude: the prodigal son pasturing the swine and his father looking from his terrace every evening to check if he is coming home and hoping so, despite everything and everyone. The world would change immensely if this unlimited hope became the lens through which men looked at themselves! [...]

There is one word we must endlessly repeat and above all put into practice—dialogue. If we do that, we will find out that opening ourselves to others does not make us poorer, but richer instead, as it enables us to understand the truth of the others, the importance of their experience and the background of their words, even when they hide behind behaviors and choices we disagree with. A real encounter implies having a clear identity and at the same time the willingness to put ourselves in the shoes of others in order to dig below

the surface and grasp what troubles their hearts and what they are truly looking for. This is the way to start that dialogue, leading us to progress towards new understandings, enriching us all. This is the challenge that lies ahead for all men of goodwill.

Societal upheavals we are often powerless witnesses to are, in fact, a mysterious invitation to take back the foundations of communion between men so as to create a new beginning. Against this background, what contribution can we make as Christ's disciples? Our task coincides with the mission God has chosen us for: it is "the proclamation of the Gospel, which today more than ever finds expression in going forth to bind the wounds of humanity with the powerful yet simple presence of Jesus, and his mercy that consoles and encourages." (Pope Francis, *Address on the Occasion of the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize*, May 6, 2016).

There is one word we must endlessly repeat and above all put into practice—dialogue.

This is the hope of the Holy Father, who encourages the Meeting's participants to pay the utmost attention in bearing their personal creative witness, aware of the fact that it is not the strength of our tools that attracts, conquers, and loosens our chains, but rather the tenacious gentleness of the merciful love of the Father we can all draw from the source of grace provided by God in the Sacraments, especially Holy Communion and Penance, which can then be donated in love to our brothers. He urges us to carry on with our commitment to be close to others and to do our best to serve them with joy, following Father Giussani's teaching: "The Christian view reverberates with a momentum that makes you able to exalt all the good that

is present in all that you meet, a momentum that makes you acknowledge your participation in that plan that will be perfectly realized in eternity and that has been revealed in Christ." (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal 2010, p. 116).

With these feelings, the Holy Father invokes the light of the Holy Spirit on your Excellency, the organizers, the participants, and the many volunteers of the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples for a fruitful experience of faith and fraternal communion. His Holiness asks everybody to pray for his ministry and gives wholeheartedly his Apostolic Blessing.

Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Secretary of State

» con, after a life that seemed irredeemable. Barely of legal age, he had already been charged with 27 crimes. But when he ended his testimony in front of the people of the Meeting, saying that for the last eight years he has had an employment card, the audience broke into applause. Pure cheering. Cheering for the humanity of the other person, a stranger until now, cheering for his wounds and weaknesses, for the greatness that moves his heart, and above all for the embrace that he received in a precise place, the Brazilian APAC prisons, without guards and barbed wire, where prisoners are called by name.

“The world would change immensely, if this unlimited hope became the lens through which men look at themselves!” the Pope stated in his message. He spoke of the father of the prodigal son, “looking from his terrace every evening to check if he is coming home and hoping so, despite everything and everyone.” This hope has already changed a piece of the world, has changed prisoners, judges, and families, through the APAC method described in one of the most visited exhibits. “If I’d known you before, I would’ve put you in my exhibit!” exclaimed the Ambassador from Honduras, Carlos Ávila Molina, in front of the Brazilian exhibit. He was among the curators of the exhibit on mercy, dedicated to the “decision of forgiveness: a personal and collective decision,” he said, as he picked up litter from the



carpet and enthusiastically spoke about returning next year to Rimini, “but as one of the volunteers.”

FLUID VISION. Doninelli said in his talk, “All of civilization depends on the esteem we have instant after instant after instant for that *you*. It is a question of esteem.” Before all else, it is a good that you exist. This was the experience of the Central African Republic, chosen to be the “spiritual capital” for the opening of the Holy Year. “We did not deserve it. We did not expect it. We weren’t ready either. But it happened,” recounted Fr. Federico Trincherio, a Carmelite missionary in Bangui, who brought his testimony to Rimini. He lifted up his robe to show his sandals, which are usually dirty, but that day looked like new, because at all costs one of the 10,000 refugees of the civil war whom they have hosted in their mon-

astery wanted to shine them for him.

“God acts in people’s lives, but also in the most complex historical and social processes,” stated Fr. Spadaro in the meeting on Bergoglio’s diplomacy, a “fluid vision” through which places posing critical problems become places of contact. It was striking to hear Spadaro, like other guests, repeat that he has yet to understand the things he was explaining to the audience. This was a constant motif in the talks at the Meeting, the “open” thought that is born only of experience, and that lives only in a bond. To be understood, it must be shared. In the end, those who brought their testimonies thanked their listeners, because they needed them.

“It is precisely when we understand that we *don’t* understand,” said Tatiana Kasatkina in the meeting on Dos- »

CAMILLO BALLIN, Vicar Apostolic of Northern Arabia



“If after 47 years I am still in the Arab world, it is because I have found the Christians and Muslims there to be brothers and sisters who accompany me in my life. What I have received so far is infinitely more than what I have given. I am glad to be able to say with all sincerity to any Arab or non-Arab sister or brother: you are a good for me. You have been a good for 47 years and you will continue to be a good for the rest of my life.”



“TODAY YOU MADE ME HAPPY”

Stories, encounters, and discoveries. Here is what happened on the edges of the exhibitions, where word of mouth also praised the “lesser” proposals.

by Luca Fiore

“Those who followed the itinerary we proposed left not so much having *understood* something, as having had an experience.” Fr. Filippo Belli, who curated one of the most loved exhibits of this Meeting, “The Merciful Embrace,” was amazed by how many people were touched personally, as seen in the hundreds of comments written on post-its at the end of the exhibit path. An example? One note said, “In four months, I lost both of my parents and it was hard for me to accept it, because I’m an only child. But a few days ago I received a proposal of marriage and now I’m getting married. Thanks to this exhibit I’ve understood that this was an act of God’s mercy.”

How many stories, how many discoveries, how many encounters happened visiting the exhibits this year, and not only the main ones such as those on Georgia or the 70 years of the Republic of Italy, but also those considered “lesser,” but which by

word of mouth in some cases became the *must sees* of this year’s Meeting.

“The most photographed panel was the one entitled ‘The Positive Exists,’ which says, ‘The one way to truly help is for us to accept that God is God,’” said Sister Mariangela, who served as a guide for the exhibit on the history and activity of the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption. “The impression is that people’s hearts were re-awakened. People often returned with some friends in tow.”

Sister Pinuccia also belongs to the Sisters of Charity, but she presented another exhibit, dedicated to her brother, Fr. Augusto Gianola, a PIME missionary in the Amazon who died 25 years ago. “People were struck by Augusto’s humanity, his freedom, his desire to serve God with his restless and adventurous temperament. A woman with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis came to the exhibit. She could only communicate with one eye. She wanted to tell the person

who accompanied her, ‘Today you’ve made me happy.’”

Among the guides for the big exhibit “Migrants, the Challenge of the Encounter,” was Hassina, an Algerian student at the Catholic University of Milan. One day she was asked to accompany Mrs. Gültan Kisanak, the mayor of the Turkish city of Diyarbakir. At a certain point the first citizen stopped in front of a photograph of Pope Francis bending over a child in the midst of a crowd of immigrants. “Here you really see how the Pope has a special attention, out of the ordinary,” she explained. “I didn’t notice that child, but the Pope not only noticed him, he stopped to take his hand. I want to do the same thing in Turkey.” Margherita was another guide who spent the week explaining the exhibit on migrants. “I realized that the exhibit emerged through me, and I emerged through the exhibit. In fact, after every explanation people would stop and say they wanted to get to know me better, to meet and talk about what they had seen, and notwithstanding my shyness, I ended up talking about myself to total strangers.”

People were also struck by the 40-odd volunteers who came from the United States and Canada to talk about the lives of “their” saints. Their vitality won over the Nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi, who asked to have the exhibit “American Dream: On the Road with the American Saints” translated into French and brought to his country.

But the surprise exhibit of this year was the one entitled “Nobody Can Escape From Love,” which described the experience of the Brazilian APACs, prisons without bars or guards. Daniel, who had been one of these “prisoners,” was the exhibit in flesh and blood. For a week he repeated his story. “At a certain point I said, ‘God, if You exist, change my life.’ And it truly happened.” Daniel explained the exhibit to many groups of children. At the end, one of them hugged him, crying. He came from a difficult life with an abusive, alcoholic father. “Daniel, from now on I’m talking with the same God you talked with.”

» toevsky, “precisely in that moment, we see the other and not our image.” You put yourself in the other’s shoes, just as she is. The Archbishop of Bologna, Matteo Zuppi, described the “restless” Church awakened by the Pope at the Florence Conference, and summarized her task as “having fondness for the human person,” which she lives with gusto, and gives to everyone with a promise. “We will discover many *you*s who will be our good!”

FROM MOLOKAI TO CALCUTTA. We can also discover a *you* from long ago, as was made clear by the major exhibit on the American saints. Their extraordinariness lay in their all-too-human humanity, which made exhibit visitors feel as if these saints were companions, because their imperfections “are the features of His face,” as the author of *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson, wrote of Fr. Damien de Veuster, who gave his life for the lepers of the island of Molokai. De Veuster’s story moved Gandhi to say, “It would be interesting to understand the source of such heroism.”

What is the source? The same question could be asked about the Jesuits missionaries in the 1600s near the Great Lakes, as well as about the beauty described in modern-day USA by Guido Piccarolo, who works at the Los Angeles Habilitation House, which helps veterans and people with disabilities who have difficulty finding and keeping work. In this place where “time is



AMERICAN DREAM. The exhibit on the saints who evangelized North America.

money, not love, and nobody wants to work with someone who is different,” Guido finds that this *you* is not something you say, but someone you welcome, “because in doing so you receive the mystery of life.”

Gandhi’s question about the “source” was elicited throughout the whole week of the Meeting. It was prompted by the endless charity of a friendship that rebuilt life in Friuli after the earthquake 40 years ago; by the hidden treasures of Georgia and the nation’s faithfulness to its Christian origins; by the way of working of the members of the Piacenti family, who are restoring the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem with the ardor of medieval cathedral builders; and by the infinite mystery of Mother Teresa. This mystery of

her life conquered the Meeting, in the exhibit constructed to evoke the dusty streets of Calcutta, designed to offer “a personal encounter” with her, with the luminous way she offered up the dark night of the soul she experienced.

This Meeting was made up of strong and simple presences, of the gratuitous generosity of the 417 volunteers who constructed it and the 2,190 volunteers from Canada to China who spent the week repeating the simple gestures of cleaning, deep-frying, raising the barrier, lowering the barrier, preparing coffee for thousands of people a day, doing things that nobody saw. “Many things struck me,” said the number one of ENI (the Italian national oil and gas company), Claudio Descalzi, at the Meeting for the first time. “The

EUGENE B. KORN, director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Cooperation and Understanding, Israel



“In Italian you say, ‘You are a good for me,’ that is, God wants both of us to be benevolent to the other, does not want enmity between us. None of us alone, neither the church nor the synagogue, can achieve the mission of God in the world. We need to cooperate and work together to reach and achieve our mission in full.”



first thing was the enormous energy created by the selfless commitment of so many young people in the middle of their summer holiday.”

The encounters of the week on the most varied of themes were opportunities for gaining awareness, an important help for real building, like the discussion on Europe with Joseph Weiler and the presentations about school, firms, Cuba, the family, and Syria, the latter with United Nations special envoy Staffan de Mistura.

THE INVITATION. Different perspectives on the needs of the world were offered, like that of Ján Figel, special envoy of the European Commission for the promotion of religious freedom outside the EU (a new role, and a new


signal from the Europe of institutions), and the relationship between development and religious freedom described by Brian Grim, one of the protagonists of the cycle of dialogues “Pieces of war, roads of peace,” organized by Monica Maggioni, the president of RAI, the Italian television agency. And by the exhibit by Aid to the Church in Need about persecuted sisters and brothers and the efforts to ensure that they are not alone. Attempts at understanding and at action.

These efforts may seem like nothing, but they penetrate the pain and disorder of the world, as the wife of an Orthodox priest, at the Meeting for the first time, said. “In this place your conscience is completely re-awakened. You think you do a lot in your life, then you arrive here and you understand that you haven’t even begun.” Or as a Muslim mother from the “sensitive peripheries” of Paris said to the volunteers of the Le Rocher association, brought to the Meeting by Jean-François Morin: “You are like pepper in a dish of couscous. There is a small amount, but it gives flavor.” Together with Fr. Pepe of the Argentine *villas*, Morin recounted what it means to “live with” the people of the peripheries, not *for* or *among*, but *with* them. He began the encounter by publicly thanking Elena, the young volunteer who served as his hostess. He could not get over the fact that she had gone to meet him at the Bologna airport in the morning. “You are the gold nugget of the world,” he said. “You. It is the person, the other. Without the oth-

er, you may have everything you want, but it is not life.”

“Life is a response to an invitation,” Doninelli said. “An invitation that a sinner cannot refuse,” echoed Sandokan, a former drug addict, sharing his story together with the young people of the Imprevisto community. Sandokan was there with about ten people from the charitable association Bocatas, which every Friday for the last 20 years has brought food to drug addicts in a neighborhood of Madrid. Looking at them it was difficult to say which were “recovered” and which were not. They are a group of friends who encountered each other through an experience of gratuitousness.

The gift of the other and the other’s importance for us was a constant motif throughout the Meeting. “I cannot do without them,” Fr. Claudio Burgio, chaplain of the juvenile prison of Milan, said of his young people. It was also present in the testimonies of those who encountered the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption, in the protagonists of the Arab world, in the performances, the book presentations, and in the gaze, among many, of Mary O’Callaghan of Notre Dame University, who spoke about the privilege of having a child with Down Syndrome and addressed the theme of prenatal diagnosis. Every day her child asks her, “Are you happy?”

“The encounter is not the repetition of me and of you,” the President of the Meeting, Emilia Guarnieri, said on the last day. “From the encounter emerges something that was not there before.” 

MOHAMED FADHEL MAHFOUDH, Nobel Prize for Peace 2015



“To speak of our experience, I think there is no better context than this year’s Meeting. ‘The other is a good for me’ is exactly what happened in Tunisia [...]. There was an effort to use the instrument of encounters. There was a work of perseverance, of listening to the other. It is thanks to this that the parties, who were on the verge of a harsher comparison of positions, were able to sit down together around a table.”

THAT BRIDGE IS FOR ME

A long-time friend (and a protagonist at the Meeting) recounts “his” Meeting, and the entreaty he carries within.

BY WAEL FAROUQ

The first time I participated in the Meeting of Rimini was in 2005. When I returned to Cairo and my friends asked what the Meeting was, the only way I could answer was to say, “Come and see.” The next year I returned to Rimini with two friends, a journalist and a judge. None of us was able to find an answer to that question, other than “Come and see.” Every year, the most curious among my friends came to Rimini, but none of them could come up with an explanation. Then, in 2010 we organized the first Meeting of Cairo. It was the answer we were looking for, the tree born of the seed that the Meeting of Rimini had planted in our hearts and brought to fruition.

The Meeting of Rimini is not a collection of cultural events over the course of a week. It is a stimulus for searching for meaning and

a dynamic for generating it. The Meeting is nothing other than the incarnation of an ever-new experience of encounter with the truth, the forms of which are as varied as human circumstances are. The Meeting could not be a bridge between peoples—they live such different human circumstances!—except as a bridge that I cross to reach my own truth. What other bridge leads to the truth, if not the act of testifying to the truth? So then, it can be said that the Meeting is the space in which the human circumstance becomes testimony, and testimony in turn becomes the human circumstance that again opens to give form to a new experience or testimony.

TOWARD THE MYSTERY. At the Meeting of Rimini, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and atheists are amazed not so much by the bridges that



it builds among them, but by the journey traveled together toward the truth, the distance that every “I” travels to reach her or his own truth, the desire to make it known and to share it. For this reason, afterwards, all those who participate in the Meeting of Rimini want to organize a similar event.

The most recent example was that of the Croatian Grand Mufti, an extraordinary figure who, after losing 36 members of his family including his parents in the massacre of Sre-

JOSÉ MARIA “PEPE” DI PAOLA, *villero* parish priest in Buenos Aires, Argentina



“Francis told us that creativity could lead to the integration of precarious neighborhoods into a welcoming city. How beautiful are the cities that go beyond distrust, that integrate those who are different and make this integration a factor of development. How beautiful are the cities whose architectonic dreams are full of places that link people and promote the recognition of the other.”



DIFFERENT VOICES. The meeting on Islam in Europe: from left, Aziz Hasanovic, Roberto Fontolan, and Wael Farouq.

sion between the *Hail Mary* and *Allahu akbar*, in the joy of freshly baked bread and its aroma, in the terror of the migrant who sees his hopes foundering in the waves, in the beating of the drums with the echoes of a far-off past, in the delicacy of the piano that did not yield in front of the clamor of the audience. It was a journey of the spirit, illuminated and comforted by the symphony of voices and by the unity of desire.

MIRACLES. In the circumstance of this search/yearning/testimony and desire for truth, we can do all things. We can search for the human being in technology, share the migrant's faith in the humanity of Europe, a faith that leads him to throw himself into the sea. We can encounter the leaders of a prison without prisoners and without police, from which nobody tries to escape, because, as was written on one of its walls, "nobody escapes from love." At the Meeting of Rimini, Europe does not let itself be defined by the transitory, that is, by politics and the economy, but by the essential, that is, by the principles upon which her civilization was built.

When a gigantic event so profoundly immersed in reality, as is the Meeting of Rimini, follows a work plan dictated by a verse from poetry, it is not strange that miracles happen. **T**

brenica, is now traveling the world to defend the rights of the members of the same religious community that committed the massacre, courageously asking in each forum he visits that Islamic discourse be renewed in order to free itself from violence, mirror contemporary life, and respond to the needs of people today. The Mufti found at the Meeting the suitable formula for testifying to and sharing the truth.

In the search for the truth, experiences intersect without losing

their originality. This was the case during the inaugural musical performance of the Meeting, *One Single Song*. The harmony among the singers and their voices, and that between the Eastern and Western music, was entirely natural.

Nobody noted that we found ourselves in front of two forms of beauty separated by language, history, geography, and religion. We all let ourselves be transported by the rhythm of the yearning for the Mystery, incarnated in the fu-

STAFFAN DE MISTURA, UN Special Envoy for Syria



"Aleppo, all the cities of Syria, are like our lives, dear friends: when things are difficult, when we are in trouble, we need faith. Faith in ourselves, but most of all to see the confidence in others, the sensation that 'we're not an impossible cause; we shouldn't be abandoned as a lost cause.' No. Aleppo deserves this, as does all of Syria, to hear 'We're with you!'"

A PRECIOUS GEM

One year ago, Pope Francis' historic visit shattered many assumptions, including assumptions about faith and politics. Since then, what has changed? And what is at stake in the race between Hillary and Trump? The first stop in a two-part journey in the USA, where the countdown to Election Day has begun.

BY MATTIA FERRARESI



It was exactly one year ago that Pope Francis delivered one of his most powerful speeches during his visit to the USA, in which he reminded the U.S. Congress of their call as representatives of the people to “defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good, for this is the chief aim of all politics.” The Pope’s apostolic visit, which went through Cuba before coming to the United States (on September 22nd), had a fundamentally political mission, yet was devoid of politics and strategic tactics. The Pope exhorted the American people and its institutions

to overcome the boundaries set by ideologies, and to go beyond labels that, even among Catholics, reduce political engagement to an argument between progressives and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans. In the country that prides in calling itself the land of the free, the evangelical “City on a Hill” admired and beheld by all the world as an example, the Pope gave a powerful reminder to put our focus back on the common good, which, according to the Church’s social teaching, “does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity”; rather, it is the “social and community dimension

of the moral good.”

In other words, it turns our perspective on its head. Period. It was a precious gem bestowed on us during that Apostolic visit in a radically polarized context dominated by wounds within the parties themselves.

THE PRESSING CHALLENGE. After one year, the situation could not be more fragmented—America heads into the presidential elections on November 8th on a road marked by uncertainty. The Republican Party has been shattered by the blows of Donald Trump, the anti-system candidate who crusades under a message that >>

» America is isolated and ailing, protected by walls and border checkpoints from external threats, whether they be migrants crossing over the Mexican border or Chinese merchandise undermining the domestic labor force. The 16 other candidates who contended for the Republican nomination were swept away, a powerful sign that the political elite is presently incapable of understanding and interceding on behalf of the needs of the people. Hillary Clinton has become the nominee of the Democratic party seeking conquest of the White House, though during the primary campaign she struggled against Bernie Sanders, who began as an unknown Independent senator with a socialist platform, but today is recognized as the mastermind of a formidable campaign that seized the hearts and minds of millions of young Americans.

This landscape, which may appear desolate, makes the Pope's challenge even more urgent. In the face of the collapse of old certainties that is demonstrated in the crisis of the parties and the erosion of the concept of representation, it is crucial that we construct entities capable of regaining momentum for building up the common good.

"This round of voting [in the primaries] is unprecedented and revolutionary, especially because Trump shook up the conservative movement. For this reason, the Pope's invitation to overcome polarization is even more significant," says historian Brad Gregory, a professor at Notre Dame University. At the same time, the fact that the two candidates competing for the White House are among the most unpopular in recent history, and that this is taking place during a fundamental crisis in the party system, illustrates, according to Gregory, "the limits of politics, which cannot answer all of man's questions: it's difficult for voters to believe that the candidates are 'incarnations of morality,' role models to



“This round of voting [in the primaries] is unprecedented. For this reason, the Pope’s invitation to overcome polarization is even more significant.”

emulate, and this sets off a quest to be creative, to imagine solutions that allow us to collaborate with a spirit of realism.”

Gregory cites as an example the birth of the American Solidarity Party, a small group inspired by the motto “Common good, common ground, common sense.” The presidential candidate of this small party, Michael Maturen, describes himself in his biographical profile as a “Catholic who spent most of his political life as a conservative Republican,” but later, “extensive reading on the views of the Church... led him to question his posi-

tions on fiscal conservatism.” Groups like the American Solidarity Party do not have a great impact on electoral percentages or seats in Congress, but Gregory sees its emergence as “a small testimony of the effort to overcome the radical dichotomy, found also in the Catholic Church, between Progressives and Conservatives, a debate between those who put all the emphasis on social justice and those who put all of it on ethics.”

WORDS AND GESTURES. In the midst of this political moment marked by profound confusion, where the only constant is the vast distance between the ruling class and the people, Fr. Thomas Reese, a Jesuit priest and analyst for the *National Catholic Reporter*, sees an opportunity which is almost paradoxical. “The Church is one of the few American entities that bring together both Democrats and Republicans, so it is in a privileged position to begin a genuine conversation on the common good. From a certain perspective, this is the most fortuitous time to clarify



BETWEEN GOD AND CAESAR. Pope Francis speaks before President Barack Obama during his visit in September 2015.

tory run its course. However, by doing so, we deny the profoundly human desire to be responsible actors, to be part of something great, and to grapple with social reality—all of which lies at the core of any democratic endeavor.”

DISILLUSIONMENT. This re-awakening and rebuilding of the person is at the heart of the political race. In this context, the full-blown crisis of the parties that has spread throughout the nation over the past year, taking over the public space, has opened a door of opportunity. What opportunity? An end to the idolatry of politics, reminding us of what is not at all assumed in America (which is, according to Jean Beaudrillard, the “original version of modernity”)—that politics is incapable of solving everything; it is not an instrument that, once calibrated properly, will introduce a society “so perfect that no one will need to be good,” as T.S. Eliot put it. The fact that the candidates facing each other in November were chosen more out of anger and resentment than conviction shows evidence of disillusionment with a system that has fooled itself into believing that it can account for and answer every human need.

It is through realism that the person once again becomes a protagonist of politics, as the flyer explains: “We are called to be the protagonists of our own history by witnessing to one another what we hold most dear, and by supporting one another in the pursuit of truth. This is what a free democratic country needs. Otherwise, we will become prey to the tyranny of the loudest voice in the room. This is the spirit of the American people we seek to rediscover and develop. In November we will vote for the candidate that most closely mirrors our genuine desires, but after having voted we will not be finished. There is much to be done.” **T**

the pertinence of Catholic social teaching, a vision that unites those who want to have a dialogue, from within and from outside of Catholicism.”

For Reese, the great achievement of Francis’ trip to America is to have “set the tone in the conversation.” America, he explains, “does not remember its discourses, but it remembers the sense, transmitted especially through gestures, of an openness: openness to those who are last, to the unwanted, to immigrants, and, more generally, openness to the other.” In this “ultra-ideological” political climate, characterized by the adoption of a more European conception of politics rather than the American pragmatism that supported the art of compromise for decades, Reese finds it difficult to open up a discussion. “Yet, I cannot think of a more convincing promoter than Francis to set things in motion,” he adds.

It is within this context that a flyer was released this summer on the judgment made by the American CL community, in which there is an acute sense of urgency in the face of the up-

“The Church brings together both Democrats and Republicans, so it is in a privileged position to begin a genuine conversation on the common good.”

coming elections. It states: “We have reduced our political agency to merely expressing our opinion on Facebook, or somewhat more actively, to casting a ballot,” and continues: “We seem to have lost the deeply rooted desire to be protagonists in the political process which has historically distinguished American democracy. The apathy that characterizes our time does not originate in the political process, nor does it confine itself to politics. Its source is quite different—we are dealing with a crisis of the person. We seem content watching and commenting, drawing back into our safe spaces, letting his-

MOTHER TERESA

After 40 years as a hospital nurse in a ward for children with incurable cancer, **TERESA VOLPATO** retired and then learned that she herself had cancer. This is the story of her journey to Calcutta and encounter with the sister, now proclaimed a saint, who turned her life upside down, and of her “contract” with God.

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI

“WHO ARE YOU?”

Teresa looked outside the window at the winter mist that enveloped the houses in Cittadella. How long had she lain there immobile? An hour? Maybe longer. She could not remember. She took a look at the calendar: January 1996. She had been incapable of doing anything since her return from the hospital. Teresa the skier. Teresa the mountain climber, never still. A month earlier, after 40 years of service as head nurse at the Center for Childhood Leukemia in Padua, when she was told that she had to retire, her reaction had been, “Well, at the age of 60 you turn

the page. I’ll be able to dedicate myself completely to mountain climbing, and finish traveling the piece of the world I haven’t seen yet.” Enough of watching children suffer, accompanying them to their death. Instead, irony of ironies, everything vanished the day of her goodbye party in the ward. A colleague had handed her an envelope with just her name on it: Teresa Volpato. It was the result of her latest exam. Distractedly she had read the report—malignant breast cancer. Three days later, she had already had surgery, involving complete mutilation. Then the therapy: chemo, radiation...

Only a few days had passed, but it seemed like an eternity. Teresa picked up the pile of accumulated mail, and her eye fell on a bright red envelope. She opened it. It was a travel agency ad for a trip to India. She had already been there. Other countries were much better. Even so, she picked up the phone and called. There was one place left, if her passport was up-to-date. Ten days later she landed in Calcutta. The first evening, the group guide described their plans. “For those who would like it, tomorrow morning at 5:30 there is Mass with Mother Teresa in the Missionaries of Charity



ON THE ALTAR. Rome, September 4th: the image of Mother Teresa at Saint Peter's Basilica on the day of her canonization.

convent." "Who is this Mother Teresa?" she asked. Everyone looked at her, horrified. "A saint! She won the Nobel Prize for Peace." But Teresa had decided at the age of 16 that God and the Church did not interest her, and that they had nothing to do with her life. She told the guide, "OK. I'll see you all after breakfast." End of discussion.

At dawn she was awakened by a strange odor. The mosquito repellent coil had burned the carpet. She heard the voices of her travel companions in the corridor as they were preparing for the Mass. She decided to go, if only to put off having to ex-

plain that black mark on the floor.

In the church on A.J.C. Bose Road, Teresa found herself pressed against the wall. In front of her was a sea of white, the saris of sisters who had arrived from all over the world for the General Chapter. Looking at them, she thought, "Poor simpletons, who don't know how to enjoy life." A woman next to her elbowed her and said, "There she is, Mother Teresa, there in the wheelchair." Teresa observed that insignificant little old woman full of wrinkles, in front of whom the world bowed down. Their gazes met for a few seconds, then Mother Teresa gestured

at her a few times with her hand. She wanted Teresa to come to her. Teresa went. The Mother gestured for Teresa to kneel beside her. The Mass began. At the moment of Communion, Teresa watched the sisters lining up, and observed that their faces were not those of simpletons. Many of them were young, some of them very beautiful. The breast cancer, the travels, and the projects seemed so far away. A thought almost forced itself on her: why do they do it? What am I here to do?

"WHY DO THEY DO IT?" When the celebration ended, Mother Teresa gestured for her to follow. In a few minutes, they were joined by a sister who translated into Italian: "What do you want to ask Mother?" "If I can remain a few days to work in her houses." That sentence spurted out of her mouth, without even passing through her head. Mother Teresa simply said, "Welcome." Teresa asked her, "Starting when?" "Tomorrow morning." "All right."

In the hotel, her travel companions bombarded her: "You're nuts! *You* of all people!" This seemed like an annoying buzz to Teresa. That insistent question pulsed within: why do they do it?

The next day, in the house on Bose Road, the sister who welcomed her asked, "Where do you want to work?" "You decide." "What do you know how to do?" "Nothing." She had decided to start from zero. "You'll go with the handicapped children. Now come with me." The sister accompanied Teresa to the landing of the stairs just outside the chapel, where Mother Teresa blessed the over two hundred volunteers one by one, saying to each of them, "God bless you." Teresa did not believe in that God, but she stood in line. She wanted to understand. She wanted to see.

In Shishu Baavhan (the children's home), Teresa spoon-fed the sick and looked around her: the little ones were in ramshackle wheelchairs and >>

MOTHER TERESA

» baby walkers. She asked the sister, “Can’t they be fixed?” “If you want to, do it!” “Where can I find a hammer and nails?” “You have to provide them yourself.” She acquired everything needed and began with the wheelchairs, then painted the cribs, and whitewashed the walls, involving the other volunteers. She had ripped up her return ticket. Even though at times she wanted to escape, every morning she got in line to hear again Mother Teresa’s words: “God bless you.”

Their afternoons were free. The sisters invited the volunteers to the hour of adoration. Teresa was not interested; she only wanted to do practical things. But one afternoon a strange curiosity pushed her to go. She listened to Mother Teresa say, at the beginning, “I don’t care what God you pray to, but pray. Come to Mass and to adoration invoking your Lord.” Teresa gave a start. “This woman doesn’t even care to explain her religion.” She began going to Mass.

KALIGHAT. After three months, she returned to Italy for medical follow-up and to have an evaluation of the treatment she had continued on her own in India. The tumor had not disappeared, but she had never thought about it, just as she had never thought about whether it was worthwhile to keep on living. She lived.

When she landed in Padua, she heard the news that Mother Teresa had died. Her friends and relatives called and asked, “Now what do you think you’ll do?” Her answer was clear: “*I have to return.*” For the sick, for the children, to see those sisters again, to be with them, friends like she had never had before. Questions filled her thoughts: who is this God they follow? The answer is in Calcutta.

This time she rented a small apart-



A FRIENDSHIP. Here, Mother Teresa on the roads of Calcutta in 1979. Right, above: Teresa Volpato in the Kalighat clinic; the distribution of food and medicine in a village; Teresa with the saint of Calcutta.

ment near the mother house. One morning a physician sister, her great friend, asked, “Tomorrow are you available to help me in the clinics?” “To do what, Sister Andrea?” “Treating wounds, bandages, whatever you can do.” “All right.”

The following morning, seeing them load medicines, clothes and food onto a truck, she asked, “Where’s the clinic?” A volunteer, without stopping, answered: “It’s this truck.” After an hour’s journey they reached a village where a line of over five hundred people had formed. The physician sister told her, “Go to the church steps and prepare the clinic. They will come to have their wounds dressed. Then, give each person a piece of aluminum foil with a bit of ointment and medical cream. Those who need an examination, send to me.” Teresa began and did not stop until two

p.m. She was fast and precise. The sister observed her and as they returned to the truck she said, “You’re good. Where did you learn?” “Forty years of hospital work.” “From now on, you’re with me.” “All right.” She always obeyed. Her Italian friends would have been stunned: this was totally out of character for her.

Every day, a different village. A few weeks later, they brought a woman with burns all over her body. Her husband had set her on fire. Teresa did what she could, and, discouraged, said, “She can’t remain here. She’ll die.” Sister Andrea responded, “If we bring her to Kalighat, the house for the dying, will you take care of her?” “Yes.”

Teresa divided her time between Kalighat and the clinics. She was good. She knew all the medicines and how to use them. The sisters noticed this and brought her a new sick person every day, to the point that she had to decide to remain with the dying, she, a person who never again wanted to see people



Teresa Volpato.



dying. After a few weeks, Sister Tall—a nickname given because of her height—stopped her and said, “At the contemplative sisters [one of the branches of the order founded by Mother Teresa] there is a room with a kneeler and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Why don’t you spend a period of spiritual exercises there?” Teresa did not understand. “What? With whom? For how long?” “Alone, a week for yourself. Go, pray, speak with Jesus. Only you must never abandon Him. When you want to leave, let us know and we will find a substitute for you.” “All right.” No objection or excuses this time, and curiosity was not the motivation that drove her. It was something she could not do without.

LOVED BY GOD. The first morning after only an hour she wanted to escape. She left and returned. That evening, walking home, she sat down at every corner, in a daze. “Who are You?” she asked.

The next morning she was still there, and the next morning after that. She spent three days in conversation with God, and at the end asked for a priest to hear her confession. It was a new beginning. She wrote her Italian friends, “My life is captivating. I feel a serenity I have never felt before. I feel loved, by God.” The sisters had full trust in her abilities, but beyond that, repeatedly told her: “In the face of the sick person you must see God; in this way you remain in conversation with Him.” They brought her those who were in the worst condition, full of worms, with purulent wounds, whose gaze asked, “Can you do something?” But Teresa felt another question: “Are you capable of following Me?”

She never left Kalighat. She had made one request of Jesus: “I have emerged from my torpor. Let’s make a contract: give me ten years of life and I’ll give You my best effort.” In 2006, the contract expired and she re-

newed her request: “I’m not ready yet. I need another 10 years.”

In February of 2016 the contract expired again. Teresa returned to Italy because of a grave pulmonary complication, which was then resolved. In her home in Cittadella, in that living room where everything began 20 years before, she recounts, “On August 17th, I’ll be 80 years old. I’ve given myself a gift: a ticket to Calcutta. My contract with God has ended; if He so chooses, I’m ready, but now I’m returning to India.” Will she attend the canonization ceremony? “For me, as for many, she is already a saint. From the very beginning, seeing what she had generated, I thought: I have truly encountered God. Otherwise all this would be humanly impossible. Today you still understand this when you are with the sisters.”

THE ALBUM. She draws a photo album out of a drawer. She is a good photographer. There are the faces of Mother Teresa, the sisters, the sick people, the children... 20 years of life. “The most beautiful years. I think that the 40 years in the hospital served to prepare me for the encounter with Jesus. He has become my friend, my brother. I talk with Him, ask Him for advice. He always answers. In the beginning my friends thought I’d gone crazy, but then they began to raise funds and some of them came to Calcutta to stay with me and the sisters. To see.”

What about the mountain climbing and the skiing she had promised herself? “I haven’t seen a mountain since then. A few days ago I got together with some friends of my youth, the old group I used to go hiking with. We’ve all aged. Some of them, thinking about death, feel dismay. But after what I’ve seen and experienced in Calcutta, I have a different awareness of life and death. And, if I think of the latter, I’m not afraid.” Teresa smiles, and seems happy. Maybe with her heart and mind already back in Calcutta. **T**

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