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Being sons and daughters

**We need a father
to discover our freedom**

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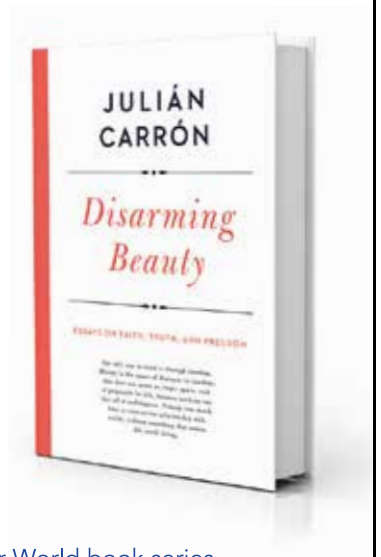
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JULIÁN CARRÓN

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Getting to the bottom of paternity

In recent issues of *Traces* we took up a critical theme from the CL Beginning Day, the meeting at the beginning of the social and academic year that marks out the movement's educational proposal and lays a path for the year's work. The articles described the context that surrounds us—a “passive nihilism” that envelops our society and our lives, sapping our energy, enjoyment, and desires—and pointed to the one thing that can rescue us from that nothingness: witnesses. Witnesses are people who reveal a different way of living, who transmit such a fascinating proposal of meaning in life that they become *authorities*. Or rather, fathers and mothers, because they generate others and help them grow.

This is such a crucial topic that we have decided to return to it. We hope to get to the bottom of this “authority,” a word that has nothing to do with power, as Fr. Giussani emphasized in the talk transcribed in the pages of the Beginning Day, but is rather “a synonym for paternity.” These are its unmistakable traits: “It is the place where new life is clearer and more transparent;” it “makes itself visible in the experience of greater freedom;” and, precisely because of this, it is also a “place of comfort, where you see that Christ conquers,” a place, that is, that makes it possible for us to stop feeling caged in by our struggles, sufferings, and circumstances. There, the “I” can breathe and always be joyful. It is what we all seek. Who would not want to discover an experience of greater freedom and joy? Who does not want a life that is more useful, fuller, and capable of “opening new pathways” in a world that seems impermeable to faith, but that actually offers Christians a great opportunity?

This month's “Close-up” is a journey toward discovering that kind of paternity. In focusing, as always, on stories in addition to reflections that help us to go deeper, once again the only valid criterion is experience. We describe a “paternal authority” that, because it is not confined to a role (not even the traditional ones: parents, teachers, priests, other leaders...) happens as it will. You have to look for it in action. “The old woman who puts the coins in the treasury of the temple can be an authority, even more than the head of the Pharisees,” Fr. Giussani reminded us. This is an authority that does not impose itself through mechanisms of power, but simply asks us to recognize it.

In the end, this was the experience of the shepherds depicted in Caravaggio's *Adoration of the Shepherds*, which CL has chosen to depict in the Christmas poster. They looked upon the least powerful person in the world, literally the last to arrive: a newborn baby in a manger. Yet, in the simplicity of their hearts, they could intuit how that Son made visible the Father, the mystery who was generating them in that very instant, and who is generating us right now. Merry Christmas.

Federico, Alessandro, Nicoletta

edited by
Paola Bergamini
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Caroline and *The Religious Sense*

I have been living in Arizona for eight months and until a few months ago, an Italian family from the movement was living in Tucson. This family has four young children, so they hired a local babysitter to help them out. Over time the young woman, Caroline, developed a strong friendship with and admiration for the parents, so much so that, following their advice, she decided to participate in the CLU summer vacation for university students. Although she didn't know anyone, Caroline went, full of questions and a desire to understand what those parents, who had impressed her so much, belonged to. This girl met the movement there, and once back in Tucson, began participating in the School of Community, even though the Italian family had moved to Texas. She joined me and three other friends to do School of Community every week in Tucson, and I was impressed by how, meeting after meeting, she would change her approach to reality and circumstances. Some time ago, while we were traveling to Phoenix for the Beginning Day, she told me that in September she had started a reading group with some friends she works with at a university. They are reading chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense*. I was left speechless and I asked why she would do such a thing. She answered, "I understood that I need friends where I am; not just friends who fill my time, but people who help me to go deeper into what is useful for my life, and now I want to better understand what I saw in the movement. So, I decided to start from chapter 10, and to propose it to those who

are with me at the university." I remained silent. This girl has no CL in her past and has never been part of a religious community; nonetheless, her heart is full of the need to share and to better understand what has happened to her. Caroline has become an authority to me in this moment because, as Fr. Giussani said at the Beginning Day, "An authority is a person, who when we see them, shows us how Christ corresponds to the needs of the heart."

Federico, Tucson (USA)

I wanted to go for me

A few weeks ago, a 17-year-old friend of mine passed away. In the face of events like this, I experience a great fear: besides the fact that he died suddenly, there is the realization that things end for real. On occasions like this one, I resist going to pray the rosary, because I ask myself, "What can I do there?" That Saturday night, the rosary was being said at the same time as the match between the Rome and Milan soccer teams. I was debating whether to go to watch to the game or not, and I argued to myself that "he would have been happy if I went to the game." However, I knew that that thought, in the end, did not correspond with what I had inside, with all the pain I was experiencing. In talking with my friends and my girlfriend, I realized that I wanted to go pray the rosary, and that I wanted to go *for me*. My friend who had died had a twin brother whom I know very well, and on that day he had incredible eyes. I went to say hello to him, and hugging me, he said, "Do not abandon us. I'm sure that my brother is now in heaven, because the day he died, the gospel was about the women who went to the tomb, found it empty, and asked what could have happened." There were other rosaries after that one, and I never questioned whether to go or not—going became a decisive thing for me because I saw that it conquered my fear of

dying, the fear that things end. There are many things that I don't face out of fear, and I realize that at times I escape, I run away, even using God as an excuse. This experience of these rosaries, however, together with the help of my friends, has spilled over into everything. By participating in them, I learned that I truly desire to look at my fears. Doing this, apparently contrary to everything I wanted, has revealed itself to be a victory over fear.

Alessandro, Rome (Italy)

“Mom, you are a little weird...”

My 13-year-old daughter has already informed us that after her confirmation next year, she will no longer attend Sunday Mass. I took this blow and left the issue alone, praying in a special way to the Holy Spirit. A few days ago, we had a very intense discussion; to be totally honest, she was exasperating and I was hysterical. It started with me not allowing her to dye her hair black, and then slid into more serious topics like school, friends, and life. At one point she said to me, “For sure, Mom, you are a little weird. Everyone knows it, even my friends!” Somewhat worried, I asked, “What do you mean?” “You do not hate anyone, you love everybody,” she answered. Surprised by this answer, I felt relieved, and I kept on going, “But in your opinion, how is this possible?” I thought she was going to tell me it was because of my personality.... Instead, she threw me off. “Mom, I know you are like that because you have encountered Christ.” These kids, who are (almost) never the way you would like them to be, see the essential and recognize beauty in spite of their parents’ poverty and limitations. How liberating it is to realize once again, with gratitude and surprise, that children belong to Another who wants them to be as they are—free to be surprised about what attracts their parents, but also free not to embrace it. To start from this point with them is altogether another story!

Signed letter

Why are you here?

On November 1st, I decided to go to Mass at the Monumentale Cemetery in Milan and to pay a visit to Fr. Giussani’s tomb. I had a lot of concerns to bring to him. After Mass, I left to go to the tomb, and I was surprised to see a colleague of mine who, without

seeing me, was coming in my direction. I am not very close to this person for a number of reasons. I called to her and she also looked surprised to see me. I asked what brought her there, and she told me that years ago her baby daughter died a few days after she was born. She had come to visit her at the cemetery as she does every year. She said to me, “If you can grab onto a reason for something, you can put it in its place and move on. But this hasn’t happened with my daughter’s death.” I could understand her totally: I was there to put a sorrow I could not understand in Giussani’s hands. As I watched her cry, I said, “You are right. Even the pope says that, while on this earth, we may never understand the reason for certain things and, because of what I am living now, I understand that we might live with a particular wound for our whole lives. But everything will be revealed in heaven and we will meet again that Good that we have never really lost.” She looked at me and said, “Could I ask for a hug?” I answered yes. She looked at me again and hugged me. Before saying goodbye, she asked, “But why are you here?” I told her I had come to visit Fr. Giussani. She replied, “I pass right by his grave when I visit my daughter. Next time I’ll stop to visit him, too.” This encounter will help me look at her differently at work tomorrow.

Nicoletta, Italy

The need for fathers

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It is one of the most problematic words used by those living in today's weary world, and one of the most argued over by those who observe the world superficially. The word is "paternity," and in its broadest meaning refers to an authority, a person who is a point of reference for both young and old, a person who offers a proposal of meaning, an ideal hypothesis about life that is so full and attractive that it pulls us out of nihilism (of which we spoke last month). We always have a great need of fathers and, naturally, mothers. We have a great need to discover again and again, and with simplicity, that we are sons and daughters. The following pages explore this need, beginning with a dialogue with Luigi Ballerini, a psychoanalyst and young adult author, a man who has worked for years with parents and children, studying the dynamics of education and offering his rich, direct experience. He acknowledges that he is a son, a person who is continually generated by something present and greater than himself, from which he draws nourishment in order to generate others.

This same dynamic is seen in many testimonies from different worlds and spheres. The need for authority and to be generated, in a word, the need for education, concerns not only parents and teachers, but everyone regardless of age. Seeing this need in action helps more than a thousand analyses about its absence, no matter how right and insightful they may be.

One of the testimonies is by Fr. Pigi Banna, a young priest who is in constant contact with teenagers in his work following Student Youth, in collaboration with educators. Like the other testimonies, his is a first person account and it shows clearly how it is necessary to "be generated now" in order to generate, as Fr. Giussani often said. (dp) ■



“Someone who broadens my horizons”



Paola Bergamini

The connection between freedom and the task of parents and between “the authority of the child” and the importance of desire... Luigi Ballerini, a psychoanalyst and young adult author, talks about why “we educate when we live” and what it means that the world needs fathers and mothers.

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“If you choose nephrology, I will teach you.” It was 1988 when Luigi Ballerini, who had just finished his bachelor’s degree, received this offer. It was extended by a dear friend’s father who happened to be the chief resident at Niguarda Hospital in Milan. Nephrology was not exactly his passion. He had chosen to study medicine to become a psychiatrist, but he realized from his studies that the methods of psychiatric treatment prevalent at that time did not appeal to him. He went to see how the chief resident did things in his ward. “Watching him, I thought: I want to be a doctor like him. I had a real master in front of me. I can say that it was my first significant encounter with an authority, in the etymological sense of the word: a person who wanted to help me grow, who took my formation to heart. Now I would say he was a person I could trust.”

Today, Ballerini is a psychoanalyst and an author of young adult novels, several that have received multiple awards. He also writes essays directed to those who work with young people. His personal experience is the starting point for our conversation about paternity and authority, the topic addressed by Julián Carrón during the CL Beginning Day (published on the CL website), taking his inspiration from Fr. Giussani. Carrón discussed an

authority that is critical for a person to grow and become himself because it is “the opposite of power.” This authority is also indispensable for the life of faith, because it is, above all, embodied in “a person who, when you see them, you can see how what Christ says corresponds to your heart.” You follow that person as a son or daughter, and in that relationship, you “feel your freedom bursting forth as personal awareness and personal responsibility.” That is the only way to generate a people.

Let’s try to delve into the word “authority.” Giussani connects it with paternity as a synonym, but then goes a step further to state that an encounter with an authority brings freedom and happiness.

That has also been my experience. I connect authority with freedom, a fundamental conclusion from Giussani that is picked up by Carrón. When there is no authority, you get authoritarianism or false authority. Take Jesus. He was not a führer but a captain, in the sense of a *caput*, “head,” meaning one who takes the initiative, freely offering his energies and desiring that the other do so with the same freedom. A führer, instead, tries to make everyone submit to him and is afraid of the freedom of others. A paradigm for this is the parent-child relationship. We are afraid



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they will become autonomous, which is not synonymous with independent. Autonomy implies a competent subject who can judge, who has the necessary criteria for doing so, but who doesn't think she is independent, which would be presumptuous. The challenge is to come to that autonomy from within the awareness that we always depend on another.

How did that happen for you? After that first encounter with a “master,” how did you come to psychoanalysis and writing books?

They went hand in hand. During my years of specialization, I trained under Giacomo Contri in psychological analysis, my other great encounter. I, who wanted to be a psychiatrist because psychological disorders fascinated me, discovered through him that normalcy is more fascinating. It is attending to the residual normalcy that exists within every pathology that

offers the possibility of healing. At the end of my training with Contri, I said to myself, “This is what I want to do with my life,” and I officially began training in Contri's school. In the meantime, I had left the hospital for a job as the medical director of a multinational pharmaceutical company.

And writing?

In the hospital, I was passionate about the human dramas of the sick. They had stories to tell. I wrote my first book and sent it to Mondadori. That was another encounter. Ferruccio Parazzoli, a writer and, at the time, head of Italian fiction for the publishing house, told me, “We would never publish your book. Yet, if you persist and learn to write, I am sure you will become a writer. Maybe even a great one.” He had my manuscript in his hands, his notes in the margins of every page. He took me seriously. After 10 years, at the height of my career with the multinational company, I decided to quit. I had finished my training and started to do what I wanted: to be a psychoanalyst and a writer.

Both as a psychoanalyst and as an author, you chose the world of young people. How come?

Because of my history and personal interests, I gained a certain amount of experience with young people, with their families and other adults involved with them. In addition to my work in the clinic, I hold training courses and give talks. Let's say it comes naturally to me to write for young people. For young people, for them often authority is reduced to a role, to something negative because it sets limits and that's it...When there has been an abdication of the “I” that judges, space is opened up for authoritarians, for those who

decide for us. It creates a vacuum that must be filled. Think of the concept of faith: it is an act of thought, not a renunciation. It is a judgment that someone is trustworthy; as an example, that person, Jesus, who acted in a particular way, is trustworthy right now, and is therefore convincing, so I follow Him. Not blindly, but as a free man who has recognized something interesting for himself. When do we lose ourselves? When our “I” grows weak and seeks a replacement. Phenomena like drug abuse and bullying often originate here. These are the errors, the misperceptions of young people; they are mistaken attempts to find solutions, but ones that begin from something good.

Could you give an example?

One teenager described his Saturday night to me in the park “smoking weed” with a friend. A typical adult might react by being scandalized or thinking that this kid is “lost.” But to my invitation to “tell me more clearly what happened,” he answered, “It was so great, because for a while I didn’t have to think and I was calm. Then, my friend leaned his head on my chest and we felt like real friends.” He gave me two precious pieces of information: he is a boy for whom thinking has become difficult and painful and he desires a kind of brotherhood he has not been able to find. The misperception is thinking that he can achieve this with a joint, but I am interested in looking beyond these errors to see what generated certain behavior, always hunting for the normalcy that remains. There is a difference, in front of a teenager’s mistake, between the closed attitude of being scandalized and listening to understand what is beneath a particular error. The latter is the road to eventually offering a correction.

Does that make the adult authoritative?

It’s a paradox, but I am convinced that you educate when you’re not educating. When we impose “education mode,” we are boring, we preach. Empty words. We educate when we live. The way we handle money, work, our emotions, our husband or wife, is educational. An authoritative person is one who lives well, in that she serves her own good without disconnecting it from the good of others. Think about discipline at school. A student can tell if a teacher wants to catch him screwing up, acting like a metal detector for mistakes, or if the teacher corrects him by taking to heart what he did. Giussani says an authority who is a source of freedom becomes a place of comfort, where life is made clearer and more transparent. You cannot always say that this place necessarily consists of the mom and/or the dad. I invite parents to try not to be jealous; that is, not to be afraid of their children finding other mothers and fathers. Here, we can use the word “virginity.” Parents—and I’d say anyone who educates—are asked to live this virginity: to support, or at least not obstruct, opportunities for their children to experience a trustworthy paternity or maternity from others.

What makes someone trustworthy?

A person is trustworthy when I discover over time—because judgment requires time—that he is not lying, that what he proposes leads to my good. This is a judgment no one else can make for me: I may make a mistake, but I will continue to do this work of comparing the proposal to what I desire. This keeps me from entrusting myself to a false authority. In this way, another person can offer direction, but it is always up to me to verify it.

We are talking about a person already capable of judging. Before that, however, there were already authorities who helped him or her to grow.

Actually, we all start out well equipped for this. The child is the true authority, in the sense of the line from the gospel, “If you do not become like children....” This does not mean infantilism; it means going back to the way children think, understanding that good comes from another person. It means, therefore, understanding how to go back to that good starting point without an objection at the outset to the other, to his contribution and what he offers.

Going back, then, to the wonder and simplicity of a child. But for that to happen, encounters that awaken that attitude are required...

Of course, there’s your whole history. The proper tense for an authoritative person is future perfect, “I will have been a master if...” The chief resident we spoke about earlier did not tell me, “I am the master for you.” In fact, if someone introduces himself to you as “authoritative,” I would be suspicious. Those who have been authoritative in my experience are those who respond well to reality, taking all its factors into account. This involves a reciprocal benefit. When are things going well for a teacher? When she grows with her student, meaning that she is not always offering a standard lesson, but one that is different depending on who is in front of her. It changes. When is a parent doing well? When he begins to learn from his children.

Speaking of parents, parenting manuals are becoming very popular. Is that a symptom of a lack of fatherhood and motherhood?

Luigi Ballerini, a doctor and psychoanalyst, is a member of the Society of Friends of Thinking–Sigmund Freud, founded by Giacomo Contri. A young adult author, he has published over 30 novels. He won the Anderson Prize in 2014 and the Bancarellino prize in 2016. A freelance journalist, he writes about education for various publications and acts as a consultant to schools, meeting with teachers, parents, and students. He is the creator of several animated TV series.



The moment we, as adults, abdicate the sovereignty over ourselves we held as children, giving up a capacity for judgment, we begin to need rules. When we are no longer capable of acting in life according to a principle of shared benefit, we enter into a relationship of command. I once saw a boy who, when speaking of his future, told me that he wanted to be in the military “because I will be told what to do.” He has entered into a mentality in which others do the thinking for him, whereas a person who is doing well always thinks of himself in companionship with another person. More and more, parents are asking pediatricians and the world of psychology not for a general orientation, but for recipes to follow almost mechanically. In that sense, we need to distinguish between desires and expectations.

What do you mean by that?

Desire always comes about in connection with another person: above all else, it is the other who awakens a desire for the person to take into account the will of the other. Expectations, instead, are auto-generated—they are born out of, grow through, and are fed by individual ambition, a striving to project ourselves so as to make the person like us. We could say that desire is adapted to the child, while expectation wants to adapt the child, or at least tries to do so. To a certain extent, this relates to the mistaken way teenagers think of what interests them. They say, “I won’t study history because I’m not interested.” But really, it is only if you study it that you can see whether it interests you. I can only discover if something corresponds to me, if it interests me, by engaging myself with it. If I meet a teacher who loves history and who awakens my interest in it, I might change my mind. Following on that, a person acts paternally when he or she broadens my horizons and suggests a new hypothesis about something I tend to be closed to. I like to connect the word authority with “author.” A father is one who is

a protagonist, who acts in reality in his or her own particular way in that moment. For me to follow means acting as he does. Let it be clear that I do not mean a kind of superimposing or substitution, in which in the end it would be “him or me,” which compromises any possible relationship. A father never wants to be put in a box, to be a fixed model.

We go back to freedom.

Both people must act in freedom. A person is paternal when he thinks of himself as a son. He himself discovers how he has been generated and encouraged by the encounters he’s had and leaves others their space. We can go one step further. We have to be biological parents and, at the same time, in a certain sense, adoptive parents, which means looking at them as “other” than us and not falling into the trap of thinking “the blood of my blood.”

Could you try to explain better?

Thinking of yourselves as adoptive parents means generating your children, helping them become sons and daughters, which means offering them a satisfying relationship and letting them build one in turn. We manage to do this when, trusting and investing in their capacity for judgment, we accept that they grow into something different from what we expected. Recently, at a talk, I was asked this question: What can we do with these kids who seems like they’re from another planet? The truth is, deep down, we cannot truly believe that they have what I call their own “personal question,” a question that, in the morning, makes them ask when they wake up, “What will I take home with me today? What will I build today?” Are these not the same questions we adults face? ■

A gaze in the light of destiny

Pigi Banna

A “call” that brings you back to your origin, and a relationship that always needs to be nourished by a present so that it can “continue to generate.” Fr. Pigi Banna, who follows the young people of Student Youth, talks about what it means to be a father, and at the same time, a son.

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No matter how full the shelves of our mind may be with advice, books, and courses on paternity that follow different ideals and schools of thought, nothing can reproduce in the laboratory the thrill of the call of another human being who turns to you with a look, a word, or even a first feeble cry, asking you to be a father. It may be a teenager who takes the initiative to ask your help with a concern he has confided to no one else, like a friend who seeks you out to receive some clarity. That person is turning to you! It is an unforgettable experience of vocation, something gratuitous and unexpected, even if long awaited.

When we speak about paternity, we must always return to this first appeal, which sooner or later emerges from the life of every mature person; this experience should be our point of reference before we seek comfort in the knowledge imparted in courses and user’s manuals that insist we fulfill a role for which we will always be inadequate (and we are not ashamed to admit it). Instead, the appeal of a son is direct-

ed to you, leading to an experience of total gratuitousness, filling with promise your life and the life of a person who, after scrutinizing you, recognizes something in you and seeks from you this promise.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMORY.

Looking at the experience inherent in this appeal to paternity, the person who receives this appeal discovers that he is pervaded by a desire for goodness and by the fear of squelching that fragile entreaty for life, still uncertain and limping, that is opening up in front of him. Who would not desire to love in every way possible those who, helpless, call you a “father” and entrust themselves to you? “What father among you, if his son asks him for some bread, would give him a stone?” Jesus asked in the Gospel of Luke. This impetus of goodness is an opportunity for a renewed and grateful memory for paternity received. The gospel passage continues, “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father.” In

front of that goodness kindled in us, all our meanness falls into the background and we are drawn to return in our memory to the figure of the person who was a father for us. Often in that moment of attention to our children we recognize and appreciate the gratuitous and silent paternity of those who generated us and whom we never had time to thank, because we did not even realize what they had done. Thus, at the moment of this appeal, this vocation, paternity, is not so much a call to play a role, but is primarily an opportunity to gratefully remember those who generated us, who looked at us with the same tenderness with which we now unexpectedly look at those in need of a father.

The vocation to paternity at the moment of this appeal, which is so gratuitous, moving, and steeped in memory, is always the fruit of something that comes *before*, of an experience that has in some way made a strong emotional impact on our personality. This holds not only for biological paternity; it is even more evident in those who live other calls



to paternity, whether through their work or in other situations. For example, mere chance did not lead a teacher to be sitting at a desk in front of a student; instead, some kind of passion brought the teacher to the place of that encounter.

In order to be fathers, we must continually return to the source of this *before*. We have to go back to it using our memory in order to gain the strength to continue generating.

This generation in the present is best exemplified for me the first time I was asked to preach the Easter Triduum for Student Youth in front of 5,000 teens. I was only 32 years old and had been a priest less than two years. I could not think of beginning that day without asking Julián Carrón, the leader of CL, to remember us. I'll never forget his answer: "Just let yourself be embraced by Christ; this will draw everyone to Him with you." After that message, I no longer felt worried about being "someone" in front of them, but only desired to respond to the presence in front of whom Carrón had placed me. In this way, my words to the students were part of a broader dialogue in which I was being generated, in which I was being placed in front of a Father.

THE OPENING OF FREEDOM. The more you find yourself wanting to respond to the questions of your children, the more your grateful memory is moved to identify *in the present* the father of whom you want to be the child, the gaze you desire to turn to without fear of being forced to continually begin again. We verify how much the paternity to which we refer in the present generates us, and to that extent, we find that we are more free. The more you discover that you are the child of a father in the present, the less you fear risking your own gesture of paternity—you do not fear falling into authoritarian clericalism or into the opposite problem, which is absolute freedom of thought unconstrained by principles, dogmas, or norms, unmoored by commitment.

One can object to this proposal with the question, "Is there a time in life when you stop being someone's son and you are only a father?" This is the flip side of the troubled question Nicodemus, one of the leaders of Israel, who asked Jesus: "How can a person once grown old be born again?"

It is always possible to be born again of a father in the present. Having this experience depends on whether you conceive of your own life in authentically religious terms or according to a reductionist scheme, whether that scheme is sociological, psychological, intellectual, or materialistic. Every person, whether young or old, must resign himself to the idea that he is moving toward the end of his days, like a branch that has borne abundant fruit but is now dry and only good for firewood if he believes he can *make himself by himself*, if he conceives of himself at best as the product of one or more of the schemes just mentioned. If, instead, he recognizes that every instant of his life has been given to him, he can discover that up to the last moment he is generated

Pigi Banna (Catania, 1984) has been an Ambrosian priest since 2014. He holds a degree in classics from the State University of Milan, is finishing his doctorate in systematic theology and the history of early Christianity, and teaches patristics at the seminary of Venegono. In recent years he has been asked to accompany the teachers and students of Student Youth.



not by himself, but by an Other, a “You” who consists of a mysterious and inexhaustible paternity, who is recalled ever more intensely in the face of the many fathers who have generated him during his life: “*Tam pater nemo*,” no one is so much a father, Tertullian wrote.

Those who live in this religious position will never stop being sons and daughters, even to the end of their days. They will introduce their children to a paternity that is greater than their own—a paternity that gives freedom and is expressed concretely in prayer when we turn to the Father who “knows what we need better than we do.” Freedom is the distinctive sign of those who are perennially generated and ultimately rooted in a religious conception of life. This freedom can be recognized in two very tangible signs. First, such people do not fear launching their own young people into a relationship with this great and ultimate Father while allowing them their freedom, understanding that they are entrusted to the care of someone greater who generates us as well. This lack of fear can be seen in the fact that jealousy does not prevent them from sending the young people entrusted to them to figures who are more authoritative than them. In addition, at an even more personal level, as the years go by and we lose great authority figures, we can live the experience of being generated in a miraculous way by allowing ourselves to be generated by those younger than ourselves, maybe by someone who has been a son to us. In this way, we allow ourselves to be generated by what the eternal Father continues to accomplish in that son.

I was struck when I read that Fr. Giussani, at the end of his last Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of CL (in 2004, a year before he died), told “his” people: “This lesson by Carrón is the best thing the Lord has given me to understand about all the meetings of our Spiritual Exercises. [...] It is the most beautiful thing I have heard in my life.”

AN EXPERIENCE OF VIRGINITY. Let’s return to the experience with which we began, to the gratuitous and irreplaceable moment of the call to paternity. A father who has the opportunity to travel the journey we have described; that is, in tenderness to the son he remembers that he is generated and feels the need to return to and

draw from the wellspring of his generation, and sees that the more he draws from it, the more he discovers in his innermost depths the eternal mystery that is the Father, a mystery like no other—how will he respond to the son’s appeal? His gaze will see beyond his son’s, recognizing in that young beggar the fruit of a story of which the son is not yet aware. The father will broaden his son’s horizons, continually pointing him to the good destiny that holds the boy’s ephemeral instant in His hands.

An example can help us understand this experience. Only a true father, in front of a fundamental passage in his son’s life like a graduation, marriage, or becoming a father, seeing the growth in that man, also has in mind the little boy 20 or 30 years before, something his son cannot remember. He is moved, but this father, who with his limited human energy manages to have a gaze upon what that child who is now a man once was, will never know what is to become of that man when he himself is no longer there. This intense experience moves him deeply, and he entrusts the son he was given to the Father, who looks at us instant by instant the way Jesus looked at Peter, Andrew, John, the Samaritan, and many others, and who recognizes in that ephemeral present of a man the child that he once was—even more than the father who saw him being born—and the man he will be. This biological father becomes a participant in the gaze of God on his son. He loves the other in light of his destiny, as Fr. Giussani often described it.

A father’s gaze upon his son will be full of virginity to the extent he discovers that his son is not his property, but rather is someone to whom only the heavenly Father is called to respond. The more we let ourselves be generated, the more we will experience in our flesh the virginity by which Being generates all things. ■



Experiencing freedom at work

Alessandro Ventura is a manager with a multinational company based in New York. He loves his job and it shows. In an environment in which many young professionals feel orphaned, many come to him for advice. Where does his authority come from? He brings the challenges of work to the level of the heart's desires.



Luca Fiore

Two years ago, the day he arrived in New York after accepting the position of CIO for Unilever USA, Alessandro Ventura received a call at 9 p.m. He was informed that the company's system that manages distribution had failed. Unilever is a multinational company with dozens of brands in the food, beverage, and personal care sector. Its annual revenue in North America is \$9 billion. Every hour the system is down and shipments cannot be made results in millions of dollars of losses. The emergency was resolved three days later at 7 a.m. Anyone would have hoped for a softer landing, but this is the life of a manager with such a high level of responsibility.

Alessandro is 42 years old, from Milan, and has been a *Memor Domini* since 2005. He first worked for Deutsche Bank in Italy and then, almost by chance, joined Unilever in the United Kingdom. Today, after 17 years, he is CIO of the biggest region in which the company is present and is part of the North America Leadership Team. Ventura comments, "I have always loved work and I love what I do so I enjoy talking about it when I get the chance. I have always had people coming to me asking for advice, sometimes during crises. Since I have arrived in New York this has happened with greater frequency. I don't understand exactly why, but when I say that my work and my faith are connected, people are surprised. I tell them that this is true even when I am working to increase the revenue of the company I

work for. If Christ wants me where I am, it means that He is asking me to do what I do." He added, "When I say this, it has in many people the same effect as a champagne bottle popping after being well shaken. There is an explosion of life."

He continued: "Many find themselves feeling alone, crushed by the weight of challenges. Nobody seems to have the authority to offer a proposal that answers the desires of the heart in the workplace. People do not have someone to look up to as an authoritative figure in the workplace. There are many who have questions. There are graduates who do not know how to write their first resume, young managers faced with the pressures of responsibilities, people who want to have a balance between family and work... People I do not know from all over the US and Europe have begun contacting me." In the era of WhatsApp, the word spreads at a global level.

"My first sources of authority were my father, a factory worker at Pirelli, and my mother, who worked in a nursing home," said Alessandro. "They taught me that every job has a dignity and to always give 100 percent." He learned another lesson during the novitiate for the *Memores*: "I went to speak with Father Ambrogio Pisoni and told him that I was ambitious, that I wanted to progress in my career, but that I also did not want to lose my vocation by making my work into an idol. I asked him if I should take a step back. His an-

swer was no and that only by living fully my passion for work would I understand who Christ is. This is something that I have slowly begun to understand over the years." The third life lesson came as a suggestion from a friend in London, who told him about a conversation he had had with Fr. Giussani, who told him, more or less, that "to be a witness for Christ at work you don't have to walk around carrying a crucifix. Instead, people will ask themselves why you do things differently. Remember, saying yes to your boss can be a way of saying yes to Christ." These are the three ways Alessandro, and his way of approaching work, have been generated. One of the people who sought him out is a young woman who was studying at MIT in Boston. She had been offered a management position at a big company and was struggling to make a decision. "One day and when I spoke to her, I saw her face light up. When I told her about Father Ambrogio, she said excitedly, "This is what I needed to hear." Alessandro realized that it would be important to talk about these things these things with more people. This led to a new endeavor, starting with the promotion of a "professional corner" at the New York Encounter in 2019, an event at the Crossroads Cultural Center, and meetings regularly with a group of friends who share a similar passion. They meet on the Upper West Side of Manhattan to help each other face challenges in the workplace. The most popular topics of discussion in America and



Alessandro Ventura (left) on vacation with some colleagues.

around the world are work-life balance and the relationship with bosses. Alessandro explained, “Our desire for fulfilment invests all areas of our lives, including the workplace. If someone says that work is a secondary aspect of life, your heart rebels. This attitude can become an obstacle. Even in the Catholic world we hear people say that we are not defined by work, that it is not the source of our happiness. Surely there is some truth in this. But this cannot lead to a lack of commitment or a cynicism toward work, thinking that the place where we spend the majority of the day has nothing to do with happiness.” So what can be done? How does one find a way out? “People seek a balance: family or vocation on one side and work on the other. In reality, what we seek is a unity between our life and work. Life is one. The heart is one. This unity frees us and it is the reality that needs to be followed even when it may tell us that a job may be incompatible with our vocation. But sometimes even jobs that take you far away from loved ones can present opportunities to deepen memory and love.”

Meanwhile, in relationships with bosses, it is fear that dominates, says Ventura. “In this context, the words of Fr. Giussani on authority from the Beginning Day text are very helpful: authority is the exact opposite of power. Power corresponds to fear, while authority—true authority that generates us as people—frees us from fear. I am in a relationship with someone who generates me now and this helps me sleep at night. From this point of view, my belonging to the *Memores* is fundamental.” He continued, “I don’t think that the main reason people come to me is because of my position or my career. It is not because of my abilities, either. I believe that they see that unity in my life. That is

what they want, even though they may not realize it. Even when people come to me to ask me what they should do, what they really want to understand is the root of the issue and what criteria should be used to make a decision. Most people want to know when they make a sacrifice whether or not there is a promise of something better.”

Ventura related a young Turkish colleague he had met in London and who he had been coaching for a while. He was looking for someone experienced for an important position, and even though she did not have much experience, Ventura decided to offer the position to her. “I talked to her and offered her the position. At first, she thought I was crazy, then she asked for some time to think about it. She later told me that she would accept, not because of the offer itself, but because it was me who had made the offer.” The woman proved herself to be the right fit for the job, but six months later she came back to him in tears and told him she was pregnant. Alessandro smiled and hugged her. “Why are you crying? This is wonderful.” She replied, “I thought I had let you down.” Later, Alessandro announced to his colleagues that he would be spending the next day in another office in London and she told him she would also be there. “She had never wanted to go to that office and had always said she didn’t like being there. But, perhaps when someone senses a different gaze on herself, she wants to see it every day.” ■

Christmas in Bethlehem

In a city marked by tensions between peoples and religions, a small group of Palestinians of various confessions meets for School of Community: Lina, Wafa, Hiba, and others. Their story of friendship began in a hospital with some Italian pilgrims who were “different from everyone else.”



Luca Fiore

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Bethlehem is a difficult city whose contradictions are interweaved in an impossibly tangled knot. On the one hand, it is the location of the Basilica of the Nativity. Its low entrance doors force you to bow as you enter. Downstairs, a silver star on a worn slab of stone marks the place tradition says that Jesus was born; candelabras suspended from the ceiling shed a gentle light, and the space is suffused with the fragrance of incense. One's thoughts turn to the wonder of Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. It is one of the sweetest pages of all the Gospels. On the other hand, a few hundred yards away is the concrete slab wall separating the Palestinian territories from East Jerusalem, passage through which is controlled by soldiers at checkpoints. The Christians of Bethlehem want to leave; they are a minority of a minority, and feel pressured by both Israelis and Muslims. The tangle of the city's paradoxes is well represented in the murals that the world's most famous street artist, Banksy, has painted throughout the city, especially the one of a dove wearing a bulletproof vest.

Even here of all places, in one of the cities dearest to Christianity and most marked by a lack of understanding among peoples and religions, a small group of about ten Palestinian friends, mostly women, has been meeting for School of Community to study Fr. Giussani's texts for the last few years. Members of different rites and confessions—Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Syrians, and Armenians, they call themselves “The Touched.” What they have been touched by is clear when you listen to their story, which began in 2010, on a day like any other, in the Caritas Hospital for Children, where some of them had been working for years.



This pediatric hospital was founded in 1979 by a Swiss priest, Fr. Ernst Schnydrig, with the support of Caritas of Switzerland and Germany. Today it treats thousands of children from the Palestinian territories and is visited by pilgrims who stop by after seeing the Basilica of the Nativity. They come to learn about one of the



contributions of Christians to Palestinian society. “We welcome about 250 pilgrims a day,” explains Lina Raheel, who interfaces with the families of their little patients. “It had become a routine for us, but then one day there was a group from Italy that was different from all the others. They seemed interested not so much in seeing what we do in the hospital as in getting to know us as people. They invited us to dinner and we became friends.”

Enrico Tiozzo Bon, president of the Federation of Solidarity Centers, was one of those Italian visitors. He came from Ferrara, together with about 15 people, including two friends, Michelangelo Rubino of Foggia and Stefa-

The group of the “touched” of Bethlehem with their Italian friends on the shore of the Sea of Galilee .



Lina Raheel (left)
and Hiba Sady.

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no Bondi of Forli. They had been invited by Vincenzo Bellomo, a lay missionary from Mazara del Vallo, on behalf of the Custodian of the Holy Land, whom Bon had met several months earlier in the context of the AVSI Tents campaign.

The group belongs to the Confraternity of Saint Catherine of Siena, a group of people engaged in social and charitable works who gather to support and accompany each other as friends in their daily work. Some are in the movement, others are not. But in order to describe it, they use a typical “CL-ese” expression: an operative friendship. Vincenzo, who felt the need for help, wanted Enrico, Michelangelo, and Stefano to meet those engaged in charitable work in Bethlehem. Lina recalls, “In the beginning we were not sure who they were and what they wanted, but there was something about them that attracted us.” Enrico recounts that he had a suitcase full of prosciutto and salami, and after visiting the places they came to see, he issued a general invitation for dinner that evening for whoever wanted to come. George Abdo, a social assistant at the hospital, commented, “What was the first thing about them that struck me? The prosciutto.” But what impressed Lina and her colleagues was that the Italians returned to visit them once, twice, three

times. In 2012, Enrico invited them to Italy to visit the places of charitable work they are engaged in, and some accepted. Lina and Wafa Musleh, a woman active in the Hospital of Bethlehem, returned from their tour very impressed. Enrico recalls, “I think they were most struck by the fact that we laypeople guided the work: we were motivated by our ideals, and it did not depend on the presence of a priest.” But something more immediate remained in Lina’s memory: “It was stupendous to see people who seemed to speak the same language, and wherever we went, we were welcomed and embraced as friends, even if we were meeting for the first time.”

After that trip, their questions multiplied and the relationships among the Palestinian colleagues changed. Hiba Sady says, “Lina and Wafa always talked about them, and I began to want to meet them. They were different. They thought in a different way. Over time, they became part of my life. If you had a problem, you could talk to them about it.” Lina was born and raised in a house facing the square of the Basilica of the Nativity, and she has seen thousands of pilgrims in her life, but never ones who returned so many times. “How much money do these people have? Is it possible they have no place more beautiful to visit on vacation?” One day the group of Italians went to visit Capernaum, but Lina could not join them. She called Wafa to ask what they were doing and spent the whole afternoon thinking about these friends on their outing. She even forgot to prepare dinner for her husband, who was returning from a business trip. “That was when I understood that something in me was changing. I was attracted by these friends in a way I could no longer ignore.”

One evening, during one of the group’s many visits to Bethlehem, Lina asked the question directly: “Who are you?” Initially, Enrico was a bit unsure. “We had never said anything about being part of the movement. It was out of a kind of modesty, but at a certain point a friend looked at me and said, ‘You have to tell them.’ So in order to explain the type of experience I’d had with Fr. Giussani, I drew on how Giussani, in *Recognizing Christ*, recounted John and Andrew’s encounter and the way Andrew must have hugged his wife when

he returned home, and how she must have sensed that something new had happened.” Lina said, “That’s what’s happening with us!” and she asked, “So, is what’s happening to us an encounter with Christ?” At home that evening, Lina could not get to sleep. For years, she had no longer believed that faith could truly respond to the great questions of life, like those arising from the suffering of children that she saw every day, but she pulled out her Bible and found the episode of John and Andrew. She read it and reread it. The next day she said, “But I didn’t find the part about Andrew’s wife...”

After that episode Lina recalled that they asked Ettore Soranzo, a member of the *Memores Domini* who had been working for 20 years for the Custodian of the Holy Land, to help them do

School of Community. “He told us about these meetings and said they help them look at things in a different way. We began meeting every two weeks, and in the pages of Fr. Giussani we found a description of what had happened to us. First we lived something special, then we understood that Fr. Giussani was speaking about what we were experiencing. At this point Christ, who made Himself seen through those people, had won. Life is the same, but we are different.”

In the meantime, their friendship with the Italians continued. There was an invitation to the Meeting of Rimini and other occasions to see each other again and get to know better the life of the movement. At a certain point, Enrico and his friends heard that the Custodian of the Holy Land was raising funds to buy the homes of Christians who were leaving Bethlehem because these buildings usually ended up

in the hands of Muslims, making it even more difficult for Christians to return from abroad. It seemed like a beautiful idea for helping their Palestinian friends, and they asked Lina’s opinion about it. She was, however, displeased with the idea. “Enrico, we don’t need your money. We need you to bring us what you are already giving us: your friendship. Use your money to continue visiting us.” It was not a matter of refusing material help, but for Lina there was something more urgent. “We labor in charitable works, but we’ve learned that in order to take care of others, you first have to take care of yourself.”

However, the flight of Christians remained a sore point, including for some of the “touched.” Wafa explains, “I was convinced that being a Christian in Bethlehem was a punishment, and I had already decided to leave because I wanted a better life for my daughters. I thought they would have no future here. I wanted to be free, not closed up in this open-air prison. But then I began to look at myself through the eyes of my Italian friends. People come here not only to see the stones that Jesus walked on, but also to see the ‘living stones,’ that is, us. If we leave, there is less of a possibility to encounter Christ in these places. Today I know I have this task. To remain.” ■



■
Ettore Soranzo (left)
with his friend Philip.

Thoroughly *human*

The image proposed by CL for this year's Christmas poster is from a masterpiece of simplicity by Caravaggio. One in which the gazes of the shepherds, "conquered by what was before them," reflect the heart of the event that made God "a force close at hand."



Giuseppe Frangi

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A diagonal. A simple diagonal. The message of *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, a masterpiece from the most extreme times in Caravaggio's life, is summed up in that diagonal line, which serves as the compositional and poetic architrave supporting the painting. The line begins in the upper right with the shepherd leaning on his staff and descends quite clearly, passing over the bald shepherd's head before arriving at Mary, who holds the swaddled infant in her arms. Caravaggio crowds all the protagonists of the painting into the lower triangle traced out by the diagonal, but in the upper triangle, he has no hesitation painting something complementary: a large space that seems to contain nothing, so great is its poverty by comparison. (Giovan Pietro Bellori described it in 1672 as a "broken-down shack with its boards and rafters coming apart.")

The force of that line lies primarily in the direction in which it points, from high to low. This is the defining fact of Caravaggio's masterpiece. The gazes of the shepherds, who have come to see the infant, seem to plummet downward toward their feet, or, to express it in a way that is more faithful to the surroundings, to a point that lies on the bare dirt. Typically, you adore something that is raised up, crowned by light from the heavens. Here, instead, the parameters are turned upside down—Caravaggio's painting, in its composition as well as its effect, points to the rough and bare earth.

The artist's geometry is populated by an extraordinary density of humanity composed of the shepherds, driven by the scarcely restrained impulse to bend down over the infant. With them is the aged Joseph, on their left, identifiable by his halo and painted with a light touch.

Their gazes are simple; they are gazes conquered by what is in front of them. That of the man first from the left is full of wonder; that of the second, visibly moved; and Joseph's, simple and devoted. Mary sits on the ground,

CHRISTMAS 2019
COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

As soon as the Unnamed entered the room, Federigo went to meet him with a calm and friendly expression, and arms outstretched, as if to welcome a guest; “there have been many times, over a long period, when I should have come to you.”
“Come to me? Do you know who I am?
Was my name given to you correctly?”

The Cardinal seized his hand with loving violence saying, “Do not prevent me from clasping this hand.” With these words he put his arms around the neck of the Unnamed, who at first tried to draw away, and resisted for a moment; but then he seemed to be overcome by that impulse of divine charity and threw his arms around the Cardinal. The Unnamed freed himself from that embrace and said “O truly great and truly merciful God! Now I know myself, now I understand what I am!”

“You must not think,” he said, “that I shall be satisfied with this single visit of yours for today. You will come back, won’t you?”
“Do you ask if I will come back?” replied the Unnamed. “If you turn me from your door, I shall wait outside as obstinately as any beggar. I need to talk to you! I need to hear your voice and see your face! I need you!”

Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*



The Christian event has the form of an encounter with a physical, bodily reality, one made of time and space. It is an encounter with a present, living, wholly human reality, whose exhaustive meaning is that of being a visible sign of Christ’s presence, God-made-man within the precariousness of a human form. This encounter is what continually orients our life, imparting meaning and synthesis to our existence. Without it, there is no source of awareness of life’s newness.

Luigi Giussani

reclining with her elbow resting on the manger, her face half lit and focused on her little son, whose arms are reaching out for her. This is a truly humble Madonna, considering that the root of the word humility is *humus*, “earth.” She is cloaked in a bright red vermillion mantle, seemingly a metaphor for the expansion of a heart inflamed by an infinite love.

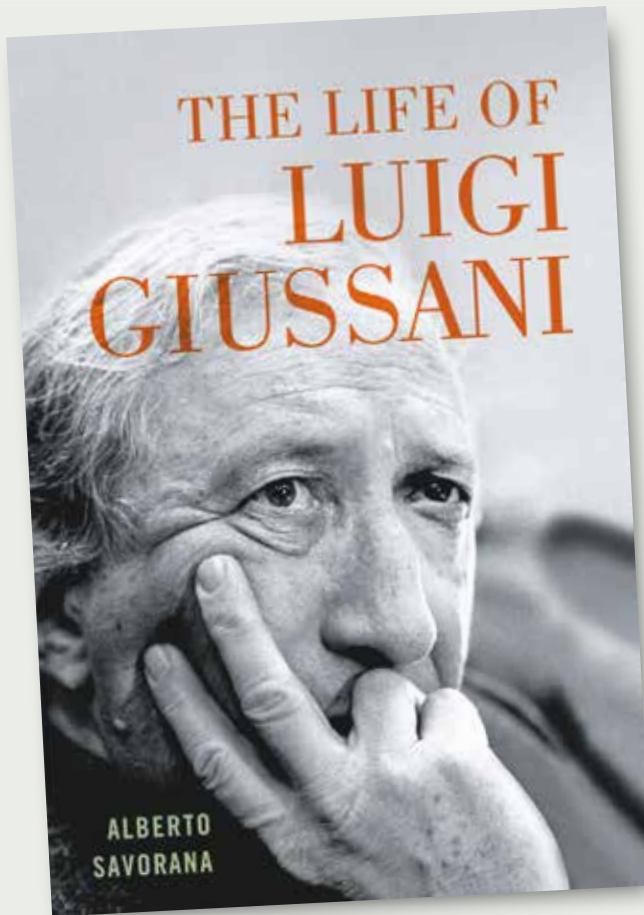
The iconography used may have been suggested to Caravaggio by his clients from Franciscan territory. The painting, now housed at the stunningly restored Regional Museum of Messina, was commissioned for the high altar at Santa Maria della Concezione, a Capuchin church destroyed by an earthquake in 1908. Furthermore, as Fr. Antonio Spadaro—a Jesuit from Messina and current editor-in-chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*—has noted, the archbishop of the “city of the strait” at that time, Bonaventure Secusio, OFM, was a prestigious figure. In short, the gloomy Cara-

vaggio, “a man with a restless, contentious, and turbid mind,” as Messina native Francesco Susinno described him, disciplined himself to accept the indications that came to him from the Franciscan commission, but in the end definitively surpassed them, with the ingenious simplicity that always brought him into contact with the heart of reality, laying bare the fullness of man’s sense of expectation.

As the great scholar of the art of Lombardy Ferdinando Bologna wrote, in paintings like this one, Caravaggio “brought the sacred into alignment with the living in order to bring the sacred concretely into the grasp of mankind... For him, showing its accessibility by way of ‘similarity’ meant freeing [the sacred] from abstract and isolating kinds of contemplation and revealing it to mankind in its deeply constructive aspect as a force close at hand.” This is precisely the point—Caravaggio saw Christmas as truly a “force close at hand.” ■

THE LIFE OF LUIGI GIUSSANI

by Alberto Savorana. Translated by Chris Bacich and Mariangela Sullivan



A detailed account of the life and legacy of the founder of the Communion and Liberation movement.

1,416 Pages, December 2017

Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy, which has hundreds of thousands of adherents around the globe.

In *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Alberto Savorana, who spent an important part of his life working and studying with Giussani, draws on many unpublished documents to recount who the priest was and how he lived. Giussani's life story is particularly significant because it shares many of the same challenges, risks, and paths toward enlightenment that are described in his numerous and influential publications.

In addition to providing the first chronological reconstruction of the life of the founder of Communion and Liberation, *The Life of Luigi Giussani* provides a detailed account of his legacy and what his life's work meant to individual people and the Church.

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