

TRACES

litterae communionis

Communion and Liberation
International Magazine

Vol. 22
June 2020

06



***Reawakening
our humanity***

TRACES

Communion and Liberation International Magazine
Vol. 22

Editor (Direttore responsabile)
Davide Perillo

Editorial Assistant
Anna Leonardi

Art director
Dario Curatolo

Layout
Maria Cristina Mazzù

Editorial office
Via De Notaris, 50 - 20128 Milano
Tel. 02.92945400 - Fax 02.92945401

E-mail: traces@traces-cl.com
Web: english.clonline.org

Publisher (Editore)
Editrice Nuovo Mondo srl
Iscrizione nel Registro degli Operatori di Comunicazione
n. 26972

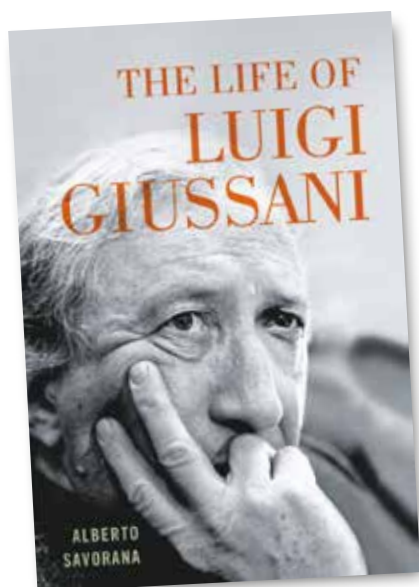
Cover
© Sincerely Media/Unsplash

© Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione
for the texts by Luigi Giussani and Julián Carrón

n. 06

June 2020

- 01** **Editorial**
- 02** **Letters**
- 04** **Close-up**
Face to face
- 08** *Where are we now?*
- 11** *"A game for children"*
- 14** **New York**
"Something for the heart"
- 18** **Austen Ivereigh**
Return to the people



1,416 pages | December 2017

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.*

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS

Beginning again on our journey

The name for this time has been chosen: “Phase 2.” That’s fine, although the line between “before” and “after” is not nearly so clear as a date on the calendar, which leaves us still holding our breath. The beginning of this shift following the peak of the pandemic has not been the same for everyone—it has come only for some, while others are still fully immersed in the tragedy, or are just now facing a risk that they will really sink into it (for example Latin America and Africa, where many people are watching with understandable apprehension). Still, Phase 2 has been eagerly anticipated, and the hope summed up in words like “reopening” and “beginning again” is incalculable. But what do we need to truly begin again?

Rules and safety measures, of course. Responsible behavior that can help extinguish the wildfire of the rapid spread of the virus and avoid sparking it again. Everyone working again, because as we see the curve of infections decline, the trajectory of the economic crisis is at risk of taking off. The list of good and necessary things to do could go on and on. But there is a precondition that comes before any of this. Fr. Julián Carrón, the leader of CL, summarized it in the title of his e-book which came out a few weeks ago, *Reawakening Our Humanity*, where he describes describes how this “dizzying time” offers us a great opportunity. We will “come out [of the pandemic] changed, but only if we start to change now,” Carrón says. In other words, only “if we are present to the present and learn now to judge what we are living,” only if our humanity is stirred from its slumber.

We wanted to go deeper into this point, to understand the nature and characteristics of that reawakening. How? Through the words of two figures who have grappled with the ideas found in Fr. Carrón’s book: a prominent American poet, Paul Mariani; an astute and insightful English theologian, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe; and then in the story of the Albanian cardinal Ernest Simoni, who spent a third of his 90 years of life locked up by a totalitarian regime, but did not live the time of his imprisonment as a “pause” in life, but rather as a time to discover what life really is. We offer these reflections because the true test of these days, even more than swabs and serological testing (which, of course, are very important) will be to observe ourselves in action, working to detect the signs of this reawakened humanity in ourselves and in others. And giving it space to grow by following the signs, so that our journey can continue uninterrupted.

Matteo, Daniela, Laura

edited by
Paola Bergamini
pberga@tracce.it

Everything in the fragment

Dear Fr. Carrón: One day while I was complaining a lot and being closed off, I found myself on the phone with one of my students. I was protesting having to stay in the house and was ashamed of myself. In a flash, the 50 square feet where my student lives with her family appeared to my mind, and I found myself begging for a simplicity that in that moment I didn't have. At a certain point, my student said, "But you know what? Between the four walls where you and I live, the most important event in the universe is being played out, that of our conversion!" In front of this certainty of judgment, I realized how my self-awareness can begin in front of the presence that changes my outlook. Conversion happens only in front of a presence. I was struck by what you said about that very thing to a graduating high school senior during a meeting a few months ago: "The question is, how can I live each circumstance, each fragment of life, without losing anything crucial. A famous Catholic theologian used this expression: 'Everything in the fragment.' How can we live everything in the fragment? For example, when you fall in love, you feel the thrill of being in front of the person you love and you say, 'I do not want to leave.' Has this ever happened to you?" This is what I'm discovering. I could stay in this isolation forever because these six weeks have not isolated my heart's desire or the desire of Christ's heart to come and meet me. It's so true that my humanity does not go into quarantine. I am discovering how poor I am, a true poverty. I cannot do anything for my kids and their

moms and I can't do anything for my parents and my friends who are 7,000 km away. In all of this, I again find myself begging for Him who can reconquer my heart in this storm.

Matteo, Kampala (Uganda)

Questions from the kids in the fifth year

"In the dark of night, in the midst of this ocean of angst, little by little, I awake: 'I must face reality. I'm in prison. If I wait for the opportune moment to do something truly great, how often will such opportunities present themselves to me? There is only one thing that will certainly come: death. We must grasp the opportunities that present themselves every day, so as to carry out ordinary actions in an extraordinary way.'" As the quarantine expanded and I became aware that its character was dangerously definitive, these words of Cardinal Van Thuân slowly revealed themselves to be urgent for me. My heroic approach to the first days of the quarantine quickly became a gray, suffocating daily routine, dominated by many worries about the present and the future. I worried about my mom, alone and ill, and about my daughters. The kitchen was occupied eight hours a day by my husband who was working from home. Who would save me from so much nothingness that threatened to overwhelm me? Salvation began to reach me through my job—I am a high school teacher working closely with two groups from the fifth year. At the start of online school, we teachers were forced into what seemed to me an unbearable bottleneck: we had to distill an entire life into a few drops that seemed essential and collect them in the blink of an eye whether the students were following along or not. But then, I saw my students' humanity blossom; I observed with amazement and gratitude their incredible growth. From the screen, they began to flood me

with doubts, demands, and questions that were more and more insistent: “Ma’am, but how am I supposed to understand what I want to study in college if we haven’t had any assessments?” “Ma’am, school like this isn’t school: I miss my seatmate.” “But how should I choose whether to help my little brothers study or dedicate myself to my own studies?” “Would it be possible to present some of our work on the final exam?” My students absolutely do not want to give up to nothingness—just the opposite. Their demand for meaning and understanding, their desire that they be present—not tomorrow, not in the future, but now, right now, in this instant—became ever more urgent and insistent. I am moved that they ask me their questions, not because I have the answers (I have hypotheses, perhaps), but because they force me to follow the same process of verification they are engaged in. They cause me to rediscover in myself the same urgency to be, to understand, and to love the task before me. I see that the alternative to nothingness is an awareness of my “I” among that clump of questions and in the urgency of pressing matters that cannot be resolved by themselves. We are not in “suspended time”; rather, this is the time of the person.

Daniela, Milan (Italy)

Unemployment and the common fund

Dear Fr. Carrón: in this most difficult moment, you are challenging us to dig deep to find true friendships that help us live. My wife and I, such as we are, have taken to heart this challenge, and we are walking in the accompaniment of your friendship together with the other faces that sustain and guide us. In April, we began to collect unemployment and we will see where the good Lord will lead us. Of one thing we are certain—that He will never abandon us. We were thinking of doing something for this emergency. And when we read your letter with the prayer for us to remain faithful to the Common Fund, we decided to make a one-time contribution equal to what we would have spent participating in the Exercises. We thought of the Fraternity because of this paternity we feel and because we know that the money will be used well. It is meant as a simple gesture of recognition of and belonging to the road that accompanies us.

Signed letter

“Now I realize I am embraced”

The introduction to the booklet *What Saves Us from Nothingness?* [published by clonline.org] was very illuminating. I had for days been trying to take stock of the situation of these months of quarantine. Reading the introduction to the book made me retrace the road I had already traveled. I was really struck when Fr. Carrón connected the nihilism that sneaks up on us and our desire to be loved. I’ve always suffered from anxiety and panic attacks and I’ve put them down to a lack of trust in God, leading to a fear that there is no meaning or reasons in life. He, on the other hand, goes much deeper. Since the beginning of the lockdown, I have started to have a ridiculous level of anxiety. My panic attacks came back and I couldn’t sleep for fear of dying, alone and in agony. Then a friend died and what immediately came to mind was thinking of him being alone in the hospital; these thoughts seemed to justify my anxiety. But someone told me about this friend’s position in front of death, and of his gratitude for the company he had been placed in, which had accompanied him to the very end. I’ve never been one who loves to be with a lot of people and I’m not comfortable at any kind of social gathering. But when I no longer have my friends, I miss them so much, and what happened to this friend brought to light for me the grace of this friendship. In fact, in looking at this period, what brought me out of my anxiety was this company, from the School of Community to the group of friends I see on Zoom to the pope at the Urbi et Orbi. What all of these moments have in common is my feeling of being loved. For the first time, I have experienced the knowledge that I am loved and embraced just as I am. This is what I’ve always desired most and now, as never before, I have put this desire into focus.

Laura, Milan (Italy)

Face to face

A dialogue with the Dominican and biblical scholar Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, who grapples with the present starting from the book by Julián Carrón. Charity, the death of a dear friend, and the most valuable lesson we can learn: “Always be grateful.”

4



Giuseppe Pezzini

“**I**n circumstances like this, the masks we wear start to tear.” Timothy Radcliffe is a renowned preacher, writer, and theologian, a Dominican friar at Blackfriars Oxford, a former Master of the Order, and a consultor to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. We have spoken with him about his experience of the lockdown, and the Covid crisis in general, in the light of Carrón’s message in the booklet *Reawakening Our Humanity*.

In the past months, billions of people have shared the same experience of “imprisonment.” And yet, Carrón paradoxically argues, this prison can be a great opportunity for liberation.

I agree with Carrón completely. St. Catherine of Siena experienced three years of self-isolation before the Lord propelled her out on her mission. She described her experience as entering into “the cell of self-knowledge.” She was faced with who she really was. This was only bearable, she said, because this cell was not a place for narcissistic navel-gazing. She discovered herself as loved into being by God at every moment. This experience of isolation may bring us face to face with reality, who we are. And if you are locked down with someone, you may discover who they are, too. Superficial identities cannot easily be sustained. The masks we wear start to tear. Either relationships collapse and become unbearable, or through the grace of God, we are brought face to face with the fragile vulnerability of both our own being and that of others. Then we may glimpse the person whom God loves, our own beauty and dignity, and that of others.



Timothy Radcliffe (born London 1945), a Dominican priest, has taught Sacred Scripture at Oxford, was elected as the provincial for the order in England in 1987, and served as Master of the Order from 1992 to 2001. He has written many books, the most recent of which is *Alive in God: a Christian Imagination*.



© Massimiliano Migliorato/CPP

Carrón talks about the value of “embracing the circumstances” and of “saying yes in every instant,” but is this just a self-deluded way to cover one’s resignation to the prison?

Quite the contrary. If one wants to be a force for good in this world, one must live here and now through the grace of God, in the present, which is God’s present to us, and in the place where we find ourselves. The desert fathers knew that the temptation was to think that if I were somewhere else everything would be fine. Rowan Williams wrote of the delusion of thinking that “somewhere else I could be nicer, holier, more balanced, more detached about criticism, more disciplined, able to sing in tune and probably thinner as well.” But the desert fathers believed that it is here and nowhere else, and now, that one must live. Abba Moses said: “Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.” If we do not embrace our situation, we shall be like a bird that abandons her eggs and so prevents them from hatching. So if I want to change myself and make a difference to others, here is the place to begin.

Carrón points out that “there is no opposition between faith and action.” But how can one be active or even charitable if stuck in prison?

Faith does not mean resigning oneself to passive inaction. Sometimes what one can do seems small, but so is the seed that the sower sows on fer-

tile ground, and yet it yields “thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times” (*Mk* 4:8). Our God is, Aquinas tells us, pure act. But often this is seen in small, even modest acts—talking to a woman at the well in Samaria, washing the feet of the disciples. Even the great ceremony of our death and resurrection in Christ, baptism, is a modest act, the splashing of a little water. Our God is humble. Sometimes our faith does ask us to be heroic like the martyrs, but often to perform small acts that escape anyone’s attention. The last words of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* speak powerfully: “The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.” Our acts of charity in lockdown may also be humble. It may be in phoning someone who feels lonely, or holding back the biting word that was on the tip of your tongue when one of your brethren or your wife or husband says something hurtful.

Two young women are quoted by Carrón as examples of such a position: Mary and St. Therese of Lisieux.

Mary was indeed called to a sort of humility, to be the handmaid of the Lord. She bore the Word of God and served that Word in the child Jesus. But he was Son of the One whom she praised in the Magnificat, who has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. This is the humble person who gave her fiat, her yes, to the God who is turning the world upside down. And St. Therese of Lisieux! I loved what Julián Carrón said about her as the patron of missions. In nineteenth-cen-

“If our eyes are open, we are showered with gifts every day.”

ture France, which was very anticlerical and often atheist, she dared to reach out to atheists and to want “to drink their bitter cup” and share their pain so that she might share with them her hidden God. Her vocation was indeed transformative. Humility is not thinking badly of oneself. It is seeing oneself with clarity and acknowledging one’s contingency, seeing that one’s very existence is a gift of God. It is only if one sees oneself with open eyes that he or she will be able to change the world. To come back to Catherine of Siena, it was this freedom from illusions about herself that made her such a powerful player in fourteenth-century Italy, a person who summoned a pope back to Rome and did not hesitate to tick off the Roman curia in no uncertain terms. As she famously said, “If you would be the person you are meant to be, you could set fire to the whole of Italy.” She did!

Fr. Giussani says that “the truth of the faith [is demonstrated] by one’s capacity to make what appears to be an obstacle, persecution, or difficulty, into an instrument and moment of maturation.” Does this also apply to the church?

It has always been so from the beginning. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles at Pentecost and they were sent to the ends of the world. But actually, they wanted to settle down in Jerusalem and avoid the adventure. It was the persecution of Christians that finally dispatched them from their comfort zone and sent them even to Rome. It was the trauma of the Reformation that revitalized the church and produced the Counter-Reformation. It is not yet clear how the Church will find new life through this present crisis, but surely it will. My hope is that it will release us from our “bubble,” to use Carrón’s word, and bring us into dialogue with all those who deeply seek to understand the vocation of humanity today, even people whose faith is different or who do not believe at all.

What kind of companionship can the church, or any Christian community, offer in these difficult times?

This is a time of intense anxiety for many people. We must witness to the peace of Christ, a peace which the world cannot give. People can only attain that peace if there is someone with whom they can share their anxieties. Often all that the church does is to be there and listen, to hold a hand and let people pour it all out. Also, in times of plague, we are confronted not just with the death of individuals, but an apocalyptic sense that death rules. One thinks of the fourth rider in the book of Revelation: “The pale green horse! Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed with him.” We live under “the shadow of death,” as Zechariah says in the Benedictus. We should be able to look death in the eye, register the pain and anguish it causes, but not be intimidated, for we believe that its rule is over. My closest friend in the order died recently because of the coronavirus. He rang me to say goodbye. He said to a friend shortly before he died: “I have been preaching the resurrection for years. Now is the time to show that I believe it.”

How are you living your own quarantine?

I was supposed to be on sabbatical at this time, and part of the plan was that, as well as studying, I should have some time to be with my family and friends. But, as we say in England, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. After a month of study leave at the École Biblique in Jerusalem, I came back to Oxford and since then I have been bombarded with requests for articles, homilies, and interviews. Thank you for asking me! I am grateful for these opportunities to share my faith with others. The sabbatical can wait. Also, as I said, I have lost and buried my closest friend in the order, who lived in Oxford. We joined on the same day 55 years ago and went on holiday together every year. This has been a painful loss. When I shared this with another friend, a Polish Dominican who works at the École Biblique, he gave me wise advice: “Be grateful.” And perhaps this is the most profound lesson of this period. Always be grateful. Not that people whom I love have died, but that they ever lived. If our eyes are open, we are showered with gifts every day. ■



Where are we now?



Luca Fiore

A deep renewal. The “visceral reality of vocation.” New York author Paul Mariani describes what he is learning and what is at the center of the reawakening of our humanity.



biography on Wallace Stevens was a finalist for the National Book Award. This year he published his eighth collection of poetry, *Ordinary Time*.

He is now retired and lives in western Massachusetts, where he watches the news of the coronavirus in America unfolding on TV. Over the years, he has become familiar with the work of Fr. Giussani and has said that “the writings of Fr. Giussani and Fr. Carrón have helped me as a Catholic author.” He received *Reawakening Our Humanity* and about two hours later responded via email, “I read it and it was truly consoling.”

What was striking to you?

My wife and I live outside of the city, so we are fairly safe. Our son who is a Jesuit lives in New York, in the Bronx, and there the situation is quite different. We are worried about him, but he says that everything is fine. I have a friend who lived in a nursing home for veterans, and he was among the first to die from Covid-19. Things like that show you that the virus can find you anywhere, even at home. We are aware that, at our age, we are among the most vulnerable. When you turn on the TV, you can’t help but hear the reports of cases and deaths. Nevertheless, there are still people who believe—and I don’t know how they can—that this is all a hoax, as if the virus were made up. But it is real! Carrón emphasizes that we must *become aware* of the impact of reality on us; he also says that reality has always been there, only we were not aware

of it. We lived our lives; we watched television; we enjoyed a nice glass of wine. Everything continued on as usual. Then, all of a sudden, something happens and it changes everything. Now we can’t even go to church. I am fortunate enough to have time to reflect. I can focus on what is taking place and what is happening to me.

What is happening to you?

My wife and I have asked ourselves again, “Where are we now? What is the real meaning of our lives?” This is, in my opinion, the “reawakening of our humanity.” And thinking of Christ was inevitable.

In what way?

It is as if He turned around and was looking right at me. The reawakening of my humanity must have a religious source. It is that gaze on me that keeps reappearing.

What have you discovered in this “dizzying time”?

One thing I have understood is that I want to keep writing poetry. I have begun to be haunted by my Italian ancestors, who hail from Compiano, a town outside of Parma. My heart returns there and asks, Who are those ghosts? What will I find if I go there? I continue to reflect on what we call the “philosopher-poet.” Can the two languages—philosophy (recently, my wife and I have been reading a lot of Kierkegaard) and poetry—speak to each other? I think they

“The book is on point. The reawakening of our humanity! Boom! This is exactly what is happening to me.” Paul Mariani was born in New York in 1940 to Italian parents. He is a professor emeritus at Boston College, where he taught poetry and literature. He is also a literary critic and has written significant biographies of American authors, including William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane (adapted into a movie, *The Broken Tower*, starring James Franco) and Gerard Manley Hopkins. His latest



Paul Mariani (New York, 1940) is a poet and professor emeritus at Boston College. He has published over 250 essays and is the author of 19 books, including the biographies of William Carlos Williams, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wallace Stevens. His account of the life of Hart Crane, *The Broken Tower*, was adapted into a film directed by and starring James Franco. His most recent book is *Ordinary Time: Poems* (Slant, 2020).

you perceive that there is something beyond. The paradox, that transcendence, coexists with an awareness that that something that is totally other is already here. All that we need to do is to open ourselves up to it. For this reason, I am very attracted to Communion and Liberation. “Communion” is what my heart is drawn to. I speak about this when I think about the dance with the people with whom I would like to dance, to sing.

Yet it is difficult to perform this dance today when we must keep a distance from each other.

Yes, but I hunger for it. I long to be able to hug my grandchildren and children. I am Italian and I need to hug them, for their good and for my own good. When we are able to do so, I will go out and hug everyone on the street. Now that we cannot do this, we understand its meaning more clearly. It is true that people are still dying. There is an atmosphere of death, of being buried, but when we go out again, we will have a renewed meaning of life. Now I have an even greater desire to be with people and to talk, laugh, and break bread with them.

For you, is life under these circumstances a “vocation”?

Yes, it is not like at New Year’s when you make resolutions and within a week you have already forgotten them. The sense of vocation, of profound renewal, is visceral. I would like to have that. It is as if I had died and after three days resurrected as Lazarus did. At that point, what would you do? You could only testify about what happened to you. Over the years, I have tried to do precisely this, to witness the faith, to what is good, with an ultimate optimism. It does not matter what happens to us because Christ is always with us. In medieval paintings, Christ is depicted as looking straight at you. It is the crucified Christ, and then the resurrected Christ, who says, “Let’s have breakfast together on the beach of the Sea of Galilee.” For me today, this means to continue to go forward, to share the bread that He gives us and to share who we are. I am almost 80 years old and I do not want to stop doing this. I want to do it as long as my strength allows me. I want to die, as we say here, “with my boots on.” ■

can. What would I tell my ancestors from Compiano if I could meet them? Honestly, I don’t know what I would say. Certainly, it would be something that goes beyond language. It must, in order for there to be an encounter. I use the image of dance. Of music. It could be a song that is inaudible, but it is real music. Truly real.

That is hard to imagine.

When I read the writings of the mystics, there were times when language fell short; you could not go any further because language is all we have. That experience is frustrating for a writer, but it is real. How do we communicate that reality? I think this is part of what Carrón is trying to do; that is, to speak about that deeper reality that Hegel would call “the ideal,” that coming into contact. Into contact with what? With whom? This is where Christ steps in. St. Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Only you....” I have taught for years and I have carefully considered language for half a century. As I grow older, the limitations of language become more and more of a reality. Existence is what matters, not so much language or speech. When you look at the starry sky, you understand that there is something infinite. You can get closer, but as you approach it, the more

“A game for children”

What sustained him during over 28 years of forced manual labor under the Albanian regime? The witness of Cardinal Ernest Simoni, who experienced freedom in prison. In these “extremely difficult times,” he sees an opportunity to remember “what we have forgotten: that life will never be taken from us.”



Alessandra Stoppa

When he—reluctantly—tells his story, he speaks of “misadventures,” but what he means is his arrest on Christmas Eve in 1963 and all that followed: the torture and 20 years of imprisonment and forced labor, first 12 years in the mines and then digging sewage canals. Today, Cardinal Ernest Simoni is the sole priest to have survived Enver Hoxha’s regime in Albania.

“Just as I am persecuted, so will you be persecuted,” he immediately notes, as if to explain that there is nothing shocking about what happened to him, and that there is even less to be amazed at in him, in the way he faced it all. “I am entirely unworthy.” This is the same sentiment that dominated him at the cathedral in Tirana on September 21, 2014, when he saw the pope moved to tears. The cause? The elderly Albanian priest’s unornamented account of his life. Eighty-six at the time, Simoni still served in dozens of parishes in the mountainous regions around Scutari. The moment the witness ended, Francis went to embrace him. They clasped hands, their foreheads touching and eyes closed, in silence. The pope called him a martyr, a living martyr. Two years later, in the consistory of November 16, 2016, he elevated him to cardinal. Thinking of that day at St. Peter’s, Simoni still feels “embarrassed,” saying, “He kissed *my* hands. I lowered them, and he went down, too... then he embraced me.”

He now lives in his adopted city of Florence. Up until the lockdown that began in February, he was in constant motion, a tireless shepherd who visited Albanian Catholics in America and served the church as a confessor and exorcist and by offering the witness of his life, a witness that now, in the face of our current trials and worries about the future, helps us to see the source of a man’s freedom, even one who was forced into inaction by one of history’s most vicious dictatorships. This is why we reached out to him as he lives his days “under house arrest,” as he says, laughing. He says he is ever-grateful for his iron constitution, which is “a grace from Our Lady. Thanks to her, I am a young man of 92!”

His replies to each question come out like a prayer. “God is infinite love. He knocks at the heart of the soul of every man and woman. He is in every home...” During this time without public Masses and few sacraments, this is even clearer to him. “Jesus said, ‘Where two people are praying, I am there as the third.’ He is in every family, in every moment, in every place in which we seek Him.” Seeing how the world plummeted into the present emergency, he finds himself repeating the words of the prophet Daniel, a “daily sacrifice,” but one in which “Jesus is alive. He is not a myth. So many of the powerful are now dust but He is alive, winning hearts.” He thin-



ks of those who are suffering the most, those who have lost loved ones, and reminds us of “what He said to Lazarus who was dead. Three words: ‘Lazarus, come out.’ From death to life.” In these “extremely difficult times” he sees a moment of conversion, of remembering “what we had forgotten: that we were created for happiness, for eternal happiness, every person...there is no death, it has been annihilated. Life will never be taken from us. It will merely be changed.”

He spoke with that solid hope he has breathed his whole life. He grew up in the village of Troshani in a deeply religious family. “Then came God’s grace: my vocation. Learning what happiness was.” Amidst the raging atheistic propaganda, the attempts to wipe out the faith, and the arrest and execution of hundreds of priests and lay faithful, he studied at a Franciscan seminary. When he was 20, the convent was closed and turned into a torture chamber. The priests were killed, novices were sent away, and Simoni was assigned to be a teacher in a remote mountain town. In 1955, he was drafted into military service, the beginning of two years he describes as “even more terrible than prison.” He finished his studies in theology clandestinely and was ordained a priest in 1956.

Seven years later came that fateful December 24th. He had just finished saying Mass in the village of Barbullush, close to Scutari, when four men from the state police hauled him off. Simoni takes no pleasure in talking about all the abuse he underwent from that moment on, in over eleven thousand days of imprisonment. But he lights up when he comes to “all the times He saved me.” He should have been promptly hanged, with three charges against him: deceiving the public with the faith, performing exorcisms, and celebrating the three Masses that Pope Paul VI had asked all priests around the world to offer for President Kennedy. He spent months in solitary confinement, where a friend of his was sent as a spy to provoke him, speaking negatively about the regime in the hope that Simoni would slip. “He had eaten at my house many times,” Simoni remembers, “but he was afraid. Anyway, I told him that Christ taught us to love our enemies and that we have to work for the good of the people.” It seems that those words under surveillance must have made their way to the dictator, because he commuted his death sentence to a life of hard labor. Even before that, he had been touched by the grace of feeling no fear when they told him that he would be hanged: “It was like nothing for me... I said,

Ernest Simoni, 92, elevated to cardinal
on November 16, 2016.

‘God is greater than all of you, and Jesus shed his blood for everyone. Everyone.’ It almost made me smile. God is the one who illuminates.”

Ten years later, on May 22, 1973, there was an uprising in the camp and he was wrongly accused of having instigated it. He received another death sentence, but it was later retracted. “And another time,” he went on to say, “all of us prisoners drank rusty, tainted water, but no one died! The Blessed Virgin protected us! She always did...” He could have died on any given day working in the mines in Spaç, five hundred meters underground surrounded by fumes and at temperatures above 100°F. In winter, it was below zero when they resurfaced. After relating these details, he took a moment in silence and said, “I am with you,’ Jesus told St. Paul.” His life, he says, has taught him “that powerful message: *sine me nihil potestis facere*, ‘without me you can do nothing.’” He refers to this over and over, with that same unconquerable memory he used to celebrate the Mass in Latin in captivity, consecrating crumbs of bread and the juice from crushed grapes in his hands. “I got the grapes from the wife of a Muslim professor who was my fellow prisoner.” There were three thousand in the camp of every religion, but primarily Catholics, imprisoned by the first country in the world to proclaim itself atheistic in its constitution. He was usually

quiet and whispered prayers to himself. “They watched me and thought, ‘He’s all right, but he’s losing it...’ I prayed with all my heart. It was my sustenance.” He secretly heard confessions, performed baptisms, and distributed Holy Communion. He never stopped being a pastor even when, declaring him an “enemy of the people,” the government sent him to work in the sewers of Scutari, “the black water canals” where he spent his last 10 years before being liberated, before he was able to celebrate Mass in a church again, on November 4, 1990. As he recounted when the Pope visited, “With the arrival of religious freedom, the Lord helped me to serve many villages and reconcile many people carrying out outstanding vendettas.”

Cardinal Simoni is always surprised when people ask him how he managed to forgive. “Jesus did everything. I just had a tiny bit of goodwill to welcome him. I have to get down on my knees and thank him, because He was always with me. He gave me strength.” Then he adds, as if it were the most natural, easy thing to say, “He told us to love our enemies and to pray for them.” And he has done so unceasingly since he was freed, entrusting his persecutors to God’s mercy. “In paradise, there will be greater rejoicing for a sinner who repents than for all the saints together! Jesus went looking for the lost sheep and carried it on

his shoulders... The desire is all His,” he says. “I wholeheartedly forgive them, as I hope the Lord will someday forgive me for my sins.”

Now, his hope is inscribed in Albanian on his cardinal’s coat of arms: “My heart will triumph.” He chose those words from Our Lady of Fatima, appearing under the image of chains broken by the cross. He is sure that “Jesus does not forget us; He helps us,” but that we also “have to choose.” What do we have to choose? He goes back to the gospel. “We all know this one: Marta is worried about many things, and she complains about Mary. And Jesus tells her, ‘Marta, your sister has chosen the better part, the more beautiful, more powerful, and sweeter part that will never be taken from her.’ We have to draw near to Him again.” Then he excuses himself, “I’m sorry, I cannot water it down... It means loving, following the commandments, prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, embracing one’s neighbor and the poor, because what we do unto them, we do unto Him... It means doing everything with Him.” And he goes deeper: it means “becoming like children. ‘If you do not become like them...’” He looks to St. Therese of Lisieux, who “teaches us how she reached God through simple things. Reaching God is a game for children—it is like abandoning yourself to the arms of your father and mother.” ■

“Something for the heart”



Davide Perillo

The experience of the volunteers at One City Mission, who provide companionship to homeless people so that “the whole city experiences the human.” Their story was born of an encounter with a homeless man and was shaped by the Franciscan brothers of the Bronx.

14

The last time he went out alone. “If we go together and get the infection, everything stops.” Supplied with aluminum containers of pasta with ragu that he had prepared at home, as usual, and bags with a sandwich and a bottle of water or fruit juice, Salvatore Snaiderbaur set off for the streets around Penn Station, a short distance from Madison Square Garden and the heart of New York, which in recent weeks became the global capital of the coronavirus pandemic. Two hundred deaths daily, even now. Mass graves on Hart Island because they do not know where to put all the caskets anymore. New York State has been home to 27,000 victims since the beginning of the pandemic. The crisis has overturned the worlds of families, businesses, and offices, and increased the number of homeless people, those whom Snaiderbaur and the One City Mission (OCM) volunteers seek out almost every day to offer food and companionship. Officially, there are 69,000 homeless

people in New York City, but this is a lowball figure. They live in a situation that “is always difficult, but now even more so: there are no longer any shops, bars, or bathrooms open. It’s a disaster. The other day I was talking with a guy who was rummaging in the trash, and he said, ‘Even if I *could* buy myself food, where would I go to buy it?’” Speaking with us on the phone in Brooklyn, Salvatore, known to all as “Salvo,” told us about Martha, Eddie, and his other friends we had met before the lockdown. We had seen their simple and disarming formula: going around in small groups to fixed places at fixed times, bringing food and clothing to those in need, but above all, meeting them and spending time with them. It seems like nothing, but it is in fact life-changing.

Salvo, who is now 57, discovered this bit by bit over time, and his life story deserves another article by itself. His roots are deeply Italian: he was born in Palermo and grew up in Milan, where he encountered the movement

of CL and became so involved that he dedicated his life to it as a member of the *Memores Domini*. His story is also very American, with adventurous chapters filled with sudden changes of direction, highs and lows. He won a Green Card through the lottery and moved to the US in 1997. Then he returned to Italy and worked as a manager at the Mediterranean Institute for Transplants in Palermo. He returned to the US “in 2005, around the days of Fr. Giussani’s death: I had just enough time to attend his funeral, and then catch my plane.” He arrived at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, and taught business for eight years. He had his life in the *Memores Domini* house, his students, and the movement, “but I slowly began to realize that something was missing, that I wanted to do something else.” He began to understand what this something was almost by chance when he was back in Italy to spend the summer in Florence with his students. “There, simply, I came to understand the road. In Atchison, life was my



house and the campus. In Florence, instead, I took the bus every morning to go into the city, and I met everyone—poor people, the disabled, volunteers, ex-prostitutes with small children... We got to talking, and they told me their stories. It opened a whole world to me.” This window opened even wider when he was in Subiaco, standing in front of a portrait of Saint Francis. The monk accompanying him said, “For Christianity, the passage from Benedict to Francis was a moment of change, more or less like what is happening today.” His words remained with Salvo. “I began to ask myself what this change meant for the church, for the movement, and for myself.”

When he returned to America, he set out to learn more about the Franciscan charism. He met the Franciscan brothers in the Bronx in the summer of 2014 and spent a month with them in a homeless shelter. “There I discovered the homeless. I lived with 35 of them. I cooked and formed friendships. I proposed the School of Community, what I am. It was a moment of rediscovering our charism; until then I had lived from the head up, but there was a human aspect of things I had lost over time. I found it again in this period.”

Two subsequent encounters helped him even more. He had lost his job and was left with only “400 dollars, a pair of pants, and two shirts.” Outside of a church in Chinatown “there was a homeless man sitting on the sidewalk who couldn’t get his shoes on. I thought, ‘if a car passes it’ll kill him.’ So I asked him, ‘Do you need help?’ and he said, ‘Yes, I can’t get up.’ He was drunk. I put his shoes on him, then got him something to eat, and spent half an hour with him. In that short time he blossomed, and began telling me about himself and his wife. I thought to myself, ‘this is something that nobody else can do now. If I don’t respond to him, Who will be by his side?’”

That man outside the church was named Alan. “In fact, the mission began there,” and even more with Santiago, whom Salvo encountered some time later “in

Salvo Snaiderbaur and OCM volunteers who take care of homeless people in New York City



16

front of the same church, lying on the ground. He didn't want help. I thought, 'he doesn't want to live anymore,' and I told him that 'I understand you, because I lost my job too, and I don't know what to do.' Santiago perked up and said to me, 'Don't worry. You'll see, it's not for ever...' He began doing for me what I couldn't do for him. I said to myself, 'OK, maybe I've understood now.' I could help him only because I was poor too. He found hope not because of what I gave him but because a relationship began between us. The entire mission of OCM began in that encounter."

The rest followed easily, in small steps. There was an unexpected donation from an inheritance that showed up out of the blue and some of my friends got involved. It was enough to start tiptoeing into a world crowded with measureless humanity, almost as big as the many wounds that can drag a person down to life on the streets.

"There are roughly two types of homeless people," Salvo explains, almost reluctantly, because it is clear that he doesn't like categories. "The temporary ones are in need for economic reasons, like loss of work or illness. It's very easy to go down from there. But these people stay on the streets a year or two, then they often succeed in getting back on their feet." The chronic homeless are another story. "They've had a fracture in their life, mental illness, drugs, alcohol. And often their families don't want them anymore, whether out of shame or because it's truly impossible."

There is another common feature of the homeless that Salvo sees all the time. "In these conditions, the human is re-

born in an encounter—not as a result of your projects or because you want to evangelize them. The only thing you have to do is be willing to stay with them, just as they are. You have to love them, not love their 'best interests.' This is your project, what you have to do." He says it took "five years of blood and tears to understand this. But what helped me the most was finding myself poor again, too," an *rediscovering* himself as poor every time he encountered them. "While we have been talking, I have seen this man going back and forth. He picked up a suitcase, moved it, left it, and then went back inside with it. What is he looking for? I could be him. I am also disordered like him. Deep down, we all are."

Salvo's work involves pure gratuitousness. This can be seen in the encounters that happen repeatedly—sometimes you find them again in the same place; they begin to expect you and you become friends. Like C.J., who lived under a billboard at the entrance to the Staten Island Ferry station. "Every time we see him, in addition to food, he asks us for a pen and a notebook." Or in the encounters in that last half an hour, like the one with Chantal on Fifth Avenue. "While I was chatting on my cell phone, she came up to me and said, 'Why do people walk looking at their cell phones? We're all crazy.'" They laughed and got to talking, and "she told me her whole story. When I said good-bye because I was going into the church there, she said, 'Thanks, go and pray for me.'" That's what the encounters on the street are like. "They begin with some unimportant comment, and end up on the personal level." Or they overwhelm you with something they say. When Salvo asked Jong, from Thailand, sitting

in his cardboard shelter built over a manhole cover, what he needed, Jong raised his eyes from the flashlight illuminating a book, and said, “Nothing. Maybe something for my heart.”

“This is what they’re searching for: to feel loved, to be treated with respect,” one of the first OCM volunteers, Martha, told us one evening last winter while she was serving pea soup from a big pot set on a little table in front of the shelter on 28th Street. “You’d always like to do more. But God provides.”

“To do more.” This is a constant temptation for those who help out. Salvo says that they face it this way: “We chose not to rent a place to prepare food, not to buy a van to transport it, not to lock ourselves into a rigid structure. You do what you can with the means you have. Remaining poor is a privilege. It reminds us why we are with them and that we are not the ones who are responding to their need.” They never give money because “if you do, you put yourself on another level, superior. You become someone from whom they take something, someone who embarrasses them.” Asked what poverty is for him, Salvo says, “First of all, realizing that without the mercy of God I would not exist. Today, here.” This awareness also makes it easier not to get worried about numbers. “How many leave the street? I still don’t know about any total returns to normal life. I know about a lot of improvements, though, striking ones.”

An example? John, “one of those with whom I became good friends.” When they met him, his feet were very dirty. “It disturbed me. I couldn’t sleep at night. I thought, ‘How is it possible for someone to live so dirtily in New York?’” One evening Salvo went to bring John food and saw that his

hands, too, were dirtier than usual. “I asked him, ‘John, what happened?’ He asked, ‘Why?’ He began to look at them, and looked at them for five minutes. ‘They’re dirty.’ He hadn’t noticed it.” Weeks went by and they continued to meet. Then one day John told him, “This is the last time you’ll see me. I’m going to Las Vegas tomorrow. It’s hot there. I can’t stay here in the winter.” It turned out that the year before he was in California, and the year before that as well. “I asked, ‘But can you spend your whole life like this?’ He was quiet, thinking. I didn’t see him for a while. Then a few days later he called me. I thought he had already left. He said, ‘Hi, I need you to write me a letter of reference. If you do this, they’ll give me place to stay.’” Salvo went to talk to the social worker and they started the process. “This is the type of progress you see. Someone who first realizes that his hands are dirty, and then slowly decides to listen to you, who doesn’t run away anymore and asks for help. I don’t know where he is now, but he has my number and can call if he needs to. We can’t expect to remove the burden of a story that brought them to living on the streets. It’s not realistic. But what I desire is that within this unbearable burden there is an experience of hope.”

There are no demands, just “a benefit for yourself,” in the words of Alessandra, a recent arrival to the small group of people who spend their lunch hour every Thursday bringing the homeless of Battery Park some pasta cooked at the American headquarters of De Cecco in Lower Manhattan. “They give you a lot more than you give them.” Her group is one of four that in normal times go on certain days to Grand Central Station, or to Brooklyn, or outside the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi. Some

are friends of CL, for whom OCM has become a charitable work. Many others are not, and have come through word of mouth. There is even a crew from the world of fashion, with models, actors, and photographers. “A friend who came last year with her husband was struck and threw a party. Some people from her world got involved.” After all, the name of OCM contains the words “One City,” a city for everyone. “We never thought of this mission as something only for the homeless. It’s for all of New York, especially for those with the greatest need—this is where we start, but it is for the city, so that the city can experience the human.”

This is true for Doni, who goes monthly together with Raquel and Peter and other friends. She brings “pasta with ragu, so they get some meat,” about thirty containers at a time. She says there’s “a miracle in every encounter,” a miracle she did not expect when Salvo spoke to her about the OCM two-and-a-half years ago. “We were at dinner with friends of the Fraternity. He talked about this thing and was moved. I asked, ‘How can I help you?’ and he said, ‘Come.’ I said, ‘No, I can’t do it.’” But then she went, bringing nothing the first time. “We began to walk the route. Everyone introduced themselves and shook hands. They asked, ‘What do you have?’ and I didn’t have anything,” continues Doni with emotion. “At a certain point, someone asked, ‘Does anybody have a plastic bag?’ I always carry one in my purse; it’s a habit, and someone asked for exactly that, do you understand? I thought, ‘I’m that empty bag.’ From then on, I’ve never stopped going, bringing food, socks, and clothes. And I always carry an empty bag.” ■

Austen Ivereigh

Return to the people

In a (virtual) conversation between Latin Americans and the British journalist who is one of the foremost experts on Bergoglio, we spoke about Pope Francis's role today, the journey of the church, and personal conversion in the context of our world in upheaval and crisis.



Veronica Pando

18

“It was so improbable that an Englishman would be chosen in this moment to communicate with an Argentinian pope.” For the British journalist and writer Austen Ivereigh, the opportunity to interview Pope Francis in this epochal moment was “a great gift.” He did not expect that “precious gem”; that is, the pope’s audio-recorded responses to the questions he had proposed. They took him by surprise by arriving when he was quarantining and in his garden, about about to plant a large jasmine in the Hereford countryside near the Welsh border.

Ivereigh is the author of the insightful biography of Bergoglio, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, and conducted a recent interview with the pope about the pandemic (published in *The Tablet* and also in *Commonweal*, *ABC*, and *La Civiltà Cattolica*). “You should lead this webinar: you know the pope better than I do,” he told the ten or so Argentinean bishops who on April 22nd attended the meeting entitled “The Leadership Role of Francis in the Time of Coronavirus,” a long-distance dialogue with five hundred people throughout Latin America, which had its start in the friendship Ivereigh developed with the curators of the exhibit “Gestures and Words” at the 2018 Meeting of Rimini. We offer excerpts from the conversation here.

How do you see Francis’s leadership in this moment? Where is the Holy Spirit leading us?

I think of his prayer in Saint Peter’s Square on the evening of March 27th. The pope spoke of conversion, of the need to trust in God, who is the Lord of history. He used the metaphor of a “storm.” It is an apocalyptic moment, in the sense that

it reveals things we must learn. I think that some features of his view of the crisis resemble his writings from the 1980s about tribulation and institutional ruin. In every tribulation, crisis, or loss of control there is an invitation to conversion, a grace that God offers us; we should be open to it and not miss the opportunity given. Francis’s leadership in this time of the coronavirus pandemic is operative: he is like a spiritual director who shows us where the grace of conversion is. But obstacles and temptations can close our mind to this opportunity. “Let’s not miss the opportunity that the crisis offers us,” he told me with insistence during the interview. It is difficult to speak in this way, because the news is shocking; there are so many deaths to mourn and so many people sacrificing themselves, so much uncertainty about work and increasing poverty. Speaking of an “opportunity” can seem truly insensi-



© Massimiliano Migliorato/CPP

tive. But the pope's leadership concentrates on the suffering and on how to respond to it: this is what changes us. He is showing us the new horizon, the new society, that can emerge. Above all, I think that we should not transform the experience into a discourse: he is offering the church some indications in this moment about how to be close to each other and not yield to the temptation to turn in on ourselves, even while we pay the necessary attention to the contagion.

In light of your first book, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, how do you see the journey of his pontificate? What did you want to say to the church and the world with your new book, *Wounded Shepherd*?

It has not yet been translated into Spanish, but it would be *Pastor Herido*. The subtitle—*Pope Francis and His Struggle to*

Convert the Catholic Church—is important, a provocation, because it refers to the pope's struggle to convert the church. It dwells on what I have learned about the central theme of his pontificate, which is not institutional reform, but conversion. I begin the book with a little mea culpa. A few months after his election, when I wrote *The Great Reformer*, like many others I was deeply impressed by Bergoglio. I studied his life and realized that in key moments of history he has been a great leader. So I believed a bit in the myth of the "superhero" who arrives during a crisis and solves things through his personal gifts and genius. There is no doubt that Francis has the qualities of a leader, but I exaggerated his protagonism. When I met him in 2018, while I was beginning to write the second book, he gently warned me against this temptation, telling me that I should not idealize his pro-

tagonism because the protagonist of conversion and change is not him, but the Holy Spirit. As his disciple, I understood that his role is to create the space for conversion and the conditions for the action of the Holy Spirit. The new book is based on the idea that people can learn what I have learned from him. His way of being a leader is not easy to understand from a "political" point of view. The fundamental objective of his pontificate is to put Jesus at the center again, making the Holy Spirit the protagonist and helping us to understand that the true dynamic factor of change is spiritual: every life experience and the historical experience a society goes through is an opportunity to reassess priorities. In my book, I write about the reform of the Vatican mentality, the passage from "dominion" to "service." Basically, Francis is seeking a hermeneutical conversion: he does not expect people

Writer and journalist **Austen Ivereigh** lives in the United Kingdom between Reading and Oxford. He earned a doctorate from Oxford on the church and politics in Argentina. He cofounded *Catholic Voices* and wrote *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (Picador Papers, 2015), a biography that has been translated into nine languages. His most recent book is *Wounded Shepherd: Pope Francis and His Struggle to Convert the Catholic Church* (Macmillan Audio, 2019; Henry Holt and Company, 2019).



© Archivio Meeting

to think the way he does, but to see humanity more through the eyes of the Good Shepherd. This is the gospel, which does not use power to effect change, but changes our approach, and thus changes everything. This is the great theme of the pontificate.

During the emergency, the pope referred to a bishop who corrected him on the “virilization” of the church. Francis said that “familiarity with Christ without community,” without the church and the sacraments, is very dangerous and can become “gnostic familiarity,” separated from the holy people of the faithful. What does this mean?

The church in which we live today, which I call “the home church,” is an opportunity to experience the church as the people of God, similar to the early church, which did not have the support of laws and large institutions. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that the faith was lived at home, in the community, like you of Communion and Liberation. But at the same time, the church can never cease being rooted in the sacramental presence and in the presence of the believing people, of the common people. Any temptation to create a bourgeois church, more intellectual or made up of people with good manners... are all attempts to create a pure or Pelagian church. It is not the church of Christ. As I clumsily hazarded in the interview questions, perhaps this is not the moment to live the church as an institution, but the pope responded, “There is no contradiction. The church is an institution, but the protagonist of the church is the Holy Spirit, who institutionalized and deinstitutionalizes it at the same time.” In other words, today’s situation demands pastoral creativity. We are already receiving daily Mass through virtual liturgies as a great gift from our pastors and we hope to learn to use these means for living communion more deeply. But at the same time, it is not an alternative to the real church: it is only the response to a crisis. Later we will return and recover the corporality and sacramentality of the presence of the people of God around the Eucharistic table, together with its shepherd. This is the church, and it will always be so.

A central question ever since the beginning of his pontificate has been holistic ecology and “the culture of waste.” The pope has dealt with these themes in the midst of the pandemic and he has developed them in the midst of our woundedness. What new elements do they introduce?

Francis speaks about extreme climate change as the consequence of environmental degradation caused by our overconsumption and overspending. For this reason, he stresses that now is the time to reestablish our bond with the environment, to realize that we are *co-created* with creation. If we are conscious of this gift, we will learn to respect each other. It is the moment to see things we did not see before. In listening to his audio answers, at a certain point his voice became very calm and instead of reading (he had made notes), I had the impression that his speaking was being guided by the Holy Spirit. It struck me. He said, “I want to stop here. This is the moment to see the poor, because we have not seen them. We have behaved as if we were the lords of all of creation.” Regarding holistic ecology and the conversion of our economies, I would like to suggest the pope’s letter to the popular movements (*movimientospopulares.org*) written during the Easter season. The coronavirus pandemic is teaching us that our life depends on those who serve. Just think of healthcare workers. It is time to reorganize our societies and economies according to this new awareness: it is a moment of conversion that is not only personal but also social and economic. Western governments have put the economies on hold to save lives, but it is clear that the consequences of this will be difficult. We cannot return to the previous model. In his letter to the popular movements, the pope proposed the provision of

a universal income because now we have to think of things that were inconceivable before. We have placed so much hope in the market and the state. Now is the moment to open ourselves to other forms of more humane socioeconomic organization.

What road does Francis propose for Latin America, home to 50 percent of the world's Catholics, whose numbers are dwindling? How does he view the growth of Evangelicalism?

Francis's diagnosis was expressed at Aparecida in 2007. In my book, I described it as the deepest discernment on the topic that the church has ever made. The foundation of his pontificate, the encyclical *Evangelii gaudium*, extends this discernment from Aparecida to the whole world. It views globalization and technological progress not as something to regret or merely to condemn, but as a fact of reality that has produced profound changes, above all in our relationship with institutions. Technocratic tendencies are undermining family ties and dissolving bonds of trust and brotherhood. In this context, it is impossible for the church to continue to trust itself to institutions as the modality for transmitting the faith from generation to generation. Perhaps it is time to recover the model of the early church, which did not depend on laws or the support of institutions, but had an experience to communicate: its encounter with the merciful love of God. This is an experience, not an idea. As Benedict XVI and Fr. Luigi Giussani said, the experience of an encounter with a person is what changes your horizon. When we communicate this as Christians, the church will grow again. But you have to realize that the church may lose many faithful along the way, tho-

se who are faithful for cultural or institutional reasons, more than out of conviction. Secularization is an experience of loss. However, for Francis it is important to see what is growing. The coronavirus pandemic is accelerating this tendency toward loss; for example, because it is impossible to go to Mass. In this crisis, the invitation is to live a deeper interior life in an encounter with Christ through prayer. I think that above all in Latin America, we will see a church acting according to the famous metaphor of the church as a "field hospital" in the midst of poverty and unemployment. Many will ask, as they did during the 2001 crisis in Argentina: Where is the Church? Has it left us? The other day I was thinking that Bergoglio has already faced an extraordinary crisis in Argentina's economic collapse. He was a helmsman in the storm; he mobilized the church, and Argentineans have not forgotten how he accompanied them. At Saint Peter's he said, "This is a time of choosing." Both for the church and for humanity, a dramatic set of choices has been presented. If both open themselves to the Holy Spirit, both will emerge from this crisis much stronger.

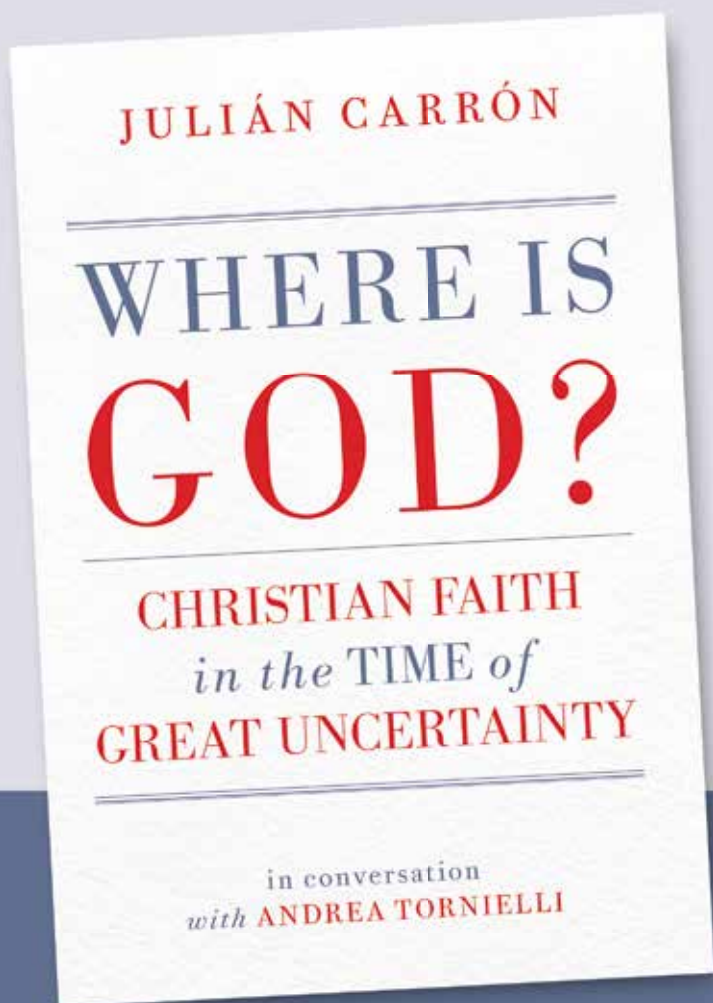
***Gaudete et exsultate* described two grave and subtle dangers facing contemporary Christianity, Pelagianism and gnosticism. How does the pope see the role of the ecclesial movements that arose after the Second Vatican Council as we face today's cultural and historical challenges? Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI recognized the important role of the movements.**

Francis appreciates the movements very much. As I noted in the first book, he believes there is a temptation to be self-referential, to a certain

Pelagianism, and above all, gnosticism, in the bourgeois and intellectual tendency to believe that you have to "be one of us" to be a good Catholic. A Catholic movement must return to the people, but in the evangelical sense. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, it has a special gift or charism that it must place at the service of the church. We have seen the different ways in which the movements relate to the pontificate, but the future of the movements is certain.

How does the pope see Europe?

I am convinced that he believes that the Old Continent is no longer capable of renewing itself through its own efforts because its attachment to power is very strong and because the technocracy has developed to the point of asking, Where is the holy, faithful people of God? When I met him in 2018, I asked him why he had so much faith in the people. He told me about pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela and the popular religiosity of Europe, but the idea that the European church can be reinvigorated at the roots by this popular religiosity is a chimera, unless there is a great change (like the one we are experiencing). The pope believes strongly in the enormous influence that migrants from places with a strong popular religiosity can have, and not only in terms of devotion, but as witnesses to an experience of encounter with Christ in the life of the people. He is very concerned about the lack of solidarity and fraternity in the European institutions that has become manifest during this crisis. Only by recovering a bond with the people will these institutions be reinvigorated. The coronavirus pandemic and the economic crisis are this opportunity for Europe. ■



WHERE IS GOD?

CHRISTIAN FAITH
in the TIME of
GREAT UNCERTAINTY

Julián Carrón
in conversation with
Andrea Torielli

Should we battle a plural and relativistic society by raising barriers and walls, or should we accept the opportunity to announce the Gospel in a new way? This is the challenge Christians are facing today.

In an extended interview with Vatican expert Andrea Torielli, Julián Carrón examines the historical moment we are living through in order to revive the essential core of Christian faith. Starting from the realization that the world is experiencing an evolution in which the difficulty of finding shared values and natural morality makes sincere dialogue between believers and non-believers challenging, Carrón reflects on the possibility of communicating the essence of the Christian faith in a form that can inspire interest in modern times.

Addressing the central questions concerning the announcement of Christian faith in today's less regimented society, *Where Is God?* discovers and rediscovers the contents of Christianity and asks how they can be witnessed again in a society that is not yet post-Christian, but potentially headed in that direction.

Julián Carrón is President of the Fraternity of the lay Movement of Communion and Liberation and Professor of Theology at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan.

176 pages - \$ 29,95 CAO

MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS