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THE SURPRISE OF THE ENCOUNTER

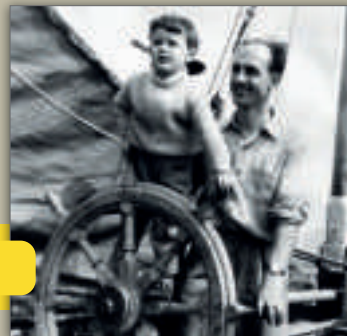
EASTER 2015

PAGE ONE

THE FASCINATION OF AN UNARMED BEAUTY

by Julián Carrón

Notes from the Assembly with the Responsibles of Communion and Liberation in Pacengo di Lazise (Verona), Italy. February, 15, 2015.



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Editorial	That Gaze Present Today by Julián Carrón	3
<hr/>		
Letters	Edited by Paola Bergamini	4
<hr/>		
Close Up	A Road that Begins Again	6
	Julián Carrón's greeting " We Have Come Like Beggars "	9
	The Address of the Holy Father The Caress of Mercy	10
	"May the Gift We Have Received Always be this Living Flame" by José Luis Restán	13
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Ethiopia	A Sign of Hope by Luca Fiore	19
<hr/>		
Story	An Answer for Rebecca	23

Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter from Nazareth, a man like all men and at the same time different. Let us consider the Gospel of John, there where it tells of the disciples' first encounter with Jesus (cf. 1:35-42). Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him...

Speaking about the encounter brings to mind "The calling of St. Matthew," the Caravaggio in the Church of St. Louis of the French, which I used to spend much time in front of every time I came to Rome. None of them who were there, including Matthew, greedy for money, could believe the message in that finger pointing at him, the message in those eyes that looked at him with mercy and chose him for the sequela. He felt this astonishment of the encounter.

The privileged place of encounter is the caress of Jesus' mercy.

Pope Francis

Audience with Communion and Liberation for the 10th anniversary of the death of Fr. Giussani and the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Movement, Rome, Saint Peter's Square, March 7, 2015

EASTER 2015



COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

THAT GAZE PRESENT TODAY

Over 80,000 people from 47 countries were present in Saint Peter's Square for the audience Pope Francis granted for the 10th anniversary of the death of Fr. Giussani and the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Movement of CL. Upon hearing the Pope's words, Fr. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, released the following comment.


“**T**oday in Saint Peter's Square we have experienced anew the encounter with Christ. We saw Him *primerear* right before our eyes through the person and the gaze of Pope Francis, the same gaze that won over Matthew two thousand years ago, but present today!

Today we have experienced what the caress of the mercy of Jesus is. We will never forget the way the Pope embraced us, making us understand that 'There is only one center: Jesus Christ.' The experience of Him will enable us to not reduce the charism to 'a museum of memories' but instead to 'keep the flame alive, not worship the ashes.'

Only this experience of the gaze of Christ—who generates 'surprise,' 'wonder,' and make us feel 'bound to Him'—will keep us from succumbing to attempts at self-referentiality and will enable us to discover in all the people we meet the good that they bring, as Fr. Giussani always taught us to do.

This experience will put us in the conditions to live Christianity as the 'principle of redemption that takes on the new, saving it.'”

THAT QUESTION AMONG LIFE'S THOUSAND BATTLES

 I went to Tokyo on a business trip. I have been a self-employed artisan for thirty-five years. I had been preparing diligently for this trip, getting ready to show the best I had to offer. My intention was not to “knock on doors” but to “knock people’s socks off.” I wanted to hear people say, “Wow, your work is amazing!” and maybe to land a good contract, the kind that changes your life. One morning, I went without an appointment to meet an important dealer. When I got there at 10:00, I learned that they did not open until 11:00. I was very annoyed at having to wait because I saw it as a nuisance, an obstacle placed between me and my objective. I realized, deep down, that I live a great



part of my day dealing with obstacles to my goals. In trying to follow the busy schedule that I set for myself, I find that in the end I enjoy nothing. In any case, taking advantage of the time I had to wait, I pulled out the

Traces I had with me and started reading the transcript of the Beginning Day. At the very start you asked, “What makes us exist *now*?” Try to imagine: there I was, committed to landing the deal of a lifetime! My instinct was to immediately file that question in the folder labeled “Hot Air” and move on to something more “concrete.” Instead, perhaps due to a small crack in my defenses, that question broke through and I was reborn. I walk to work every day, and in those twenty minutes, while lost in my thoughts, something almost always takes me by surprise. Becoming aware of things, I become aware of myself; I begin to live again. As the Gospel says, the eyes that were blind begin to see and the ears that were deaf begin to hear. Pulled from the fog, I am born again. To avoid being vague or unnecessarily poetic about this word, to be “reborn” means, for me, “to be”: to feel the blood in my veins again, to look, to listen, to be surprised, to be moved, to feel my nostalgia or sadness when it comes, but also the peace from the mysterious Presence that comes as things happen. *To be*. The question from Beginning Day comes full circle to the question that floored me in Tokyo while I was trying to land the deal of a lifetime. How wonderful to find that question in the experience, among the twists and turns of my daily battles. How beautiful when things are not obstacles, but possibilities for rebirth! So much for “hot air”; instead, something actually strong enough to sustain life.

Marco, Ravenna (Italy)

EXHIBIT GUIDE

HOW FR. GIUSSANI'S STEPS HAVE MARKED MY OWN

I agreed to serve as a guide for the exhibit in Piazza Maggiore on Fr. Giussani. I spent the first round holding my breath, embarrassed by my inadequacy. In my exhaustion, Fr. Giussani took over. I set aside the role of “guide” in order to be led, letting the core themes contained in the panels resound in my own experience. Each of these themes had echoed in a precise moment in my life and I realized how much, even in the fog of my life, Fr. Giussani’s steps have marked my own. A tenderness was born for myself and for those in front of me. There was no great miracle: no one fell to the ground overcome by a sudden conversion. I came away with the sense of being part of a journey of poor persons touched by the Mystery. In my steps I felt the strange lightness that comes over you when you let in the Unexpected.

Roberto, Bologna (Italy)



AT THE AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE

THE FACES THAT BROUGHT ME TO ROME AGAIN


Forty years ago, an unexpected encounter with CL changed my life forever. In my long-lasting participation in the protests of the 60's, I was unknowingly and unsuccessfully trying to attach the underlying religious quest to the equally strong quest for social justice. The results? Total failure, on both fronts. As a young student, I was deserting and criticizing the Church, but at the same time, I was unable to give realistic answers to the challenging questions that society was throwing at me. Later, during the first year of college, I was converted, not by a perfect political analysis, but by some faces. Because of this encounter, I joined the Movement. After years of debates and strategies, I couldn't care less about the organization. Those faces, not the best possible, attached themselves to my life, giving me a glimpse of a changed life. Because of those faces, I agreed to go on a pilgrimage to Rome to see Pope Paul VI during the Holy Year and in 1976, I was in Riccione for Fr. Giussani's famous conversation on utopia and Presence. I was struck by that



priest's stress of two aspects of Christian life: freedom and mercy. Forty years later, other faces make me see with my own eyes that the only thing that matters is to bump into persons who have been changed by Christ. Because of those faces, I went to Rome to see Pope Francis. At this point in my life, I have no need of ideology, revival, or nostalgia. I need a caress that lightly touches the things that don't go well. In Rome I heard Pope Francis stress again what I had heard from Fr. Giussani at my beginning in the Movement: freedom and mercy. They are still valid: so much so that those two decisive antidotes to self-referentiality have given me another beginning, contrary to anything I would have predicted. Today, the essential for me is to experience the caress of mercy. I ask that mercy accompany me and that I should know how to recognize mercy until the last day of my life. For me, this means following the charisma of Fr. Giussani in the new challenges, of my life and of the Movement.

Stefano Andriani, Italy

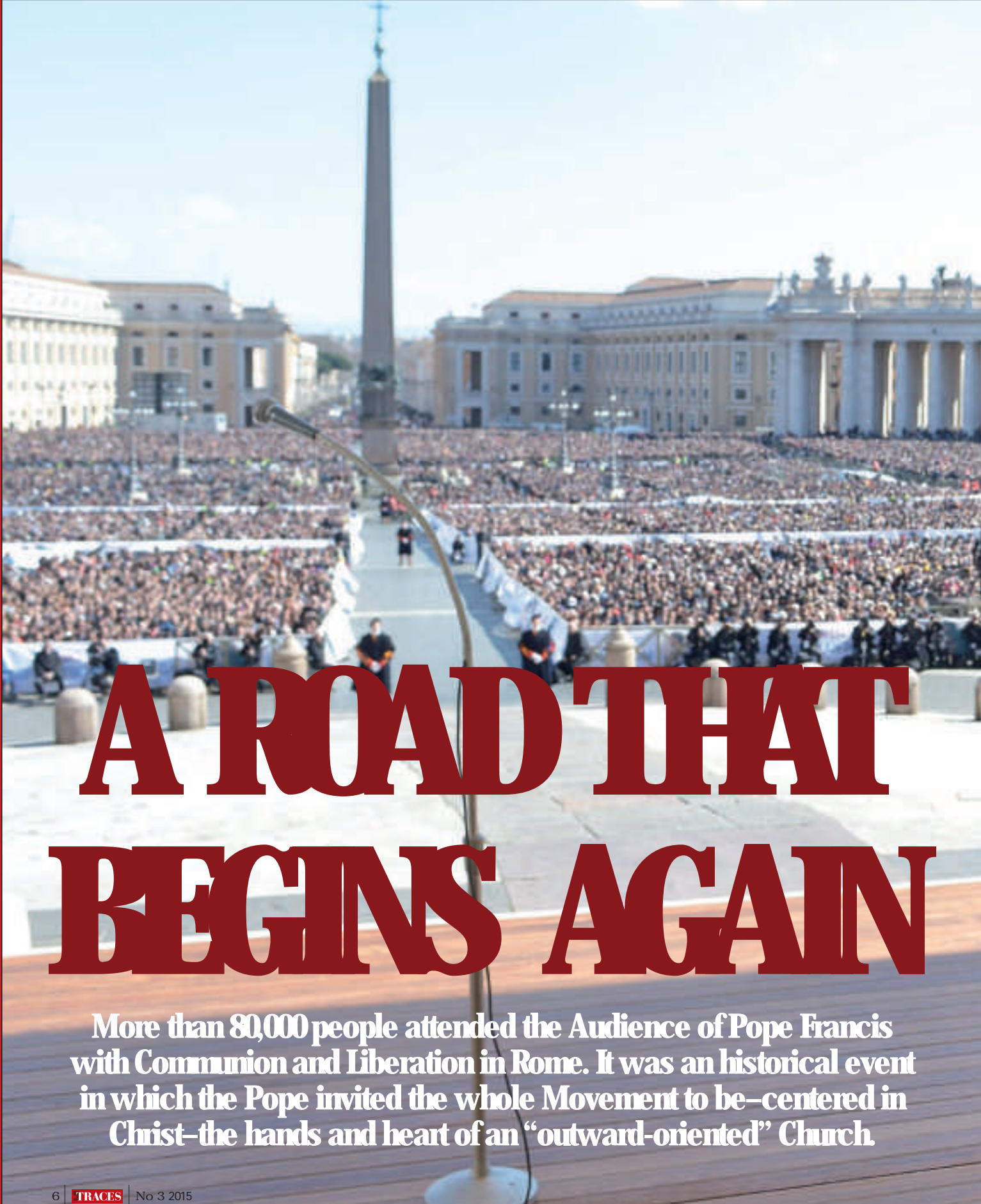
ON SUNDAYS TOGETHER WITH ROD

 During the summer of 2013, I talked with some friends of ours from Vancouver about the need to do charitable work. We finally decided to visit Rod, a quadriplegic person who was friends with some of us. My desire to be educated by charity was struggling with my interest in spending time doing other things. Furthermore, I was thinking that another charitable work might work better, but, at the same time, I had the intuition that some time and consistency were required to allow me to be educated by what we were doing. Talking to a friend,

we helped each other pay more attention to this desire and we started to arrange our common visits more systematically. Leaving home on Sundays for Rod's became a regular decision to open my time to something outside my immediate plans, expecting from every visit that something new might happen. Looking at our small kids, I realized that there is nothing that I desire more for them than this openness to something different and greater than us, so much so that my wife and I brought them to spend the afternoon with Rod a couple of times. On one of those Sundays, we were nine people gathered around Rod, talking

with him and singing songs with a guitar and a ukulele. I started to think that it was ridiculous, and maybe even stupid, to be so many people accompanying one single person, but then I realized that Rod never complained and that I have way more than nine people around me. I began to desire for myself the same sense of gratefulness for life that Rod had. Rod passed away on Christmas Eve. When we received the news, my wife told me: "We have lost one of the best things we had." Indeed, doing charitable work is one of the best and most educational things that I have.

Lucas, Vancouver (Canada)



A ROAD THAT BEGINS AGAIN

More than 80,000 people attended the Audience of Pope Francis with Communion and Liberation in Rome. It was an historical event in which the Pope invited the whole Movement to be-centered in Christ—the hands and heart of an “outward-oriented” Church.



Pope Francis embracing Fr. Julián Carrón
in St. Peter's Square, Rome, on March 7, 2015.



Iwonder as I wander... out under the sky... The voices and notes hang in the air. Everything stops and the eyes of eighty thousand people turn to the image that suddenly appears on the screens. He's here! The Pope has arrived. Everyone was waiting for him but even so, the surprise transforms the Square. In front of the Basilica everyone is standing on their chairs; wonder rolls through the crowd like a wave, all the way through to Via della Conciliazione, and in one voice everyone be-

gins singing: *Ho un amico grande grande!... [I have a great, great friend!...]*. It is a people's explosion of enthusiasm for a man. Just one man, like you and me, but the fact that he is there makes them feel that everything is true, the faith is true and life is true, every morning: work, studies, suffering, raising children, loving.

This moment perfectly captures the first audience of CL with Pope Francis. Julián Carrón's letter inviting the Movement to Rome clarifies what is happening. We have it before our eyes:

everything has its "substance in the bond with the fragility of a single person." Like Zacchaeus, a young man has climbed up a lamp post in the middle of the Square. The Popemobile makes a long circuit alongside the thousands of hands outstretched at his passing. "I have not been left alone," thinks Barbara, 26, as the crowd applauds, sings, and waves booklets: "I arrived here angry for various reasons, but everything changed when I saw him."

"The event of Christ reaches us, too,



JULIÁN CARRÓN'S GREETING

“WE HAVE COME LIKE BEGGARS”

Your Holiness, We are very happy to be able to meet you in such an important year of our history. I thank you from the heart in the name of all my friends who have arrived here from throughout the world for this gesture of paternity for the people born of the testimony of Fr. Giussani, the tenth anniversary of whose death we celebrated on February 22nd. It is truly moving for us to return to this Square where we saw him manifest in front of Saint John Paul II his wonder at the people God had brought into existence through his passion for Christ as “an instrument of the mission of the one People of God.”

His person and life, through which he drew us to Christ in obeying and following His Church, are present more vividly than ever in our memory. The more time goes by, the more we realize, in following him, the importance of his figure for each of us and for all. This is why we desired to come to you, Your Holiness, because we do not want to let wither away the “freshness of the charism” that fascinated us.

Aware of our fragility and betrayals, we have come in pilgrimage to the tomb of Peter to pray for the freshness of the charism, as you yourself suggested in your speech to the Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. We want to live more and more each day “always renewing the ‘first love’,” that first love that caused us to exclaim “When I encountered Christ, I discovered my humanity” (Gaius Marius Victorinus).

Thus we have prepared for this encounter first of all by asking the Holy Spirit to continually renew in us the disposition of heart we had at the beginning, the simplicity without which we become set on the forms of the past, forgetting the essential and allowing to weaken the impetus of life that fascinated us.

We know well that by our own strength we cannot generate or preserve the freshness of the charism; we need the grace received to blossom again ever new in our lives, and this can only happen by maintaining the bond with Peter, which Fr. Giussani instilled in our lifeblood. This is why we have come like beggars, with the desire to learn, to be helped to live with ever greater faithfulness and passion the charism we have received.

Only rooted in Christ in this way can we make Him present through our lives in the existential peripheries, in every sphere and in every circumstance in which each day the drama of our fellow men is lived out, especially those most tried by life and thirsty, even unknowingly, to encounter the merciful gaze of the Lord. We, like them, need this gaze of mercy of which you, now, are a sign and instrument.

We are here, Your Holiness, yearning to experience the renewal of the unique Event that, passing through the centuries, has reached us today in this Square, and enables us to experience the beauty and joy of being Christians.

Thank you, Your Holiness!

wretches that we are. That Grace began to penetrate into the world through Our Lady, and today reaches us, too, to fill the empty amphora of our hearts. Let us prayerfully ask that it also find the same welcome in us.” Carrón’s words to introduce the gesture had accompanied the waiting time of those who had been filling the colonnade since early morning, arriving from every part of the world (47 countries) and by every means of transport. Then there was *Morning Prayer*, the video and the words of Giussani, the

songs of a clear beauty like the air this day, from the *Ave Maria* in Chinese to the Argentinean *Zamba* dedicated to *don Francisco*. “There is no other Christ than the one who happened to Mary,” the leader of the Movement continued: “From then on, there is no other Mary than the one defined by the call of Christ.” The same thing is happening now with the presence of the Pope, with everyone’s emotion-filled gratefulness for the life of Giussani, for the “profoundly human” road that this man travelled for his own sake

and to give it to everyone, and with the Holy Father’s closeness, his oneness with what the Movement lives.

ALREADY THERE. “The privileged place of the encounter with Jesus Christ is my sin,” he says in his speech: “Only those who have been caressed by the tenderness of mercy truly know the Lord,” know what He has given back to us. The forgiveness of today. The Pope says he often stopped in front of *The Calling of Saint Matthew* by Caravaggio. The Pope’s arrival in the >>

» Square is like the gaze of Jesus in that painting, while you are there with the money still in your hand, holding onto what you are unable to give, while you err or try to do good, to wait well or while you are not even seeking. "He comes and invites us." He comes and chooses us, now, to follow Him. "When we arrive, He is already there, waiting!" the Pope says forcefully. Jesus is the almond tree that is the first to flower in spring, and following Him makes life blossom.

IMMEDIATELY BOUND. After speaking of the good that Giussani did "for me and my priestly life," he warms to the topic of the encounter. "Everything in our life starts with an encounter," the encounter with the carpenter of Nazareth, "a man like everyone else and at the same time different." He recounts how the first disciples felt themselves looked at deep down, "known intimately," and how this "immediately bound them to Him." Only this can give rise to Peter's yes and ours: "Christian morality is a moved response."

Carrón's son-like request for help "to not let wither away the freshness of the charism" finds sure guidance in Francis: the Pope does not take for granted the vitality that "the original charism has not lost." He shakes up the journey of the Movement and of our personal life: "Be free!" Be free from closure, from your own belonging and habits, from decisions already made, from the ashes to which you are devoted, whatever form they may take. "Learn from everyone." Listen to those who are not like you. "Christianity is the principle of redemption that takes on the new, saving it," he will say at the end, quoting Giussani. Francis forcefully asks us to be outward bound, to be "decentered": "at the center there is only the Lord!" There is love, that is, there is "what comes from God." And there is one task: "Adopt »

THE ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

THE CARESS OF MERCY

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning! I welcome all of you and I thank you for your warm affection! I address a cordial greeting to the Cardinals and Bishops. I greet Fr. Julián Carrón, President of your Fraternity, and I thank him for the words he addressed to me on behalf of all; and I also thank you, Fr. Julián, for that beautiful letter that you wrote to everyone, inviting them to come. Thank you very much!

My first thought goes to your Founder, Msgr. Luigi Giussani, remembering the 10th anniversary of his birth in Heaven. I am grateful to Fr. Giussani for different reasons. The first and more personal is the good that this man did for me and for my priestly life, through the reading of his books and articles. The other reason is that his thoughts are deeply human and reach the most intimate yearning of mankind. You know how important the experience of encounter was to Fr. Giussani: the encounter not with an idea, but with a Person, with Jesus Christ. Thus he educated in freedom, leading to the encounter with Christ, because Christ gives us true freedom. Speaking about the encounter brings to mind *The Calling of St Matthew*, the Caravaggio in the Church of St. Louis of the French, which I used to spend much time in front of every time I came to Rome. None of them who were there, including Matthew, greedy for money, could believe the message in that finger pointing at him, the message in those eyes that looked at him with mercy and chose him for the *sequela*. He felt this astonishment of the encounter. The encounter with Christ who comes and invites us is like this.

Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man, the carpenter from Nazareth, a man like all men and at the same time different. Let us consider the Gospel of John, there where it tells of the disciples' first encounter with Jesus (cf. 1:35-42). Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him.... Or when, after the Resurrection, Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love me?" (*Jn* 21:15), and Peter responds: "Yes;" this yes was not the result of a power of will, it did not come only by decision of the man Simon: it came even before from Grace, it was that "*primarear*," that preceding of Grace. This was the decisive discovery for St. Paul, for St. Augustine, and so many other saints: Jesus Christ is always first, He *primareas* us, awaits us, Jesus Christ always precedes us; and when we arrive, He has already been waiting. He is like the almond blossom: the one that blooms first, and announces the arrival of spring.

One cannot understand this dynamic of the encounter if astonishment and adherence are inspired without mercy. Only one who has been caressed by the tenderness of mercy truly knows the Lord. The privileged place of encounter is the caress of Jesus' mercy regarding my sin. This is why you may have heard me say, several times, that the place for this, the privileged place of the encounter with Jesus Christ is my sin. The will to respond and to change, which can give rise to a different life, comes thanks to this merciful embrace. Christian morality is not a titanic, voluntary effort, of one who decides to be coherent and who manages to do so, a sort of isolated



challenge before the world. No. This is not Christian morality, it is something else. Christian morality is a response, it is the heartfelt response before the surprising, unforeseeable—even “unfair” according to human criteria—mercy of One who knows me, knows my betrayals and loves me just the same, appreciates me, embraces me, calls me anew, hopes in me, has expectations of me. Christian morality is not a never falling down, but an always getting up, thanks to his hand which catches us. This too is the way of the Church: to let the great mercy of God become manifest. I said in recent days to the new Cardinals: “The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for eternity; [but] to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart. The way of the Church is precisely to leave her four walls behind and to go out in search of those who are distant, those essentially on the ‘outskirts’ of life. It is to adopt fully God’s own approach,” which is that of mercy (*Homily*, February 15, 2015). The Church, too, must feel the joyous impetus to become an almond blossom, i.e., spring, like Jesus, for all of humanity.

Today you are also commemorating the 60 years since the start of your Movement, “born in the Church”—as Benedict XVI said—“not by the will of an organized hierarchy but originating from a renewed encounter with Christ and thus, we can say, by an impulse derived ultimately from the Holy Spirit” (*Address to members of Communion and Liberation*, March 24, 2007; ORE edition, April 4, 2007, p. 5).



After 60 years, the original charism has not lost its youthfulness and vitality. However, remember that the center is not the charism, the center is one alone, it is Jesus, Jesus Christ! When I place at the center my spiritual method, my spiritual journey, my way of fulfilling it, I go off the itinerary. All spirituality, all charisms in the Church must be “decentralized”: at the center there is only the Lord! For this reason, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, when Paul speaks of charisms, of this most beautiful reality of the Church, of the Mystical Body, he ends by speaking of love, of that which comes from God, which is truly God’s, and which allows us to imitate Him. Never forget this, to be decentralized!

Thus the charism is not preserved in a bottle of distilled water! Faithfulness to the charism does not mean “to petrify it”—the devil is the one who “petrifies,” do not forget! Faithfulness to the charism does not mean to write it on a

parchment and frame it. The reference to the legacy that Fr. Giussani left you cannot be reduced to a museum of records, of decisions taken, of the rules of conduct. It certainly entails faithfulness to tradition, but faithfulness to tradition, Mahler said, “is not to worship the ashes but to pass on the flame.” Fr. Giussani would never forgive you if you lost the liberty and transformed yourselves into museum guides or worshippers of ashes. Pass on the flame of the memory of that first encounter and be free!

Like this, centered in Christ and in the Gospel, you can be the arms, hands, feet, mind and heart of a Church “which goes forth.” The way of the Church is to leave her walls behind and go in search of those who are distant, on the peripheries, to serve Jesus in every person who is marginalized, abandoned, without faith, disappointed by the Church, a prisoner of one’s own selfishness.

“To go forth” also means to reject self-referentiality, in all its forms. It means knowing how to listen to those who are not like us, learning from everyone, with sincere humility. When we are slaves to self-referentiality we end up cultivating a “labelled spirituality”: “I’m CL.” This is the label. Then we fall into the thousands of traps offered to us by the pleasure of self-referentiality; by that looking at ourselves in the mirror which leads us to confusion and transforms us into mere impresarios in an NGO.

Dear friends, I would like to conclude with two very meaningful quotations of Fr. Giussani, one from the

early part and one from the end of his life.

The first: “Never in history is Christianity realized as a fixity of positions to defend, which relates to the new as pure antithesis; Christianity is the principle of redemption, which takes on the new, preserving it” (cf. *Porta la speranza. Primi scritti*, Genoa 1997, p. 119). This must have been around 1967. The second is from 2004: “Not only did I have no intention ‘to found’ anything, but I believe the genius of the Movement that I saw born was feeling the urgency to proclaim the necessity for a return to the basics of Christianity, in other words, a passion for the fact of Christianity such as it was in its original elements, and nothing more” (cf. *Letter to John Paul II on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Communion and Liberation*, January 26, 2004).

May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you. And, please, do not forget to pray for me! Thank you.

» fully God's own approach," this mercy He has for us, a surprising mercy, unexpected, even "unjust" according to our criteria: He is "One who knows me, knows my betrayals and loves me anyway, esteems me, embraces me, calls me again, hopes in me, expects of me."

Before closing, asking everyone to pray for him, he draws upon another passage from Giussani: "the genius of the Movement that I saw coming to birth lies in having felt the urgency to proclaim the need to return to the elementary aspects of Christianity, that is to say, the passion of the Christian fact as such in its original elements, and nothing more!" he says with impetus. Then he gives his Blessing and spends time greeting leaders and friends of the Movement from throughout the world and also from different traditions and faiths. The Pope embraces a group of prison inmates and caresses them, blesses and kisses a little girl with a unique fondness, so unique that it responds to the need of each person. In the meantime, the people slowly make their way out of the Square, still bowled over by the unexpected good they have experienced: "What happened? Who passed by?" says Lucia with few words and a radiant smile.

LIKE A BABY. The big questions that fill people's hearts cannot wait, and are shared among friends as the colonnade empties. There are greetings and hugs, the last photos. Andrea reflects on the Pope's admonitions, which wound him and cause him to desire a road that begins, that begins again: "He told us many things; I want to enter into them, to live them." For Alberto it was his first encounter with a Pope. Behind his sunglasses, the forty-five-year-old cried like a baby the whole time. Why? Giussani had answered in one of the videos, recounting how John and Andrew met Jesus: "Kids, without putting too fine a point on it, this happened." **T**



Pope Francis with some inmates that attended the Audience in St. Peter's Square.





“May the Gift We Have Received Always be this Living Flame”

The Spanish Radio Cope interviewed Fr. Carrón after the audience. Here we publish the transcript of that dialogue.

BY JOSÉ LUIS RESTÁN



Today we have with us the Spanish priest Julián Carrón, currently President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, just two days after an unforgettable gathering with Pope Francis in Saint Peter's Square, where over 80,000 members of the Movement gathered from all over the world.

The Pope asked the members of the Movement to be the hands, feet, arms, mind and heart of an outward-bound Church. How do you think this request of the Pope's can be actuated in the daily life of the Movement?

Fundamentally, in continuity with what is the DNA of the Movement itself. The Movement was born precisely in the outskirts, in the spheres of school, university, and workplaces, responding to the many needs that we see in the neighborhoods, people without work, who cannot make it to the end of the month, who are seeking hope, who need to find mean-

ing in life, immigrants... All this is already part of our way of being in reality and living what has happened to us. Thus, in this further indication of the Pope we are encouraged to live what we are already living, but with greater awareness.

What is the difference between keeping alive the freshness and vitality of the charisma, now that Fr. Giussani is no longer present, and fossilizing it, as the Pope warned Saturday? How do you feel this responsibility of yours?

It seems to me that every Christian has the responsibility of keeping the event of Christ from being reduced to something that belongs to the past, but living it as a present fact that shapes life. Human experience tells us this. It is one thing to fall in love with someone, and we all know how much this present fact shapes life, filling it with a presence that is so present that we overflow with joy and gladness; but we know well what happens when all this is reduced to a mere memory, is fos- >>

» silized, or turns into something already dry, without the newness and freshness of the beginning. This happens with Christianity, too. If Christianity is only a memory of the past and not a present event, in the end it will not interest us. It will be unable to attract the heart, to grasp it with all its humanity, and thus Christianity will not interest us. We went to Rome precisely with the desire to ask for this, because we are well aware that we cannot give it to ourselves. Just as it was a gift to have received it through the charism of Fr. Giussani, we have to ask for it, as he taught us to ask for it, so that this gift we have received may always be that flame of which the Pope spoke.

Those who do not know the reality of CL well might think that it is a typically Italian phenomenon, even though your presence here today would indicate otherwise, as would the fact that there were people from every continent in Saint Peter's Square. So, could you please give us a quick overview of the presence of CL in the world?

The Movement has grown considerably in recent years, touching eighty countries, obviously with different presences, also in terms of numbers, in the different nations. In some it is just at the beginning, while in others it is more consolidated. What interests us more than the numbers, which depend on how the Lord chooses to use this grace He has given us, is the verification of what we have received, that is, that when you live Christianity as Fr. Giussani taught us, in the most essential, most elementary aspects of the faith, you can encounter the heart of any person, on any continent, in any culture, in any situation you are called to live your life. This is a continual surprise for us. Saturday in the Square there were people from China, New Zealand, the United States, Latin America, and Russia. This tells us that the human

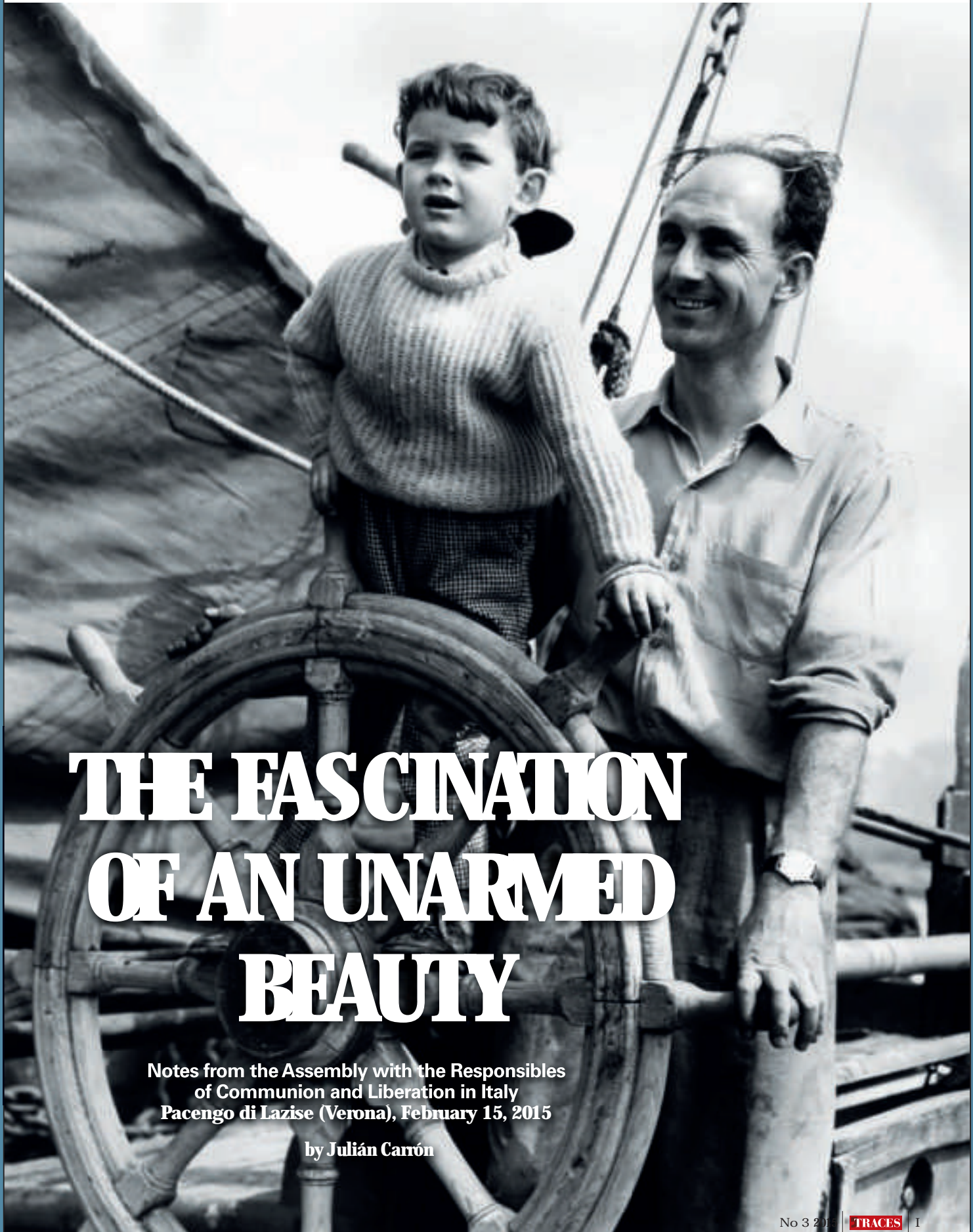


heart, that of any person at any latitude, awaits an encounter that can give the gusto of living.

Pope Francis said that Christian morality is not a titanic effort to be coherent with a series of principles, but the moved response to the unexpected mercy of God. I have the sense that today in some ecclesiastical spheres this is a hot topic that provokes discussion; it certainly shows a particular accord with Fr. Giussani's perception.

We are the first to be profoundly moved that something Fr. Giussani told us many years ago, which surprised us when we heard it the first time to the point of being moved, because we felt embraced in our humanity and our sin, should be said today by the Pope and the whole Church. This tells us something fundamental for understanding Christianity: that Christianity can be reduced—as already underlined by previous Popes, beginning with John Paul I, then John Paul II and Benedict XVI—to a system of ethics. Fr. Giussani always reminded us of John Paul I's famous affirmation that in the Church's attempt to present

herself to modern people, she transformed the wonder of the beginning into a series of rules, into the titanic effort of the person. John Paul II and Benedict XVI insisted on this on many occasions: when Christianity is reduced to this alone, it loses its true nature of an event that changes life. Saturday the Pope referred to the famous scene from *The Calling of Matthew* painted by Caravaggio, in which Matthew himself, a sinner because of his occupation as a tax collector, is full of wonder in hearing himself called, he himself, by Jesus, who knew all his sinfulness. I can imagine what happened Saturday in the Square in some of the Italian prison inmates who had the opportunity to meet the Movement, what they must have felt when the Pope embraced them. It is the experience of Matthew, of every sinner in history in front of Christ, of each of us. For this reason, the experience brought home by those who participated in a gesture like the one we experienced Saturday in Saint Peter's Square, that stays in your heart and in every fiber of your being, is this embrace full of tenderness, of the mercy of Christ that has reached us once again through Pope Francis. **T**



THE FASCINATION OF AN UNARMED BEAUTY

Notes from the Assembly with the Responsibles
of Communion and Liberation in Italy
Pacengo di Lazise (Verona), February 15, 2015

by Julián Carrón

“Do we Christians still believe in the capacity of the faith we have received to attract those we encounter, and in the living fascination of its unarmed beauty?” (J. Carrón, “The Challenge of True Dialogue after the Attacks in Paris,” *Corriere della Sera*, February 12, 2015, p. 27). This is not a question that we can take for granted. In fact, every time we respond to a situation like this and ask ourselves, “What should we *do*?”—we demonstrate that we still haven’t understood the answer to this question. This “What should we do?” is the biggest giveaway. There is one thing we have to do, just one: to be converted, to let ourselves be won over once again by the fascination that is the only reason that we are here. Everything else is a consequence of this: at a certain point in time, the fascinating power of the faith—the conquering fascination of its unarmed beauty—won us over, as yesterday’s Gospel reminded us. “I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. [Unarmed, carrying nothing else and fixing our eyes and every fiber of our being on nothing but that which has won us over] [...]. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it [which means carry with you that newness that cures every sickness in the house; it’s not an exaggeration: when a person who is changed enters a house, he heals what is ill], and say to them [only after healing them, because only then can they understand], ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you’” (*Lk* 10:3-9). It’s an event that allows people to comprehend the content of what is proclaimed. First it happens, and then it is understood; it’s precisely because it happens that they understand. Though this has always been the method, and it’s even more crucial now, it’s as if at some point, without realizing, we substitute something else for this fascination—as Fr. Giussani told us over and over again.

In 1982, during the first Fraternity Exercises after the Pontifical recognition of CL, Fr. Giussani said, “You have grown up, and while you have reached a level of competence in your professional lives, in the relationship with Christ there is a kind of distance possible (in contrast with the zeal of many years ago, especially considering certain moments years ago) [in other words, the energy of the beginning is no longer there, we no longer have the same fascination to communicate to others, the zeal of many years ago is gone]. There is a kind of distance from Christ, except in particular moments. What I mean is, there is a kind of distance from Christ except when you sit down to pray [which often becomes just something extra, “stuck on” to life]; there is a distance from Christ except when, for example, we take on an initiative in His name, or in the name of the Church

or of the Movement [and in so doing, often we are able to “cover up” the distance, as Cardinal Ratzinger said]. It’s as if Christ were far from our hearts. With the poet of the Italian Renaissance we can say we are ‘with graver interests occupied’; our heart is as if isolated, or rather, Christ remains isolated from our heart, except in particular circumstances like prayer, initiatives, when there is a meeting, or School of Community to be led, etc. This distancing of Christ from the heart, apart from certain moments in which His presence seems to be at work, generates another distancing, which reveals itself in the ultimate uneasiness we feel amongst us—I am speaking even of husbands and wives—in an ultimate mutual uneasiness. [...] The distancing of Christ from the heart distances the ultimate dimension of my heart from the ultimate dimension of your heart, except in the simplest of shared responsibilities (taking care of the house, looking after your children, etc.)” (L. Giussani, “The Familiarity with Christ,” *Traces*, no. 2, 2007, p. 2). As a result, we find ourselves anxious in front of the challenges we face because, as we say, “We have to be able to do *something*.” But this doesn’t help, precisely because we are up against this collapse of

There is one thing we have to do: to let ourselves be won again by the fascination that is the only reason we are here.

evidences that we have been talking about for months. We are immersed in this melting pot of cultures, religions, and diverging worldviews that we call “multiculturalism.” In this context, the place of freedom that is Europe is threatened by those who want to impose their worldview using violence, as we saw once again this morning on the front page of all the newspapers reporting what happened in Copenhagen. And so I ask myself, “Do all of those who meet us find in us something capable of attracting their humanity, of challenging their reason and their freedom?” In many, “a great nothingness” or “a deep emptiness” is what prevails. Today we see how true it is that there is no evidence except this nothingness, because nothing is enough to attract people, and so for many life degrades into violence. Each and every one of us in our society finds himself in front of this nothingness, and so every attempt at a response will have to verify if it is capable of overcoming this nothingness. All else is merely a distraction.

As Fr. Giussani says, the first battle takes place inside of us. If we have lost the fascination of the faith, after having experienced it, if we find ourselves with our hearts separated from Christ, what can we offer to others? Do we really think that, if the fascination no longer shines in us and through us, we can respond to the situation described by doing something else? With his characteristic incisiveness, Fr. Giussani catches our mistake, and tells us still today: we can be here, busy with a hundred projects, but if that fascination has disappeared, our heart is far from Him.

This is the real question, my friends. This means that our historical circumstances are a unique opportunity for us to ask ourselves, “Can those who meet us be so attracted by the truth

that we carry that their reason and their freedom are challenged and re-engaged?" This question tells us that we constantly need to deepen our awareness of the relationship between truth, reason, and freedom. The problem is that it's not enough to repeat these words, not if we don't understand the connection between them and what we mean by truth, what we mean by reason, and what we mean by freedom. As we have seen, there are others who claim to defend freedom or to belong to something that they claim possesses the truth, but who, in the name of their truth, commit the most reprehensible acts. If the relationship between truth, reason, and freedom is not clear, any kind of belonging admits itself to suspicion. The same words can be reduced in a thousand ways. If this isn't clear, then we will continue repeating these words without ever introducing something capable of responding to the emptiness in society. This—as I have said—is why we must come to terms with the relationship between truth and freedom. Throughout Christian history we have had to learn that "the only way to truth is through freedom" (J. Carrón, "The Challenge of True Dialogue...", op. cit.).

It's crucial that we understand what unites these two things, because otherwise they remain just words thrown together. We need to understand more deeply how truth is capable of attracting our freedom and fulfilling our reason. Truth is not a definition, nor is it a doctrine that, simply because I affirm it, commands another's freedom. If a definition is not something one has acquired in experience, as Fr. Giussani always used to say, then it is a schematic imposition, a formality; even a correct definition, if it is not understood in one's experience, will easily be viewed as an imposition, and people will rebel against it. Christianity is not a definition. Guardini writes, "[It] is not a theory about Truth, or an interpretation of life. It is also this, but this is not its essential nucleus. This is constituted by Jesus of Nazareth, by His concrete existence, by His work, by His destiny" (R. Guardini, *The Essence of Christianity*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2007, pp. 11-12). Truth is, therefore, a person. Think of the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate: *Quid est veritas?* What is truth? *Vir qui adest*, a man who is here, a presence. Truth, then, is understood within a relationship, as Pope Francis said, in an encounter.

If there is anyone who can understand this, it's us. The video with clips of Fr. Giussani and his words (which will be distributed in Italy with *Corriere della Sera*) is yet another proof of this. Fr. Giussani is an encounter for us; Christianity communicates itself through an encounter. It was he who said, "What is missing is not so much the verbal or cultural repetition of a proclamation. Today's men and women await, perhaps without realizing it, the experience of an encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a real presence that their lives are changed. [It would be enough just to read this, what man is

waiting for now more than ever, "perhaps without realizing it, is the experience of an encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a real presence that their lives are changed." If life is not truly changed, even if we verbally or culturally repeat the Christian proclamation, nothing happens; not in us or in those we meet.] It is only a human impact that can shake up today's man: an event that is an echo of the first event, when Jesus raised His eyes and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly; I am coming to your house." In this way, the Mystery of the Church, which has been handed on to us from two thousand years ago, must always "happen again" through grace. It must always be a presence that moves; that is, a movement that by its nature makes life in the place around it, in the place where it happens, more human. [People recognize that Christianity is "happening" there because it is a presence that makes an environment more human.] Those who are called experience a miracle analogous to that which happened for the first disciples. The encounter with the redemptive event of Christ is always accompanied by the liberation of one's full humanity" (L. Giussani, *The Christian Event*, BUR, Milan 2003, pp. 23-24). The liberation

of our humanity comes along with the Christian encounter because it is an encounter that frees us; it is an encounter with truth that engages our freedom, that attracts our freedom, and therefore liberates us. We cannot speak of a Christian encounter in any other way.

Kierkegaard said, "Christianity is communication of existence. [...] [T]he difficulty is to become Christians, or to continue to be so, and the most dangerous illusion is that of becoming so sure of being [Christian] as to

desire to set oneself to defend the entirety of Christianity" against adversaries, "instead of defending faith inside ourselves from the illusions" of our adversaries (cf. S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Volume 1*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 353).

We can't get by with cultural discourse alone, with just a cultural message, otherwise God could have saved Himself the trouble of the Incarnation of His Son and sent us the message in the mail—He could have saved us and Himself some trouble! By becoming man, taking on flesh, Christ chose the method for communicating truth: stripping Himself of any power beyond the sheer splendor of the truth, He was a witness to us, unarmed, of the fascinating power of truth. This means that if we don't connect our belonging with a witness, it will be difficult for us to give any meaningful contribution to help our brothers and sisters in humanity in today's situation. It's only through our witness that others can recognize our belonging as a positive challenge to their reason and their freedom. This fascinating power of what is true, this splendor of truth, however, is not something that I generate, because only "those who follow »

We must come to terms with the relationship between truth and freedom. It's crucial that we understand what unites the two things.

» me will have the hundredfold on earth,” as we said in yesterday’s liturgy. The continuation of the initial fascination in us is a result of really following. We can see that we are following when we see the fascination that our presence provokes in others, and there are others who tell us how much they are fascinated when they meet many of us.

For all these reasons, I would say that the article published in *Corriere della Sera* is a synthesis of the proposal we make to ourselves and that we extend to everyone. “In front of the events of Paris it is sterile to mount opposition in the name of an idea, no matter how right it may be.” You see, without a witness that challenges their freedom, it’s unlikely that some other thing will bring people back to life out of the nothingness in which they are immersed. The issue, then, is that Europe and its space for freedom not be an “empty space, void of proposals for life,” but rather a place where one can witness to the fascination of the truth, the fascination that draws us from the pit of nothingness—us before anyone else, because we are the first to distance ourselves from Christ, despite remaining in the Movement and doing a thousand things, as Fr. Giussani said in 1982. This is the only way that Europe can be a “place of a real encounter between proposals of meaning, different and numerous as they may be,” a place of freedom where we can “[say] in front of everyone, individually or together, who we are.” In other words, “each makes available for everyone their vision and their way of living. This sharing will enable us to encounter each other on the basis of the real experience of each person, and not on ideological stereotypes that make dialogue impossible” (J. Carrón, “The Challenge of True Dialogue...,” op. cit., p. 27).

Because often we don’t understand all the things we have just said, often we don’t understand the primary concern and witness of the Pope, either. We don’t grasp the importance of him saying, “Dialogue, thus, begins with *encounter*. The first knowledge of the other is born from it. Indeed, if one begins from the premise of the common affiliation in *human nature*, one can go beyond prejudices and fallacies and begin to understand the other according to a new perspective” (January 24, 2015). Often, we think this is not enough and so look for a shortcut to impatiently impose the truth, which only generates confusion in everyone.

The historical circumstances in which we live give us an extraordinary opportunity—again, first and foremost for us—to more deeply understand the truth that fascinated us. It’s not enough to repeat that truth has become flesh if this hasn’t sunken into our very bones, affecting the way we face all of reality, and if we don’t accept that the only way to communicate truth is called “witness.” Just as the Pope says, “In this way alone can the liberating message of the love of God and the salvation that Christ offers be proposed in its strength, beauty, and

simplicity. One can only move forward in this way, with an attitude of respect for people...” (February 7, 2015). We must respond to this decisive question that I posed in the beginning: “Do we Christians still believe in the capacity of the faith we have received to attract those we encounter, and in the living fascination of its unarmed beauty?” In his Message for Lent, Pope Francis reminds us that “mission is to bear patient witness to the One who desires to draw all creation and every man and woman to the Father. Her mission is to bring to all a love which cannot remain silent. The Church follows Jesus Christ along the paths that lead to every man and woman, to the very ends of the earth” (*Message for Lent 2015*, October 4, 2014).

What is at stake today is faith, more than ever. This is the why we are going to see the Pope—we’re not going to Rome on vacation! We’re going to beg for faith, which has as its anchor and surety the tie with Peter, in a moment in which the figure of the Pope seems to be a topic of debate for many Christians. As we have said, belonging without following leads to confusion. “If one doesn’t grow in decision journeying *within* our history, he creates problems for himself as well as in the community [...]

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[and] the first symptom of this is that they don’t follow the Movement represented by its central leadership!” (L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose* [“Certain of a Few Great Things”]: 1979-1981, Bur, Milano 2007, pp. 21-22) or, alternatively, we don’t follow the Church in its central leadership. If we live like this, we will become one of the many interpretations of Christianity, as I wrote in the letter in preparation for the audience. We will go on thinking that

we don’t need anyone else, and “managing” a Christianity reduced to our own measure.

We are all facing a challenge and a proposal that we must verify; we go to Rome as beggars asking for faith. We have this entire year to ask Fr. Giussani, 10 years after his death, to continue to watch over us that we may overcome this distance from Christ, because if we can’t continually rediscover the fascination that moves us, there’s no way that we will move others! “That which we will do for others is the overflowing of what happens in us, and nothing more” (*ibid.*, p. 22), as Fr. Giussani reminds us. The pilgrimage to Rome can be an opportunity for everyone if each of us—in our respective home or wherever we spend our time—communicates the reasons that we are going, the reasons that we beg and the real need that we have. We are meeting with the Pope because without the tie to him, there would be no Movement, there would be nothing like it. The underlying foundation of our experience, as Fr. Giussani always reminded us, is the relationship with the fragility of Peter. Without this relationship, you couldn’t even dream of an experience like CL! Let’s help each other to be fully aware and present for this great event, and to live even the time we spend on the road to Rome as a pilgrimage. **■**



Imprisoned under the Communist regime, now he serves his former captors, and is a guide for all Christians in Ethiopia. The newly-appointed Cardinal **BERHANEYESUS SOURAPHIEL tells about himself and a people with a 2000-year history of faith. Today, they still have much to teach us.**

BY LUCA FIORE

A SIGN OF HOPE

“You will not know the day nor the hour.” For Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, C. M. (Congregation of Priests of the Mission), the sixty-five-year-old archbishop of Addis Ababa, the hour came on January 4 at 2 o’clock in the afternoon. He was in the middle of his siesta when they knocked on his door. “Your Excellency, the Pope has made you a cardinal.” He tells the story without hiding his surprise, even though Addis Ababa had a long history of Cardinals as archbishops, and despite the fact that he is respected throughout the country, in part because of his past as a political prisoner and his role in the reconciliation efforts after the Mengistu dictatorship. He, for example, was the one who sent chaplains to the prisons where those who were once his captors are now imprisoned. Even former executioners should be offered spiritual help, he says; they should have the chance to return to be part of society. In addition, a sympathy for the poor is written in the DNA of his vocation: as a Vincentian, he is a follower of St. Vincent de Paul in his passion for the least fortunate.

Through the selection of his second batch of new cardinals, Pope Francis has confirmed his preference for the peripheries, and not only in an existential sense. In the eyes of the North, Ethiopia is outside every sphere of power. And yet, it is a land with 2000 years of Christian history and a future as a leader of the African continent. Cardinal Souraphiel welcomes us in a sitting room in the Pontifical Ethiopian College, built on the side of the hill that is dominated by the dome of St. Peter’s basilica. He has many things

In my cell, there was just one tiny window. I could see the birds flying outside, and I was envious.



to tell us, about himself and the life of the Church in Ethiopia.

What can you tell us about the new cardinal of Addis Ababa? Where does he come from?

Ethnically, my family is Amharic, and we’ve been Catholic since the time of [Cardinal] Guglielmo Massaia [1808-1889], under Emperor Menelik II. Then the Catholics began to be persecuted by the State and by the Orthodox church, who wanted the country to have just one religion, and so my grandparents had to escape to the village Chelewa, close to Harar where I was born. I studied first in the La Salle Christian Brothers school, and then in the Vincentian

seminary in Addis Ababa. For my theological studies, I went to King’s College [in London] and the Gregorian [in Rome]. I was ordained a priest in 1976.

And you yourself were persecuted...

Yes, under Mengistu. It was the end of the 1970s and the Communist regime took power. The government banned all missionaries, and their property was nationalized. I continued to visit rural parishes, but since I didn’t have a place to stay, I slept in the sacristies. I didn’t have a thing to eat and the parishioners brought me food in secret, because it was prohibited. Then they put me in prison and kept me in isolation for a month. They could have killed me at any moment. In the cell, there was just one tiny window. I could see the birds flying outside, and I was envious.



Later, they moved me into the section with the other political prisoners. There were 120 of us, of various religions. We prayed at night, in secret. They let me go after seven months with the agreement that I would leave my religion. That was the time of the “Red Terror;” if I hadn’t left, they would have killed me.

What does your appointment mean for your country?

It is a big sign of recognition from the Holy Father of what the Catholic Church is in Ethiopia. We are a very small community: just one percent of the population. Still, we are seen positively by all. If you are small, you are respected, just like a child that no one sees as a danger. We work with the poor and will refugees. We do not proselytize, we evangelize through attraction. I think Francis likes this.

What attracted you? Why did you decide to become a priest?

The Vincentians have always gone to proclaim the Gospel in the places where no one else wanted to go. Some, from our order, made eight-hour trips by foot to reach some villages. They lived without fresh water and electricity. They went to obscure little places and, for example, opened a little school. These priests and sisters showed people a love that could not come from men and women. It was God’s love. I was impressed by the great respect that they had for people. I was attracted by their sacrifice for us.

What about the charism of St. Vincent won you over?

His dedication to the poor is very deep, and it is founded on the respect for human dignity. It doesn’t matter if someone is rich or poor. What attracted me about his approach is that he didn’t condemn people. He didn’t condemn the rich, saying he was exploiting the poor, or condemn the poor saying, “You’re poor because you’re lazy.” He accepted both. His attitude was similar to Pope Francis’s.

What do you mean, more specifically?

Just think of when he went to Lampedusa, or when he said at the European Parliament in Strasbourg that it’s unjust that immigrants die trying to cross the Mediterranean, because they are human beings seeking a better world. Francis speaks to our consciences, and I hope that this helps to have better laws passed. There is also work for us to do: it is our duty to change the situation where we are, without forcing people

to run away in order to overcome the challenge of poverty.

How can we overcome this challenge?

Education is important. The Catholic Church has the best schools in our country, and we are now opening a university. We are confident that it is education that forms the common mentality, and this can help to create new political and economic leadership.

The Pope says that poverty is not a sociological category, but a theological one. What does this mean for you, who live in one of the poorest countries in the world?

In the rural areas of our country, people are always happy to welcome those who come from the outside, even if they have few possessions. They say, “I want to be like Abraham at the oak in Mamre, when he welcomed the Trinity in the form of three angels.” In every human being, we find God. In every poor person, in those who suffer, we find Christ. I think this is the theology that Pope Francis is talking about. It’s not in thinking that this one is poor because this other is rich, or that kind of

analysis. No, a poor person is a human being and, as such, is created in the image of God, whoever he or she is. This is why our schools and hospitals are open to everyone, not only to Catholics.

You mention schools and hospitals supported by the Church. How

do you understand the fact that the Church shouldn’t be an NGO? This is a point that we’ve been reflecting upon, along with the other Ethiopian bishops. The govern- >>

In every poor person, we find Christ. This is the theology that Pope Francis is talking about.

» ment says that we need to distinguish spiritual activities from social initiatives. They say “register according to the laws, but what you do in church is your own private affair.” What they don’t understand is that you can’t divide the person, who is made up of body and soul. A human being must be helped as a whole. If you only address issues on a material level and forget about the spiritual dimension, you build up only to break down again. Education, for example, is evangelization. Some people treat us like an NGO, but often NGOs arrive, complete a project, and then leave. Not us. Like them, we work to help people become self-sufficient, but we stay there, because the spiritual accompaniment has to continue.

Now you have opened a new Catholic university. Is it true that it was the government that asked you to do so?

Yes, it’s true. We also wanted it. Among other things, there’s a precedent for this: after World War II, the Emperor asked the Canadian Jesuits to found the state university of Addis Ababa. The same things happened in Asmara, Eritrea. Our former Prime Minister asked John Paul II directly. He wanted a university that was of good quality and connected with other universities in East Africa. Today we have ties in Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan, and soon with Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. These relationships are important, because when young people study together, they become brothers and sisters. The project continues and will continue to grow. For this, we have to

We work to help people become self-sufficient, but we stay there, because the spiritual accompaniment has to continue.

thank the Italian Bishop’s Conference, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, once the nuncio to Ethiopia and now at the UN in Geneva, and our friends in CL for their help.

What is your hope for your country and for the Church?

I would like to see Ethiopia continue its path toward development. The country is growing quickly,

including in terms of population. We are about to become the second largest African country, after Nigeria. Now Addis Ababa is home to the headquarters of the African Union, and the entire continent is watching us. Today I think of what Benedict

XVI said on his visit to Africa. He said, “Don’t trade out your traditional values for less demanding values that ‘cost less.’” In this area, the Christians of my country can contribute a lot to the rest of the world. Especially when it comes to respect for life. In our families, children continue to be a gift from God. The elderly continue to be important and no one, today, would even dream of “throwing them away” like trash. I would like to see Ethiopia improve in its interior and become a sign of hope for other peoples.

What did you say to the Pope when you met?

I invited him to Ethiopia. Did you know that we were evangelized in 34 A.D., a year after Jesus’s resurrection, but no Pope has ever come to visit us? **T**



IN THE HORN OF AFRICA. On the previous page, a reception after an Ethiopian wedding. Above, Cardinal Souraphiel with Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, once nuncio in Addis Ababa and now at the UN in Geneva. Below, the Cardinal after the ceremony with the Pope on February 14th.



AN ANSWER FOR REBECCA

Luisa walks slowly; there are still 10 minutes before the next bell. She is almost to the door of the room where she'll teach her next class when she sees a girl behind a pillar. Luisa walks closer and says, "Rebecca, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in class?" "Miss, I was waiting for you." Her tone isn't promising. Rebecca, who transferred this year from another high school, has a quick and demanding mind. Just a few days after arriving, she made it clear where she stood with a firm declaration: "I'm an atheist." Today, the first thing that leaps to Luisa's mind is that Rebecca has an academic issue. "Talk to me; what's wrong?"

In a matter of seconds, the teenager unloads an avalanche of words. "I'm angry," she says. "We've failed. The world has failed. All of our ideals have failed. My Communist friends told me that the Paris attackers were right to do what they did. I'm not convinced. Please, help me to understand." "Rebecca, I don't have a ready-made formula that I can give, but if you want we can try to go to the bottom of this, to understand. Together. We can ask for help from the history teacher. What do you say?" She smiles, "Yes, thank you." The bell rings, and they enter the classroom. Before Luisa can even set her books on her desk, a student raises her hand. "Miss, today we can't just have class like normal. Did you see what happened in Paris? What is happening?" They are right, you can't go on as normal.

THE FOLLOWING DAYS WERE FILLED WITH SPIRITED DISCUSSIONS. Other students also asked questions; they were looking for explanations. In the teacher's lounge, Luisa and her colleagues discussed it. You couldn't just wait for it all to pass. Then Giovanni had an idea. "Ok, with the students who'd like to go, we can take a day trip to Paris. We'll meet up with the French teachers that we know. We can ask them our questions. Luisa, will you come?" "Of course." The students loved the idea, and the trip was planned in a few weeks.

The first meeting was in a café downtown with Sandrine, the teacher of a middle school in the suburbs. The students barraged her with questions. Sandrine spoke about her north African students, a few of whom kept pictures of the terrorists in their desks. She spoke about what it means to love them, and how they are a challenge to her...

OUTSIDE THE CAFÉ, Luisa realized that Rebecca was walking by herself. The girl's face looked troubled. Luisa went over and asked, "What's the matter?" "I've never met a woman like that. Did you hear how she spoke about her students who are 'out of their mind'? Did you see how her eyes were shining when she said that she needs them to understand herself? Miss, do you understand what that means?" Rebecca's eyes were also shining. A few hours later, they met with the philosopher Olivier Rey and the mathematician Laurent Lafforgue. The conversation was blunt and full of urgency. Walking on the way to lunch, Luisa asked Rebecca, "What did you think?" "It was very interesting, but I wouldn't have understood a lot of it without having met Sandrine," she responds.

In the subway, on the way back to the airport, Rebecca sits between Luisa and Giovanni. "I need to tell you something. I recognize that you took my questions seriously. Coming here and meeting Sandrine is the beginning of the answer I was looking for. Usually, we think that the answer to why some things happen is an explanation, a truth that you impose on it. Instead, I'm seeing that the response to my sense of failure is two teachers who take me seriously and brought me here."

A MONTH LATER, Luisa and Giovanni were speaking in the front entrance of the school. The first bell rang. "So, when is Sandrine coming?" "Definitely before Easter, Rebecca." "Good. Then we're going back to meet her students, right?" "Of course." "We'll see." Since the trip to Paris, not a day passes without Rebecca seeking them out. For them, it is the opportunity to learn to look at reality the way that she does.



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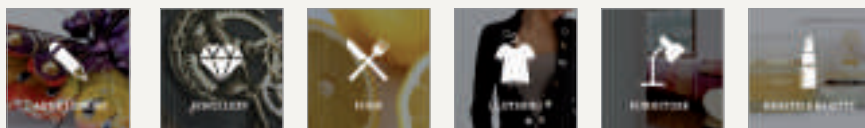
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