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TRACES

01

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LITTERAE COMMUNIONIS

THE ROAD TO

CERTAINTY

The questions and the doubts. But most of all the expectation of meeting something that answers the desire for happiness. A tour in the University world to discover what faith can say to a twenty-year-old.

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e Liberazione for the texts

by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

DOCUMENT

THE REVOLUTION OF TENDERNESS

On page 4, the letter Pope Francis sent to Fr. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, after the pilgrimages of the Movement all over the world to commemorate the closing of the Jubilee of Mercy.



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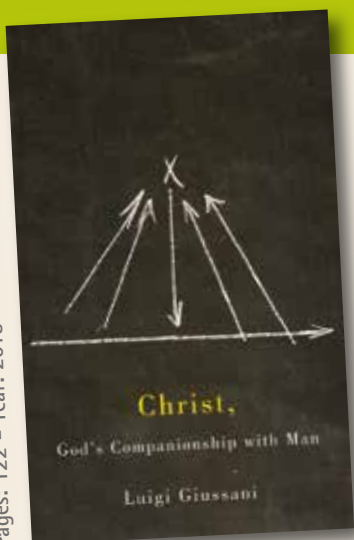
LUIGI GIUSSANI

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 *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 COURAGEOUS BEGINNING

If there is one word we hear often these days, it is *beginning*, a lovely word in and of itself, but at times also a difficult, if not even wearisome one to hear and use, because it concerns not just the year that is starting, but also all the unknowns that it brings with it. In Italy, the referendum to change the Constitution has been put on the shelf, the Government has changed, but the problems are the same as ever, and at times it seems we are forever returning to the point of departure. But the word *beginning* is difficult also in the broader world, given that January brings the start of the unforeseeable Trump presidency, the big unknowns about Europe, the echoes of the terrorist attacks of Berlin and Ankara, the war in Syria... Thus the idea of starting over can seem to be an idea already full of shadows and distrust. Or—just as frequently—it can seem like the same old routine, as if the new year couldn't bring anything really new.

But instead, as Pavese wrote, “the one joy in the world is to begin. It is beautiful to live because living is beginning, always, in every instant.” If you think about it, there is no action or sentence that is not a beginning, even the most everyday gesture, even the most taken for granted and repeated word (leaving the house in the morning, saying “hi” to a friend), is *always* a bridge erected between my “I” and reality, and always expresses expectancy, a desire for good, whether conscious or not. Realizing this fills time, giving it a different heft and gusto, making it an opportunity to discover something about yourself and the world.

This is what you discover thumbing through this issue of *Traces*. It happens in university classrooms when 20-year-olds who are burning with questions and uncertainties happen to run up against another way of living, and this encounter becomes a road to verify a proposal for oneself. A beginning. Or for those who are older, when this earned verification slowly but surely makes someone so certain and grounded that she can even face six years in a gulag and begin again, forgiving, as with the life of the Lithuanian Nijole Sadunaite. Another beginning. These things are shown in other articles and testimonies, too.

But the heart of this issue is revealed as you turn the page now. You will find a gift that Pope Francis gave to the whole movement of CL, sending Fr. Julián Carrón a very beautiful letter that we should study attentively, because it makes us understand what enables this beginning, where it finds its nourishment. He does this by pointing to a radical program: “Going back to our origins is not a form of reverting to the past, but it is the strength for a courageous beginning directed at tomorrow.” We hope you enjoy reading this issue, and wish you a good beginning to this new year. T

THE REVOLUTION

The letter Pope Francis sent to Fr. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, after the pilgrimages of the Movement all over the world to commemorate the closing of the Jubilee of Mercy.

What a joy to be able to share with all of you the handwritten letter I have received from Pope Francis, with his personal blessing!

The Pope thanks us for the offering we collected during our pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries throughout the world on the occasion of the Holy Year of Mercy, sent to him for his charitable giving.

But Pope Francis did not stop at thanking us. In fact, he also wanted to indicate to us where we must look in order to continue our journey, so as to “testify with courage to the authenticity of the Christian life.”

I ask you to read the letter attentively and reflect upon it, to help each other understand it more and more with the help of friends, in your Fraternity groups, to cherish and apply its contents.

God never ceases to amaze us. How can we not be struck and grateful for this unexpected gift of a father who cares so deeply for the destiny of his children?

My prayer for you is that Christ finds each of you open to the way He has chosen to come to meet us this Christmas. This is not something to be taken for granted. As Fr. Giussani always reminded us during the Advent season, we can await His coming but without truly loving the way in which He chooses each time to come.

Let us ask Our Lady to make us open like her to the surprise which the Mystery visits on us today.

I urge you not to let a day pass without praying for Pope Francis, as he has asked of each of us.

Milan, December 20, 2016

Julián Carrón

OF TENDERNESS



D.S.M., November 30, 2016

Reverend Fr. Julián,

I would like to thank you and the entire Fraternity of Communion and Liberation for the offering you collected during the pilgrimages and generously sent me for works of charity.

It does my heart good and consoles me to know that from more than two hundred Marian sanctuaries in Italy and the world, so many people wanted to undertake the journey of mercy in the spirit of sharing with the needy. In fact, the poor remind us of the essential core of Christian life. Saint Augustine teaches us, “There are certain persons who are more ready to distribute all their goods to the poor, than themselves to become the poor of God.” This poverty is necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him. Therefore we go to the poor, not because we already know that the poor person is Jesus, but to return to discovering that that poor person is Jesus. Saint Ignatius of Loyola in turn adds that “poverty is mother and wall. Poverty generates, is a mother, generates spiritual life, life of holiness, apostolic life. And it is a wall; it defends. How many ecclesial disasters began for lack of poverty.”


In a world lacerated by the logic of profit that produces new poverty and generates the culture of waste, I never cease invoking the grace of a Church that is poor and for the poor. It is not a liberal program, but a radical program because it means a return to our roots. Going back to our origins is not a form of reverting to the past, but it is the strength for a courageous beginning directed at tomorrow. It is the revolution of tenderness and love. For this reason, I ask you, too, to unite your intents toward this objective. May you work with serenity and fruitfulness, and courageously testify to the authenticity of the Christian life.

To each and all of you I send wholeheartedly the blessing of the Lord.

Please do not forget to continue to pray for me.

Francisco

THAT LAST PRESENT FOR MARK, THE HOMELESS MAN


 A while back, at the listening center at my parish, I met Mark, a homeless man. He came with a friend. He had gentle eyes, and was grateful to be heard and looked at as a human. Some time later, I ran into him at the shopping mall. I hugged him, but he almost recoiled, because it had been a long time since he had changed his clothes. "I haven't seen you in a long time. Come visit me at the center!" I urged him. From that day, he returned often, if only to greet me and tell me "I'm still here." I invited him to my house for a pizza. He arrived on time, and had washed and changed. He ate, told some lies, smiled, and left. At the beginning of November, I received the news that he had died. They found him under a blanket of cardboard boxes. I called the morgue. "I would like to know how to find him, to bring some flowers to his grave." They asked me who I was and why I was interested in this man. "I know him, many here know him, and we would like to come to his funeral." A few days later, I was summoned to the police station. An officer told me it was he who had found the man, and that they were conducting an investigation to find his identity. If anyone knew something, could they possibly find a family member to identify him? Among the papers at the listening center, we found his friend's phone number, and called. He gave us a name, and we told the police. Just a few days later, I was



telling a woman at my parish about Mark when the morgue called. They said since they had a first and last name, it was finally possible to have a funeral, but it would cost 1,100 Euros. The man beside me overheard everything. He said goodbye to me and left in a hurry, saying he had an urgent matter to attend to. An hour later, the doorbell rang. I opened the door, and it was that man, who handed me an envelope saying, "Here is the 1,100 Euros for the funeral." I never would have imagined that from the simple desire to bring some flowers, God makes me realize that He uses our inadequacy to show His face.

Rita, Milan (Italy)

WELCOME CENTER: US, LIKE THEM

 Speaking with a colleague, I discovered that she volunteers at a welcome center for immigrants in Germany, near Schaffhausen. I was moved by her stories and her supremely human attitude toward these people. One could see that she stays with them because she takes their being to heart. It is not

a mere volunteering done from some sense of piety, but because, like each of us, she has within her a need to do good and to see others for who they are, men and women like us all. It strikes me that even a non-believing colleague (or at least not practicing) can be for me a sign of the Mystery Incarnate. I asked this colleague if I could go with her to meet these people. She told me that every other Saturday, they get together for a snack and to spend a few hours together. So, I invited a few friends to join me, keeping in mind what's written in the booklet on charitable work: "When there is something beautiful within us, we desire to communicate it to others. When we see others who are worse off than we are, we desire to help them with something of ours. This need is so original, so natural, that is within us before we are conscious of it. We call it the *law of existence*." There were eight of us, plus our two children. We didn't do anything special. We spent time with the kids (most of them very young), we chatted, some of us played some group games. It was a truly beautiful afternoon. First of all, we saw with our own eyes that what is happening in this particular period in history, these streams of migrants, is really something immense and unthinkable. Most of these people are very normal—engineers, educated people, like us. It could have been me who, instead of being born here, was born in Aleppo. But the most beautiful and unexpected thing was that I realized that, as is said in School



ENCOUNTER

PUSHING THE CAR WITHOUT GAS

Dear Fr. Julian, I was riding my moped to the “Food Drive” when up ahead I noticed a woman in her 40s pushing her car. My first thought was to help her, but then I said to myself, “She’s on the opposite side of the road, and I’m running late.” And after a few seconds, “I’m going to collect food for the poor, but I won’t help a woman in trouble?” I stopped and asked her if she needed help. “No, no, I’ve got it,” she responded. I realized she was crying. I tried to insist, “But it’s dangerous, why don’t you get in the car and I’ll push it?” “No, no, really I’ve got it.” I was about to leave, when I thought about the time I had some trouble in college and friends from the Movement helped me. So, moving from formal to the familiar form of address, I said, “You’re not used to accepting help.” “What? No, I’ve always done things myself. Now, my mother has died and I lost my job. I used my money to print my résumé which I carry around with me, but I ran out of gas. I thought I could do it, but...” “You have your résumé? I know some people who help others find work.” At that point, she let me push the car to a parking lot. I also offered her 10 Euros for gas, but she didn’t take it. She said to me, “You’re an angel.” I thought, “In a certain sense, yes, because it’s not so much my alleged goodness, but the gaze of Christ that reached me through the Movement, that allows me to look with tenderness on those I encounter—from my students to the sometimes grumpy people who come to do their grocery shopping during the food drive.”



Davide, Milan (Italy)

of Community, “The certainty of being loved allows me to embrace reality.” Having beside me the company of my friends is truly proof of being loved, that there is Someone who loves me. Only with this certainty am I able to embrace reality, so that even simple small talk with a young Syrian fills my heart with gratitude.

Sara, Zurich (Switzerland)

THE MESSAGE OF THE RELIGION PROFESSOR

Agnese, in her first year of high school and in a wheelchair due to an undiagnosed illness that is now

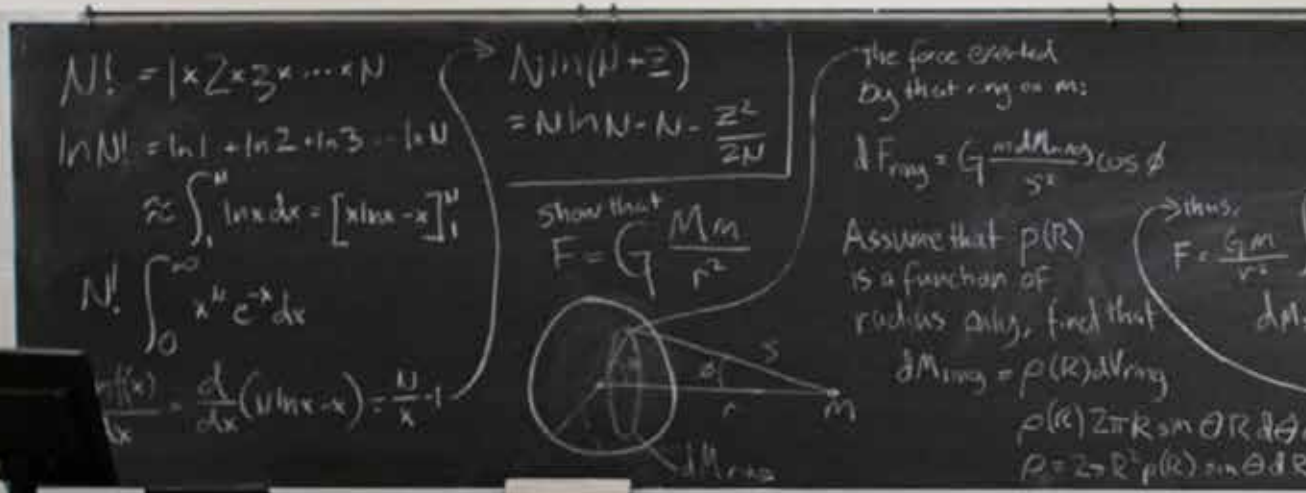
improving, wrote this message after a regional GS encounter.



Mauri, I absolutely wanted to thank you for this unforgettable evening. Elena sent me *The Story* (the last song we sang) when I first became sick, and it was my primary anchor. After leaving the hospital, I tried to listen to it, but each time I burst into tears at the second verse... Today, I did it! I am ever more aware of the fact that alone, I am worth nothing, but with you, I am worth something. I am moving forward thanks to the strong certainty of being loved. Five minutes ago, my religion

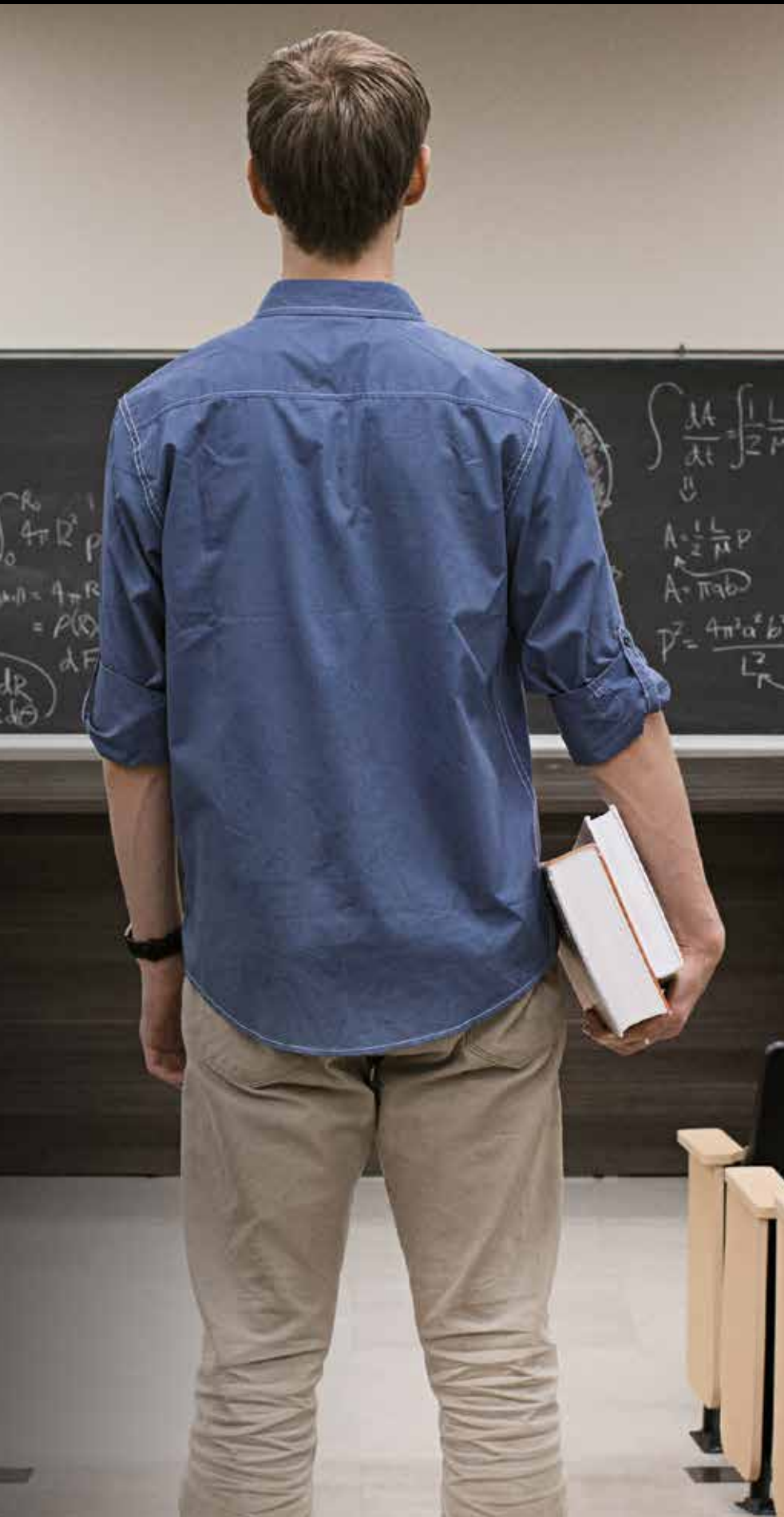
teacher sent me this message: “Agnese, I just wanted to thank you for the witness you give me and my friends each day. Your gaze and your smile are worth more than a thousand words. But, I wanted to ask you if next week, or whenever you wish, you would tell us about this great faith of yours, which I don’t know where it comes from. These are very difficult days for me. My cousin committed suicide, but I am able to move forward thanks to your smile.” After reading this, I told him that I move forward thanks to the certainty I have.

Agnese, Gualdo Tadino (Italy)



“ALL MY DESIRE”

Four thousand University students recently attended the Spiritual Exercises. A great challenge was issued by Fr. Julián Carrón to the participants. Because in a rapidly changing context, only a faith attainable within human experience is able to develop “a certainty full of reasons.” And be communicated to everyone.



BY DAVIDE PERILLO

"Aren't you afraid?" he asked her point blank. He had sought her out to talk at a café in the cloisters of the Catholic University in Milan, where both are studying Humanities. But when the conversation warmed up, Margherita found herself in front of a question she had not expected. "Don't you think of what could happen after you graduate? No more university, the things we do, our friends..." After a moment of silence she answered, "Yes, I think about it, and I feel a little dizzy at the idea, because I don't know what'll happen. But I'm not afraid. Everything that's happened to me so far I never could have imagined, but it's the road that's making me more myself." She told him about herself, her faith, an encounter "with people who changed my life and way of looking." He responded, "Well, I haven't had an encounter like that yet, but I'm waiting for it."

An afternoon at a café, like many others. This is a good starting point for a quick journey to give an idea of what faith can mean for a young person who attends university today, what form a Christian presence can take in the midst of classrooms and lessons. That dialogue between Margherita and her friend encompasses almost everything, the uncertainties of those who are in front of a key moment, the infinite expectancy revealed by those questions: the desire to be happy. And there is the great question that burns in the heart of a 20-year-old, but not only in someone young: is it possible to meet someone—someone—who responds to this expectancy, who helps one to live, opening the road to certainty?

"YOU MADE MY DAY." "Today there is no longer anything to lean on, except something that directly relates to >>>

» the person,” explains Carmine Di Martino, a professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Milan and, together with Fr. Stefano Alberto, a professor of Theology at Catholic University, leader of the CLU (the university students in CL). Students are only interested in what serves them for living. This presents a challenge to faith: “Nothing counts more than the subject, and her awareness.”

The person. This is the key sphere, raising eternal questions, which must be focused on in a different way among young people. Today the need emerges forcefully among them that various forms of Christian presence, including action in student organizations, welcome stands for first-year students, and study groups—all things that have existed and continue to exist—should be centered on what Di Martino calls “personal experience,” and thus played out by far the most often in the “encounters” that occur in the thousand rivulets of daily life: conversations during lessons, apartment life, and studies.

This happened to Giuseppe, an Engineering student in Bologna. A professor started a lesson on human resources by saying that “to face the problem of personnel management in a firm, you have to start with knowledge of the human person.” “Those words attracted my interest right off,” he recounts. “We had just begun work on *The Religious Sense* and I went back and re-read the first premise.” He went to talk to this professor, and they began a dialogue about the book. Giuseppe recounts, “when we talked about it, he said, ‘You know what the Americans say? You made my day. Thank you. This is what I want from my work.’” Giuseppe made the unexpected discovery for himself that he could be “an instrument of correspondence and wonder for the heart of another person.” He was also surprised when the professor said, “Look, I’m an agnostic, but what’s written in this book is true. Go to everyone in this way, be-



cause a movement like yours is a spark that sets the human motor into action, and this can change the university.”

CORRECTIONS. Again, in Bologna, at the Medical School, Erica had a conversation at a café with a fellow medical student. “Erica, nothing is enough for me.” This student had excellent grades, a splendid family, and a steady boyfriend. “Nothing. I don’t know what to do, to whom I can ask my questions. But I’ve met you and your way of facing things gives me a hope that I’ve never seen.” Those were her exact words. How did Erica respond? “I proposed that she spend time with me, and so I invited her to the gestures of the Movement. But even as we were leaving the café, I couldn’t believe it. Was she talking to me? With all my limits, my inconsistencies?” This friend started following the experience of CL. The other day she sent Erica a message: “Can I participate in the Common Fund? When I see something that corresponds to me, I have to go for it fully.”

Correspondence is a key word for understanding whether Christianity can

take root today, whether it can be interesting again, whether it has anything to do with the desire of these young people. “In a moment like the current one, when there are no longer the educative points of departure, the core foundations of family education, or strong ideals, everything must be discovered from within one’s own experience,” Di Martino observes. “You can’t say ‘God,’ just as you can’t say anything else, unless it is made evident from within your experience. And if the Movement weren’t a proposal that we are living today, as is testified to us and offered with passionate insistence by those who lead us, by Carrón—a proposal directed to the ‘I’ that individuals can, or rather must, verify, subjecting it to the judgment of their reason affectively engaged with life—it would not be accepted. It would not be of any interest.”

Thus, following a series of facts, you gradually begin to see a different form of presence and testimony. Federica is finishing her degree in Humanities at the University of Milan, and is writing her undergraduate thesis on Leopardi. She started out with



sponded, “I don’t know. However, as I was listening to Carrón, I was thinking that he must live an answer, otherwise he wouldn’t be able to talk like that about fear, insecurity, and desires. He couldn’t be the way he is. But this is understood also from you, from how you live.” By “you” she meant the young people who had invited her. Young like her, maybe confused, full of problems, but certain, thanks to a lived experience.

IN THE HOSPITAL WARD. So, this is the road of certainty. It emerges like this in life, bit by bit, and challenges the great obstacles that loom in front of the hearts of these young people, “the emotion meter,” as Di Martino calls it. “Everything is measured in the coin of emotions. True is emotion at a high level. False is emotion at a low level. There is a use of reason that needs to be rediscovered, because they apply reason when it comes to exams, but not to life. Consequently, they are afraid to bind themselves to someone, to commit themselves. Either Christianity has influence on life, or...”

Martino studies Medicine in Milan. A few days ago, he said, “Working in the hospital ward, I found myself following two very young physicians with many questions.” They think the same way as the mainstream, above all about the hottest questions: life and death. “In the beginning, when these discussions emerged, I threw out a ‘right’ answer. They were not convinced, and I was not happy.” Then? “Over time I realized that I gained more by truly looking at their questions, without worrying about concluding the discussion right away, but looking for the sliver of truth they had, too.” Things turned around, and they began to have real dialogues. Above all, he discovered that “spending time with them, I understand better who I am, where my uncertainty comes from when I treat them as less than what they are. I also understand where certainty comes from.” **T**

good intentions, wanting to demonstrate the poet’s deep religious sense, and to show that he was not a nihilist at all. In the beginning, she was entirely focused on “testifying to what I believe in.” Then, when she submitted her draft to the professor guiding her work, she received corrections like “this passage is too explicit,” “I don’t share this idea,” or “this judgment is too personal.” Federica recounts, “I was annoyed, and said to myself, ‘well, he’s understood that I’m Christian and wants to object.’” But at the end of the draft the last note said, “I agree!” “I was dumbfounded,” admits Federica. “It wasn’t a case of me, the good guy, against him, the bad guy, who had it in for me. I realized that he cared more about my work than I did.” She found that “correcting those pages was the most beautiful work,” and also discovered that “the value of testimony lies not so much in the force with which, even in the good, we seek to express what we believe in, but rather in letting the beauty of a gaze on life (and on Leopardi) emerge from within what we face, without

worrying about defending anything.”

“The value of testimony is not only that, let’s be clear, but it is important to grasp the nuance. At times you hear it said that ‘the presence is missing,’” observes Di Martino. “That’s not true. I believe that the presence, also culturally, has been enriched and deepened today.” Why? “Because this focus on the person has led to the flowering of a whole range of initiatives, among them cultural initiatives, the purpose of which is not to confirm some ideas, but to develop interests that are born of an experience lived by concrete subjects with name and surname, and they verify it.”

In the following pages you will find the story of the Spiritual Exercises given by CL to university students last month, led by Fr. Julián Carrón. Many of the 4,000 participants were there for the first time. On the first evening, one of the “new” ones said, “All the things he said are true, you can’t deny it, but I don’t even tell my best friend these things.” The next day, talking about the lesson in which it emerged that Christ is the one who saves desire, some objected “it’s not that way for me.” This girl re-

BY FABRIZIO SINISI

It was cold in Rimini on those December days. The university students thronged silently outside the Expo Center pavilions waiting to enter. When the doors opened, they rushed in to get seats as close as possible to the stage. They quickened their pace, some even running. They got their notebooks and pens ready, and looked around at each other with curiosity: each person had arrived there with a particular story and a precise expectation. Many had invited their friends, like Bernard, who studies Humanities in Milan. “If what we live is crucial, if it truly sustains everything, then inviting another person is the opportunity to look at it and love it more. Inviting you can mean you bring a question about what you are now, what you truly want now.”

“You are the desire of my soul,” was the title of the 2016 Spiritual Exercises. The title in Italian had the “you” in lowercase, and the challenge was to understand the “you” that can be the desire, all the desire, of my soul. Fr. Julián Carrón, who for years has personally preached the Spiritual Exercises for the university students in CL, went straight to the heart of the situation of each person, a situation that is often dramatic. “Doubt about existence,” “fragility in living,” “lack of substance in oneself,” “terror of impossibility,” “horror of the disproportion between oneself and the ideal,” are some of the names for the drama of our times. But this, he said, quoting Giussani, “is the foundation of the question, and you start anew from here.” Discovering that you are structurally incapable of fulfilling yourself through your own efforts may seem like the end, but actually it can become the beginning of everything. “In fact, there is a word that dominates human experience:

‘desire.’” Each of us, Carrón continued, can verify whether, even deeper than all our dramas, there remains the ever-ineradicable desire to live, the desire for “something more,” the desire for a meaning that makes life truly *life*.

GIORGIO GABER AND U2. This question challenged everyone, and this was manifest in the attentive and responsive silence with which everyone listened to the performance of two songs that Carrón suggested as examples, Giorgio Gaber’s *Il desiderio*, and U2’s *I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For*. Quoting Giussani, Carrón said that we place great importance on desire: it is “the profound attraction with which God calls us to Himself.”

During the trip back from the Expo Center pavilions to the hotels, Simone from Rome asked, “what horizon is there for my studying? If the horizon of my studying is the studying itself, it is not human to live it. Here I learn to study by asking a bigger question, a question about who I am.” He calls it a “human” gaze. It is “a radically new way of facing our ‘daily book’: here at the Spiritual Exercises, I learn this.”

Fausto is studying Physics in Trento. The introduction had barely finished, but he was already a river in full flow. “When we arrived in Rimini today, before dinner I realized that all my desire, the interior movement with which I had come, had already disappeared. I didn’t know what my question was anymore. It was really beautiful in Carrón’s introduction when he encouraged us to ask the Spirit to keep us always needy, and to give us back to ourselves. As I was listening to him, I understood for the first time the meaning of this continual return to the origin of the human structure. I often think I need someone who limits himself to talking to me about Christ, because I take for



granted that I have encountered Him. Here instead, there is a continual return ‘backward,’ looking more deeply at the constitutive dynamics of my being. How can I truly know something, enter into a relationship with someone, if I am not conscious of who I am, of how my heart moves?”

THE PRODIGAL SON. “Bring the seed planted to fruition, / overcome our resistance, / free us from hopes that disappoint.” These invocations during the Morning Prayer together on Saturday seemed to express the innermost depths of the heart of a single person, but hearing them murmured by thousands of young people was an experience that opened up a question and prayer. One could be led to think, “They are a people, and maybe they do not even know it.”

The Saturday morning lesson was the central moment of the Spiritual Exercises, and also the most demanding, as participants were called to work together. Carrón began by clar-



RIMINI. The Spiritual Exercises in the pavilions of the Expo Center, December 9-11, 2016.

ifying the distinction between desire and image: we often respond to the immensity of our desire with an inadequate hypothesis, and then feel forced to flee from that inadequacy, to distract ourselves elsewhere. He explained this dynamic by telling the parable of the Prodigal Son, a story everyone knows, but the way he told it made it seem like the first time. The son, who deluded himself that he could do things on his own, at a certain point recognized the nature of his need and set out to return home. The father to whom he returned was certainly no different from the one he had left, but *the son* was different; he had a new awareness of himself. The pig trough was the place of his new beginning.

This also clarified the title of the last passage of the lesson, “Christ saves our desire.” When we are truly aware of the nature of our need, then it is as if the concrete and real value of that Father from whom we fled becomes clear to our eyes. In

the depths of our misery we find the way to the Father. Luca, from Milan, had been working in the Congo for the last six months, serving as a foreman on one of the projects of the Engineering faculty. He came to Rimini from Africa, with only a short stop at home. “The reason I was working in the Congo is no different from the reason I’m here. If this experience enables me to live and work well, I can’t help but seek it continually. The origin of the way I am in the world is here.” Ines is from Barcelona, and studies Economics there. She, too, was provoked by that lowercase ‘you.’ “I understood right away that it meant the Lord. It wasn’t something taken for granted; I knew it from experience. I asked myself to whom I could direct all my desire. Only to Him, only to the Lord can I consign *all* my desire.” As she said “all,” she did not notice the trembling in her voice. Her friend Maria, also from Barcelona, seemed to read her mind. “These Spiritual

Exercises are the opportunity to finally no longer have to hide what is in my heart.”

IMPLACABLE CHEERFULNESS. These Spanish students laughed among themselves. There were many of them from Barcelona and Madrid. They organized a volleyball game in the street in front of the hotel with Italians, Ugandans, and Ukrainians, and laughed so hard that they could be heard in the hotel hall. Passers-by were surprised by such implacable cheerfulness. In the hotel, in the meantime, people were arranging tables and chairs for the assembly to gather questions to ask Carrón that afternoon. There were so many questions that they lacked time for all of them; the bus was outside waiting, and they had to go back to the Expo Center for the Saturday afternoon session.

“This morning’s lesson bothered me,” said Giulia, “because it seemed to disqualify my specific needs. If my desire is greater than everything and only Christ can respond to such a height, what becomes of the particular circumstances?” Carrón looked at her and suddenly asked, “Giulia, have you ever fallen in love?” “Yes,” she replied. “And did the experience of your falling in love disqualify the particular circumstances of your life? Or did it exalt them?” Brought back to experience, Giulia remained silent and smiled. An objection that perhaps is valid in terms of logic is not answered with another affirmation, but with a question that brings the discussion back to experience. Federica asked how you can distinguish a sign of experience from an image. “Are you capable of distinguishing when a friend is true and when he isn’t?” Carrón asked her. “Can you distinguish when someone loves you or not? Yes you can, because you already have in >>

JULIÁN CARRÓN

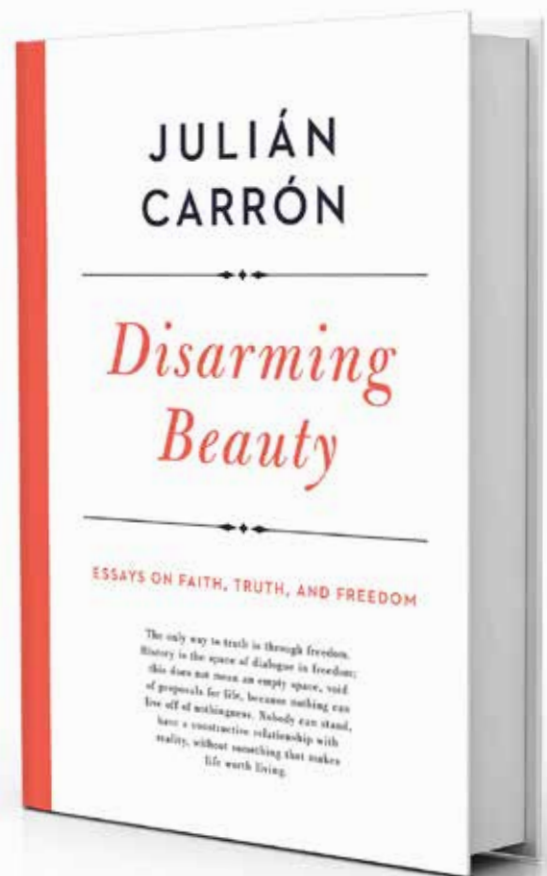
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» your nature all the instruments for understanding. If you are aware of the measure of your need, you don't wait for something inadequate to respond to your desire for happiness. This consciousness is the beginning of freedom."

ANXIOUS TO LIVE. Carrón did not stop there: before and after the gestures, during meals, there was continual clarification and dialogue, a deeper look at the ideas. One of the adults asked him why he was so interested in the experience of the CLU. Why was he wagering so much on the university students? "Because they verify with seriousness the experience that the Movement proposes," he responded. "They understand that what saves them is not the capacity to reason, but sincerity about experience: they never cheat on that. We need to pass all our questions through the sieve of experience."

On Sunday morning the students crowded the pavilions for the summary. The gladness with which they were there, anxious to live, alert to receiving, was almost incredible. Carrón told them that there is a place where they can return. "There is a You capable of saving all our desire." There is One I can trust, not with a naive credulousness, but with certainty full of reasons. "The great things we need for living become accessible only according to a method that is not decided by us. The true decision is whether we accede to this method—a submission to experience, as it was with John and Andrew when they encountered Jesus—or whether we prefer to follow our own images." We can have doubts, questions and reservations, "but nothing can keep Him from happening again or keep me from recognizing Him," added Carrón. Then he asked the question, the most crucial: "Are you interested?" **T**



Michelle, Arnold, and Marvin.

THE EMBRACE IN EVERY MOMENT

From Kampala to Rimini. Marvin, who writes songs, Michelle, who returns because "this is where I want to be," and Arnold, who suffers from an eye disease...

Among the 4,000 participants at the Spiritual Exercises for university students, held in Rimini last December, there were three young people from Uganda. Eighteen-year-old Marvin had just finished high school in Kampala. He plays the guitar, writes songs, and would like to study Aeronautics. He was at the CLU Spiritual Exercises for the first time. "I wanted to come last year, but I was still a minor," he said, smiling. We met him on Saturday at lunch. He was very enthusiastic about the morning lesson. "What he said is true. It's really this way. It happens so often that I run away from myself, trying to distract myself so that I don't see my heart. Instead, this companionship helps me to look at what I truly want. It's a place where my miserableness and sin no longer count for anything. Here I'm not judged at all. I'm not looked at not for what I've done, but for what I desire. This is the gaze of Christ."

Michelle speaks little. The 21-year-old Education major is here at the Spiritual Exercises for the third time. "I feel like a child discovering her father," she said, "full of how Christ knows and embraces my desire. I return because

this is where I want to be. Jesus achieves what would seem impossible: He frees me from judgment. He doesn't look at me in terms of my past, but makes me feel continually chosen."

Arnold is 19 years old, studies International Marketing, and seems to be the most timid of the three. He previously suffered from an eye disease that could have left him blind. Last year he came to Italy for treatment and went to visit Fr. Giussani's tomb to leave a prayer request. The most natural prayer would be to ask for healing, but Arnold had an even more pressing request. "At Fr. Giussani's tomb I asked that I be given the same gaze that he had, the same desire to live reality fully in every moment. I've learned from Fr. Giussani the profundity of my heart, something in me that is stronger than any drama or sin. I've understood that my desire is to be loved." He said that he discovered this in the Movement. "This is why I've come here to the Spiritual Exercises, because Christ embraces me in every moment. There's nothing similar to this: there is nothing like it in the world."

F. S.

A SMILE IN THE GULAG

She was arrested, tortured, and sent to Siberia. The accusation? Having spread news about the Church in Lithuania. And yet, **NIJOLE SADUNAITE** speaks of her jailers as “my KGB brothers and sisters,” and says, “even now we’re called to speak the truth with the strength of our weakness.”

BY LUCA FIORE

She drove the prison guards crazy. She kept singing and singing. The air ran thin in her cell in the basement of the KGB headquarters in Vilnius. Nevertheless, Sadunaite intoned the hymns she had learned as a child. The guards beat on the door, asking her to stop. They reported to the warden, “They brought us an ‘extra-long’ record and there’s no way to turn it off.” Nijole Sadunaite, now 78, tells the story with a look of amusement. She looks a bit like a gentle grandmother, but she never retired from her passion for freedom and for truth because, in her words, “Still today there are people who, like our brothers in the KGB, answer neither to God nor to men.” That expression—“brothers”—says it all about the kind of woman Nijole is. One with enough gall, even now, to make the Lithuanian political powers of the day uneasy.

She lived in the cell in Vilnius for nine months, growing thin and losing most of her hair. Without her knowledge, they subjected her to ionizing radiation to wear her down and pressure her to confess. She never talked. She never betrayed her friends. Those months of torture, she says, “were the most beautiful months of my life, because I’ve never felt God so carnally close.”

Arrested on August 27, 1974, and tried a year later without witnesses in a closed trial, she was charged with “having typed Issue 11 of the underground magazine *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*” and sentenced to serve six years: three in a gulag close to Saransk, in the Volga region, and three confined in Boguchany in Siberia. The judges listened to the guilty party’s last statement without raising their eyes. “A glorious destiny has fallen to me;

not only to fight for the rights of man and for justice, but to be condemned for their sake,” Nijole told the court. “Unhappy is the man who doesn’t love. Yesterday you were amazed how serene I was. That shows that my heart is full of ardent love for my fellow man, because only by loving does everything become joy.”

Hers is the story of a woman full of joy, even in her years in the gulag. She stopped to wonder at the starry sky, made friends with her cellmates, and prayed with them. While in her confinement, she encouraged her dissident friends. She sent the state functionaries responsible for her “reconditioning” into a crisis of doubt. When she was freed, she gave herself to the underground movement, splitting time between Vilnius and Moscow, dedicated to spreading the *Chronicle*. In 1989, John Paul II asked to meet her during World »



» Youth Day in Santiago de Compostela. After his embrace, the severe case of anemia she contracted from the radiation in her cell in Vilnius was mysteriously healed.

Meeting Nijole Sadunaite today and listening to the way she sees the world has the same effect that it must have had on her jailers. You come out mystified and a bit captivated by her simple and unconquerable faith.

Let's start from the beginning, how did you become a dissident?

In the 1970s, the Soviet propaganda said that there was freedom of worship in our country. If the churches were closing, they said, it was because people weren't going anymore. Because of this, we came up with the idea of creating a tool to report on what was happening in the Christian community. We wanted to send our SOS out to the world.

You knew you risked going to prison.

Yes, there were many trials. Many people ended up in psychiatric wards. There were similar initiatives in Ukraine and Moscow, as well. One time, the KGB made it known that if another issue of the *Chronicle of the Russian Orthodox Church* were to come out, they would, in order to repress it, arrest 10 innocent men and women. Sergei Kovalev, a high-profile professor who helped us Lithuanians, among others, decided that he should be identified as the sole editor. They published his full name, address, and phone number. They didn't want innocent people to suffer in their place.

How did they find you?

I worked at a typewriter in my broth-

er's apartment with a friend who dictated to me. We didn't know that the woman next door was a KGB collaborator. They had opened up a little crack in the wall, hidden by an electrical outlet. They could hear everything over on the other side. During my interrogation, the agents asked me, "You had pity on everyone, but your neighbor had no pity for you. She denounced you right away."

And how did you respond?

If that neighbor really believed that denouncing us would do good, because we were people who wished evil on the Soviet people, then she did the right thing. If, instead, she'd sold herself for 30 pieces of silver, I couldn't help but have pity on her.

"Those months of torture were the most beautiful months of my life, because I've never felt God so close."

Did you ever meet her again?

She still lives in the same apartment. When I go to visit my brother, every once in a while, I run into her on the stairs and we say hello.

Have you ever asked her why she did it?

When I wrote my memoir, *A Radiance in the Gulag*, I related this incident without mentioning her by name. She told me that it wasn't true, that she wasn't the one who turned me in. But the 14 KGB agents who walked into my house came out of her apartment.

What happened then?

My friend Brone and I were taking a break. We had just finished typing the sixth page of an issue of the *Chronicle*. They burst in saying, "Everyone freeze; we're going to photograph everything." It made me want to laugh. "What are you shouting about? It's not like we're



IN SIBERIA. Boguchany, Russia, 1977. Nijole Sadunaite during her years of confinement. On the right, the embrace with John Paul II and other images after she was freed.

hiding an atomic bomb or something." My reaction and sarcasm threw Brone off a little; at first she thought it was all a joke. Then they told us to stand against the wall. I reassured them that all they would find were those six pieces of paper. As they searched, we started saying the Rosary.

Weren't you afraid?

What could they have done to me? At the most, send me straight into the arms of God. One time, during an interrogation, they set a bottle with some poison inside in front of me. I said, "Thank you so much! I'm a sinner, but this way you'll send me straight to Paradise. I'll be grateful to you for eternity." But they never did what you asked them to. They couldn't afford to create a martyr. If you're not afraid, they can't do any-



Is the fight for truth still needed today?

Just as in Soviet times we had our KGB brothers and sisters, so today we have those who think only about their personal gain, always focused on themselves, answering neither to God nor to men.

So what do you do?

I take a stand in instances of glaring injustice and seek to be there, physically, for the victims. When I see a person who's undergone an injustice, I fight for that person, without worrying about public opinion. Recently, I was asked to intervene in front of the Parliament, and I spoke of a case that wasn't very clear that the judicial system had declared closed. Neither party had any interest in opening it up again and no one wanted to say what he thought. My one concern was for the 10-year-old girl who was involved. Then, three years ago, I publicly defended a girl who was wrongly accused, for political reasons, of being involved in a terrorist organization. When she got sick in prison, I took her medicine and when she was freed, I helped her out. I'm not interested in political motivations. I defend the truth and accompany the person. I just can't keep silent, even though many people advise me to do so. They tell me I'm old and senile.

What, in particular, do you hope people will remember from your story?

God is good to everyone, even to us weak sinners. People think that I survived and resisted using my own strength, but it's not true. If we have faith in God, we're invincible. Hate is weak. A breath is enough to overcome it. Those who are angry never come out as winners. Not having any arguments for the truth of what they say, they use force. Our force is in our weakness. **T**

thing to you. Otherwise, you start doing everything they ask you to do. I used to say, "If God is with us, who is against us? A million KGB agents is nothing in the eyes of God. A breath and you're no longer there."

What was the hardest moment for you?

When they locked my brother in a psychiatric hospital. They told me, "If you talk, you'll save his life." It was very difficult. But I knew that, all things aside, my brother was in God's hands, too. And, in fact, they released him a few months later.

Have you forgiven the people who've hurt you?

Of course, I've always been grateful to them. It's through them that I've seen God's goodness. They were very unhappy people. They were confused

by the fact that their violent methods didn't work on me. But God shows us that there's another kind of force. That is what I experienced. They carried me off to Siberia saying I wouldn't come back alive. And here I am.

The Year of Mercy ended just recently. What did it mean for you?

Every year, and it was true for this last year as well, is full of joy, and at the same time full of pain (think of all the wars and injustice). Joy and pain always go together; they are the face of our daily life. And what we need the most is really mercy. The Jubilee reminded us of this need we have: I am in constant need of God's merciful gaze to be able to look at others as He looks at me. When he loses sight of his relationship with God, man becomes a slave to evil.



THE SILENCE AND THE FACE

As the film by Martin Scorsese comes to theatres, we take a look at the history of the Japanese martyrs of the 1600s and questions about faith in the least Christianized of the continents. Through the book that obsessed the director, and the voice of today's missionaries.

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

Silence, the new film by Martin Scorsese recounting the persecution of Christians in seventeenth-century feudal Japan, has already evoked lively discussion. It was inspired by the 1966 book of the same name by the Catholic Japanese writer Shusaku Endo. Scorsese says that it has obsessed him ever since he read it. “The story touched such deep chords in me that I didn’t know if I could even try to come to grips with it.” The gestation of the film lasted nineteen years. The American director said that he found himself “living with” that story: living life, “my life, around the ideas that were in the book”—faith,

first of all, the Incarnation, grace, and how it is received. Many powerful and interwoven questions reverberate in Endo’s book, and for the most part are left unresolved, but they can be summarized into one: what it means to live and communicate the Gospel.

The protagonist is Fr. Sebastião Rodrigues, who embarked for Japan with two Portuguese Jesuit companions in 1634 to find Fr. Cristóvão Ferreira, a provincial superior of the Company of Jesus, because word had reached them of his capture and apostasy in Nagasaki. It was unthinkable that their teacher could have renounced the faith, and so, incredulous, they set out. In doing so,

they in turn meet with persecution.

“We hope that the film will make Christianity and its history better known,” says Fr. Renzo De Luca, an Argentinian Jesuit sent to Japan by Jorge Bergoglio in 1985, who currently directs the Museum of the 26 Martyrs in Nagasaki, the most important Christian museum in the country. The vicissitudes of the Japanese Church, the repression and the clandestine life of the *kakure kirishitan*, the “hidden Christians,” who for two centuries cherished and preserved the faith in silence, are still too little known.

The Japanese Christian community was born with the first preaching



MISSION. Liam Neeson plays the Jesuit Cristóvão Ferreira in *Silence*, the film by Martin Scorsese.

of St. Francis Xavier, who arrived in 1549. Thirty years later, there were 150,000 baptized Christians. But suspicions about Catholicism grew, and these suspicions, together with commercial interests, and aggravated by the hostility of Protestant merchants, led in 1612 to the Catholic faith being prohibited by law as a perverse doctrine (*jakyo*). The missionaries were expelled and the community, which by then numbered 300,000 people, was fiercely persecuted.

THE FUMIE. Today many people visit the Museum to learn what happened. “We have material that is unique in

the world. Even people who would never enter a church come here,” continues Fr. De Luca. “The number of pilgrims shows the importance of this story, even though it is one of suffering, for all of Japan.” The story is even more important today, when “the life of the faith here has weakened. It exists, but you see it less than before. The vitality is missing. We are in a country with complete religious freedom: there are Christian schools and universities, and there are no restrictions. But there is strong indifference to the religious experience.”

Notwithstanding the title, Endo’s book is full of characters who “speak”

about God, including those who deny Him, betray Him, ask forgiveness and betray again, and once again seek forgiveness. There is also the character of Fr. Ferreira, who chose apostasy (and who returned to the faith and was re-integrated into the Society of Jesus). The “silence” in the story takes many forms. There is the silence in which the Jesuits must spend their days, hidden in the mountains, waiting for night when they can celebrate Mass and baptisms. The silence of the faces of the converts, made mask-like by a life in hiding, and of those who bear torture without making a sound: those who do not recant are suspended upside down in a grave, or immersed in boiling water, or crucified on poles in the sea, at the level of the water, until the waves, day after day, make them into skeletons. There is the wind that bears their song (“We are on a journey, we are on a journey toward the temple of Paradise”), the agony that extinguishes their voice and leaves space for the silence of the sea, in which Fr. Rodrigues hears the silence of God. “Why do You not speak?” he implores Him.

But even this is not the most dramatic question. The most searing question is the one the protagonist reaches in a climax of conscience in front of the face of Jesus: what does it mean to follow You? His is the face for which Fr. Rodrigues feels the greatest love; this face is always before his eyes, but he must decide whether or not to tread upon it. Christians are subjected to the practice of *fumie*, forced to profane with their feet the icons of Christ and Our Lady in an act of apostasy. If the Jesuit walks on that face, he renounces Him, but he saves the life of other Christians who are about to be executed.

SAMURAI. Thus the missionaries, who arrived in order to give their lives for those people, found themselves in >>

» front of farmers and fishermen, mothers, poor people, who were dying because of them. “The first thing that we learn from the history of our martyrs,” continues Fr. De Luca, “is that persecution does not destroy Christianity, but strengthens it.” This mysterious fecundity will shine before everyone in March, when Pope Francis will beatify Takayama Ukon, “the samurai of Christ,” the first *daimyo*, or feudal lord, to be officially recognized in this way by the Church. Ukon, whose baptism name was Giusto, died in exile in the Philippines for refusing to abandon the prohibited “religion of the West.” “It is a great event for our little Church,” says Fr. Mario Bianchin, superior of the PIME missionaries in Japan, who speaks about the greatest challenge facing a missionary today in the least Christianized of the five continents. Not counting the many immigrants from Catholic countries, the Japanese Catholic community numbers not even half a million people, just “as it was in the 1950’s and 1960’s,” explains Fr. Bianchin.

Bianchin has been in Japan for almost fifty years, and it has been “a spiritual journey,” he says. “The mission here today here is not ‘adventurous,’ but it *is* an adventure, a discovery, a never-ending deepening, above all an interior one. I am immensely grateful for it.” He arrived when he was 31 years old, with the same simple desire he had as a child. “I knew Jesus, but in the world there were many children who still did not know Him. If nobody went to them, they would remain unhappy.” The challenge he has lived from then on is still the same: “That the vision with which one arrives be reformulated and clarified by experience. New ways, the most adequate ways to announce Christ must be found.” In Japan everyone knows “Xavier” and they study about him at school, “but the history of Christianity is still lived



YESTERDAY AND TODAY. Above, the inhabitants of a Japanese village gathered around a group of Catholic missionaries, around 1880. Right, Fr. Mario Bianchin. Here, Scorsese received by the Pope, for the world premiere of *Silence* at the Vatican.

for the most part as political history, and so the Christian faith has had difficulty growing.”

When the missionaries returned to the Rising Sun two centuries later, in the 1800’s, “the Church began with the poorest, as she always does, but in a hostile context. The intelligentsia was hostile to the West and its faith. We began again from charity.” And to this day, this positivity of presence is what is recognized and imitated, “but it is not embraced,” Bianchin stresses. “Japanese society pursues the same values, but they are values that no longer have a soul within.” In addition, the announcement of the faith is “still often expressed in cultural terms that are not found in the roots of Japanese culture. They perceive Christianity as an alternative.” Thus they admire and express gratitude, but say “It’s not for me.” “This should make us reflect,” says the missionary. “It is the great question of the relationship between culture and faith: the Christian faith is not a culture.

It makes culture, but is not culture in and of itself. It blesses the cultures that it meets and enriches them.”

THE SURPRISE. Life here is lived in “circles,” in groups, which serve to support people in certain spheres. “People feel very strong external and social pressure. If the Church is presented as another ‘circle,’ people will reject it, because it is something added on. It doesn’t bring joy.” As Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, then-superior general of the Jesuits, wrote in 2005 on the crisis of Christianity in Asia, “Our message is not made visible by our life.”

When a profound encounter with faith happens, “It happens because the Lord is at work. And, based on my own experience, I can say that most of the time it passes through a trial, such as difficulty in the family or an illness. Above all, it is never an intellectual process. Evangelization through concepts does not take root. It only takes root through a deep heart-to-heart relationship,” that “unknown

A POWER GREATER THAN ANY BETRAYAL

The idea of the film accompanied Scorsese for over 20 years. Now playing in cinemas, it recounts what is victorious even in the midst of torment and persecution.

by Antonio Autieri

In the 17th century Japan, Christians were persecuted ferociously. Two young Jesuits leave Portugal to find a Catholic priest who had apostatized. When the two priests arrive, they find themselves bringing the sacraments secretly to believers who live in conditions of misery and fear, but are steadfast in their faith, even though they know little of the religion they profess. This faith can cost them dearly: those who fall into the hands of the local inquisitors must decide between saving their own lives and those of their families by walking on sacred images, or facing a violent martyrdom.

The two priests also continually run the risk of encountering this choice, at times comforted by the faith of simple people, at times bewildered in front of suffering and tormented by doubts. Where is God? Why does He not make His voice heard?

A film that Martin Scorsese has strongly desired to make for twenty years, *Silence* centers on the figure of Fr. Rodrigues, who is certain of his mission in the beginning, then becomes increasingly tor-

mented by the suffering inflicted on the Christians, and racked by doubts. God's "silence" in particular is a scandal that brings him to the verge of desperation. Yet he is also comforted by the example of people who choose martyrdom with courage and gladness. (There is a very moving scene in which a man dies on a cross after invoking Christ and singing prayers.) With its very beautiful photography, historical accuracy, and profundity in the words it uses, *Silence* synthesizes all the religious anxieties of the American director, who grew up in a Catholic family. Some accuse the book and film of exalting those who apostatized for fear of death.

This is not the case at all.

Those who betrayed the faith, afflicted by guilt, have a sad gaze. Instead, the figure of Kichijiro, who continually betrays but always returns to the priest, and that of Rodrigues, show the power of God's mercy, greater than any betrayal, and how just a small gesture, a final "yes" is all that is needed to forgive and triumph, in the silence and secrecy of the heart where persecution has no power.



The film poster.

human warmth," as Endo described it, that opened a breach in the Japan of the Tokugawa shogunate, so much so that faith was kept alive, secretly, even though there were no longer any churches or priests.

"In the 1800s, the French missionaries discovered the secret communities of the faithful when Japan, shaken out of its isolation, reluctantly re-opened the doors to the Church," recounts Fr. Bianchin. The archives of the Society of Foreign Missions in Paris contain an 1865 document written by Fr. Bernard Petitjean in which he recounted a great surprise. He had finished building a church in Oura, a suburb south of Nagasaki. The "hidden Christians" who lived in the surrounding villages had understood that the *bateren* had returned, the priests who had taught the religion of Jesus to their ancestors, so one morning a small group came to Fr. Petitjean. A woman spoke for all of them: "Our heart is like yours," she told him. "Where we live, there are 1,300 people who have our same heart [...]"

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